

A Not So Linear Timeline

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Halt, who goes there?

I am Mackenzie Griffin; I live in Kelowna and grew up in Fort Assiniboine.

No. Where are you and who are you from?

I am Mackenzie, I am Cree and Saulteaux. My reserve is Sunchild First Nation. My mother is Kathleen Griffin. My grandmother is Louisa Lagrelle. I am also white. My father is Timothy Griffin. He is my ally.

What does it mean to be Indigenous?

That is a question I cannot answer, at least not simply. Below is an amalgamation of poems and emotions. A timeline of my life, if you will, in no particular order.

What does it mean to be mixed?

It means that I must hold both parts of myself, a thousand-pound brick and a thousand pounds of feathers. Both weigh the same, but they appear to be different. I must recognize where I have privilege and where I am disadvantaged. I must acknowledge where harm has been done to know where healing must begin.

Where is healing?

It is in me. In you. In all of us, and none of us. It is one step forward and eighteen steps back. It is thirty-nine steps forward before finding yourself exactly where you began. It is awareness and vulnerability, fear and cleansing from shame. It is not linear.

Whose land are you on?

I am on Syilx territory, home of the Okanagan peoples, which stretches from Colville Confederate Tribe in Washington to territory in Revelstoke. I am here studying at the University of British Columbia. I have come to learn about myself, to find my place in this world. I have also come to find my footing, to learn from those who came before me.

What does it mean to learn?

My father has a saying, you don't know what you don't know. It is a simple statement, but a true one, because there is always more to learn. We are all on a journey and community is the very thing that binds us together. To know whose land we are on, is to know we are journeying with one another and that we all have wisdom to share. It is to know that the land has agency, has stories to communicate if only we are willing to listen. In *Native* by Kaitlyn Curtice, she states that community is "the thing that sharpens us, hurts us, heals us. It is the thing that leads us home or to a new home we did not know we longed for. Community is the miracle that reminds us we are still looking, still searching" for transformation (18).

Let us journey together.

Authenticity is Indigenous

Authenticity is defined as being of undisputed origin,
it means the individual knows where they have come from.

Authenticity means speaking Cree or Saukteaux,
and knowing more than one Indigenous recipe.

Authenticity is full of heritage and tradition,
it is dancing in Powwows with colourful dresses that jingle as you move.

Authenticity is knowing the stories of the past,
the ones worth sharing, and the ones greatly cherished.

Authenticity is everything that I am not,
but what if Authenticity is not all it is cracked up to be?

See maybe, Authenticity is living in a home with graffitied walls and mouldy bathrooms.
Maybe it is finding dust and ashes at the bottom of a chest.

Maybe, Authenticity is begging to share your story,
and once you do, you find it trampled on by the ones who heard it.

Authenticity is statistics of high school dropouts and teen pregnancies,
it is joining gangs, dealing drugs and being handed a legacy of alcoholism and gambling.

Authenticity is receiving a gift of violence, wrapped in shiny bows, and glossy paper.
It is the erasure of once was, and the rising of resistance hundreds of years in the making.

If Authenticity is this, do I want it?


If Authenticity is pain, violence, and suffering, why do I long for it?

Because if I am Authentic then I take away from the people who truly deserve it,
because Authenticity would mean living in a two-story house with three expensive dogs.

It would mean speaking only English and having the privilege to attend university.
Authenticity would be a hollowed-out shell of what once was.

If I claim Authenticity, am I participating in Colonization?
The little white girl, who wanted to be Indian.

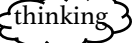
The Art of Listening:

Listening requires more than just your  s

It is facing forward and *leaning* in

It is keeping your eyes WIDE and your heart **open**

Listening is not w...a...i...t...i...n...g until you can have your turn


It is not  thinking about what you are going to say next

Listening is being quiet and **attentive**

It is ensuring that the speaker has said everything they need to before sharing your own thoughts

The art of listening *does not* mean you agree

It does not even mean you *like it*

All it means is that you listen with more than your  s

A Hurt You Put There

I don't know what to say to make you hear me
I don't know what to say to make you see me

All I know is that I'm hurting
It's a hurt you put there

A hurt I cannot undo

Your words are shameful
Your false accusations blind me

Your angry shouts and impatient tapping silences me
Your backhanded blows and upright jabs fill my gut with bile and my mouth with blood

I don't know what to say to you to make you change your mind
I don't know what to say to make you listen

All I know is you've hurt me, and we can't go back

Inclusion is Not Decolonization

Inclusion is br-*ing-in-g* one or two people of colour into a SeA of white faces.
It is including the ONE black kid into the game of grounders, you play on the playground.
It is tokenistic gestures and meaningless words.

Inclusion is making the world seem a little less white without solving the real problem.
For imagine you looked around the room and every single person you saw was a different race or ethnicity.

Imagine every single person you work with was hired because of skillset and not because of the colour of their skin.
Imagine you turned ON the news to see stories of people not like you

Imagine.

You see, decolonization is not about who is *included* in the norm but rather how systems are **transformed**.
For one should be able to go to work, or school, or community events, and see people of their own race.
There should be a level playing field, instead, the other team has

a 90-yard advantage.

So, what do you do when you want to ~~assure~~ the way stories are told?
What do you do when you want **everyone** to have the same kinds of privileges and advantages as **white people** normally do?
How do you change a system that has been “working” for hundreds of years?



Wait.

Slow down a minute.

Take a Breath.

You can't do it all on your own.
Even if you want to.

For only when we work **together** do things really begin to change.

Only when our , our , our souls, every part of us changes.

Only together, can we see any change at all.

Heart, Mind, Body & Soul

Have you ever taken your heart out of your chest and studied it?
Are there any gaping holes?
Dark bruises?
Does it leave your fingertips stained red?
Does it hurt to hold?
Are you afraid to drop it?

Have you ever taken your brain out of your head and studied it?
Is it soft and delicate or hard and calloused?
Is there a cloud of fog around it, so much so that you can't see the actual organ?
Is it full of stark words and images that dance around like little fireflies?
Do you feel invigorated when you observe it?

Have you ever taken your soul out of your body and studied it?
Can you touch it?
Does it glow?
Feel lighter than anything you've ever held or is it heavy with unresolved burden?
What does it long for?
Does it try to jump off the operating table, restrained only by you?

And now we come to the body.
You cannot take it apart, for every part works together to form one body.
But if we were to study the body, what would it look like?
Would it be quick and agile, moving with ease that only a healthy body can do?
Does it groan and pop, each movement jerky and unbalanced?
Are there tiny chunks of hamburger sitting at the bottom of your stomach?
Is it full of water or is it composed of dirt?
Are there parts more valuable than another?

And that is the question in all of this, isn't it?
What does it mean to care for every part of yourself, not just one part?
What does it mean to care for your heart, a place long known to represent all emotions?
What does it mean to care for your mind, a place of vast intellect?
What does it mean to care for your soul, to fill up your gas tank when your spirit is waning?
What does it mean to care for your body, a place of energy and physical strength?

What does it mean to hold all parts of yourself as valuable and just as important as any other?

Grieving for a Phantom

losing someone would be hard,
for anyone.
but what if you lost someone
you hardly knew?
what if it was someone
you loved the idea of
but knew you could never have,
like sand slipping through your fingertips.
what if it was someone
that never showed you love.
no hugs or kisses,
just greedy fingers
snatching at your resources.
what if it was someone that treated you
like you didn't exist?
and sure,
it might've been because
they never learned how to love;
residential schools ripping away
all that mattered,
like joyfulness, affection, and a caring heart.
but even so,
knowing that never made it any less hard.
because losing someone would be hard,
for anyone.

A Time Almost Before

the dirt roads have divots half the size of me
people walk or take horse and buggies
cars exist but not here
never here

we go to the Indian Agent to get groceries
he comes once a month
there are 13 of us and so we get 50 pounds of flour
it has to last

we eat off the land
moose, elk, deer, rabbit
whatever we take we give thanks for
we use every part of it

there are no refrigerators, no storage bins
so we dry our food or store it in snow
it will go bad if we don't

we don't speak no English
only Cree and Sauteaux
nipâpâ speaks a little French

I don't think we need to learn it
but they send us away anyway
we all go at once,
but some of us are too little

I am only there a few years
I am 5 maybe 6
I stay until 12 or 13
it doesn't matter

When I return it is hard to remember the time before

Something Taken

Âniski-nôhkom never wore pants
but it never affected how much power she held.
She never spoke English,
but she was a force to be reckoned with.
She didn't know modern medicine,
but she listened to the land
and somehow that was almost better.

Âniski-nôhkom was a medicine woman.
She healed gangrene and cancer.
She knew the plants you mixed together to alleviate cramps,
and knew the ones you'd steep to soothe sore throats and clear stuffy noses.

To be a medicine woman was a great honour,
often passed from okâwimâw to otânisimâw.
But something stopped all of that.
Something that cannot easily be undone.

When you can no longer speak to your own children,
how do you pass on knowledge?
When your children hurt so bad their only solution is addiction,
how do you share the most sacred part of you,
the most sacred part of history?

But what does it mean to let the knowledge die with you?
What does it mean that you can't go back,
can't raise someone from the dead
to make them share their wisdom.
What does it mean to be lost?
A child without history, without culture.
A ship without an anchor,
without land anywhere in sight.

I Didn't Grieve for You

My mother told me the news while she was in Walmart.
The call lasted two minutes, maybe three max.
I cried more out of shock than anything else.
Everyone suspected you'd been murdered.
Your ex said you killed yourself.
They were sending you for an autopsy.
Days passed, and we learned the results wouldn't come through for another year.
Your native blood making you somehow less worthy than all the others.

I didn't grieve for you, not really.

I grieved for all the people you represent.
For all the Indigenous people who dropped out of school early.
Who got stuck in a cycle of shame and guilt, or who encountered a lifetime of addictions.
And who did you leave behind, but your daughter, your mother, your brothers and sisters?
You were the second child to go, and somehow, I know you won't be the last.

So, I grieve for all the people you represent.
I was too young to help you.
I didn't know any better for I'd grown up in my own cycle of trauma.
But I hope that one day I can help others.
I hope that one day I can help people just like you.

Do No Better

my aunt waves her hand in greeting
or perhaps dismissal
she mumbles an acknowledgment or two
smiles even
but I can tell she's staring at us from underwater

my mother helps build cabinets in the kitchen
she spends hours fixing them
making sure the space is tidied once she's finished
my aunt doesn't help
she can do no more than sleep

no one blames her
yet we wish she'd do more
wish she'd strive for the truth
strive for the safety of her children
for a better life than that on the rez

but what can she do really
call the coroner to find her daughter committed
suicide or worse
that she was murdered, and the police
did nothing

she could call various police stations,
friends of her sons
to find what jail cell he's in
but perhaps she'd only find him dead
a third child gone before she is

what can she do but find a tutor
learn the material herself
so her daughters can be the first to graduate
so Nana doesn't follow in the footsteps of her siblings
so Charmaine feels empowered enough to never give up

what can she do but refuse to aide
unhealthy habits
the ones of her sisters drinking
away their problems
the same problems she numbs herself

the ones of her mother popping pills to ease the pain
of her children selling drugs or joining gangs
of her mother spending
hours in the casino, so she can win
just enough

but can I blame her after knowing
all of this
would I try to do so much better
or would I try and be in the same place
suffocating under the covers

For Whoever Comes Next

I don't know what it's like to lose a mother,
but I know what it's like to lose,
to long for something you can never have.
I know what it's like to go about your days joyful,
but to still feel like something is missing.
Something that carves a hole
inside your heart.
A hole that can be filled
but never full.

Marylynn, I pray that you would continue
to be joyous.
I pray that your memories would be sweet,
and not bitter with the things that might've been.

Marylynn, I pray that you would come alongside me,
that you would work every day to break the cycle of trauma
our families couldn't break
on their own.

Marylynn, would you remember
that it is not your fault,
that we all hurt in our own way
and we are not alone.

Would you remember the love we have for you,
the love your mother has for you.
Would you remember
her like a breath
on your neck,
or a blanket tucked
tight around you,
a love ever present even if
you can't quite feel it.

Marylynn, would you grow
to be a woman like great, great kôkom.
Would you grow to be proud of who you are,
every part of you.
Even the parts that hurt the most.
Maybe, especially those parts.
Because every part comes together
to make us who we are,
and we cannot separate the heart from body.

The Box I Made for Me

It's tapping on glass,
sitting cross-legged in the **box**
I made for myself.
The **box** I made
to protect myself.


It's *tossing* and *turning*,
the covers a **heavy** unwelcome weight.
I can't get up.
I don't want to get out,
of the **box** I made for me.

It's *wiggling* your toes,
wondering if they're still there.
I don't feel anything
in this **box**.
The **box** I made for me.

Make Me a Spectacle, I Dare You


I sit with shoulders *hunched* and legs *pulled* up against my chest.

Shivers run ^{up} and ^{down} my spine

Your   watch me,
I'm a **spectacle** for all to see.

Your hands and faces **press** against the glass,
leaving *greasy* fingerprints and *fogged* up glass.

You **stare** for hours

 passes

I wonder when it will **stop**.
IF it will stop.

I don't find myself that interesting.
I don't do anything anymore.
I haven't moved in days and still you watch,
Like you expect something will happen.

Well, I say,
something has happened.
A change in me,
a change *you* put there.

I will not be SILENT,
A *whisper* in your wind.
But do not expect me to answer to your GAWKing.
I am more than what you've made me to be.

#LandBack

What does it mean to give the land back?
How can we tackle such a complicated problem?
Is it even worth dealing with at all?
Is it the ONLY important issue worth dealing with?

Why are my poems always full of questions?

But seriously, what does it mean to give the land back?
Do we send all the colonizers back to where their ancestors came from?
Do we turn crown land into Indigenous land?
Do we make non-Indigenous folks pay taxes to Indigenous peoples rather than the government?
Do we change the way we talk about ownership? About acknowledgements? About responsibility?
Do we dismantle the Indian Act or the Reserve Systems and replace it with something new? Something that acknowledges treaty rights and self-determination.
Something that works with communities to establish self-governance according to each specific municipality and each specific need.
Do we change the way power is stratified? The way it is coercive? The way it is damaging?
Or perhaps, do we start to consider the ways in which we work together? The ways in which we coexist?

What does it mean to go back?
I mean actually go back.
Because I don't think we can, at least not all the way.
All we can do is look at the past and look at the future to better understand the present.

All we can do is listen.

Listen to each other. Listen to the land.
What do we still have to learn? For there is always something.
Always a whisper in the wind, waiting to be heard. To be grasped. To be challenged.
A whisper waiting to push us further than we've ever gone before.