

# **Returning to the Lands of Our Ancestors: Northern Indigenous Women, Resurgence, and Diverse Academic Journeys**

**Anita Lafferty, Crystal Gail Fraser, and Crystal Wood**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This is the edited conversation from a panel discussion that took place that took place in Sòòmbak'è, Treaty 8 territory, in June 2022. Our panel was part of the in-person conference program for NAISA North: Regional gathering of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), hosted by Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, and held at the Yellowknife Ski Club.

“Returning to the Lands of Our Ancestors,” brought us together as three Northern Indigenous scholars with diverse backgrounds and experiences in academia, who found common ground in our kinship ties that take us back to our ancestral Lands in the Northwest Territories. The conference was an opportunity to return to our homelands together, carrying the knowledge of our ancestors, looking to be grounded and guided after long absences from the North due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also a chance to collaborate and discuss what resurgence means for us after two years of turning inward and being away. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, discusses resurgence as “another way of describing [the] flourishing of Indigenous knowledges, laws, languages, and practice” (2017, p.17). This is what our panel intended to do. Together, we shared our experiences as Indigenous scholars, reflected on practices of northern resurgence in our academic lives, and explored ways to ensure our selves, our families, our communities, and our cultures continue to flourish.

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## WHO WE ARE

**Anita Lafferty:** nehgha dahgohndih Anita Lafferty sudze Łíídlı́ Kúę First Nation. Hello everyone, it's really beautiful to be here today in Denendeh. This is my first panel as Dr. Lafferty, I still am coming to terms with that because it's been a very long journey to the PhD, and not a journey that has been my own. I take my ancestors with me on this journey, they have guided me. I also take each and every one of you sitting here along with me. The North has been central in my mind throughout this journey so each of you have been a part of it in your own way.

I am a ts'éli-iskwew, a mother, a daughter, a sister, an aunty, a great aunty. I have a daughter and I dedicated my work to her because I think about the young people and that's where my heart lies. I am married, my husband is from Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation west of what is now called Edmonton. I am also an educator, I am a teacher. I have a Bachelor of Education and that's where I started my journey in post-secondary western education. Throughout my school experiences including my PhD there have been many struggles that I had encountered, so it's been a long tumultuous yet advantageous journey.

Flying into Denendeh a couple days ago is always a feeling that overwhelms my entire physical and spiritual being, like a welcoming, a coming home of sorts. I've been fortunate enough to travel back and forth every now and then, because my family is up here. Most of them reside in Hay River, that's where my mother, my semo resides. She's on her way here to visit me now, driving from Hay River.



*Denendeh Sedze : My heart in Denendeh (June 22, 2022). This photo was taken from the plane just before landing in Sqòmbak'è. Photo by Anita Lafferty.*

I am looking forward to seeing her, my beautiful niece is here too so I am really happy to share this with her and this is her first time seeing her Auntie up here so shout out to you! I am thinking about her; she is also journeying in post-secondary and as I mentioned the reason, I do what I do is for the young people, leaving guiding steps so that I can lift up their voices because from experience often our voices feel silenced. It is time to unsilence and lift up their voices. So that's just a small piece of me and my journey. Oh yes. and I have 2 dogs. I've got to acknowledge my puppies, Willow and River. They are named after the place of my ancestral roots, where my grandmother and grandfather lived before relocating in Łíídlıı Kúę. Mahsi.

**Crystal Gail Fraser:** Shoorzi' Crystal Gail Fraser vaazhii. Shiyughwan kat da' Juliet Mary Bullock shahanh t'iinch'uu ts'at Bruce Fraser shityè t'iinch'uu. Guuyeets'i' dechuu. Ts'at Marka Andre shitsuu t'iinch'uu ts'at Richard Bullock shitsii t'iinch'uu. Inuvik ts'at Dachan Choo Gehnjik gwits'at Gwichya Gwich'in ithii.

My name is Crystal Fraser, I am Gwichya Gwich'in and of English and Scottish ancestry, originally from Inuvik. My parents are Juliet and Bruce and my grandparents were Marka Andre and Richard Bullock, my great grandparents on my maternal side was Julienne The'dahcha, the one who carries a feather, also known as Julienne Andre, and John Tsell of the Tsiigehtchic area. It is really nice to be here, I am so proud of Anita. I've only just met Crystal Wood but I am going to follow her work and her over the years. I live in the Edmonton area with my husband, who is a settler originally from Hay River, and my 6-year-old daughter. It's a pleasure to be here; we are among friends and family.

I am an assistant professor in History and Native Studies at the University of Alberta. I am hoping to advance some work in the North, and support relationships and communities. My professional training is as a historian and I study the history of Indian Residential Schools. I've been doing that work for over a decade now, but it is Survivors, former students, and Elders who are the experts. I am learning new things every day. I am an intergenerational residential school survivor. My grandmother was institutionalized at Immaculate Conception Indian Residential School in Aklavik and my mother at Grollier Hall in Inuvik. We are now in a month of anniversaries of unmarked graves; May 27 is the anniversary of the news out of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc and the anniversary of the possible 751 unmarked graves at the Marieval Indian Residential Schools is tomorrow. If anyone needs support or outreach, please notify a conference organizer.

I wrote down the first question, "Who am I"? This is very difficult! I feel like I am a different person every day and that one day I may be strong and the next day I may be something else, flipping between working in the public to being in the background. One day I may be an activist and the next day I might need to turn inward. I think we can be many different things at many different times. Hàjı'.

**Crystal Wood:** Hello, my name is Crystal Wood. I am a member of the Łíídlıı Kúę First Nation, same community as Anita Lafferty. I first want to begin with sharing how honored I am to be here with these ladies, and with all of you, and thank you Creator for another beautiful day. My late mother is Cecelia Antoine. She left her community a long time ago. I'm not really sure of the exact reasons but I have a few thoughts that come to mind, given that she went through a couple residential schools. I grew up in Treaty 6 and Treaty 7 territory my entire life. I was born in Whitecourt Alberta, and then I was adopted out at age five (as part of the Sixties Scoop) so I lived in Hinton, Fox Creek, and then down by the Blood reserve near Waterton, AB so I was fortunate to grow up working in Waterton in the summertime. Right after high school, I came to Calgary to pursue my education in Justice studies at Mount Royal College (my education journey continues but as I

explain below). When I finished that, I did a 180 and didn't go into that field, and then I met my husband, and we had our son Tristan who's now 14. Later on, we moved up to Treaty 6 and so now I live on an acreage near Spruce Grove, Alberta. And we had our daughter there, her name is Saje and she is now 11. And then we have our 3 dogs. I am just honored to be here, and thank you.

## OUR EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS SO FAR

**Crystal Gail Fraser:** I've been quite open about my experiences and story, especially in the North, and some people are familiar with my story. I started on this path when I was 5 years old, attending Sir Alexander Mackenzie School and I had a lot of questions about this Mackenzie person. Who was he? And why do I need to care? So, I had a lot of questions growing up in Inuvik. I wondered why our people struggle with addiction, why certain things are a certain way. And why we didn't talk about it? Why wasn't I learning my own language? It was very traumatic for me when my family and I left Inuvik when I was 14. We moved to Lethbridge, and that severed many different connections. I no longer had my grandparents close, I was no longer on my homeland, I didn't go to my fish camp every summer like I had for 14 years. That led me to a path of leaving high school in grade 10, being homeless and not living a good life. I am, however, grateful that I did not struggle with addiction at that time. I didn't have anyone in my life who was Indigenous or a role model. My life improved when I moved back to Yellowknife when I was 20. And even though these lands are not mine, there are Gwich'in histories and connections here. When I was 23 working at a local pub, I registered at Sir John Franklin High School to finish my grade 12. I don't know how or why they took me but I convinced them. And it was an English teacher there who saw my work and encouraged me to apply to university.

I was accepted at the University of Alberta (U of A). Being back in Alberta was intimidating because of what I had experienced in Lethbridge. But I was determined to help my people and I thought I could do that by becoming a lawyer, but in the end, law did not speak to my heart. History resonated with me and that's not surprising. My first history teacher was my great grandmother. I remember we had her set up at our fish camp in a makeshift bed: a pallet with all kinds of blankets, comforters, and pillows. At that time she was around 94 years old, laying there and smoking her pipe. My aunties joked, "Oh she's sleeping" but then you'd see this little puff of smoke come out of her pipe and you would know that she was awake and listening. She was my first story teller. She told me about our ancestors, driving a dog team, and other really incredible experiences in her long life (1889-1983).

During my studies toward a Bachelor of Arts (2004-2008), there were no Indigenous history courses at U of A. I remember sitting in Canadian history courses and being told "there are no Indigenous people in Alberta". I was encountering the system in a violent way, saying that our history, our words, our ancestors did not matter, but also that they did not exist. That was very, very difficult for me, and I had so many questions. That's why I needed to undertake a Master of Arts in History degree program. I went to the University of Victoria, which grew my mind in super cool ways.

And then after my master's, I still had so many questions and I needed to do a PhD. This brought me back to the U of A. My studies took nine years, a long process because I was working in community, centering Survivors, and working with oral histories. During that time, my daughter arrived. Working on residential school histories is politicized and I have been denied access to archival records on residential schools, I

have been told that my research does not matter, and I have been told that we know everything there is to know already. Those things were very hard to hear. But I suppose I also underestimated my ability to deal with the actual contents of those records and the experiences of Survivors. In interviews, we talked about sexual violence, the removal of our people from our lands, all kinds of harmful things, and the elimination of our languages. During that time, I had to seek therapy. One exercise that really helped was envisioning present me sitting with future me - Elder Crystal - in a canoe at my fish camp on the river. Every time I would encounter something hard, I would say "What would Elder Crystal say?" That brought a lot of answers to me.

At the end of the day, I was able to get through the doctoral program but of course faced various institutional pressures throughout: "why aren't you finished the PhD, you needed to be done in this amount of time, we are going to cut your funding off." These programs try to be 'one-size-fits-all'. Additionally, I struggled to find my good people to work with in the discipline of History. Fortunately I had a very wide community of Indigenous friends, scholars, and academics, a couple of them are here today, who saw me through it. I finished and received my PhD in 2019, and my work won a scholarly prize, but more important than that, it's really been a pleasure to work with community and work with survivors and actually have the words of our people, their stories, reflected in history now (Fraser 2019).



Crystal Gail Fraser's journey, as illustrated by Melaw Nakehk'o, Dene Nahjo's  
Indigenous Women's Gathering, Dél̓nə 2019.

**Anita Lafferty:** Where did my journey start in education? Oh my goodness there are so many stories that are present in that one question! My methodology is called narrative inquiry, it's the storying way, but more in depth as I inquire into and about experiences. One of the greatest teachings about experience I got was from Elder Bob Cardinal. If he put this water bottle in front of me, here, I see it from this angle, and this is what I am seeing so I have a perspective of how it looks to me and I'm experiencing it from this place I sit. Sara here will look at it from a different angle and she is experiencing it from a different place than me. Jennie sees it from another perspective and so forth and so forth as we go around the bottle. We all come with experiences. So I didn't look at a PhD as a way of looking at a question to answer it, it was also an identity journey, my personal and educational journey.

There were many challenges that also came along with understanding academia and my western education. And for me part of that was the identity journey that I had to take and that's what really for many of us Indigenous scholars have to go through. It comes with many challenges and we each have different experiences. Some of those stories were shared here over the past couple days. In the work that I do, I am thinking about the challenges we as Indigenous scholars are faced with. For me, the answer to those challenges are the women's voices, they were always present along my journey. For instance, I had to move down south when my daughter was three. There were not many programs available to study in the north, they had programs like office administrator and stuff like that. It wasn't what I wanted to do. Before that I worked across the street from here at the Legislative Assembly. I went for a walk yesterday and was thinking about that process and all of these amazing beautiful Dene that were in leadership. I had never experienced a job like that before so it was really inspiring, it touched my heart and it made me think bigger in terms of career. I didn't want to have an office admin job because I knew there was something bigger for me out there. And it was the grandmothers' voices that kept encouraging me. So as I moved south, I did my undergraduate degree in education and that was a journey in itself. I could be here for a couple of hours telling you about all that journey. One challenge that comes to mind was in my third year of my undergrad I felt stuck because of the work and constant challenges of being away from home thinking "What am I going to do? I don't feel good here in academia, why am I here?" I had hit a wall and I wanted to quit. But it was the grandmothers' voices that brought me back. Sometimes when we think about those grandmother messages, they're not direct messages, for instance my grandmother didn't say "You got this." The message comes in another form but you just have to listen for it and be present. It is a deep listening from within, learning how to listen. I have heard this as a teaching that we've forgotten how to listen. And so I am always cognizant of this teaching.

After I completed my undergrad, I taught at a high school in Edmonton. I was brought back to high school experiences and the challenges our young people are continuing to go through. As a teacher, I brought my students out onto the land. These experiences allowed me to rethink the curriculum in a deeper sense. Working in an urban high school made me think more about the political system and the administrative roles that manage curriculum so I decided to take my master's in Educational Leadership and Management. For me it was to really understand the system of funding and so forth. Because as a teacher I faced challenges in order to bring my students out onto the land. There are many policies and barriers that are in place for teachers, so I wanted to understand how that system worked. My master's degree helped me understand that in more depth.

The grandmother's voices were still present and one day I had an Elder's tea with my students. At this point, I was contemplating continuing my western education and doing a PhD as my peers were encouraging me to "keep going, keep going". I kept hearing that and so I remember writing my first paper in the master's program, literally crying at midnight and pushing send, feeling like "what is this?" I felt a negative energy telling me that I wasn't supposed to be there, and so it didn't feel good. All these tears came. But the next day I think everybody else in my course had that same feeling, so that was comforting in a sense but also daunting because I was the only Dene in that circle of master's students and so that was a challenge. But the grandmothers were still there and present in my mind and so when I had that Elder's tea, her message to the young people was "keep going." I took that message and I applied it to my PhD and I continue to listen for that voice as it has led me all the way.

In my work I talk about those stories and the stories of my grandmother, and mother. It's those grandmother theories that sit with us. For me I understand those teachings because I listen to my matriarchs and that's where my teachings sit. We have to walk in balance and so, for me that's where many of my land teachings had come from and settled. My seta, my mother, is from the North, my grandmother, my great grandmother, and so on. And so when I journeyed through this process of PhD work, my storied experience brought me to my kinship relations, the kinship curriculum. When I think about it now, I met lots of relatives even in the past couple of days! When I am on campus I am always looking for relatives. They always seem to find me in some way and that's how I met Crystal Fraser. I reached out to her during my PhD knowing she was a Northerner and so I connected with her. I had met Crystal Wood when I was doing community work and she was a parent going to teach beading to one of the classes I was working alongside. And she was telling me a little bit about herself and I said we are cousins, we're related. We have created our own supports and I feel it is because the grandmothers' voices are guiding us.

I am always listening and thinking about our women and our strong women stories and really finding that space for me was finding that Northern voice. Voices that we know we can recognize. It's been a long time since I've been back at home, I travel a lot. I think about my grandfather, he was a trapper. I feel like I am a cartographer of the landscape like in different landscapes all over, always shifting. This notion is always present in my mind and in the work that I do. So yeah, I have experienced many challenges in my educational journey. I could sit here all day talking about it but I'll let someone else talk now. Mahsi.

**Crystal Wood:** I just want to add and acknowledge that the last time I was in this territory I was a baby, so when I arrived here in this territory, it was really humbling and emotional for me because it feels like home. I was talking earlier (with colleagues) about 'blood memory' and how your spirit remembers, so it was interesting that I when I am around the mountains (rock), the water, trees it always feels like home, so when I am here the territory seems similar but different, but it feels like home, I just want to start with that.

So, how did I start on this path? In high school I was looking at my work and educational options and I felt education was the best route for me. However, I was hesitant about whether I would be good at education because I was told when I was younger that I was not a good writer. When you are told things like this at a young age, they stick with you. That stuck with me for a very long time, even when I was pursuing my post-secondary education. But I'll get into that and how I addressed that in a little bit.

Starting through my journey, I completed the Bachelor of Applied Justice Studies degree at Mount Royal College (now called Mount Royal University). I found that it wasn't my path and so from there I worked in the private industry for a long time, and then I moved up to Treaty 6 territory. I happened to be at a powwow where there was a display of pamphlets from Athabasca University and I was like "Ooh, this looks interesting, this looks cool." There was a program called Bachelor of Management for Indigenous Nations and Organizations. And that really started my education journey again. I started taking courses online. With a young family there were times it was difficult to navigate everything but I learned to develop time management skills to complete each course. Later on, I worked in public secondary education working as a workshop facilitator teaching Indigenous beading that included foundational education about Indigenous People(s) in Treaty 6, then I worked as an Educational Assistant, and then as an Indigenous Liaison at a high school. From there, I was hired at a Tribal College rooted in First Nations culture and traditions. I was there for nearly four years and I am incredibly grateful: I learned a lot about Indigenous cultures, governance, and ceremony. While I was there, I decided to pursue my Master of Education in Aboriginal Studies through Queen's University and completed it in 2020. During that time, I found it difficult once again to navigate the responsibilities of family combined with busy schedules, and the dedication needed for my studies. But, with my family support and dedication to my studies, and time management I was able to do it.

What pulled me into pursuing a PhD were the educational experiences of my children. When I thought about it, and reflected about it, it was very similar to mine. Indigenous knowledge, education and programming was very limited for my children. When I started digging into it and asking questions, the school division was offering some programming and services but the availability was inconsistent. When I started to become more involved it seemed like a very tokenistic approach, for example helping to plan for National Indigenous Peoples Day, so one day out of the entire year. This didn't sit very well with me, so with the help of another Indigenous parent we contacted the school division to help with meaningful change for education. Over time, a committee was built, however change is slow and I am reminded of baby steps, but now my son is fourteen years old." In reflection of this slow change, it really propelled me to apply for my PhD so I can help with creating meaningful and impactful change for our future generations.

When I applied for my PhD program, I was really excited about it. Having completed my master's program, I felt I knew how much work it would be, but I didn't realize how much more expectations and work it would be! They don't tell you that part, you get the encouragement which is awesome, but I thought I could balance being a full-time mom with family obligations, full-time job, and full-time PhD studies. It turns out I couldn't, so I had to give up on something so I decided to give up my full-time work to become more present and active with my family and as a student, and I am so glad I did, and that I am pursuing my PhD.

When I started my first year, and first semester, I think one of the challenges I really had was the transition from working in a First Nations College rooted in First Nations tradition and culture moving to this big white western institution. I asked myself "Do I belong here?" That was probably one of the biggest questions that I had. The language is different, the people were different, instructors were different, they were different from where I was at the education setting that I was at. I really struggled for the first three weeks, and thankfully Anita reached out to me and she said "How are you doing?" and I was like "...not so well." and so it was a saving grace to have a conversation with her about this and my hesitancy of being in higher education, she affirmed to me that I belonged, and said "Yes! You belong, your voice matters, you need to be here." And I was just very appreciated for her mentorship and support. And then also reaching out to the other support

that I already had as well, people who I trusted. And smudging, lots of smudging! I am grateful that I was able to get through that hesitancy.

I think the last challenge that I have recently encountered is the patriarchal and colonial view of Indigenous women I experienced in the classroom. That was a difficult experience, but thankfully I was able to connect with my trusted friends, mentors and supervisors who were able to support me through it. But, with going through this experience, I was able to find the courage to speak my truth and the whole experience taught me that your voice matters, and I learned that mine does too.

## HOW WE CAN CONTINUE TO FLOURISH

**Crystal Gail Fraser:** There's a lot to say about flourishing and work. Simply existing in these spaces allows us to flourish. Holding people accountable, sharing important Indigenous Knowledge even if you're repeating yourself, standing against tokenism - these are examples of practices that help me flourish. Take up the space. I have lighter skin so I have a privilege that some other Indigenous Peoples do not. A part of that privilege means leading interventions and having uncomfortable conversations. That is hard work, but ultimately a responsibility that comes with privilege. I've finally come to accept that I'll never be fluent in my language. Dinjii Zhuh Ginjik is one of the hardest languages in the world to learn. And in order to do the work that my community has asked me to do, and to be a good parent, I've accepted that I can't live in a language nest for 2 years. That was a really hard thing to accept for me but I am still finding ways to use my language, even in academic ways. We can normalize our Indigenous languages in publications, as one example. I'm trying to be that steady and persistent voice that speaks to my core values, my culture and heritage, but also to our beautiful languages. That's really important to me. And also understanding that I am just one person and I choose to place my energy behind important and achievable goals.

A part of that is self-care. Earlier when I introduced myself, I mentioned that you can't be all the things, all the time. Somebody said to me once that our commitments need to model a flock of geese: it's not the same goose leading the pack the entire time. You can move to the back and let someone else lead depending on what is happening in your life. Sometimes when you see that lone goose flying, you're like "dude!" Sometimes I was that goose, for example, when I was a teenager, but you find your way back to the flock, right? And hopefully you don't have to struggle to find your way back. Hopefully, you look after yourself well enough and you nourish your body, your soul, and your bank account so that you're able to return on your own terms and schedule.

I get emails from residential school deniers every day in my work as a scholar of residential schools, and as a member of the Governing Circle for the National Center of Truth and Reconciliation. Many, many people will block those kinds of emails and whether this is a good or bad thing, I haven't figured it out yet. But I read all the emails. I read them because I need to be able to dissect these arguments and destroy that line of thinking. But this is a way that I flourish, I think, is in fully understanding these arguments that are calling into question genocide, that are calling into question the deaths of our ancestors and loved ones, that do not believe residential schools as a vast network of death and oppression and carceral spaces existed, people telling me that the stories of my grandmother and mother are false. A part of my flourishing is holding people accountable.

A part of my flourishing is holding people accountable because “I am sorry” isn’t enough. I want the names of every person that worked at Indian Residential Schools, I want to know if they are alive and I want to know if they can be held criminally responsible. I wonder what it would look like for the settler state of Canada to be accountable to the International Criminal Court. Thank you.

**Anita Lafferty:** Mashi, thank you. I was thinking about this word flourish that came from Leanne Simpson’s work (2017), she’s talking about it in the context of resurgence where she shifted that concept from resurgence to flourish. I really like that concept of flourish as opposed to resurgence. I feel like the term resurging sounds as though I am coming out of the matrix or something. So, I like the concept of flourish. It better fits my worldview. My dissertation is titled “Where my edhéhke [moccasins] take me” (Lafferty 2022). Sitting here, I’m looking at Jennie’s moccasins and the beautiful beadwork. The beadwork on our edhéhke is very prominent in our grandmother’s stories, including my mother’s stories. I would say my mother has a PhD in edhéhke [moccasin] making, and so when I think about the process of making edhéhke, it’s not just the process of moccasin making, there is a longer process. For me, there’s the ceremony of the hunter that’s going out on the land, and then the hide tanner, and the edhéhke maker. There are many facets of the process, it’s not just one part of it, and so when I think about flourishing, I am thinking about her and her journey of edhéhke making. That’s a journey in itself and with it comes the images of beautiful beadwork of the many Dene flowers and images of the land. I think about all of our young people and the connections I’ve made. The many Dene flowers that I’ve come across or the flowers from across Turtle Island in my travels and I see that as an uplifting, especially for our young people who struggle.

Now the sun is coming out and we can all gather here together in this beautiful space and have these conversations. I am looking out onto these beautiful faces and seeing all the Dene flowers here, and the beautiful kaleidoscope of flowers that we all encompass, that we each carry. So for me that term flourish is very central to my heart and my soul flame when I think about my grandmother, my granny theories, because that’s where my work has led me. It has led me back here to the trails of my ancestors. I’m thinking of the image from the Dene Nation of our ancestral trails. This image sits very well in my heart, with trails like the veins that embody us. I think about all the stories that are yet to be shared that our young people need to hear, especially our women stories that were often absent because I, too, come from a place of intergenerational trauma. I don’t tell those stories too much because that’s my own healing journey and a part of my work and this work has also been about healing for me.

So, when I think about flourishing, I’m thinking about all those concepts of the journey that we’ve had to endure. Yes, I do have a western education but I come back home in that kindergarten mode still because I am always learning, watching, and observing with a new perspective. For me, that’s flourishing. I’ve heard so many stories so far in the past couple days and I see and hear and feel, even taste the stories that are coming out of this beautiful space. For me that’s important because our young people are sitting in the crowd and my daughter will be listening and our daughters, and granddaughters too.

Yesterday, I met my great grandniece for the first time. She was born on Christmas Day here in Yellowknife. I think about her and walking forward she will be able to hear those stories now. Our stories will no longer live in trauma. I think about the flower blooming and so that for me is the flourishing. That is what sits with me in my heart. Mahsi.

**Crystal Wood:** I had to think about this question. Coming here helps me flourish. Learning about this land, the people here, my relations and culture and then bringing that home and pouring that into the work that I do, in addition to the learning that I have, and will have (in Treaty 6 territory). And I also want to come full circle with the writing piece that I had brought up. It took me to the end of my master's program to finally see myself as an okay writer, a good writer, embracing the way that I write, the things that I learn, and being able to write the way that I do, that helps me flourish.

And I think that the last thing is my children. I think about my children, I think about my grandchildren (that I will have) and the importance of my passion and work I am doing and hope to do to make a positive change, for the seven generations forward. That really, really pulls me forward to flourish. Thank you. Mahsi cho.



*Crystal Wood's journey so far. She will update it as she continues on her path. Art by Crystal Wood, 2022.  
Painted during PhD Studies, IPE - EDPS 538, Instructor, Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax*

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**Dr. Anita Lafferty** received her PhD from the University of Alberta in the Faculty of Secondary Education. She is ts'élí- iskwew (Dene Cree) and a citizen of the Liídłıı Kúę First Nation in Northwest Territories. Her doctoral research examines approaches of Indigenous curriculum perspectives that are grounded in Dene k'ęę (philosophy) on the Land. She was awarded the 2022 Margaret "Presh" Kates Aboriginal Doctoral Award in Education for her doctoral dissertation. Her research includes learning from/with the Land, experiences of Indigenous youth, identity, healing, and matriarchal knowledge. She takes a multidisciplinary approach in her research drawing on the fields of multimedia, art, poetry, storytelling, and Indigenous methodologies.

**Dr. Crystal Gail Fraser** (she/her) is Gwichyà Gwich'in, from Inuvik and Dachan Choo Gëhnjik in the NWT. She is an Assistant Professor at the University of Alberta in History and Native Studies. Crystal's doctoral dissertation T'aih k'ighe' tth'aih zhit diidich'ùh or *By Strength We Are Still Here* studied the history of student experiences at Indian Residential Schools in the Inuvik Region between 1959 and 1996 and was awarded the 2020 John Bullen Prize by the Canadian Historical Association. Her work makes a strong contribution to how scholars engage with Indigenous research methodologies and theoretical concepts, our understanding of Indigenous histories during the second half of the twentieth century, and how northern Canada was unique in relation to the rest of the settler nation. Crystal is a member of the Governing Circle for the the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, the Gwich'in Council International, and the National Advisory Committee on Residential Schools Missing Children and Unmarked Graves. She is the co-author of 150 Acts of Reconciliation, an award-winning publication that has had more than 100,000 unique engagements.

**Crystal Wood** is a member of the Liídłıı Kúę First Nation from Fort Simpson, NWT and resides with her family in Treaty Six territory on Turtle Island. She currently is a PhD student in the Indigenous Peoples Education program at the University of Alberta. Her educational background, professional and lived experiences, and personal drive for meaningful change in education encouraged her to pursue her higher education.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mahsi cho Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning and the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association for hosting us at the NAISA North Conference and making it possible to share our stories with a public audience. Mahsi cho Sara Komarnisky for chairing the panel and working with us to publish this piece. Mahsi cho Sarah McGregor for transcribing the audio recording of our panel discussion. Her care and accuracy shines through!