

Remembering rightly

Our experience of the Sixties Scoop

Lydia Neufeld Harder with Ingrid Bettina Wolfear

We want to tell the story of how our mother/daughter relationship was affected by the Sixties Scoop of Indigenous children in Canada.¹ We will each speak in our own unique voice, Ingrid's words written in italics and Lydia's in roman.² Our memories are colored by the present and the past, by what we are learning now and what we knew then. In all of this we are attempting to "remember rightly" what happened then and what is happening now.³

The term "Sixties Scoop" was coined by Patrick Johnson, author of the 1983 report *Native Children and the Child Welfare System*.⁴ It refers to the practice in Canada of removing primarily Métis and Aboriginal children from their families in the 1960s to 80s and placing them in foster homes or adopting them into white middle-class homes. Social workers, often untrained and unfamiliar with the culture and history of Aboriginal communities, evaluated the proper care of children according to Euro-Canadian values. For example, a diet of dried game, fish, and berries was not considered adequate, though this had sustained Indigenous people on the prairies for many years. In many cases children were unexpectedly and forcefully apprehended because parents were living in poverty or because children were being raised by relatives, even though otherwise the chil-

1 I use *Indigenous*, *Aboriginal*, and *First Nations* interchangeably to refer to the descendants of the inhabitants of Canada before it was settled by Europeans.

2 Ingrid's words are excerpted from an interview recorded by Michele Rizoli for the purpose of this paper. Her words have been lightly edited for clarity.

3 Miroslav Volf uses the term "Remembering Rightly" in the subtitle for his book *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). His book is helpful but concentrates on how a victim should remember. Much more needs to be said about what it means for a perpetrator or someone involved in systems that perpetrate violence to remember rightly.

4 Patrick Johnston, *Native Children and the Welfare System* (Toronto: James Lorimer and the Canadian Council on Social Development, 1983).

dren were receiving loving care. According to one report by a social worker in British Columbia, almost all the newly born babies were removed from their homes on the reserves during some of those years.⁵

Mennonites, as a faith community, were involved in this process as well, both as social workers and as adoptive or foster parents. A resolution passed in 1966 by the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, on the theme of Indian-Métis relationships, testifies to this involvement. It reads in part:

WHEREAS our country is increasingly facing race problems related to Indian and Métis, and

WHEREAS we are largely responsible for the problem, and

WHEREAS the solution also depends largely on us, and

WHEREAS various governmental (i.e. Indian Affairs) and non-governmental organizations (i.e. Children's Aid) are making strong efforts to give first Canadians a better future . . .

BE IT RESOLVED: . . .

*3. That we encourage more Mennonite families to adopt and foster homeless Indian and Metis children. . .*⁶

What does remembering rightly mean for each of us in this context?

See, my body remembers, and my body reacts, and I don't remember. The research that has been done recently about blood memory is totally correct. . . . What the body retains and how far back it goes. . . . I was born Aboriginal, First Nations. All the pain and suffering that my people carried are part of my blood memory. I was born in Calgary as part of the Siksika Nation, who are Blackfoot, of the Plains Indian part of the Confederation, Treaty Seven. I have a ten-digit status card recognized by the Canadian government. But I did not know that until I was in my twenties. I grew up confused, with a loss of identity. . . . The question of why this was so was never answered until now when there has been more research done on how the connection between the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual is carried in the body. So, for myself, though I don't remember consciously with my mind, I now know there is a good reason for that loss of memory.

5 Erin Hanson, "The Sixties Scoop & Aboriginal child welfare," Indigenous Foundations, https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/sixties_scoop/.

6 "Minutes of the 64th Session of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada," in *The 1966 Yearbook*, Winnipeg, MB, July 6-10, 1966, 1.

I want to remember the story rightly of our adoption of Ingrid, whom we named Kristen, by recalling the larger political context and the systemic injustice that affected us deeply as a family. I was unaware of the power I carried as a Canadian citizen with the privileges and rights that I assumed were mine and as a Mennonite with a strong sense of identity as a Christian. I wonder how to tell my story when my memories are shaped by my own biases and prejudgments. I want to explore the power dynamics and injustices involved in this story; however, I also want to leave room for the joyful and reconciling moments that continue to nourish our relationship.

The adoption process

What I recall about the interviews with the social worker were her probing questions. “What are the prejudices you carry? Is there a child that you would find difficult to bring into your family circle?” She was most afraid, I think, that we were “do-gooders” who would soon tire of the challenges that came with adoption.

At the time we were happily settled in Edmonton after several years of seminary training. My husband, Gary, was pastor of a Mennonite church. I was a homemaker, parenting our two boys, ages six and four, and very involved in volunteer activities in our congregation and community. Why were we considering adoption when we already had two children?

First, we were hoping for a daughter since we had two sons. Both sides of our family tree seem to specialize in boys. Adoption would be a sure way to ensure the right sex for our next child. Second, we felt family planning was an ethical choice. During the 1960s, in our Mennonite theological circles, there was a great concern with the over-population of the world and the lack of resources for that population explosion. In addition, we were convinced that all life needed to be in service to God, including the shape of our family. Since successful methods of birth control were now available, we needed to make a choice about the size and type of family we wanted to be. And third, we naively thought we had something we could offer a child without a parent—a stable, loving home environment.

I knew I was not ready for another round of diapers and baby food and talk about babies and home-making with other mothers. I was yearning to go back to my career of teaching, to rational discussion of theology and politics, to move away from the physical labor of housework. We de-

cided we were open to a somewhat older child and that racial background was not a barrier.

It was the Friday before Thanksgiving in 1973, nine months after we had received the approval for adoption. All day I had a premonition that the social worker would call. I remember feeling disappointed and discouraged when I glanced at the clock and realized that the social work offices would soon close. And then we received the call. An Aboriginal girl, age two years and four months, was waiting for us in Calgary. We could meet her on the Tuesday after the holiday weekend, and if everything went well, take her home the day after that. There was jubilation within our family. Our older son had been praying faithfully for a sister. Our prayers were going to be answered!

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To our surprise, the social worker who met us was a friend and former pastor of our congregation. He was able to reassure us in our choice to adopt but gave us very little information as to the child's earlier life. That was all confidential

and not available to us. We were more anxious to meet this little girl than probe into her background. Our sons, who felt privileged to meet her first, were playing with her in the playroom. As a child I had always envied other girls who had black hair and brown eyes but had never imagined I would have this beautiful girl as my daughter. We had no doubts that she belonged in our family. I remember going down the elevator on the day we took her home, overwhelmed with joy.

At the time of adoption, I knew that other Mennonites were adopting Indigenous children and that Mennonite social workers were involved in that process. But I did not reflect deeply on the birth parents and their pain or on the Indigenous community and its values, nor did I ask many questions about how these children came to be in the welfare system. I naively assumed that social workers knew what they were doing.

Yet I do remember that niggling feeling I had when the questions I did ask were so quickly and superficially answered. I was told that the mother was unable to parent the child and had given her up. The father was unknown. I asked about whether it was wise to rename the child or whether we should keep her name. The social worker told me she had been called "baby" for most of her life thus far and so changing the name

would not be problematic. I asked about her somewhat delayed physical development and was told that in her first foster home, she had not developed well because she had spent too much time in her crib. I asked about getting some photos from her first two years but was told these were not available for adoptive parents.

Our daughter came to us with a large paper grocery bag filled with a few clothes and two stuffed toys. It was as if her first two important years of life were wiped away. But we thought our love and embrace would wipe away all neglect that she may have experienced. We did not recognize our middle-class white privilege or the class distinctions that were subtly affecting the adoption process. We now confess that our eyes needed to be opened.

As an infant who was handed off to various people for short periods of time, I never learned the right tools to protect myself. I have been labelled with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which helped me make sense of why I have been in survival mode all my life. . . . I grew up being uncomfortable, feeling different, yet not seeing myself as an Aboriginal person. Yet when people looked at me, that is what they saw. When I look at the family photos, I can see the discomfort in my face, not really believing that “OK, I am happy.” Right from the first two and a half years, I knew how-to-put-on masks and how to build walls of protection around myself. I did not have the bonds with others that I should have learned as an infant. I missed out on life because I dissociated from my feelings and so was not linked with another human being. I became numb so did not know what it was like to feel. . . . I didn’t know how to walk until after two. I didn’t know my name, so that’s messed up. For this newborn child to go through trauma immediately after birth, having that systemic bloodline of trauma (including parents in residential schools) and then also not getting the early tools to manage the trauma—that means I was already behind in so many ways. The “system” failed me from birth and did not allow me to develop and flourish.


Becoming a “family”

As I look at the photos and mementos of Kristen’s childhood, I smile. Balloons and popcorn symbolize for me the celebrations and ordinary, everyday happiness that were part of our experience with our new daughter. Hiding in closets and jumping out to surprise us never failed to bring forth laughter. Kristen was certainly a unique personality with strong likes and dislikes. Yet she fit into our family patterns quickly. I remember our

five-year old Kendall looking at a family picture only months after the adoption and wondering why Kristen wasn't in the picture.

A few months after the adoption, Gary's mother came to see us and to become acquainted with her new granddaughter. She arrived after our children had been put to bed. But I decided to wake Kristen, so she could meet her new grandmother. It took only one moment before Kristen ran to her for a hug. We wondered if this grandmother reminded Kristen of her last foster mother. A connection was established that only became stronger throughout that grandmother's life. Whenever Kristen had a difficult time falling asleep as a young child, I would suggest: "Think of a safe warm place where you can snuggle in and fall asleep." The place was always Grandma's lap.

I also remember that Kristen easily accepted anyone as a caregiver. Although she called us Mom and Dad, she did not demonstrate that there

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was a special bond between us for quite some time. She would give anyone a hug and stay willingly with any babysitter. It wasn't until the year we spent in Paraguay when she was six years old that our family relationships became stronger. In a foreign country where everyone speaks a different language, we had to learn to

depend on each other. I do remember Kristen being excited to meet so many people with brown skin and black hair. She even expressed this to us: "Now you are the different ones and I am the same!"

One incident in Kristen's childhood demonstrates the cracks that were beginning to appear in our approach to Kristen. We were on a family outing and came to a park featuring a large teepee. I asked Kristen to stand in front of it for a photo. She steadfastly refused to do it. Was this her stance against being objectified as an "Indian"? Was this her intuitive grasp that I was placing her outside of our family circle because of her Indigenous roots? Was this her response to not having any exposure to the culture of the people to whom she belonged? I still cringe when I think about that day.

We were glad that we lived in a multicultural neighborhood, but our important church context was quite mono-cultural. I now recognize that I was trying hard to impart my values to our daughter without an equal effort to help her connect with her own Aboriginal community and its values. We had no Indigenous friends during those years and only read

about “Indians” in books—not many of them accurate portrayals. Our efforts in parenting focused on Mennonite and Christian values subtly influenced by what we now understand as more generally Euro-Canadian values. We did not value the deep spiritual and cultural roots of the Aboriginal nations. We assumed that the differences in our blood heritage did not matter. No wonder that Kristen responded differently to situations and experiences than our other two children.

When I was around six years old, this girl in my Sunday school class said to me, “God doesn’t love you because you’re brown.” I visually remember exactly where in the church she said it to me. She was younger than I was, also had an adopted sister my age. I was blown away that this little kid could say something so powerful, so terrible. And in church! So that stuck with me for the rest of my life.

When I was a child, my hair was kept very short and that made me uncomfortable. I was a girl, but I had a boy haircut. Oh, yeah, my dad pulled out the masking tape for the bangs so that they could be cut straight. I remember in kindergarten there was another Aboriginal boy and he was a big boy and I avoided him. And then in grade 7 I met an Aboriginal girl. When the Aboriginal dancers came to the school she would say, “This is who we are.” And I said, “Okay?”

I remember my grandma as being gentle and accepting. But so often I was stepping into situations that I was not prepared for and was hurt in the process. Bonding is the key to relationships, but I was just receiving and not knowing what the boundaries were.

Moving throughout the country was another dislocation; there was no connection to the land, which is a major part of identity, especially for Aboriginals. It was during the move to South America that I started to see myself as a brown person after seven years of not knowing what people were seeing and not knowing how I’m feeling and just feeling displaced—not in the right spot because I’m brown and they’re white with blond hair and blue eyes.

In Paraguay the ladies on the bus would take care of me because they saw me as indigenous. The care. I felt the care! And then I was put into a Mennonite private school (with its blond-hair, blue-eyed students) learning two totally different languages (German and Spanish). The Paraguay experience was a major turning point in my sense of identity.

A fragile identity

As Kristen grew older, she began to ask more and more questions, which revealed some of the struggles she was having. I wrote down some of her questions at age twelve: *How come it is so hard to live the right way? How come*

we have to live? Why are there words like love and care? Why is it so hard to not use God's name in vain? Why does Mark [older brother] have it so easy?

The teen years were difficult. I became afraid for Kristen's safety when I realized how vulnerable she was to abuse as an Indigenous girl.

One day Kristen came home from high school and told me, "Now I can tell everyone I am a Mennonite!" This was a big surprise to me.

Kristen began to seek her independence and try to find her identity in various peer groups. She was often angry, and at times she was quite depressed. I was losing patience with her and was discouraged when I realized how I so often reacted in anger. We took Kristen to a counselor, but she refused to say a word. I remember a conversation in our front yard when she told me that she often felt like running away and would do so if I

forced her into counseling. We made a deal that she would not run away and that we would try to trust her more to make good decisions.

This was difficult for me to do as I watched her making choices that did not express our values and that put her in danger. I spent many nights waiting and worrying about her. When she did experience abuse and mistreatment, we tried to be there for her. I soon realized that I needed to create some space for nourishing my own spirit, so I entered a program of studies that led our family to Toronto, a difficult move for Kristen just before high school.

One day Kristen came home from high school and told me, "Now I can tell everyone I am a Mennonite!" This was a big surprise to me. She informed me that she had taken a course at school about Mennonites, describing them as conservative, Swiss background people, who used horses and buggies to drive to church, who refused to use electricity, and who lived in rural areas of Ontario. "Now I can tell everyone that I am a Mennonite! No one will believe me anyway!" she said.

Kristen was sure of one thing. She needed to get back to the western provinces where she felt more at home. For her last two years of high school she decided to go to Rosthern Junior College (RJC), a small Mennonite boarding school in Saskatchewan that some of her Edmonton friends were also attending. Though we were reluctant to send her so far away, we also realized that the independence she would have from us could be helpful in our relationship. She made some good friends and had some positive experiences. But she also found the rules and regula-

tions restrictive and often felt misunderstood and even betrayed when she shared feelings that were not kept confidential by the staff. I began to sense how difficult it was to be one of only a few Indigenous students, all of whom had been adopted, in a town where the barriers between Mennonites and Indigenous folk were huge.

Now we see that we too were part of the larger system that was trying to destroy the culture and unique identity of First Nations people by assimilating them through the fostering and adoption process. As Fournier

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and Grey explain, “The impossibility of emulating the genetic characteristics of their Caucasian caretakers results in an identity crisis unresolvable in this environment. . . . The Aboriginal child simply cannot live up to the assimilationist expectations of the non-Aboriginal caretakers.”⁷ The harm that was done is summed up in a decision by Superior Court Justice Edward Belbaba who ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in an Ontario

Sixties Scoop class action lawsuit. He stated that Canada had breached its common law duty of care to take reasonable steps to prevent adopted children from losing their Aboriginal identity. This left these children as “fundamentally disoriented, with a reduced ability to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. The loss of Aboriginal identity resulted in psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, unemployment, violence and numerous suicides.”⁸

Our vested interests as parents, as school administrators and teachers, as social workers and as guidance counselors were often disguised and hidden as we talked about doing what was best for the Aboriginal children in our midst. We did not understand that the choices available to Aboriginal teens were fewer and different because of the disorientation and loss of identity that came with adoption into a dominant culture that had oppressed their peoples for centuries. At the time I had little idea how deeply this affected not only individuals but also the larger Indigenous community.

7 Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Grey, *Stolen From our Embrace* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997), 30.

8 *Brown v. Canada (AG)*. 2017 ONSC 251 [Sixties Scoop Class Action] para.7 [4].

I was asking questions as a teenager because I did not know what it means to love. There's a difference between the dictionary meaning of love and knowing what it means when people say, "I love you." I know I love popcorn, but do I know I love another human being? I can say to my kids, "I love you," but do I really? And for me to say I love myself; I don't know what that means. So I put on a mask of pretending to know what it actually means.

Before RJC I was confused with no answer to the question of why this was so. The world didn't make sense, society didn't make sense. I observed hypocrites within the church and community, seeing their actions and hearing the words but also seeing the disconnect. Rosthern is a small town in Cree territory where Mennonites had settled as immigrants. While at RJC I was connecting with Indigenous people who lived on the reserve. The poverty on the reserve was a reality that was ignored by the Mennonite people. Many of these Indigenous people had gone to residential schools and had lost their identity.⁹

When I went to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission¹⁰ meetings in Toronto in 2011 with my brother Mark, I sat in on a session where somebody was speaking of their experience in residential schools. This triggered a strong response in me. I realized that the experience of the residential schools and my own experience as an adoptee were very similar. The adoption of Indigenous children was another version of the same thing—to take the Indian out of the human being. To lose the Indigenous part of us. To forget the unique role that we as Indigenous were given by the Creator.

Discovering roots

After successfully finishing high school, Kristen felt ready to begin the search for her birth mother. Together we looked through the adoption papers and especially her health records for clues to her birth family. It was not difficult to hold the papers up to the light and discover traces of Kristen's birth name that they had tried to erase. The name "Wolfear" led us to the Blackfoot reserve beside Gleichen, a reservation on which the Siksika nation had been placed only a few miles away from Rosemary, Alberta, where my husband, Gary, grew up. Over the next few months, both Mennonite and Aboriginal networks were enlisted to find her family. A call from a sister surprised Kristen one day, and they talked for hours as

⁹ I resonate deeply with the experiences and feelings of the main character in the novel Carol Rose GoldenEagle Daniels, *Bearskin Diary* (Gibsons, BC: Nightwood Editions, 2015).

¹⁰ For more information on these meetings throughout Canada, see Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (<https://www.trc-ca>).

she discovered a family she knew nothing about. The experience of meeting her mother for the first time was traumatic. Kristen writes about her feelings in *Intotemak*, a Mennonite periodical for Native Affairs.¹¹

*I get a lump in my throat
Tears in my eyes
When I think of that time
The moment of fear
“I would not survive”
Every feeling known
Jumping frantically
In my heart and soul
Feeling confused and alone
Laughing on the outside
Crying on the inside
Patience and time
Proved I could survive
And I will the next time too.*

This marked the beginning of Kristen’s formal search for her Aboriginal roots. In 1992 she went to Guatemala with a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Youth Discovery Team to acknowledge and affirm the resilience and survival of native people of America during the last 500 years. Perhaps this could counter the recognition of the “discovery” of North America by Christopher Columbus (who had lost his way in the trip to India!). She was disappointed to discover that MCC was unable to enlist any other Indigenous person for what she had understood was to be a four-member Indigenous team from North America. The other three young people who were now part of the team were not nearly as engaged in the larger purpose of the group as she was. She then worked as an MCC volunteer at the Walnut Receiving Home for helping Indigenous mothers in Winnipeg. She also traveled across Canada with a Peace Bus tour that visited various reserves to encounter Aboriginal peoples. They caught a glimpse of the rich culture and spirituality but also noted how much was taken away. In an interview after these varied experiences she speaks about how churches should respond to adopted native children

11 Special thanks to Mennonite Church Canada, the publisher of the periodical *Intotemak*, for permission to republish this poem, which originally appeared in *Intotemak* 22, no. 2 (March–April, 1993): 6–7.

in their midst: *Churches should support whichever decision that person would make, whether it is to never look into their blood heritage or stay with the Mennonite system or . . . try to make them match.*¹² She has continued her search for roots as she meets more of her relatives, as she visits reserves and hears the stories, as she participates in the ceremonies and rituals of native spirituality and as she meets Aboriginal folk in a variety of other settings.

The words of my mother to Kristen when she told her she was going to Calgary to meet her birth mother encouraged me during those years. “Kristen,” she said, “you know you can always love *more* people.” My

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mother recognized that we need not fear that finding a birth family would necessarily erase the experiences and love that we had shared over the years. I have held that truth tightly through the many ups and downs in the years that followed.

Kristen’s search for her roots also began our search for greater understanding of the relationship between the First Nations of Canada and the settlers who came later. What we discovered was a

trail of oppression by government, churches, and ordinary citizens like us—residential schools, physical and psychological abuse, broken treaties and promises, and much deception. For example, the government took reserve land (Kristen’s home reserve) without permission to build a dam that brought prosperity to the Mennonite community in which Gary grew up. Kristen’s parents and her husband’s parents spent time in residential schools and have told us stories about the abuse suffered there. Stereotypes of Indigenous people and distorted historical facts continue to be taught in our schools. As settlers we benefitted from these abusive situations.

Emotionally we also needed to come to terms with the fact that not only was Kristen searching for her family; her family was also searching for her. We cannot imagine the pain of families who were separated without having the knowledge and power to find out where and why this was happening to their family. A CBC podcast titled “Finding Cleo” tells a heart-wrenching story from the point of view of those searching for the

¹² Margaret Loewen Reimer, “Kristen Uncovers Her Aboriginal Heritage,” *Mennonite Reporter*, September 20, 1993, 5.

truth about their lost family member.¹³ We are only beginning to hear how these forced separations of family members have affected not only individuals but the larger communal identity of our First Nations people.

So much of our own thinking was influenced by the settler mentality which assumed that the Doctrine of Discovery with its “fabric of lies” gave us the power to decide what happened to Indigenous folk who had lived in the land for centuries.¹⁴ This false sense of privilege has permeated every aspect of the relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples by legitimating untold violence and injustice. We need to consciously repudiate and reject and dismantle this Doctrine of Discovery in order to be open to transformation. As Christians who settled on Indigenous land, we need to look again at the biblical and theological justifications that were used and point out how they benefitted us as settlers.

Why did I look for my parents? It was all Lydia’s influence. She wanted me to find out what my last name was. . . . To meet my mother was devastating because I saw the poverty and the distrust. . . . I also met my younger sister. She’s messed up too. Going from a middle-class family into what I assume was social housing, experiencing the difference in lifestyle was traumatic. . . . To be with bloodline family but they were strangers—perfect strangers.

One of the commonalities was humor, so there was a lot of laughter and joking to avoid the opposite feelings. It is more natural for Indigenous people to resort to humor.

I had a relationship with my mother, Heather, for ten years before she died. Meeting her, meeting my family, that in itself was traumatic. Finding out the traumas that my family have gone through (and of course not talked about) and seeing the effects as the aunties and uncles and my mother were trying to numb themselves, and then seeing their kids who were also trying to numb themselves and I too for various reasons . . . It’s the body that remembers.

13 Connie Walker, *Missing and Murdered: Finding Cleo*, CBC Radio, Podcast Audio, April 2, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/findingcleo>.

14 The Doctrine of Discovery is the “ostensibly legal justification for European claim to, and sovereignty over, indigenous lands and peoples.” Cheryl Woelk and Steve Heinrichs, *Yours, Mine, Ours: Unravelling the Doctrine of Discovery* (Winnipeg, MB: Mennonite Church Canada, 2016), 7n1. See also Shari Russell, “Still Questioning: The Theft of Indigenous Children,” *Intotemak* (Fall/Winter, 2016): 28–31; Sarah Augustine, “The Doctrine of Discovery and the Anabaptist Coalition to Dismantle It,” in *Resistance: Confronting Violence, Power, and Abuse within Peace Churches*, edited by Cameron Altaras and Carol Penner (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2022), 17–30; Jennifer Delanty, “Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery: One Congregation’s Response,” in *Resistance*, 65–71.

The first teaching that I remember came straight from the Creator. . . . I saw a white owl on my cedar tree in my back yard. . . . Several different elders explained to me its meaning: "It is a messenger of death." That is when I was called to the hospital because my mother was dying. . . . I was put as next of kin but did not know what this meant, who to ask, and what part of culture should be involved. . . . I was at her bedside when she passed. . . . This was all confusion, not knowing the power of the Sprit and the connection with the Creator; it was all foreign ground.

The funeral was traditional, a new teaching for me. My instinct was to do the traditional thing, but I didn't really know what that was. That's when my gut instincts guided me. . . . I had my head shaved and put the hair into the coffin. . . . At the funeral everyone else began taking small strands and braids from their own hair to also put into the coffin. It was instinctively the right thing to do.

Small pieces toward reconciliation

Through the counseling and being part of the Aboriginal elder wisdom and really observing what is in front of me and going with the flow brought me to where I am today. It has been a gift, having my eyes opened. There are many blessings, but at the same time, it has been extreme. . . . So I was brought into this world in trauma, in pain. My question is, Why? What is the larger teaching in that? There is still some anger; there is a lot of confusion; there are communication barriers. . . . The physical element (the body memories) is what is holding me back. But I had the inner strength to go through all that! The "intuitive vibe" is an amazing thing that I was given. I know that with everything, there is a time and place, plus everything happens for a reason. . . . Patience is the way to live.

As for the adoption, that's been one of the strong poles that has allowed me to connect back to my Indigenous side. Because my parents were open-minded, they were supportive. They were able to take things in. Having a father who has the teachings on how to manage trauma is a blessing. And him being an introvert as well because he can listen. (That has been a challenge, having an introvert as one parent and an extrovert as the other. It's quite a dynamic.)

I have to accept what has happened for what it is. It is not something that as a human being I can overcome, but spiritually I have trust in the Creator and in time.

Kristen has blessed us in so many ways. We took many trips to British Columbia where she had settled and were able to hold each of Kristen's babies in our arms soon after their birth. When she moved to Toronto, after she became a single mom, we could support her and participate more

in the daily and weekly life of her family. We have also shared pain—when there was abuse, when relationships were broken. Sometimes our relationship was tenuous; however, gradually we were able to reconnect in more healthy ways, giving each other space when needed.

There were many birthday parties for grandchildren and trips to the zoo or the lake. Watching our grandson dancing at a pow wow, attending school graduations, camping with the larger family circle all hold precious

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memories for us. We have experienced many joyous times together and have met some of Kristen’s Indigenous family and friends. Most important to me was meeting Kristen’s mother and sharing a Christmas meal with her at our home. We thanked each other for the part we each played in Kristen’s life. Kristen gave us each a similar candle holder. I cherish the photos of that Christmas. Another

highlight was the wedding of our daughter a few years ago—celebrated by a Mennonite ceremony attended by the two families, Aboriginal and Mennonite, followed several months later by an Aboriginal ceremony also attended by both extended families.

Yet the question of what reconciliation looks like on a personal and a systemic level still haunts me. Healing is often elusive for Aboriginal people who continue to bear the wounds of injustice because injustice continues in a variety of ways. But I know that we, who adopted children during the Sixties Scoop, also need healing and forgiveness. Remembering rightly is part of that process for me.

A few weeks ago, Kristen came to me and asked my help in applying to change her name officially to Ingrid Bettina Wolfear, the name given to her at birth. Intellectually I was ready for this; what surprised me was that I wholeheartedly could support this emotionally as well. Ingrid has moved north to live with her husband on First Nations land and is appreciating the presence of the lake and trees and sky all around her. She has a young daughter named Charlotte Marlene, the “Marlene” chosen because my second name is Marlene. We continue to keep in close touch with each other.

Our grandchild, Mitchell, when he was around six years old, asked us, “When did God and the Great Spirit become friends?” Somehow, he had caught a glimpse of a reconciliation “made in heaven.” I pray that this

kind of reconciliation may come on earth as it is in heaven. Remembering rightly may be the first step.

About the authors

Lydia Neufeld Harder, PhD (Toronto School of Theology), is retired from her formal work as theologian and pastor, but she continues to reflect on Mennonite theology and practice, particularly on the way power has functioned within the church and scholarly communities. She has taught sessionally, presented at numerous academic conferences, and worked as a pastor in the Mennonite Church. Her most recent book, *The Challenge Is in the Naming*, chronicles her theological journey by placing earlier published essays into the personal, social, and church contexts in which they were written. Lydia and her husband, Gary, live in Toronto, Ontario, where they attend the Toronto United Mennonite Church. Their three children and their spouses and their nine grandchildren and one great grandchild give them ample reason to travel and to keep in touch with the challenges of the next generations.

Ingrid Bettina Wolfear was born into the Blackfoot Nation, where all of her larger family and community were survivors of Residential School. She was in survivor mode from before the time she was born with blood memory as her backbone. She was a single parent to three children born within twenty-five months, until she met her husband of ten years. She and her husband live with their school-age daughter on Sagamok Anishnawbek Nation in Ojibway territory. Healing continues for all.

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