

**Start with Self: Considerations of Being in Relationship**

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**Abstract**

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This dissertation of practice is a thorough and reflexive examination of self and identity as I seek to explore relationship, as a white woman administrator at a community college, with Indigenous peoples without causing further harm with the goal of supporting Indigenous identity, self-determination, and restoration of land. Using the method of critical autoethnography interrogated through the lens of feminist epistemology, I explore questions of losing/discovering home, losing/discovering (my) mother, and grief in order to engage my whole self in my relations with my colleagues, my family and friends, and my community in the pursuit of liberatory action.

# Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Acknowledgements.....  | vi  |
| <i>Content Warning</i> .....   | vii |
| Introduction/Intervention Statement .....  | 1   |
| Purpose/Guiding Questions .....  | 6   |
| Significance/context.....  | 8   |
| Positionality Statement .....  | 9   |
| The Patterners for Quilting .....  | 16  |
| Foundational Blocks for Quilting .....   | 18  |
| The Quilt Design.....  | 23  |
| <i>Research Questions</i> .....  | 23  |
| <i>Research Methods and Justification</i> .....                                      | 23  |
| <i>Participants, Sampling Procedures, &amp; Protection of Human Subjects</i> .....   | 24  |
| <i>Proposed Analysis</i> .....   | 25  |
| <i>Reciprocity Statement</i> .....   | 25  |
| In My Mother’s House, Buoyed by Love .....   | 25  |
| <i>Don’t see me; don’t notice me; move on - My Father in My Mother’s House</i> ..... | 27  |
| Between the Lines.....   | 29  |
| Finding Mother .....   | 33  |
| Finding Home .....   | 37  |
| Finding Water .....  | 46  |
| <i>Walking the Lands: Richmond Beach, 2003-2005</i> .....                            | 48  |
| <i>Walking the Lands: Edmonds, 2008-2018</i> .....                                   | 49  |
| <i>Walking the Land: Genesee/Lake Washington, 2018-2022</i> .....                    | 50  |
| <i>Walking the Lands: Duwamish River, 2020-Present</i> .....                         | 53  |
| From Silence/Invisibility to Action: Cultivating Healthy Relations.....              | 57  |
| <i>Who Invited You?</i> .....  | 58  |
| <i>Cultivating healthy relations: Listening and meeting needs when invited</i> ..... | 59  |
| <i>Cultivating healthy relations: Listening and learning</i> .....                   | 62  |
| <i>Cultivating healthy relations: Moving authentically</i> .....                     | 66  |
| Method Makin’ and Porch Sittin’ .....  | 69  |

|                 |    |
|-----------------|----|
| References..... | 73 |
| Appendix A..... | 80 |
| Appendix B..... | 81 |

## Acknowledgements

To the Duwamish, Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Tulalip, and the Coast Salish peoples: I think, work, and write on occupied land. I walk the Land in this beautiful, stunning place in the Pacific Northwest I call home and am keenly aware of the caretaking the Tribes and Indigenous peoples have done since time immemorial. The fight for recognition and sovereignty, the fight for the rivers, the fight for the forests, and the fight for healthy ecosystems and communities continues, and I stand in solidarity with you and hold myself accountable to you. I humbly hope my research better prepares me for engaging in healthy relationships with Indigenous communities. I'm especially grateful for the Indigenous friends I have been working with through the Ridge 2 River and the Indigenous Plant Signage projects.

This work is an unfolding of me that I'm sharing; my fear and elation at doing so are equal in nature. I'd like to acknowledge the communities that shaped me and this work. I would not be here without my mother. One of my last coherent conversations I had with her was regarding the first doctor in our family, one of her first cousins, and memories she had of her childhood and journey. Her dementia was advanced enough that I sometimes didn't know if she understood or not, but I know in my heart this was her way of saying, "I see you and the work you are doing, and I am proud." This research is dedicated to my mother, my sisters, and to all of the women in my family – I see your strength.

To my family...My daughter, thank you for your support over the years and for helping me become the person I am; I work now in the hopes of a better future for you. My brothers, for supporting family always and for being there with Mom at the end - all of us together felt right.

To my colleagues now and throughout the years: I thank you for the wisdom, the lessons, the difficult conversations, and the community college family, one where access and inquiry are

continually examined; your contributions to my research are appreciated, and I hope my research is of benefit.

### *Content Warning*

In parts of this dissertation, I write about topics that may be painful for others to read. These include descriptions of my experiences related to the death of a parent, alcoholism, fire, abuse, and domestic violence. Readers who may be sensitive to these elements, please take note.

## Introduction/Intervention Statement

salty air breezing through rustling leaves.  
water flowing in, out, over, through  
speaking to rocks and concrete walls, which seek to contain, but only restrain  
for a time.  
water merging with sky, a symphony of blue on a fair day  
but likely it's more of a serene grey, nine times out of ten, in Seattle.  
My feet trace the rhythms of my body as my mind seeks refuge from the tick-tock of time.

*~Alison Pugh, March 2022, Reflections on walking the Land, Salish Sea.*

I am a Dean at a community college in Washington state. Like much of higher education, the college where I work is having an identity crisis after two years of operating remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and various states of lockdown. I argue though that this crisis has been percolating for a long time and much of it stems from a lack of connection to the communities with their natural ecosystems where they serve. Even community colleges, designed as open-access institutions, are dropping the “community” out of their names as they begin to offer bachelor’s degrees. As community colleges seek to be perceived and valued at the same level as other 4-year institutions, they create even more disconnection from their service communities by their very names.

Community colleges in America, like the rest of higher education, are not immune to the challenges caused by institutional racism, discrimination, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. As institutions, they are centered in white, Euro-centric, and heteronormative frameworks that continue to harm students, staff, and faculty of color. After almost 70 years of integration and multiple social movements for civil rights, equality, and multiculturalism, disparities among different groups continue to persist in student achievement, from standardized testing to grades

in the classroom to completion of courses and programs in K-12 and higher education (Au et al., 2016; Institutional Research, 2020; Kezar & Posselt, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Love, 2019; Patel, 2016; Zamudio et al., 2011). In addition, many institutions profess diversity goals, mostly defined as demographic representation in the academy, and have for decades, yet the number of faculty of color continues to be low nationwide, in Washington state, and at my own institution (Institutional Research, 2020; Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2023; Zambrana, 2018). Nevermind Zambrana's assertion that "the language of diversity eschews any thoughtful discussion of structural and racial and ethnic inequality" (2018, p. 1) or her analysis that diversity initiatives in higher education hiring benefit white women, international faculty, and other racial ethnic groups more than they do African-Americans, Mexican Americans, American Indians, and Alaska Natives, what she specifically terms Underrepresented Minority (URM) groups assimilated in U.S. through mostly involuntary means (Zambrana, 2018). When viewed through the URM lens, the numbers are even more abysmal.

The Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) is working to address racial inequalities as a system. In June 2019, the SBCTC adopted the following vision statement integrating racial equity for the first time, "Leading with racial equity, our colleges maximize student potential and transform lives within a culture of belonging that advances racial, social, and economic justice in service to our diverse communities" (Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, 2022). The college where I work adopted similar language in fall 2018 with a promise to work towards becoming antiracist. While such statements are often made to herald direction for institutions, Sara Ahmed (2006) argues that they are nonperformative and that "antiracist speech acts is a mechanism for the reproduction of institutional authority, which conceals the ongoing reality of racism" (p. 110). Aligned with

Ahmed's assertion, the actual supported initiatives stemming from this vision are often focused on quick solutions as evidenced by the funding to diversify faculty per one of the elements of SB 5194, the Our Colleges, Our Future Act, signed into law in 2021. The State allocated money to each institution to fund a certain number of conversions from part-time to full-time faculty with a focus on recruitment of faculty according to diversity, equity, and inclusion plans. The money was supposed to be used the next academic year; in that scenario, hiring should have already happened by the time the money and allocation process was available. This type of quick fix will not transform each institution's hiring process as it does not allow for the time needed to identify and examine the structural issues that keep us replicating the same broken system over and over again, mired in white supremacy culture with its characteristics of urgency and quantity over quality (Okun, 2021). Data from the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges shows that between the years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, white-identified faculty, as a percent of overall faculty throughout the system, decreased from 75% to 72%, showing incremental change that will need continued investment of time and resources (2023).

As part of many colleges' antiracist efforts in the state, the focus is not only on issues of race, but also settler colonialism and Native American sovereignty. For the last three years or so, it has become a norm at the college to open meetings with a Land Acknowledgement that states: we are occupying Indigenous land; paying homage to associated Tribes and First Peoples; and asking us to consider the implications within our work. The format of this varies widely. The Seattle Colleges adopted the following:

Today we recognize and honor the original occupants and stewards of the land where we now gather. Many of us are joining this meeting from lands that are the traditional home

of the Coast Salish people, the traditional home of all tribes and bands within the Duwamish, Suquamish, Tulalip, and Muckleshoot nations.

Today, we honor the survival, the adaptations, the forced assimilation, and the resilience and creativity of Native peoples—past, present, and future. We encourage participants to consider their responsibilities to the people and land, both here and elsewhere, and to stand in solidarity with Native, Indigenous, and First Nations People, and their sovereignty, cultural heritage, and lives.

This may or may not be followed up with further reflection from the person sharing or the group and does not usually include action related to the cultivation of relationship with Indigenous communities in the region despite the oft-expressed need for this.

My own discipline and research interests align with sustainability and human interactions with ecology and the environment. In my current job, I'm constantly reflecting on these connections at both an operational level as a college as well as in the classroom. As my thinking evolves, I'm considering how questions of environmental sustainability relate to issues of white supremacy in community college management. Before becoming an instructor and then dean, I was a sustainability practitioner, working to reduce organizations' negative environmental impact. This was done mostly through a business-oriented framework, the triple-bottom line (TBL). John Elkington deemed TBL as a framework for business to define and evaluate the impacts of the intersection of three bottom lines: environment, equity, and economics, with the goal of transforming the capitalist economic system that dominates worldwide with its emphasis on economic profit only (Elkington, 2004). Many criticisms of this framework exist; a succinct one comes from Sridhar and Jones (2013) who identify three main critiques: 1) the measurement

of TBL; it is notoriously difficult to measure, particularly the equity aspect, but the environmental dimension poses challenges as well; 2) it is a framework grounded in systems theory (Kapra, 1996), but the elements are not integrative, interdependencies are not mapped, and trade-offs between the elements occur frequently when applied; 3) organizations can use TBL as a compliance mechanism as opposed to furthering positive impacts, meaning they report on impacts, but take little to no action to improve environmental and equity performance. TBL is widely used as the framework for advancing sustainability on higher education campuses, including where I work, although the college does participate in a more sophisticated system of assessing and measuring through the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Reporting System (AASHE STARS). Even so, TBL and STARS are both largely based on colonial approaches with emphasis on quantitative measurement and lack of attention to Indigenous community and land issues and how these interrelate to environmental issues. Relationships should be the center of this work, and I experienced a heart-shifting realization that ecological restoration/sustainability work must be centered in Indigenous communities.

The college where I work sits squarely on the ancestral lands of the Duwamish peoples, many of whom were driven away based on settler colonialism and commerce. Just below the ridge where the college is sited is the current Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center. The entire area hosts many important cultural sites important to the descendants of the Duwamish peoples. The prominence of the location, where academia literally overlooks important ancestral lands, and the literal runoff from the college rolls downhill into Native ancestral waters is not lost on me. It is a position of dominance that I seek to mitigate by working on connection and

relationship with the Coast Salish peoples based on reflexivity, recognition of harm, reciprocity, reparation, and healing.<sup>1</sup>

## Purpose/Guiding Questions

So how do I attend to such relations without a thorough and reflexive examination of self and identity? How can I be in relation without being able to explain who I am and where I come from? These questions are important for me to consider and other researchers as well, whether you are an insider or an outsider to Indigenous communities, and I would argue these are fundamental questions to consider in the work of creating antiracist and healing institutions.

Exploration of my story explores the following themes:

- Losing/recovering my home
- Losing/recovering my mother (bio/land/generational ancestor)
- Grief → healing → engender new types of community and collaborative spaces

My academic background was firmly rooted in: third-person writing, detachment, and the need for "objectivity." Before I started my EdD program, I didn't even really understand what positionality was. Authors and researchers such as Linda Smith, Leigh Patel, JoAnn Archibald, Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang, Marcia McKenzie, and others opened my eyes to the problems of such methods, not just when researching within Indigenous communities, but also of research in general, which continues to be steeped in colonialism today (Archibald, 2008; Patel, 2015;

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<sup>1</sup> Native American Tribal identities are extremely complex as they not only stem from historical and cultural identities, but they also interact with U.S. federal recognition and sovereignty, blood quantum, and historical and present-day settler colonial logics. The Indigenous villages around the Duwamish River historically included peoples whose descendants are now members of federally recognized Tribes such as the Muckleshoot, Suquamish, and Tulalip. It also includes peoples whose descendants identify as the Duwamish Tribe and are seeking federal recognition. Some of these identities are intertwined. I acknowledge that I am an outsider to these communities and, while I know some of the histories, I can never fully understand the complexities of these family lineages. When I identify the "Duwamish Tribe" in this work, I do so to honor the wishes of people I know who identify as such.

Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Patel states, "Research is a fundamentally relational project - relational to ways of knowing, who can know, and to place" (2015, p. 48), and goes on to charge researchers to ask the questions of any undertaking - Why this? Why me? Why now? In asking why me, "this question should prompt a humble pause and reflection on the specifics of individuals' experiences that make them appropriately able to craft, contribute, and even question knowledges" (2015, p. 58). I sit in the center of these questions as my purpose for this work.

Smith (2012) and Patel (2015) both speak to Western research and its need for dissection and classification as antithetical to Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and axiology. In addition, Smith describes the crux of the problem between traditional Western research and Indigenous communities is that "it has been taken for granted that Indigenous peoples are the 'natural objects' of research" (2012, p. 122), something to be examined, classified, and even extracted. Sandy Grande (2018) critiques the academy itself "as an arm of the settler state" (p. 47) that continues to erase Indigenous histories, perspectives, and contributions and charges that the settler state has strategies "to placate dispossessed people while evading any effort to change the underlying power structure" (p. 56). Because of this there is deep mistrust of research, researchers, and the academy in Indigenous communities.

One fundamental value and way of being within Indigenous folk centers on community, relations, and connectedness. Both Patel (2015) and Archibald (2008) describe the concept of holism, a concept of relationship between parts that form a greater whole due to these relations. These parts can include facets of self, the spiritual, and the physical. Smith states, "For researchers the skills and reflexivities required to mediate and work with these dynamics (the dynamics of relationships) are quite sophisticated" (parenthesis mine) (2012, p. 138).

## Significance/context

Seattle is home to the Duwamish peoples who are scattered on lands and waters surrounding the Salish Sea with ancestral lands adjacent to what the government calls the Lower Duwamish Waterway, since they attempt to control the river by engineering, but the community calls the Lower Duwamish River. This area was declared a Superfund site by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2001 due in part to the long history of industrial pollution where the river meets the Puget Sound. This negatively affects the food, water, and air of the area, and according to Gould and Cumming's *Duwamish Valley Cumulative Health Impacts Analysis*, "Georgetown and South Park residents have up to a 13-year shorter life expectancy (at birth) than wealthier parts of Seattle" (2013, p. 2). This brutal statistic leads me to reflect - what is the college's responsibility to the community's greater social and ecological ecosystem? In addition, the Duwamish, as a Tribe, are actively denied federal recognition and sovereignty and are thus operating with even less access to material resources and political power as they struggle for federal recognition (Mitchell, 2015). Even the University of Washington in Seattle's official land acknowledgement intentionally excludes the Duwamish because of this (Ross Braine, 2020). Native American and Indigenous students are living, learning, and dreaming in the middle of this present-day and long-standing anti-Indigenous context, further complicated by issues related to federal recognition and persistent settler colonialism.

As I think about what cultivating a healing and restorative praxis might look like in this space, I am reminded of Love's words, "Abolitionist teaching is not a teaching approach: It is a way of life, a way of seeing the world, and a way of taking action against injustice (2019, p. 89). She then goes on to describe a vocabulary that conjures up powerful imagery that inspires,

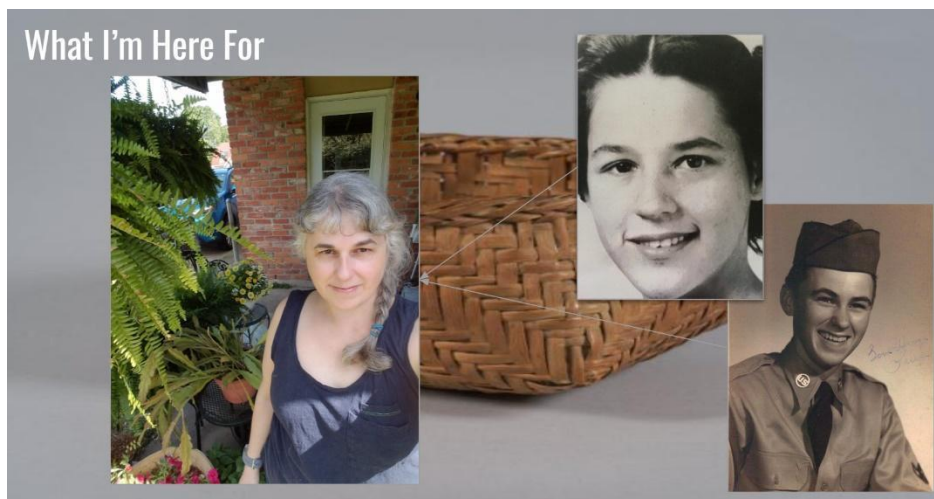
moves, and *directs* me – freedom-dreaming, art for joy and resistance, black joy, co conspirators, thriving - more than the prefixes de, anti, mis used so often in critical approaches (Kelley, 2001; Love, 2019). Patel argues for a systemic view of educational inequality (including nonhuman life forms), a research stance that uses a “holistic ecology” as its default approach and critiques the single factor/single intervention research approach that permeates the sciences, both historically and in the present (2019, pp. 17-24). Newberry and Trujillo argue that challenges today, such as ecological decline and climate change, require a transdisciplinary educational approach “since it serves an antidote to the reductionism that is an artifact of Western scientific approaches to knowledge whereas knowledge is holistic, synthetic, and multi-contextual” (2019, p. 204). Such an approach combines many disciplines as well as practitioners outside of academia. Further, they posit that integration and synthesis is necessary for the complexities of problems today (Newberry and Trujillo, 2019). In other words, Indigenous knowledge and worldviews are central to humanity’s future! I come back to the question of in what ways can education, and in this case, the College collaborate and partner with Indigenous peoples and tribal organizations without causing further harm with the goal of supporting Duwamish cultural identity and restoration of land and waters? Before I go straight to solutions as I have been trained to do, I must examine my own positionality, biases, assumptions, and traumas that I bring to any relationship.

## **Positionality Statement**

I continue to be struck by the intense personal work that is necessary for doing equity and justice work in the world. Jamila Lyiscott emphasizes, “Social justice requires personal wellness. Public impact requires private introspection” (2019, p. 14). Reflection and introspection is a key component to making change (Chilisa, 2020; Freire, 2018; Kezar & Posselt, 2020; Lorde, 2007;

Love, 2019; Lyiscott, 2019; Patel, 2015; Rogers-Ard & Knaus, 2021, Smith 2012; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). This work derives much from my experiences in the recent past specifically and my processing and reflections as this is where I feel I began to really dig deep in the who, what, how of me and my relations.

In March of 2021, I traveled back to Alabama to help care for my mother who had become bedridden after she broke her femur from a fall. She was 87 and already in hospice care at home and had been for a couple of years. My sister was the main caregiver but wasn't physically capable of handling the new level of care that was needed; at the same time, we did not want to put her in a nursing home for a lot of reasons, but especially due to COVID and the visiting restrictions in place. My mom had dementia and while she did often become confused, she was better when she was in a familiar place surrounded by familiar people. I knew I had to come home and bought a one-way ticket since we really had no idea what would happen, or even at the time, whether my sister and I could handle the care with both of us working from home and me attending school as well.



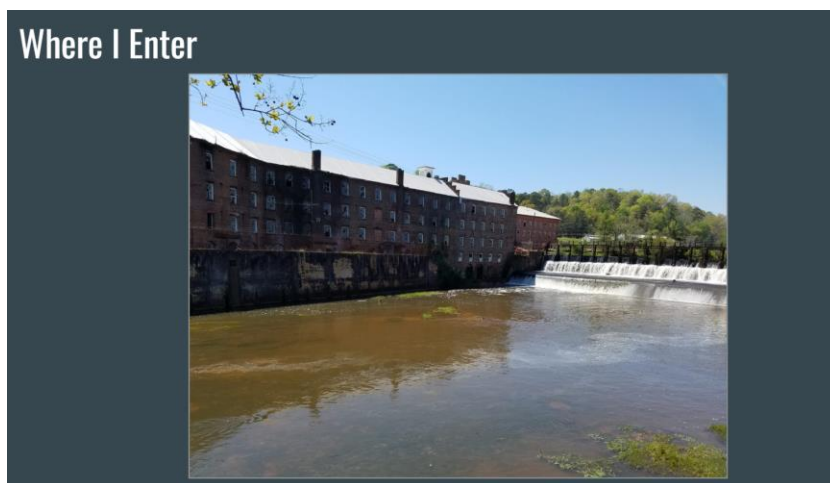
These pictures are of my mom and my dad – the physical and genetic manifestation of where I'm from. In the background is an Indigenous-crafted basket from the Southeast tribes – I

put this here to represent my “storybasket,” as described by Jo-ann Archibald (2008), a weaving of strands forming a container. I’m not Indigenous, and I’m not a storyteller steeped in the ancient oral tradition of Indigenous cultures, but I humbly offer a rudimentary form of my storybasket to you.

As I think about my work uncovering my positionality, I am struck by Audre Lorde’s words, “what I most regretted were my silences. Of what had I *ever* been afraid?” She continues, “What are your tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?” (1984/2007, p. 41). So this work is about me not being silent about one of the most difficult times of my life and having the tools to see the rewards of self-reflection and naming of traumas as well.

The term “coming home” is complicated for me. I am from hot, humid heat, oceans, big family gatherings, girl gangs roaming the subdivision, the park and swimming in the bay on those days when we could stand the smell in a place where big oil was king. I am the descendant of a long line of women who survived mostly in poverty-stricken conditions with an overlay of sexism and abuse by men: family, lovers, and husbands who themselves often struggled with substance abuse, primarily alcoholism. I was raised by women who weave families together often with nothing but love, hope, and a whole lotta work. I struggled to find my voice in a place rooted in sexism, racism, and oppressive conservatism, in a home where I hid from my alcoholic father and wished myself invisible more times than I care to think about and left the first chance I got, going away to college in New England and then to Seattle after graduation. I’m a white Southern woman in exile.

I spent my childhood in two places: the gulf coast of Texas and then Central Florida, but my roots, my ancestors on both sides of my family are from Alabama. My mother moved back to her home in Alabama when I left for college, and I've spent the last 31 years rejecting Alabama as my 'home.'



This is a picture of the cotton gin factory in Prattville, AL, which really was the basis of the formation of the town and where multiple generations of my family have lived. As I reflect on this photo and the factory's still-prominent place in downtown Prattville, Dr. Bettina Love speaks to me, "Too often, though not always, our allies are eager White Folx who have not questioned their Whiteness, White supremacy, White emotions of guilt and shame, the craving for admiration, or the structures that maintain White power" (2019, p. 117). I feel like for the first time, I have tools with which to interrogate, question, and attempt to come to terms with my past and my ancestry in a way where I can better navigate making change in our complicated world today.

First, I acknowledge that Prattville was previously occupied by the Muscogee, a confederacy of tribes, whom the settlers referred to as the Creek Indians. The Muscogee

occupied much of the Southeastern U.S. and most were forced by the federal government to migrate west to provide land for both white settlers and industry that benefited colonial and racist structures and white families (although white males benefited the most). The Muscogee are a living tribe based in Okmulgee, OK today. My ancestors directly benefited from the land parcels that the government practically gave away to certain white settlers once the Muscogee were forced to migrate.

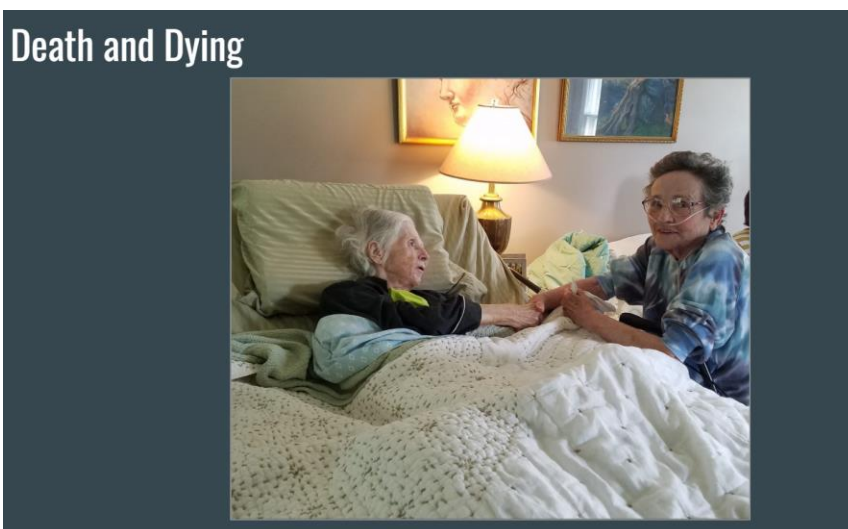
In addition, the invention of the cotton gin is key to the expansion of slavery in the US. According to the 1619 Project, led by Nickole Hannah-Jones and initially published by the *New York Times Magazine*,

Cotton was to the 19th century what oil was to the 20th: among the world's most widely traded commodities...But cotton needed land...The thirst for new farmland grew even more intense after the invention of the cotton gin in the early 1790s. Before the gin, enslaved workers grew more cotton than they could clean. The gin broke the bottleneck, making it possible to clean as much cotton as you could grow. (Desmond, 2019, p. 33)

My family worked in the cotton gin factory and was absolutely complicit to the building of capitalism in this country on the backs of enslaved people, and my ancestors were slave owners. This is not something we talked about ever, but rendering my own family's racist past invisible does not make it disappear, nor does it decrease its present-day impact.

And yet, according to Sandra Styres, in her essay "Literacies of Land" – "we find our existence in the intimate and embodied expressions of place. Such knowledges are highly contextualized, soulful, (re)membered, and experienced" (2019, p. 27). When I'm in the Pacific Northwest, a land of majestic coniferous forests, I do find myself missing the noise of the birds

and insects, the roundness of the trees, the warmth of the water, the big family gatherings, the slow pace, and the talk, mostly easy, accented, and languorous. I recognize the truth of Styre's words as I return to the South immersing myself in family care and finding solace in my grief as I walk the Land.



This picture is the last picture of my mom. She is visiting with her youngest sister for what would be the last time. What I discovered in this process is that in my culture, we don't deal with death very well; I felt ill prepared for what I walked into and powerless to help in so many ways throughout. What I wanted most was for my mother to have a peaceful and dignified transition, and in the end, we did our best to provide that for her despite limited options and limited assistance. After a few months of her gaining more energy, eating fairly well, and becoming more active and cognizant, the pain hit on a Friday. By Sunday she had moved to a "state of transition," a euphemism for beginning the process of dying; I was in a state of disbelief even though it was a long time coming. It took us a couple of days to get the pain in check, but that also meant mom was in a mostly non-responsive state, so it was emotionally painful for us to administer the medications that would make her this way.

And then, we started to create a family circle. Family started to gather at the house, around her, talking to her, touching her, and saying goodbye. The day before she passed, two of her seven grandchildren, my sister, and I circled around mom for the evening and late into the night playing and singing songs that she loved as she simply adored music. The next day, she died in the late night; I was lucky enough to be by her side, holding her for one last time. What pain, my heart split wide open, and yet, what a blessing! My eldest brother came over, and we held vigil with her all night as her spirit flew and dissolved into oneness with my sister, her brother and sister, her parents, and distant ancestors. Memories of the place she called home left behind as she transcended into realms our minds can't grasp. In the early morning, they came to take her body, and we ate breakfast together, still in our family circle, telling stories, reminiscing, crying, and offering touch and consolation. I'm reminded of the story circles described by Archibald (2008); we were definitely "story-listening" with our ears and our hearts as my brother, who normally doesn't share his feelings often, opened up to share history I didn't know in a vulnerable and tender way. That has gone a long way to healing past hurts, that mainly occurred through our silences. For me, though, I must return to the Land to help me in my grief.



This is a picture of Autauga Creek – I love the sound of the running water in the red clay-muddied Autauga Creek, which powered the cotton gin factory in Prattville - and also fed generations of my family and provided joy in recreation and respite from the heat. During this time with my mother and immediately after, I spent many hours walking the creek, the water readily accepting my tears, and the movement and voices of the water flow bringing peace to my heart during a very difficult time...So I spiral back to the impacts of the Land that hit deep and resonate in my body and soul. And I feel I am home with my ancestors.

## **The Patterners for Quilting**

While recovery of homeplace drives my work, I need an anchor for my critical exploration. Feminist epistemology is the theoretical framework firmly rooted in bell hooks' connection of theory and practice through lived experience:

To me, this theory emerges from the concrete, from my efforts to make sense of everyday life experiences, from my efforts to intervene critically in my life and the lives of others. This to me is what makes feminist transformation possible. Personal testimony, personal experience, is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because it usually forms the base of our theory making. (1994, p. 70)

Critically engaging in my story and naming my pain makes space for personal healing (hooks, 1994).

This feminist epistemology is also rooted in Audre Lorde's (2007) sense of the erotic, "a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings" (p. 54) and the idea that "for women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence" (p. 37). Similar to hooks' (1994) assertion that witnessing our stories as women creates healing opportunities, Lorde (2007) views this process of authoring our own poetry as creating a "safe-house" for the authentic exploration of our feelings making way for the birth of the new. In this project, I seek to rediscover my own poetry that for too long I suppressed due to self-criticism, self-censoring, and lack of prioritizing time and space for this type of expression.

Along with hooks and Lorde, Grande (2015) critiques feminism as "whitestream" feminism and argues that it is suspect due to the paucity of an intersectional analysis with economics. The absence of such theorizing in the literature is so glaring, she asks the question, "Who gains from abandoning the problems of labor?" (p. 203), and then she squarely blames whitestream feminism, "principally structured on the basis of white, middle-class experience, serving their ethno-political interests and capital investments" (p. 181). I seek to engage in

intersectional feminism<sup>2</sup>, examining my own complicity and privileges as a white woman and the dynamic interplay of gender, race, class, and settler colonialism. As I examine these intersections, I keep in mind Tuck & Yang's (2018) "ethic of incommensurability as an alternate mode of holding and imagining solidarity" (pp. 1-2) as well as their concept of "inner angles made between us" (p. 2) to map small shifts in relations instead of linear distance between ideas.

## **Foundational Blocks for Quilting**

For my literature review, I intentionally elevate often marginalized scholars - Indigenous, Black, and other scholars of color - whose work speaks to me. I compare Leigh Patel and Linda Smith's work about Western science and research and the continued reliance on the premise of neutral research, objectivity, and empiricism, at the expense of relational research and other knowledges. In addition, they provide insights into Western science's overreliance on compartmentalizing, measuring, and analyzing parts, often omitting synthesis or examination of the whole, often leading to a failure to understand relationships. I then look at data from my own institution in order to better understand the achievement of students of color and Indigenous students according to some of the college's markers of success. In doing so, I bring in Teresa Newberry, Octaviana V. Trujillo, Jamila Lyiscott, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Bettina Love, Paulo Freire, and Tara Yosso to illuminate alternate ways of understanding educational experiences of students of color beyond the measurement of achievement mired in white, Euro-centric, and heteronormative frameworks. Finally, I turn to Anthony L. Brown, Dolores Aramoni Calderón, Wayne Au, Barbara Smith, Linda Moon Stumpff, and Robert Cole along with Jo-Ann Archibald,

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<sup>2</sup> Although I am a cisgender female, I honor the spectrum of gender identity and seek to engage in a feminism inclusive of trans and non-binary gender identities. I acknowledge that sexism affects anyone not cisgender male and is further compounded by the intersectional experiences of sexual orientation, race, and class. When I use the terms woman/women, this includes anyone who has ever identified as such.

Bagele Chilisa, Sandra Styres, and Christi Belcourt to illuminate Native American and Indigenous student experiences and their cultural relationship to storytelling-as-learning, Land, and holistic ecologies. These writings show how the lack of such learnings in the U.S. educational system negatively affects Indigenous student achievement and even their participation in the system at all.

In Patel's book, *Decolonizing Educational Research*, she deftly debunks the colonial view that research is neutral and objective and goes on to show the "simultaneously co-constitutive and intertwined nature of research and knowledge" (2015, p. 50). Yet as the COVID-19 pandemic began, one of the faculty in the division I oversee bemoaned about how "behind" many of our students are coming into his science class (even though they met the prerequisites), and how he wants to help them "get up to speed." When I suggested an alternative perspective of asking, looking at, reflecting on what the students are bringing with them to the classroom and teaching using those inputs, what Yosso would call "community cultural wealth" (2005), I felt he was listening. Later though, in the conversation, he went on to talk about how in science there are fundamental, aka "real" truths, and students have to understand these truths. As Smith (2012) states, "What makes ideas 'real' is the system of knowledge, the formation of culture, and the relations of power in which these concepts are located" (p. 50). In community colleges, curriculum and instruction are still deeply embedded in what Freire (2018) calls a "banking" method of education; teachers make deposits to passive students, waiting to receive "fundamental truths" (p. 72) steeped in Western values and traditions.

The disciplines of science are historically rooted in the positivist tradition, which supports the mentioned faculty's perception of fundamental truths based on empiricism and the Scientific Method (Smith, 2012). Smith states, "Underpinning all of what is taught at universities

is the belief in the concept of science as the all-embracing method for gaining an understanding of the world” (p. 68). She also describes the limits of such colonized research, “Understanding is viewed as being akin to measuring. As the ways we try to understand the world are reduced to issues of measurement, the focus of understanding becomes more concerned with procedural problems” (p. 44). Further, Patel (2015) states, “Compartmentalizing complex wholes into disparate pieces facilitates the naming and ordering of those pieces and parts in order to have dominion over them” (p. 19). This directly contradicts Indigenous epistemologies, axiology, and ontologies, which are fundamentally relational and holistic, and thus Indigenous peoples and research are classified as “other” and continually excluded from the discourse firmly rooted in the colonial West (Chilisa 2020; Patel 2015; Smith 2012).

My interaction with the faculty moved me to look at data from the college Racial Equity Report (Institutional Research, 2020). In the college transfer programs division, the data showed that between 2015-2020, students of color passed (2.0 or above) at below average rates across all categories except Asian. Digging deeper into the specific department where the faculty I mentioned worked, for the same period, this data plays out similarly across racial/ethnic categories with the lowest pass rates among Black/African-American at 75%, Hispanic/Latino at 76%, and 2+ races at 77%. The overall pass rate for the department is 84%. Also of note, among 1,042 American Indian/Native American students and 1,013 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, 0 < 10 in five years took a class in this discipline (pp. 26-27) although there is a large percentage of students who do not report race/ethnicity. Newberry and Trujillo posit, “In order to be successful in science many students are faced with a potential loss or erosion of identity in order to perform in a knowledge system that does not value or incorporate their cultural heritage” (2019, p. 206). Lyiscott concurs and states that people of color intuitively know that

“‘excellence’ means erasure of self” (2019, p. 70) since excellence generally means performing to white standards and navigating whiteness; I am also relating the “excellence” here to the bar the science instructor I mentioned previously has set for his students. Gloria Ladson-Billings’ describes the concept of educational debt: “the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society have created an education debt” to students of color (2006, p. 5). This framing is in opposition to the usual context of disparities as an achievement gap, where the bar is set and maintained by white folks (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Patel 2015). Love further describes the harm we do to students of color in the U.S. educational system and equates the achievement gap to a new form of sharecropping, “Dark students and their families are sharecroppers, never able to make up the cost or close the gap because they are learning in a state of perpetual debt with no relief in sight” (2019, p. 92). I need to approach the review of the racial disparity data at the college with this debt-framing in mind instead of student gaps and consider how I can work to disrupt and dismantle racial and structural inequalities.

This debt exists both in achievement and educational completion for Indigenous students at multiple levels in the educational system in the U.S. As well, the continued invisibility of Indigenous peoples and culture remains an issue for all students as curriculum is consistently whitewashed (Smith, Stumpff, & Cole, 2012). In the case of no Native American/Native Alaskan/Native Hawaiian/Native Pacific Islander students not taking science classes in certain disciplines at my institution, these students may be missing out on higher-paying jobs in engineering, aerospace, energy, and certain research industries for example. These industries are missing out on the varied perspectives these folks of color would bring to bear to their work. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, STEM occupations continue to grow (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021) following the trends of above-average growth from 2009 to

2014 (Vilorio, 2014). As well, the majority of STEM occupations have above-average wages, lower unemployment, and a smaller gender pay gap than other types of occupations (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016; Fayer & Watson, 2017). I do acknowledge people of color continue to also be marginalized in these fields in various ways, which may also impact student choices. Thus, “education fails to be the ‘great equalizer’ in society; rather, schools are active participants in the process of maintaining dominance” (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011, p. 75).

The long history of erasure through physical and cultural genocide and dispossession of land for Native Americans is important to understand as well as acknowledgement that these erasures continue when considering the context of Native American students today (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016). Land, connection to land, and relational and reciprocal balance between humans, animals, and plants, are central to Indigenous worldviews (Archibald, 2008; Chilisa, 2020). Styres (2019) describes the importance of Land, “Land is at once storied and relational informing the social, spiritual, and systemic norms and practices of a particular culture-sharing group in relationship to their places” (p.28). Archibald (2008), in her quest for learning Indigenous storywork, a cultural pedagogical method, identifies the storytelling contexts as the Longhouse, land, and home, and notes that the classroom is not amongst these contexts. Belcourt (2018) declares, “the only education that our children need is from the land” (p. 120).

This literature review serves as context and conversation related to my own day-to-day musings on science education: indigenizing the curriculum - making room for differing epistemologies and centering on Land/place - all which require the development of relations within the local and Indigenous community, but first, I must critically research self in my effort to cultivate healthy relations without repeating settler-colonial patterns of harm.

## **The Quilt Design**

### *Research Questions*

For my project, I explore my own story, set against the backdrop of losing my mother and a global pandemic, as inquiry into the following questions as preparatory for liberatory action:

What does it look like to lose home?; what does it look like to grieve mother

(biological/land/generational ancestor)?; how to sit in grief and healing to engender a new type

of community and collaborative space; and how do I cultivate healthy relations without repeating

settler-colonial patterns of harm?

### *Research Methods and Justification*

I will engage in Critical Autoethnography as a method to describe my story and my positionality: my background, my assumptions, my limitations, and my lived experiences critically examining my own intersecting cultural identities and relationship to power and social constructs such as gender, race, class, and settler colonialism. Boylorn & Orbe (2021) describe autoethnography as “a critical method by using three central features of critical theory, which include: to understand the lived experience of real people in context, to examine social conditions and uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination” (pp. 8-9). This is especially important as I consider working with the peoples of the Duwamish as an outsider and white woman. To engage my own intentions and interests is key to relationship-building and girding against interest convergence, assimilation, and settler colonialism (Au et al., 2016; Patel, 2015; Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2018; Zamudio et al., 2011).

Indigenous research methods include storytelling as a key facet (Smith 2012, Archibald 2008, Tuck & McKenzie 2015, Chilisa 2020). The elders taught Archibald (2008) seven

principles for First Nations stories and storytelling, “respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy.” While I am not Indigenous, these resonate with me as a framework in which to explore relational reparations and partnership and reinforce Indigenous calls for balance, synthesis, holism, and multiple approaches in science and education. I am also deeply impacted by Archibald’s metaphor of the “storybasket,” stories woven together as a gift for others.

My interests though go beyond the human into the non-human, living ecosystems upon which we all depend, and as such, I will engage with Critical Place Inquiry as I center place and Land in my healing process. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) describe “how our embodied and emplaced practices of movement, and stillness, are among the ways that place shapes us individually and collectively, and in turn, through which we shape and reshape place” (p. 32). I will interweave my lived experiences and storytelling with walking the Land to generate place-based data, including what Sofia Cele describes as concrete aspects, including the physical characteristics of place as well as the human experience of place interacting through the senses (as cited in Tuck & McKenzie, 2015).

My data will be a combination of observations, field notes, poetry and will also explore my mother’s family archive.

### *Participants, Sampling Procedures, & Protection of Human Subjects*

My project is personal in nature and will consist of my own notes and observations and does not include any persons besides me as the researcher. I will, however, sometimes include observations and experiences that involve living people I know. I will create pseudonyms as needed or refer to them generally to protect their identities.

### *Proposed Analysis*

My data will include my own observations, field notes, poetry, and photographs. All photographs are either my own or from my mother's archive. I will analyze the narrative using the framework of feminist epistemology while interrogating the intersections of gender, race, class, and settler colonialism within my own story.

### *Reciprocity Statement*

Research is relational and as such, I value reciprocity within the process. This is especially sensitive due to historical and continued exploitation of Indigenous and communities of color by the research community among all Western disciplines. I request permission, respecting cultural processes, to engage in my work as my focus centers non-white needs as an outsider. The seven principles for First Nations stories and storytelling as told to Jo-Ann Archibald (2008) serves as a framing for my work that include, "respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy." I seek to be of service to humans and the natural world by cultivating a reflexive praxis in my work to better understand my own positionality and impacts, which is the bulk of this project.

## **In My Mother's House, Buoyed by Love**

"Our stories provide light. Our stories provide strength. Our stories offer roadmaps to find and see one another. Our stories honor God. Our stories build homes" (Sankofa Waters, 2022, p. 2).

I have a strong network of women in my life who have supported me all along the way. Without them, I would be lost. With the recent passing of my mother in 2021, she joins my ancestors to help guide and provide strength; I still talk to her a lot. My mother never discouraged me and was always there to guide as much as she could and push me in directions where I would grow and learn. When considering her support over the years, I'm reminded of

when I tried out for cheerleading when I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. This was for the town's recreational football league in Texas. If you know anything about Texas, cheerleading is considered a serious sport. Anyway, I'm short now, and I was pretty tiny then. During tryouts, I went to the middle of the gym by myself, and I had to do a cheer and a few jumps by myself. This was a regular-sized school gym, which is pretty large for one small child to be in the middle doing something. My sister, Susan, attended the tryouts with my mom, and apparently, when I opened my very loud mouth, their jaws dropped to the floor. I don't think they were expecting what happened on the gym floor that day, but I remember afterward their praises and encouragement, which really never stopped. I have three sisters and many aunts with their children, my many cousins whom I grew up with. It's a big family, which likely led to me being such a loudmouth when I needed to because no one could hear you unless you were raising your voice.

Much later, when I was a sophomore in high school, I started getting these brochures from all over the country for different colleges; this was before the internet. One day, a brochure for Mount Holyoke College located in Massachusetts showed up, and I was quite drawn to something about it. At this point, my family was lower-middle class because my mom had been raising us as a single parent and often struggling to make ends meet, but she never shared that with me as a child. I approached her, and I said, "Mom, I want to check this college out." She did not blink, and she made a point to save money so that I could fly across the country between my junior and senior year to check it out and have an interview on campus. I fell in love with the campus the moment I stepped onto it, applied in the early decision process, and I was accepted by December of my senior year. I got a pretty hefty financial aid package, with some loans, but my mom still had to pay about the equivalent of an extra rent every month while I was attending (thankfully, I was the last child out of the house, which made it easier for her to be able to do

this). My father never contributed even though the family contribution was also based on his income because of the FAFSA (free application for federal student aid) that requires both parents' income up to a certain age. I do acknowledge that I was a beneficiary of a college policy, "need-blind admissions," which did not factor financial need into admissions decisions; if you were admitted, and you had need, they provided a hefty financial aid package to support you. I was probably among the last students who were able to benefit from the broad application of such a policy as many colleges began eliminating them in the mid-1990s in the wake of financial difficulties. I am amazed looking back on this that my mother never flinched and never questioned whether or not I would be able to go. Somehow, she provided the foundation to make it happen. That decision and corresponding work changed my life by giving me access to opportunities I would have otherwise missed, and I'm forever grateful to the woman who never even blinked when I told her I wanted to go to an Ivy League school on the other side of the country.

*Don't see me; don't notice me; move on - My Father in My Mother's House*

Contrast my assertion and confidence growing out of my mom and sisters' support with my childhood habit of hiding; I always willed myself to be invisible when my dad came home drunk, so that he would not turn his attention to me. My sister recalls a time when she put me at the top of my closet on a shelf and covered me with blankets while Dad was being abusive, yelling and sometimes worse. He shot guns *inside* the house; he never shot at people that I remember, but just terrified everyone with the threat by shooting the gun in general. I witnessed some physical abuse that Mom and some of my siblings endured although for me, I escaped most

of the physical abuse, but suffered much under the emotional abuse of a drunk, unstable father who I always feared was one step away from violence. Even among this terror though, I was protected as much as possible by my mom and my sisters. This childhood filled with willful invisibility turned into a life-long practice of hiding myself in many ways that I continue to struggle against today. This picture shows one of my obvious hiding places, and although it shows me smiling, when I look at this photo, I feel the edges of that old fear becoming real again.

My dad was a man who was socialized to hide his emotions, which means he didn't process them well if at all; his idea of cultivating relationship was to go fishing or hunting, especially with other men. I have



many photos of my dad with male friends and brothers and what fish they caught on their latest trip and almost no photos of him with family or friends in other contexts. This picture shows my dad in the middle with his brother on the right. He was very smart

and likely would have benefited from more education, but growing up in the rural South limited his opportunities. Like many other young men in similar situations, he chose to enter the military, specifically the Air Force, immediately following high school. This is when he began courting my mother, and they were eventually sent to Hawaii as a newly married couple when my father was stationed in Honolulu; my eldest brother was born there. For my mom, this move was a huge change for her. Not only was she newly married, but she had never left



Alabama. Knowing her, she likely had a lot of fear and also excitement, but she was also very reliant on my dad. Thus began the start of a long-term painful arrangement for them as my dad was not a good partner with his needs usually coming first, but not uncommon for the time. My mother was a strong woman, and she railed against this inequity in their relationship. They lived on a U.S. military base when Hawaii was on the verge of becoming a U.S. state, yet the militarization of the territory created deep resentment within the native Hawaiian community - another piece of my family history revealed - my dad's direct role in furthering the colonization of Hawaii. Mākua et al. speak of creating purpose through Hawaiian story, mo'olelo. They describe five concepts that make up mo'olelo. One of them, ho'olono, is about deep listening, "We are not listening to what we are wanting to hear; we are hearing what we need to learn" (2019). I'm listening with all of my senses to my story to create a purpose based in healing and love.

## **Between the Lines**

After my mother died, my family appointed me to go through her papers. Now I wouldn't call my mother a hoarder by any means, but she was someone who appreciated the importance of documentation, and with a bit more education, she would have done well as a professional archivist and maybe historian. After a couple of weeks of down-time after her death, I started the laborious process of combing through her trove of papers, notebooks, journals, and file folders, making the difficult decision of what to keep and what to shred or recycle. In addition to her own personal papers, she also was one of the family genealogists, documenting family trees well before ancestry.com existed and piecing together elements of my storybasket of ancestors for me and the rest of my family.

I found many gems in this mountain of paper, including stacks of letters, carefully tied together with ribbons, between my mom and dad during their courtship when he was in the Air Force and stationed elsewhere, including one with his marriage proposal to my mother. My mother endured 40 years of marriage with six children, much of it unpleasant due to my father's alcoholism, absences from their partnership managing a family business as well as managing the family home and raising the children. This discovery of my father's early commitments to my mother revealed a dimension of my father and their relationship that I had never known, the discovery of hope and promise for a future that lingered on long well after was healthy for either of them.

Another gem: every tax return filed by my parents from the beginning of their marriage in the 1950s to the present. My mother was good with numbers and was the accountant for their personal finances as well as their joint business, owning and operating a grocery store and liquor store for a fair portion of their married lives, twelve years. My first reaction was, "Really, Mom? Every tax return?" As I sat in examination of the documents though, I realized their worth: the addresses that document the family moves each time my father decided he needed to leave a place due to his restlessness; the amount they made each year from jointly-run businesses and separate jobs as well as long stints of unemployment for my father; the developing complexity of taxes over time with the first tax returns being simple slips of paper that were smaller than 8.5" x 11." These tax returns also show the systemic sexism that my mother fought against after she reached retirement age and realized the huge financial implications of running a partnership business with a structure of submitting tax information under what seems like a sole proprietorship. When my parents bought their store business in the early 1970s, they did so as partners, but filed taxes and reported self-employment taxes to one social security number, as the

form only allowed one social security number. They chose my father's, which would have been a fairly normal behavior for a married couple at a time when women could not even apply for credit in their own name. When filing taxes jointly as married, the impact of this remained hidden until my mother realized much later, after separation and then divorce, that for all these years, in which she actually was the heartbeat of the business. Her hard work and sweat kept it going as my father sunk further into alcoholism and deep depression, absent from the job and home for most of the time...after all this, the earnings for those years in a successful business went to my father and were shown as a "\$0" on my mother's social security statement. This of course factored into the low payment my mother received from social security after retirement. She received little help from the social security office who advised her that she needed my father's confirmation on paper to prove that the business was run as a partnership in order to have new calculations run, which he never gave.

She was unpaid for labor, not only in the home, but also in the workplace. She believed that other women might be suffering similarly due to the structural inequality she encountered as a married businesswoman in partnership with her husband; she wrote to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) as well as the Women's Equity Action League in D.C. for help in 1995 and then again in 1998-letters I found in her archive. She never received a reply.

April 21, 1998

American Civil Liberties Union of Alabama  
207 Montgomery Street Suite 825  
Montgomery, AL 36104

Dear ACLU;

In July 1995 I retired. I filed for my Social Security benefits and was shocked to find that I had not received credit for my most productive years of working. From 1970 to 1982, I was in the grocery business with my ex-husband. We operated this business on a percentage from 1970 through 1973. In December of 1973, we purchased the business in both our names. In 1982 we lost the business due to a fire. For all those years, I worked hard and put in many more hours than my ex husband. He is an alcoholic and is not dependable.

A joint income tax return was filed. The supplement to the 1040 Form on which you computed the self-employment taxes had room for only one social security number (copy enclosed). As a result, my ex-husband is receiving all of the social security benefits, while I am receiving none.

The social security office informed me that there is nothing that can be done other than my ex-husband signing over my half to me. Ms. Green of the Social Security office in Montgomery called him. He verified to her that we were equal partners in this business but he would not sign the form sent to him by the Social Security Office.

The attorney offices that I called require a large retainer to even hear my story. Since the **federal form was grossly discriminatory**, I was hoping you might have had such a case, or could at least let me know if there is any hope for me getting proper credit for the work I did all those years.

I was married for 40 years and had six children by my ex-husband. We were divorced in 1993 because for many years he has been an alcoholic. Since our separation he has been admitted more than once for treatment in a VA Hospital. I worked all these years under the old rules, when you get pregnant; you quit your job. When the pregnancy was over, you find another job and start all over at the bottom, thus the low amount of income I made throughout my lifetime except when I was in business with my ex-husband. This business made it possible for my family to live in one place for over three years. My ex-husband never stayed at a job for long and we moved around a lot until the joint venture. This was made possible because I took on most of the responsibilities of being

there and running the business. Previous employees and customers can verify all this.

I am enclosing copy of my 1979 joint tax return; my social security earnings record and letter from the Social Security Administration noting I informed them I had been self employed from 1970 to 1982.

Thank you for reading this and I hope to hear from you.

Sincerely,

*Letter my mother sent to the ACLU. See Appendix A for a transcription.*

This struggle to be seen, to be valued, and to be compensated for labor is a common struggle for women the world over. For my mother, her uncompensated work at home raising six children was compounded by the lack of formal recognition of her business partnership with her husband, which then resulted in significantly less compensation at retirement. These experiences led my mother to encourage me to be financially independent - her warnings around life choices

that had long-term financial implications resonate today, and I wish I would have been more open to her advice about some of those choices in my younger years instead of choosing to learn these lessons experientially. As a white daughter in the U.S., my experience of growing into adulthood so often took the form of developing my independence no matter the consequence (even when it simply didn't make sense), not valuing my elders' experiences and teachings, steeped in the white supremacist characteristics of individualism and defensiveness (Okun, 2021). Only now, after many years of making some poor choices, am I able to reflect that my mother often knew best, and I ignored her many times, likely causing her considerable distress and anxiety.

## **Finding Mother**

When asked to speak about women and fiction, Virginia Woolf (1929) wrote, that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write...” (p. 4), therein summarizing two major challenges of women to simply be, learn, and grow intellectually, that continue today. Women experience a lack of independent and generational wealth as well as independent space in the home with many women worldwide inextricably bound to domestic chores and childrearing even when they may have careers and other aspirations, highlighting the continuing inequalities in labor in marriage/domestic partnership. In my own relationship with a man whom I consider to be feminist, I still ended up with the bulk of responsibility around child-rearing, meal planning, and domestic chores even though I had a career and worked full-time. I tried to fight this during my relationship but was never able to change the dynamic fully and often became too exhausted to continue my attempts at change. This inequity crowded my mind and complicated my relationship with my partner as well as with other pursuits beyond the job and home. Our struggles with uncompensated labor and unequal partnerships in the home is borne

out by data. In the England et al. article, *Progress toward gender equality in the United States has slowed or stalled*, the authors found that between the years 1970-2018, while there has been progress, gender equity has slowed or stalled depending on the indicator (2020):

The slowdown on some indicators and stall on others suggests that further progress requires substantial institutional and cultural change. Progress may require increases in men's participation in household and care work, governmental provision of child care, and adoption by employers of policies that reduce gender discrimination and help both men and women combine jobs with family care responsibilities. (p. 6990)

Woolf (1929) queries, "For it is a perennial puzzle why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet" (p. 43). She then places the blame squarely on structural inequalities between men and women in terms of wealth and access to independent space/time, "What had our mothers been doing then, that they had no wealth to leave us?...I pondered...what effect poverty has on the mind...thinking of the safety and security of one sex and of the poverty and insecurity of the other...what effect has poverty on fiction?" (1929, pp. 23-25). I ask the same question today extending the meaning of poverty beyond the financial as many women continue to struggle for the time, energy, and intellectual space for artistic and intellectual pursuits.

This leads me to another discovery in my mother's papers - she was a poet. I always knew she was a skilled writer, and she did keep journals over the years although many of them are filled with her bible study learnings with an occasional personal or family musing. The discovery of five poems, one about each of her children at the time (written before I was born), opened my eyes to a voice filled with poetic expression and depth, recognizing the inner nature of her children even when they were quite young. I was filled with sadness at reading these,

seeing a talent that lay fallow for much of her life due to circumstances that prevented the cultivation of such gifts: lack of formal education, time, money, and independence - a pervasive poverty that Woolf articulated in 1929. She was another voice lost to persistent patriarchal and classist structures and for others, they face persistent racist and colonialist structures as well.

Oct 5, 1971

he grew  
not tall and graceful  
as a willow,  
he grew  
strong and sturdy  
as a warrior,  
he grew  
sensitive, loving  
and playful,  
full caring for nature  
and with tender  
heartiness he roams.  
he is strong for work  
with his body  
his hurt is great,  
but my love  
for him shall  
surely help him  
grow  
into a true and great  
man to love and  
be loved as I  
have loved him  
as he grew  
my Mike

She dreams  
that she doesn't care  
she cares the most  
she is capable of more feeling  
and deeper feeling than anyone  
I know  
The best for her even  
if she pretends to herself  
she doesn't care.  
LOVE for all her years

she is real  
she will always be there  
my LIFE  
To her my heart aches  
for in her realness  
she will suffer  
if only she can have  
what I have missed

Nov. 14, 1969

His face is beautiful  
in it's innocence  
Capped by tawny brown  
hair and eyes that  
laugh merrily  
He spies a cricket  
dancing across the floor  
He loves openly and  
gently  
Even the lively little  
cricket  
He has at last caught  
in his little boy  
hands.  
Hands that have  
touched his turtle  
to pet it like a  
kitten  
Hands that have  
found a lowly  
worm  
Watched it wiggle  
in his palm  
Never daring to hurt  
it

Gently he sets it  
free again  
To find its home  
In the sweet earth.

Angels are portrayed  
by little girls  
But when he looks  
up at night and  
Says "I love you"  
He is a picture of  
an angel.

My heart aches that  
he will have  
to grow up.  
I will cling to him  
as long as I can  
For he is my darling  
Matt.

She is tender  
As she reaches out her heart  
She reaches to empty space  
There is a crack  
A piece falls off  
She is disillusioned  
But the search continues  
If only I could wrap that heart  
in velvet  
Cushion out all the heart ache  
For she is tender  
My Missy

From my mother's archive: Poems for each of her children, 1969-1972 (before I was born). See Appendix B for transcription.

After 40 years of marriage, raising six children, and shifting jobs many times mostly due to my father's restlessness, my mother ended up without a home of her own to grow old in and to leave to her children. This caused my mother great anxiety as she did not want to burden her children as she grew older, and something seemed awry with this fact considering she owned many homes throughout her life in partnership with my father. For this next section, I trace my mother's homes through the period of my own life, which admittedly, as the last of her children born when she was 39 years old, covers only a portion of her adult life.

## **Finding Home**

“Of all the institutions that shape us...home is the first. I name home as ground zero, however any person defines it” (Sankofa Waters, 2022, pp. 1-2).

I do not know when my mom and dad owned their first home, but likely their ability to do so had a lot to do with my father serving in the Air Force for enough time to be able to access the homeownership benefits for veterans, albeit only available to white males at the time.

Although I was born in LaMarque, Texas, we moved when I was an infant. My first memory of our family home was in Seabrook, Texas, a small town perched on Galveston Bay outside of Houston. This is also the location of the family business, a grocery store called “Zackie’s.” My parents owned a house on West Flamingo in a subdivision called Seascape II - a two-story pink house with a red door, a front yard with two trees meant for climbing and shade, and a backyard with a fence covered with honeysuckle vines that filled the air with their sweetness every summer. The house had 5 bedrooms, 2 baths, a 2-car garage, and generous living space.



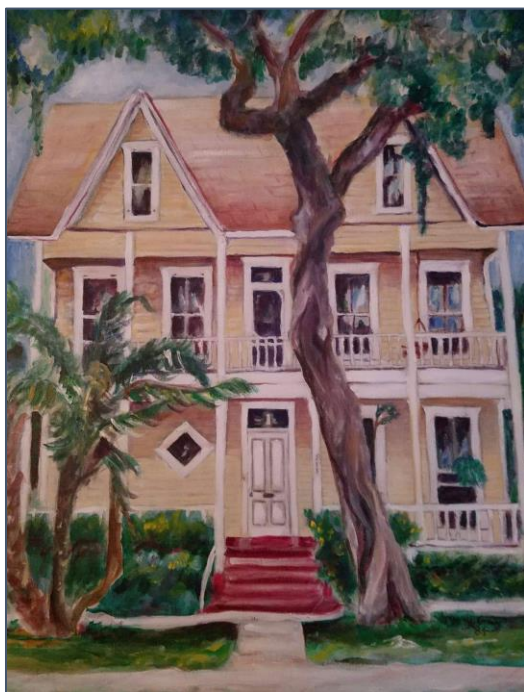
*Me in my parents' grocery store, Zackie's.*

When I was 10 years old, my parents' business burned to the ground via a small electrical fire that started in the back. They considered rebuilding, but the next year, Hurricane Alicia ripped through the Houston area and our neighborhood, spawning tornadoes that significantly damaged our house. With the combination of this plus the complexities of new zoning affecting the business rebuild, my parents, and likely primarily my dad, made the decision to move. They sold the house and collected the insurance money from the store fire. With that in hand, they moved to Central Florida.



*Zackie's after the fire.*

After a short time looking, they ended up jointly purchasing a home in Sanford, Florida with my aunt and uncle (my mom's sister). Sanford, a small town next to Lake Monroe, was quickly becoming a suburb of Orlando as the city grew and is a place now famous for the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012, another tragic death of a young Black man by a racist White man not held legally accountable for his action. And yes, this pervasive racism in my community is one of the reasons I felt the need to leave as soon as I became of age.



*Painting of our house by my Aunt, Mary J. Gray*

The house was a 3-story, Victorian-era house with many bedrooms, living spaces, two front porches that spanned the width of the house, and huge, moss-covered oak trees out front overhanging the uneven brick street, Oak Avenue - plenty of space to fit two families although my family was significantly smaller now with just two children in tow (me and my sister) as my other siblings were adults and on their own.

In this house, my mother thrived in many ways, likely due to living in a more communal situation with her sister there for support and female companionship. My mother was a quilter and both my aunt and Mom were artists with that house as the perfect canvas for their colors, crafts, and wonderlands they created, especially around holiday times. bell hooks (2009) speaks of her grandmother, Baba, who quilted, “To her, quiltmaking was a spiritual process where one learns surrender. It was a form of meditation where the self was let go... There was always work to be done, space had to be made for stillness, for quiet and concentration” (pp. 155-156). I know quilting was a similar outlet for my mom, and she claimed her time for this as it was a blend of artistry and practicality, an arts outlet that she could justify.

Quilting and weaving baskets, although from different traditions, are art forms that store stories, time, and artistry from the makers and often serve a practical purpose. JoAnn Archibald likens basket weaving to the seven principles of storywork, “Each principle has a separateness that is like a long flat piece of cedar bark used for weaving a basket. As each piece is woven together, it may lose its separateness and become the in-between space that creates the background for a beautiful design” (2008, p. 153). bell hooks describes her writing of *Belonging*, “To write this piece I have relied on fragments, bits, and pieces of information found here and there... Memories of old conversations coming back again and again, memories like reused fabric in a crazy quilt, contained and kept for the right moment” (2008, p. 153). My mother’s love for quilting likely has its origins in a history with complex interactions between Black and White families in the South impacted by race, sex, and class. While I raise up my mother’s name as an artist, I also acknowledge the lineage of Black women who toiled in their own homes and the homes of White families and created art regardless of circumstance with quilts that were “maps charting the course of our lives. They were history as life lived” (hooks, 2008, p. 160).

As bell hooks notes that for her grandmother, Baba, quilting was a way “to cease attending to the needs of others and ‘come back to herself’” (2008, p. 155), and yet so often, quilts were a gift to others. I’m blessed to have a quilt made from my mother’s hands with the textiles explicitly woven in with her prayers for me and my family. While my mother flourished creatively in this house, in other ways, the ground was shifting beneath her.



*The quilt my mother made for me.*

My understanding of the joint home purchase was that my parents paid the down payment on the home while my aunt and uncle owned the house on paper and paid mortgage payments. The details of the agreement between them were not disclosed in my mother’s papers and have been kept secret throughout the years and is something I wished I asked my mother specifically about, but I’m left with bits and pieces of a puzzle. The outcome though is not a puzzle because through whatever family agreement there was in conjunction with the deterioration of my father’s alcoholic condition, my mother lost her stake in property ownership and any wealth she had.

Although my parents had insurance money from the grocery store fire, my mother knew she had to get a job right away. She quickly got a job as a bank teller in town while my father looked for work. During the five years of living at that house, my father never had steady work, but yet continued to drink alcohol excessively. My mother worked, took care of me, and also cared for my father by making sure that he had food to eat when he came home drunk. I remember her shepherding him to bed regularly, her attempts at keeping his drunken interactions with anyone else at a minimum. This must have taken a huge toll on my mother in terms of the physical and emotional labor she was putting into keeping everything running as smoothly as she could. In addition, she had to manage family dynamics with her sister and my uncle around my father's condition, continued unemployment, and house finances. I suspect she burned through the cash they brought with them just keeping things afloat. My memory of the time was that I was less interested in the complicated and often abusive home dynamics, especially during my teenage years, so I missed details around the deteriorating relationship between my mother and her sister and my uncle. I was busy cultivating my own pathway into adulthood and out of that house.

When I was in 10th grade, my mother and father finally separated, and my mother demanded that my father leave. During the next year, my aunt and uncle sold the house and we had to move. They didn't share any proceeds from the sale with my mother. We lived in a rental - a small, patio home in another part of Sanford for the next two years before I left for college. I remember this time as a quiet time with my mother - for the first time ever, we were by ourselves, a gift during busy teenage years as I prepared to leave home. This was a hard time though for my mother who was completely on her own without savings or assets, raising her last child, getting her ready for college, and dealing with a fracture in the relationship with her sister-

something she kept secret in the ways that women do when needing to take care of the essentials life thrusts upon them.

In 1990, my grandma died of a heart attack, somewhat unexpectedly as she was seemingly in good health based on what we knew. I was leaving home to move to Massachusetts for my first year of college at Mount Holyoke College, and my mom decided to move back her home to Alabama to take care of my elderly grandad, who had relied on my grandma for so many things in his patriarchal household. My mom was worried, and with her last child leaving the nest, she had to find the next thing to take care of because caregiving was an essential element of her life and identity for what else had she been allowed to cultivate? So began her “retirement” years, moving from place to place without owning one of her own, living with family or in homes owned by more privileged family members. She spent many years in a couple of homes owned by her cousin and finally died in a home owned by her son. Her dementia was fairly advanced by the time she moved into her son’s home, she was often confused about where she was, not recognizing it as the home she lived in.

My mom had six children: 2 sons and 4 daughters. In examining snapshots of career, wealth, and home ownership, the two men, one with some college, but no degree, and the other with no college, found careers that paid well and owned homes early in their adult lives, which they kept and used to build more ownership opportunities. My eldest brother owns multiple properties and was the owner of the last house my mom occupied, which he rented to my mom and sister. Out of the four daughters: one died young of an overdose, two others married and then divorced, losing homes and wealth in the process, and the other is me, struggling in some ways, privileged in others. Two daughters earned college degrees or higher. One daughter graduated with a GED and the other graduated high school and had some college, but no degree. I consider

the implications for my own family relative to data showing that even though women are making strides in educational attainment achieving parity and beyond, salaries/pay for women still lags behind men (England et al., 2020).

My own journey to a place of my own began in 2005, after my first separation from my ex-partner when he was not interested in home ownership, and I was. My daughter was six years old at the time, and I was ready to take this step, but her father was not. This left me with few choices on the market with little savings for a down payment and only my own income to consider for the mortgage. I got caught up in a time when mortgage providers were offering all kinds of options and less strict requirements in terms of down payments and existing equity; in other words, I got caught up during the homebuying frenzy before the market crashed in 2008. I ended up with two mortgages; one was an adjustable-rate mortgage, and the 2nd mortgage substituted for my down payment, but my options were not explained well to me nor were the implications of this choice. I do not remember being given choices because of my situation; I said, "I don't have a down payment," and my agent and mortgage broker said, "Not a problem." I understand they are in the business of making sales, but this had huge implications on my life. In fact, my embarrassment at this episode in my life is so intense, I knew I had to uncover it for my writing here as part of my journey even though everything in me wanted to hide it.

After the market crashed in 2008, two things happened, my ex and I decided to give it another go in our partnership, and I was drowning in debt, underwater in my mortgages. I lost the house after several years of struggling, and for the next several years, I sunk deeper into debt while partially supporting my partner as he went back to school to finish his bachelor's degree, and I was trying to keep my family together. My partner left the relationship in 2012. Once again, the financial implications of my decisions have long-term impact, and only now, at 51,

about 11 years after our breakup, am I feeling like I am generating enough for savings and owning a house, which I hope to pass on to my daughter.



*Y'all, I'm sitting here watching the sunrise over the Cascade mountains from my new home, which I just bought. I'm so thankful I was finally able to fulfill my dreams of owning a place I could be proud of and that will serve as a home base for all my witchy ways focused exclusively on healing and love.*

*~Alison Pugh, Facebook post, November 24, 2022.*

In November, 2022, I purchased my own home, bought with a down payment and a mortgage financed through my income. I felt my mom's whisperings in my ear throughout my search process, and strongly felt her presence in my choice. I'm in the Longfellow Creek watershed, which drains into the Duwamish River on the unceded lands of Duwamish and other Coast Salish peoples, including Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Tulalip. I own a 2 bedroom, 2 bath condo in the Fairmount Park neighborhood of West Seattle, close to work, downtown, and walking distance to many things, including beautiful natural settings as well as local commercial centers. Even with all of my struggles, I still feel immense privilege for where I'm at now with a "room of one's own" and all the benefits that implies that includes a freedom over my own space that I haven't known before and a place where I can cultivate spiritual connection to the Land with its flora and fauna.

## Finding Water

Like bell hooks, “I have yearned to find my place in this world, to have a sense of homecoming, a sense of being wedded to a place...I need to live where I can walk...as one who is claiming the earth” (2009, p. 2). I also want to acknowledge one of my professors, Dr. Dawn Hardison-Stevens (2021) who created an assignment, *Walking the Lands in Silence*. Her assignment gave me words and format to describe what I’ve been intuitively doing for most of my life. My walking creates maps of my presence, my musings, my breathing, my healing. Now, it is a light tread, working to avoid harm, but at the same time acknowledging the settler colonialism that stole the land where I live and work from the Duwamish and Coast Salish peoples.

As a white, southern woman in exile, I’ve been blessed with a second home here in the Pacific Northwest. I knew it the moment I drove across I-90 over Lake Washington into the tunnel, *Seattle-Portal to the Pacific*, that spat me out on a curve bringing the bright lights of the city into focus. Even though it was night, I knew in my heart that I just entered a place I would not leave for a very long time, a place where I felt a connection that would only deepen over time. The daytime view of the city, the Puget Sound, and the surrounding mountain ranges of the Cascades and the Olympics only reinforced my feeling, and I began a journey in 1994 that would result in an 18-year partnership, many friendships, and a daughter who would have roots in this sacred place.

The water flowing around and through the Land remains my locus for my personal mapping of this Place. Mní Wičhóni (water is life) from the Lakota resonates with me not just because of my own personal spiritual connection to water, but also as a reminder of the Indigenous struggle to preserve and restore waterways throughout the world. As Alayna Eagle

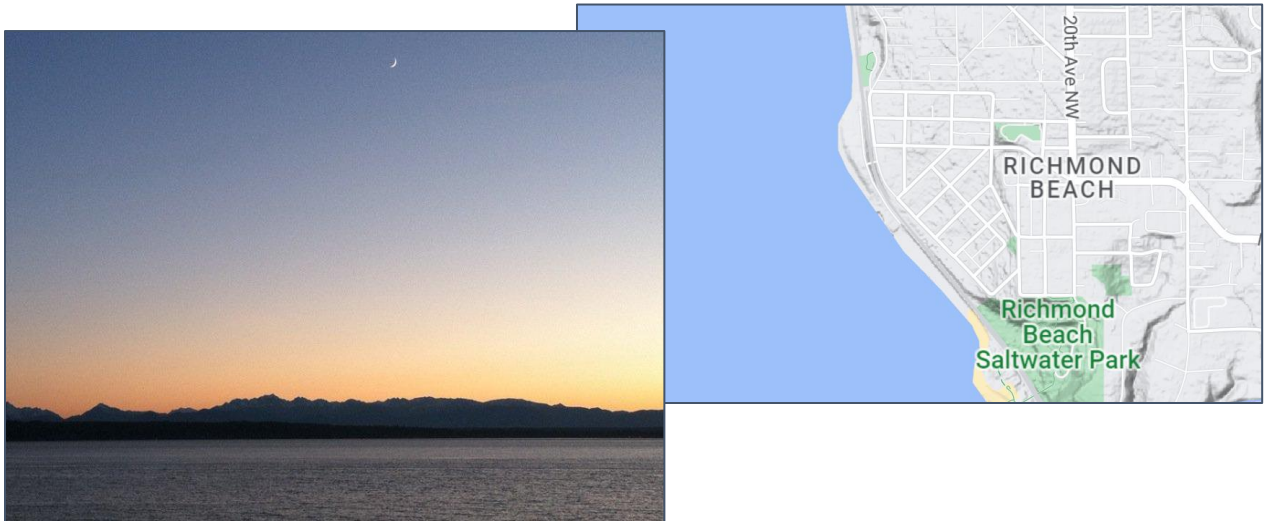
Shield (2020) said about the resistance at Standing Rock and the water is life movement, “This was a fight for our lives and our lifeways” (p. 4). I acknowledge the fight and deep wisdom of the tens of thousands of Indigenous peoples who gathered at the Standing Rock Sioux Indian Reservation to protest the route of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), which, in the case of leaks or rupture, would have devastating effects on treaty lands, sacred sites, and water sources (Shield et al., 2020). The Sioux Tribe, locked in legal battles, continues in its struggle for sovereignty today with the U.S. government and DAPL operators and affiliated companies. Alayna Eagle Shield (2020) goes on to say, “Water and young people will always be the way forward for our people” (p. 5). I acknowledge the fight and deep wisdom of the Indigenous peoples and community groups in and around Seattle who watch, stand, and fight for the protections and restoration of the Duwamish River and shoreline, demanding accountability from industry, the Port of Seattle, the City of Seattle. These include the Duwamish peoples, the Muckleshoot, Suquamish, and Tulalip Tribes and other Coast Salish Tribes, Duwamish River Community Coalition, the Puget Soundkeeper Alliance, among others. I may not have understood this when I first moved to this Land, but now, I hold it in my heart as a sacred call to action.

*sky  
in the soft, grey drizzle  
a melding of muted layers of colors  
that speak of softness  
and buoy dreams of exploration.*

~Alison Pugh, May 7, 2022 - Written in a rainy, grey spring season after musing how much I stare at the sky to allow space for thinking, dreaming, or not thinking at all.

The following sections are journal maps of my walking in the neighborhoods I’ve lived, my feet connecting to this Land I call Home as I ask for Nature to soothe the jagged edges of my life experiences.

*Walking the Lands: Richmond Beach, 2003-2005*



Footfalls padding over concrete, rail ties, hills, bridge, and sand - sometimes rapid with breath and blood circulating to a rhythm that's palpable - a time in my life where I ran regularly more than I walked. I clocked hours familiarizing myself with the topography of the hilly neighborhood and the joining of the Salish Sea to the gray sand and rock of the beachfront, my mind letting go of the pressures of circular thoughts, the salt air cleansing. In November, I regularly gathered madrona berries from the trees around the neighborhood just because their coloring captures my favorite sunset hues. Sometimes I made bracelets out of them, the red orange darkening as the berries dried. My daughter spent hours at low tides wandering the beach with her father, collecting any number of shells and rocks, hues, shapes, and smells she kept over the years to later remind her of this precious time in childhood. She knew more about the sea at age 6 than I did as an adult.

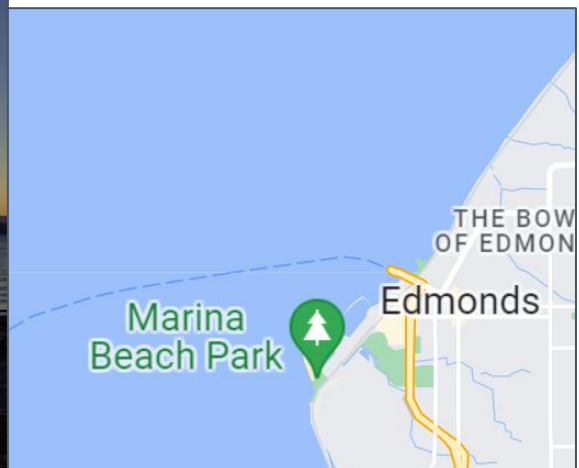


*Me and my daughter in our yard at Richmond Beach.*

*The mountains outside my window are covered with snow, yet the sun shines brightly, the water reflecting its brilliance in a thousand pools of dappled light.*

~Alison Pugh, Richmond Beach, 2005

### *Walking the Lands: Edmonds, 2008-2018*

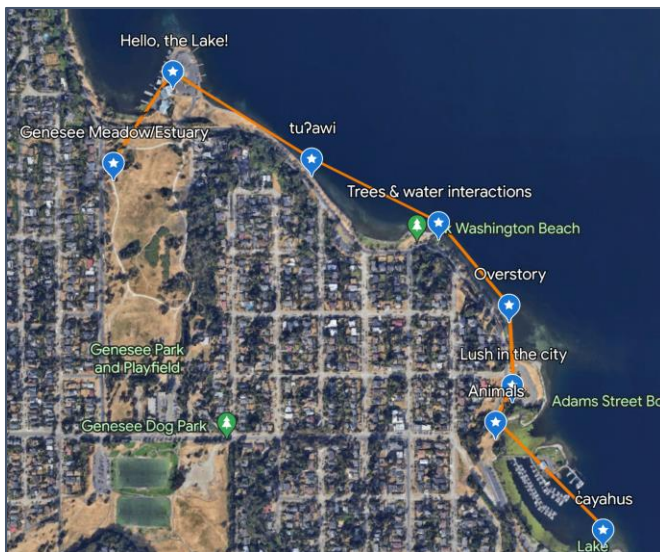


Partnerships and friendships unravel, and my daughter grows into her teenage years. The intersection of sea and sky still heals as I walk the Edmonds waterfront on the Salish Sea

regularly. The smell of the wild roses on Sunset Ave. mingling with the salt air, a singular perfume for losing oneself momentarily. The ferry coming and going, going and coming, the buzz of the ferry horn, the hustle of folks arriving and departing. Moving through the crowd and cars to get to the beach, then the marina, then the dog park. Not a place for solitude necessarily, but still conducive to clear the mind and the heart when the sea breaks upon the sand, rocks, and seawalls churning its fizzy noise, and the strike of sun pierces through the layers of cloud at sunset.

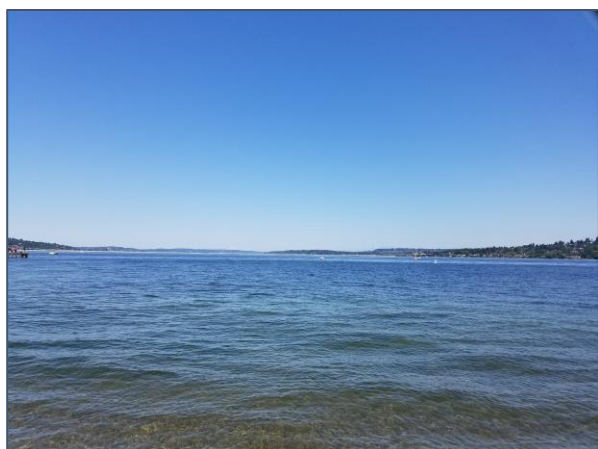


*Walking the Land: Genesee/Lake Washington, 2018-2022*



*My "Walking the Lands in Silence" map made in Google Earth, 2021*

Turning to the east, Lake Washington is the next place where my walking draws the maps of my life. My daughter, now grown, leaves the house, and I have to downsize in all the ways, including rehoming two of my long-time pet familiars - a time of grief and loss infinitely compounded by the loss of my mother. My walking journey begins at the border between land and sea where wetlands should be. In the wet months, the Genesee Meadow provides a much-needed place of landing and nourishment for migratory birds as it turns marshy. I can imagine this place without roads and sidewalks and walls, and the border between land and water would be much more difficult to discern, but the interactions much richer.



Hello-the Lake! I give thanks to the lake every single time it comes into view. I used "The Waterlines Project" map (Sheikh et al, 2009) to overlay my route with Indigenous place names, named in Southern Lushootseed, the language of the Duwamish descendants and southern Coast Salish peoples. tu?awi, "trout," is on my route. In

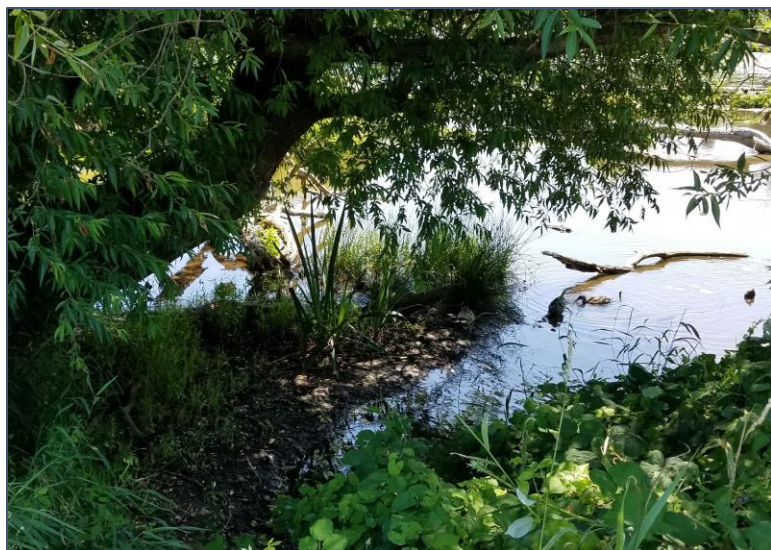
the Puget Sound, there are very few places where you can see the forest as it would have probably bordered the water 500 years ago because white settlers and subsequent generations eliminated most of the coastal trees for views and/or access. The quest for prime real estate views or commercial usage of waterfront/waterways in our capitalistic society have fundamentally altered the borders of water and land, creating definite lines instead of the naturally occurring gradual shift found in wetlands. Tidelands were built to house, harbor and feed innumerable life as well as absorb much of the impacts of large storms and shifts in water

levels. Without it, species and habitats are lost, and large storms and even tidal shifts wreak havoc with their accompanying flooding; impacts we deal with today. In this place, I consider how humans interact with the water - seeing folks taking kayaks and wakeboards out in the water here and imagining Indigenous folks taking their canoes out although it's not something you see in this place often these days. Canoe journeys do happen though in the Salish Sea during certain months of the year.

Along the route, I encounter many trees that I adore, including sčəbidac (Douglas Firs), Hemlocks, ǰəpayac (Western Red Cedars), Spruce, and č'ulac (Big Leaf Maple) to name a few. Indigenous names are given in Southern Lushootseed from the Duwamish Tribal Services' Indigenous Plants Signage project sponsored by Seattle Parks and Recreation. I think about the ecosystem services the trees



provide, especially on hot, summer days - the water and carbon dioxide storage, the biofiltration,



and the shade. The value of the shade is enormous to humans in the city in these times! This place is a lush respite from the concrete and built environment. Here you see a variety of trees and plant life and some ducks taking a rest in

protected shade. We see far fewer animals than we would have even 100 years ago...but here are few - crows, ducks, herons, fish, and turtles all call this land home. (In late summer) blackberry season is starting! One of my favorite things is to walk in the summer and taste the fresh berries from the land...something I know is also of extreme value to Indigenous folks and traditions. I'm learning how important it is to preserve Indigenous foods and traditions in this region as they are the things that give this region life - berries, salmon, whales, trees, water, forest - also the realization that following the seasons (cycle/wheel) is a healthier and more natural path to follow.



*The smell of fullness, stem and leaf, plump and well-fed.  
The feel of cool air eddies swirling around my ankles.*

~Alison Pugh, June 4, 2022 - Written during one of my regular walks on the shore of Lake Washington. I was thinking about the fullness of spring and seasonal cycles.

At the end of my walk is çayahus or place of a supernatural monster "horned snake" (Sheikh et al, 2009), the Seward Park peninsula on view across the water, and the mystery of the origin of the name still shrouded in local Indigenous lore. My body turns back to walk my lakeshore path again, and my heart is light.

### *Walking the Lands: Duwamish River, 2020-Present*

Every morning as I arrive at work, I look to the eastern horizon and think of the river flowing parallel to the ridge where the college is sited. The Duwamish River, less accessible for recreational access in Seattle due to the industry sited up and down its shores, but once home to

many Indigenous tribal sites, including villages of Duwamish peoples, and as well as white settlers in Seattle bringing their extractive industries with them - the river serving as a main transportation route and also the lifeblood of the communities with its bevy of local foods, including salmon, many other fish, crabs, mussels, and clams and estuary ecosystem supporting many other animals and natural processes. Today, only salmon is deemed safe to eat. According to the King County Public Health Department (2019), “In the Duwamish River, the seafood that spend their entire lives in the river (perch, sole, flounder, crab, mussels and clams) are unsafe to eat. They have high levels of toxic chemicals (such as PCBs) that you cannot see,” a direct result of poor environmental practices of the past and current industry that crowds the riverfront. These industries became dominant after the colonists burned the Indigenous villages, chasing them out of their homes and off their (mother) land after convincing the government not to honor the Treaty of Point Elliott of 1855 that promised Tribal signatories hunting and fishing rights as well as Tribal reservations in exchange for 54,000 acres of land (Cummings, 2020). The U.S. government set up these tensions and more after its racist, imperialist, and patriarchal policy, the Donation Land Claims Act passed in 1850 that offered free land to any *white males* who would settle in the Northwest, and echoes my own family’s history of moving into the southern U.S. with promises of free land in exchange for settling after Indigenous folks were forced to leave as well as my own mom and dad’s ability to buy their first house based on my father’s veteran benefits, available again to only *white males*; not much has changed over the many years between these policies. Parcels ranged from 160 acres to 320 acres, and the settlers came with a philosophy of private property and land ownership that directly conflicted with Indigenous culture and practices of more communal and migratory/seasonal living (Cummings, 2020).

The Duwamish people have been in the Seattle/Greater King County area since time immemorial. Our stories, such as "North Wind, South Wind", tell of the last Ice Age, and an Ice Weir breaking over the Duwamish River. We were the first signatories on the Treaty of Point Elliott in 1855, signed by Chief Si'ahl, who was chief of the Duwamish and Suquamish tribes. Our longhouse today stands across the street from where one of our largest villages was located before it was burned down by settlers in 1895.

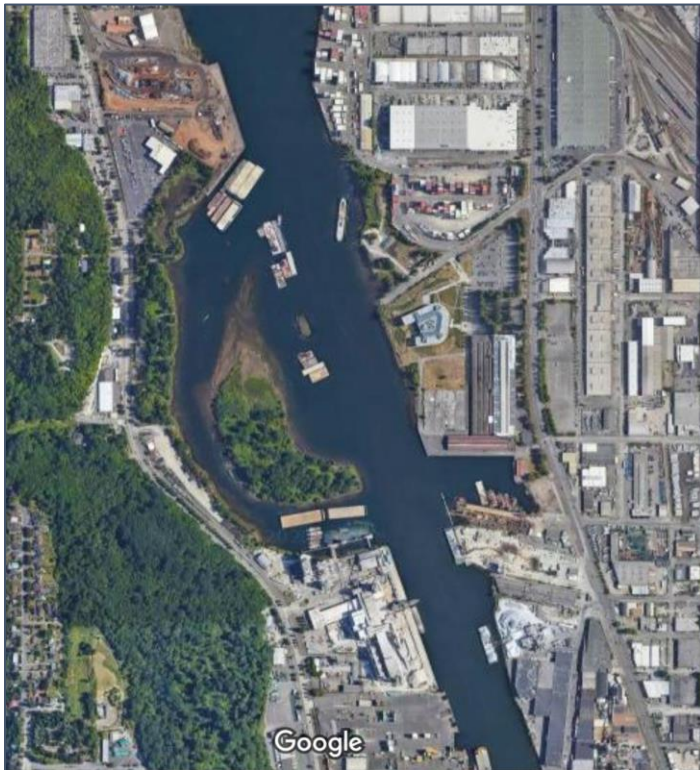
(Duwamish Tribal Services, 2018)



*View from the Tuaultw Park looking toward Kellogg Island, May 2022.*

On February 26, 2022, I attended a Bird Walk sponsored by the Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center, led by Elaine Chuang at the Herring's House Park (Tuaultw) and the həʔapus Village Park, the park commemorating the village across from the Longhouse. Events at this time were still rare due to the pandemic lockdown ending in Washington State just the summer before, but folks came out in force to walk the Duwamish shoreline on Native ancestral

lands. Elaine spoke of the traditional importance of the riparian habitat to the diets of many living things, “When the tide is out, the table is set” (2022). She also spoke of the changes wrought in the landscape due to human engineering where 25 miles of winding river was transformed into 4 miles of straight, concreted waterway except in the very place we were walking, the only part of the lower Duwamish River saved from the Port of Seattle/Army Corps of Engineering voracious land forming. In 1975, the same year the Port started to work this area, Washington State passed a law to protect archeological finds, which ended up saving this last natural curve of the river that very same year, even after the Port demolished part of the site “accidentally” and a battle over development ensued (Cummings, 2020). The Duwamish Tribal Services sited the new Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center, built in 2009, across the street from the only natural riverfront in the City of Seattle proper.



*Aerial view of the lower Duwamish River with the natural bend visible to the left*

## **From Silence/Invisibility to Action: Cultivating Healthy Relations**

Transitioning from my walks in the land, mapping the geography of my intuitive healing process in connection with the Land, always seeking waterways- Mní Wičhóni!- I turn to actively working with the Land and its people and continue asking the question, how do I cultivate healthy relations without repeating settler-colonial patterns of harm?

As a Dean at a college on unceded Coast Salish lands, I'm seeking ways to go beyond the land acknowledgment that has now become regular practice as we start meetings and events and engage in actions. One of my priorities is to center Indigenous folks in ecological restoration work to repair harm to home and the Land Mother. As an outsider, considering this work carefully, including my background, my experiences, and familial generational experiences, is of primary importance because I don't want to continue inflicting harm, causing trauma, or simply benefiting the college through interest convergence. Yet, this work of unfolding the hidden parts of myself scares me. "And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger" (Lorde, 2009, p. 42). In this work, I also consider the danger of urgency, one of Okun's (2021) characteristics of white supremacy, and often, if I'm being honest, my go-to. My tendency is to go straight to solutions without pausing for reflection and examining my own biases and positionality with respect to the issue or problem at hand, risking repeating settler colonial patterns of harm. This dissertation itself is my journey into another way of being, processing, considering before acting, especially with respect in any official capacity I hold. At work, I access power, not only within my title/position, but also in my capacity as a representative of a college with a long history of inflicting harm as part of academia. I dance between inquiry,

reflection, relations, and work, but I'm shifting the work to listening and tending relations more and more rather than production or getting results, a challenging switch that needs constant attention.

### *Who Invited You?*

Shortly after starting the EdD program, I spoke to our then Associate Vice-President of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion to see if there was any current work within the Indigenous communities that needed support. She mentioned that there was an Executive Steering Committee (ESC) for a project called Ridge to River (R2R) that she was a part of but was finding it difficult to participate in because of the calendaring and conflicts that she had. With her permission, I reached out to Sam Brown who was leading the project. Sam Brown is a force of nature. He identifies as a Duwamish Tribal Member and now lives in the southeastern United States assisting in the cleanup and measuring impact of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Sam has a background in environmental science and has worked for NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) for many years, but as I understand it, is now retired, yet continuing to do good work. He promised his mother, who also identifies as a Duwamish Tribal Member, that he would continue supporting the Duwamish, as a Tribe, in whatever ways he could, and he often serves as the pro-bono environmental consultant for the Tribe (S. Brown, personal communication, January 18, 2021). I had a wonderful conversation with Sam where I talked about my grant background and the possible skills I could bring to the table in support of the R2R project. He welcomed me and quickly got me on the email list to be included in the R2R meetings and communications; I was now a member of the Ridge to River Executive Steering Committee. At this time, we were at the height of the pandemic, so everything was virtual.

*Cultivating healthy relations: Listening and meeting needs when invited*

My first meeting was a whirlwind of trying to keep up with the players in the room. There were stakeholders from several community organizations with varying degrees of expertise and scientific knowledge, researchers from UW working on water and soil quality monitoring as well as river restoration, and folks who identify as Duwamish Tribal Members. In all honesty, I found it difficult to keep up, but I furiously scribbled notes during those initial meetings to get a sense of the project, the priorities, and who was at the table. The project revolved around the West Duwamish Greenbelt and the feasibility of connecting an existing but informal and incomplete trail system from the top of the ridge, from specific destinations, the College and K-8 Pathfinder School, to the Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center and other Indigenous cultural sites as well as the Duwamish River. King County awarded a grant to the Duwamish Tribal Services as there were many complicating factors to extending and formalizing the trails, including residual pollution on the ridge from industry in the Duwamish Valley, specifically cement kiln dust (CKD). The grant itself included working with consultants on a feasibility study, which was to include next steps for the tribe as well as monitoring water quality along the greenbelt and its watershed that drains into the Duwamish River. This was a time-bound grant that ended in 2022, yet the stakeholders at the table were interested in continuing with the project, including identifying next steps in continuing the work with the goal of connecting the ridge to the river, with Duwamish village sites being a central destination.

At the end of spring 2022, Sam Brown called for other leadership to step up within the group as he was finding it challenging to keep up with his family responsibilities, the time change in scheduling meetings, and he noted that the Indigenous folks leading the work trusted

the group and its work. I sat there for a long time being silent as I still felt like somewhat of an outsider in the group, but it seemed that other stakeholders had too much going on to step into a leadership role, but everyone acknowledged they still wanted the group to continue. I thought to myself even though I may not have the technical expertise for some of the work, I could certainly lead the group in terms of scheduling meetings, organizing documentation, crafting agendas, and facilitating meetings, so I finally spoke up and said I would do it if I could get assistance from the group in terms of the more specialized needs. The group wholeheartedly accepted me as chair of the group, and another member was inspired to step in to be co-chair at that point, for which I was immensely grateful. Although I have the skills for leading the group logistically, I also feel strongly that the college needs to be an active partner in this work in the future as a property owner in the West Duwamish Greenbelt and am pleased the group is continuing. At the same time, I've been keeping it informal so far; I've been inspired by Dr. Dolores Calderón in this. As a guest speaker in one of our EdD classes, she spoke about her work with a local Tribe and her intention to keep it informal, putting the relationship and community first without adding the complicated dynamics that an institutional partnership with a PWI (primarily white institution) might bring. Building relationships takes time. As well, many sites of resistance are important to this work, even if they are small (D. Calderón, personal communication, June 5, 2021).

We've met monthly this fall and winter under new leadership. We've had good attendance at meetings from a variety of stakeholders. We've agreed on a schedule of meetings for the next year and crafted a mission and vision statement for the group as we move into this next iteration of the Ridge to River Executive Steering Committee. Some of the stakeholders are working together on a mapping project, which will help identify some potential areas of focus for connection and development within the trail system. We hope to complete one of these pathways

in the next year, connecting the K-8 Pathfinder School to the Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center. The connection between the College and the Duwamish Longhouse is a longer goal due to the complexities of the trail mapping, property ownership, and avoiding the cement kiln dust on the ridge.

### **Ridge to River Executive Steering Committee Mission & Vision**

*Ridge to River* began as a vision of the Duwamish Tribe to develop connections with the broader community, by working together to create safe and enjoyable walking connections between the Longhouse & Cultural Center, the Tribe's ancestral sites along the Duwamish River, and points along the West Duwamish Greenbelt ridge. Integral to creating these pathways is restoration and healing of the land and water. It continues today through a collaboration of community groups, community members, and the Duwamish Tribe who work together as the Executive Steering Committee.

The Ridge to River Executive Steering Committee commits to this vision by:

- Partnering with the Duwamish Tribe actively in service to the vision.
- Seeking resources and making connections with appropriate agencies and organizations to cultivate funding.
- Transforming the West Duwamish Greenbelt into a well-used walking trail network connecting points between the ridge and the Duwamish River, prioritizing access to the Duwamish Tribe Longhouse and Cultural Center, but also connecting the community to schools, parks, neighborhoods, transit options, the Duwamish River, and other Duwamish Tribal ancestral sites.
- Assessing and monitoring environmental impacts with a focus on restoration and healing.
- Engaging community members in the work that reflect the diversity of the community, including Tribal members, folks of color, and youth.

*Cultivating healthy relations: Listening and learning*



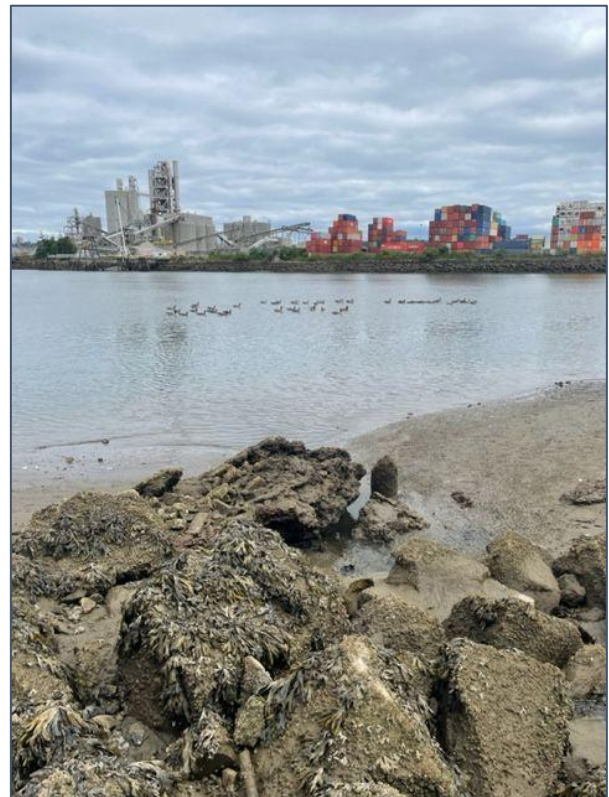
In July 2022, Katherine Smith sent out an email to the Ridge to River Executive Steering Committee about an opportunity for water quality monitoring at the *tuʔəlaltxʷ* Village Park on the Duwamish River. I took her up on the offer and met her at the park at the appointed time. This

opportunity only occurs once every few months as the tides make this spot mostly inaccessible.

When driving there, I realized I had never been to this specific spot before. Set in between an industrial recycling facility on one side and a rock/gravel facility on the other, this sliver of

parkland extending to the river contains a slough emptying to the river that is roped off for protection/restoration. The park itself is a nice spot for sitting with some benches, picnic tables surrounded by some lovely trees and a pier for viewing as well as fishing. The beach is also accessible at lower tides.

The history of the park is important as according to the Port of Seattle website, this was one of the first parks establishing public access to the Duwamish River surrounded by



industry so close to where it empties to the Puget Sound (Port of Seattle, 2022). Since the park itself was developed in the 1990s, volunteers have spent many hours working on the restoration of this spot to provide some natural habitat for the abundant species who still call this river home or at least a brief resting place.



I met Katherine, and we walked down the beach to the T-105 (Port terminal) culvert where stormwater run-off from the ridge, roads, parking lots, and surrounding industry flows directly into the river. This was our site for monitoring. Katherine let me know that at first, during the Ridge to River project, this was a key site because they were trying to assess the quality of the water flowing into the river here, but surprisingly, there haven't been major concerns during the few years they have been monitoring. Continued vigilance is needed though, and water monitoring is included as a key aspect of future Ridge to River work. After we conclude our sampling, we walk back along the shore together, my feet sinking in the muddy shore, the birds flying overhead, my connection to this Seattle river stronger.



*The exact location where we took our samples.*

It's easy to overlook the only river in the City of Seattle, the Duwamish River. Even the Port and City officials don't call it a river with "Duwamish Waterway" spelled out on the signs that signal its prescribed naming to the humans traversing bridges and roadways nearby. "They call it waterway. We call it a river," Sam Brown states as he shrugs his shoulders (S. Brown, personal communication, May 10, 2022). In many ways though, this renaming is significant as it attempts to separate the natural flows and behavior of the rivers into something more mechanized, human-made, and controlled - a silencing, if you will. I prefer to relate to the river as a dynamic entity. Cleo Wölfle Hazard (2022) describes water and rivers as "willful, unruly, feeling, acting beings" (p. 9) in their examination of relations between rivers and queer trans folks to model ways of being that emphasize change and adaptation in order to heal and restore. No matter what you call it though, the river continues to shift and speak although you may have to work harder to listen for these gifts from the Duwamish.

My mother never talked in any detail about the violence and abuse she endured at the hands of my father with me nor any of her other children; she never openly called herself a

victim. Although her silence persisted, she did commit to making a difference in her community for other victims of domestic violence later in her life. In the early 2000s, she and a couple of women friends from church worked with the Mayor of Prattville, Alabama to establish a Domestic Violence Task Force to raise awareness about domestic violence issues with the express purpose of creating a women's shelter (safe house) in Autauga County where none existed.

Their first step was to bring folks together. According to my mom, “67 political, civic, church, and service leaders along with interested citizens attended” (J. Pugh, personal archive, June 6, 2007). According to the local paper, “Mayor Byard said he was shocked at how many people were in attendance at the meeting” (Woods, 2005, August 6). The Task Force was formed, and work continues today. My mother received a “Key to the City” presented by the mayor for her efforts. The city later created a position in the police force dedicated to helping domestic violence victims and providing training to officers related to domestic violence crimes. Recently, I read that the Governor of Alabama, Kay Ivey, granted money to shelters across the state from the Domestic Violence Trust Fund, which was created by the state legislature in 2015 (ADECA, 2023, February 15).

I like to think that this continuing support for victims of domestic violence in Alabama contains seeds of my mom's work. At the same time, I acknowledge the importance of speaking out about the specifics of our experiences, which my mother did not do when it came to the painful parts of her life. Audre Lorde speaks of transforming silence into *language* and action (2007), “We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid” (p. 42). From my mother's journal,

“Nothing haunts me like the things I never said” (J. Pugh, personal archives, May 18, 2014). I commit to speak/write *and* act, bringing light to my dark corners to accept my whole self working with a purpose that honors a holistic ecology.

*Cultivating healthy relations: Moving authentically*

In addition to walking the lands, my personal restoration maps connected to Mother Nature, another part of my personal healing relates to my writing and creative expression. I’ve peppered a bit of my journal/poetry writing throughout this dissertation, much of which has been inspired from my personal journey through this program and this work. From a past journal of mine:

*To write  
without judgment  
without comparison  
without restraint.  
Fear of expression,  
holding so close  
within,  
A hard crust  
encasing.  
<Hiding>  
Barely able to breathe  
Barely able to see  
Charting a map  
A hope of discovery.*

~Alison Pugh, 2014.

I’ve written creatively here and there throughout my life, with very long gaps in between. The poem above from 2014 describes fears, hiding, and holding back - much of this relating to my childhood need to stay invisible for protection. My current process of reflection and

discovery of self inspires me to express more openly and more frequently, allowing for the naming of emotions in service to moving authentically in the world.

***On the precipice of possibility***

*Before the breakdown of vision into  
a thousand tasks.*

*Before the sweat.*

*Before the do.*

*There is a swell.*

*A joy.*

*An almost spill.*

*Holding time*

*generating glimmer.*

~Alison Pugh, 2015.

The 2015 poem above feels like a precursor to this work, the expression of holding a joyful reflexive space before action. While in the EdD program, I've written more poetry to capture my experience of life moments. As Audre Lorde expresses (2007), "But as we come more into touch with our own ancient, non-european consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes" (p. 37).

***Where I am from...***

*I am from...*

*Alison. My mother, Juanita. My grandmother, Thelma.*

*I am from...*

*hot, heat, oceans, big family gatherings, girl gang roaming the subdivision and park. I'm also from hiding in the closet and behind doors from my alcoholic father.*

*I am from...*

*cornbread, black-eyed, collards, and banana pudding. I'm also from nasty casseroles built from jars and cans.*

*I am from...*

*kerfluffle, whoopsie daisy, blithering, dagnabit, and other old-fashioned words that give hints about the generation I spent my childhood with.*

*I am from...*

*flowers, food-generating plants, succulents, cat trees, books, and records that transport me to other worlds and move my body.*

~Alison Pugh-Raw answers to “Where I’m From” writing exercise on July 10, 2020, in the first class I took with Dr. M. Billye Sankofa Waters. This is the first hint that I’m going to dig deeper into my own poetry throughout this EdD journey.

*warmth suffusing my skin  
and beyond into the blood  
find pathways to heart.*

~Alison Pugh, April 2, 2021-Written in Dr. Chris Knaus’ class when he asked us to do a free-write haiku as the opening exercise in the class. At this point, I was in Alabama taking care of my elderly mother who would die a month later. While everyone else in the cohort was in the cool and likely rainy Pacific NW, I was outside soaking up the sun rays during our class zoom session.

*sun beaming down  
heat blooming the moment  
as my skin relaxes in relief.  
the corner of my mouth ticks up  
even in this moment of peril.*

~Alison Pugh, June 25, 2022 - Written on a sunny day after a dismal, rainy June in the immediate aftermath of the overturning Roe v. Wade by the Supreme Court and two mass shootings in the U.S. in May alongside ongoing congressional hearings about the January 6th insurrection that many folks are ignoring and/or claiming as fake while continuing to believe the big lie that TFG won the 2020 election.

Continuing to explore and express my emotional life creatively nourishes my spirit, helps me embrace my whole self and sets the stage for healing relations with others, human and non-human alike. After my mom’s death, the discovery of her personal writings and glimpses of an inner life she rarely expressed compelled me to bring to light hidden parts of her to add to my own storybasket - the experiences of a life lived, honoring her way of knowing and being, and adding depth to my understanding of where I’m from.

Cultivating healthy relations to humans and non-humans alike without repeating settler colonial patterns of harm requires reflexivity and exploration into the inner folds of me,

including examining my family history to better understand my positionality - the struggles, privileges, and power that I bring to bear in my relations and work as I attempt to move authentically in the world. It also requires an understanding and acceptance of alternate ways of knowing and being; my probe into feminist epistemology serves as a hopeful bridge to better understanding indigenous epistemologies albeit from an outsider perspective.

## **Method Makin' and Porch Sittin'**

This dissertation germinated and grew in the shadow of a global pandemic. I was accepted to the UW Tacoma EdD program on February 19, 2020, and the world was in lockdown a month later. My expectation of the program and forming new relations with my classmates and professors changed as our classes shifted to remote/Zoom during the first quarter, summer 2020. We met each other physically for our first in-person class together in December 2022, 2.5 years later. We worried and grieved together online as sickness and deaths from COVID-19 affected family, friends, and sometimes us; the world reeling from the death of almost 7 million people to date with Folks of Color disproportionately affected. We worried and grieved together as more Blacks were murdered, folks protested that Black Lives Matter!, and my Black Classmates suffered, sometimes inexpressibly so. We worried and grieved together as xenophobia grew against Asians in the U.S. as some political leaders in the U.S. referred to COVID-19 as the "China Flu," and my Asian classmates suffered from tremendous stress and anxiety. We learned new ways of communicating and expressing ourselves online to get through a very dark time.

In the midst of this, my 86-year-old mother fell and broke her hip in March 2021. She had many existing health problems already. Her stint in a rehab facility was unsuccessful as she never walked again. While figuring out what the next phase of her care might be, I booked a one-way plane ticket to Alabama to help my sister, my mother's primary caregiver. I was working

full-time, but the college was still operating remotely; me shifting to Alabama while working was relatively painless due to the pandemic, this type of flexible work was a boon for some workers, but admittedly didn't exist for others. I arrived the day after my mother returned home from the rehab facility. My mother was now bedridden and back in hospice care at home with nurses checking in only a few times a week, the bulk of care our responsibility. My sister and I spent our days rotating between work hours and Mom care, and I juggled the EdD program along with applying for the permanent position at the college for a job I was already doing. My brothers intermittently provided care as well. I spent daily time with my mother laughing, telling stories, making healing food, worrying, crying, and sometimes sitting in silence holding her hand. I also spent good time with other family that I don't see often because I live on the other side of the country. Two months later, my mother died, and her spirit flew away, oh glory!

I lay this out, even repeating some elements, because this is the backdrop of my dissertation - my lived experience - that cannot be separated from this work. Naming grief and trauma is important to processing it, but so often, silence prevails. Processing grief and trauma is elemental to cultivating health relations, allowing me to be authentically present. This dissertation is a journey of naming for myself and for my mother, giving voice to her silence, and helping to set the stage for healthy relations in my future.

About a week after my mom's passing, I started to go through my mother's papers. I went through a 5-drawer file cabinet and many boxes in my mom's closet. I set these precious materials out on the bed that she used to dream in every night, handled them, read them, and categorized them. The materials included photographs, letters, journals, poetry, tax forms, business-related documents, newspaper clippings, mementoes chronicling important events in my mother's life, cards celebrating a number of occasions that held special meaning to her, and

scrapbooks, among other things. M. Billye Sankofa Waters (2022), in her work related to Black communities but relevant to anyone exploring ancestry and home, speaks of losing personal stories and histories, “Too many of us keep our ‘gold’ tucked away in boxes and books with broken spines that get discarded when the matriarch/patriarch passes” (p. 2). My mother lovingly carried these materials around with her move after move, and I committed to handling them with the same loving care. In the future, I’ll be working on digitizing these materials for my family to access to illuminate our history. I’m positive she meant for me to find her archive and work through it in some way, but I don’t think she ever imagined that I would include some of it in my dissertation. It only made more and more sense to me though as time went on that this emotional work would form part of my methods.

As I went through the materials night after night, my emotions were roiling, but I was so grateful to have these windows into my mom’s life. Thankfully, my sister was with me, and we often retreated to the porch to converse about my recent findings. Being 12 years my senior, she can often fill in gaps in my understanding of family events. Sometimes a photo or document would elicit questions that neither of us were able to answer; other family members were sometimes consulted. While I am the youngest of six children, my eldest brother is 18 years my senior, and has a very different set of memories of my parents and family, which helps with some parts of puzzling out details. These interviews formed the basis for much of my data validation and some data gathering. The porch was often the setting for these conversations.

bell hooks (2009) describes the porch as “made for females to have outdoor space to occupy” (p. 143) and “liminal space, standing between the house and the world of sidewalks and streets...a threshold. Crossing it opened up the possibility of change” (pp. 146-147). Thinking of the porch as a liminal space seems appropriate for this time especially with so much of our

thoughts and emotions, spoken and unspoken, focusing on the liminal space between life and death. Like hooks (2009), my sister and I agree “a perfect porch is a place where the soul can rest” (p. 152), and we spend many hours drinking coffee, reading, chatting, laughing, and creating community on the porch (now the outdoor deck of my new home). In my mother’s house, my sister created an outdoor oasis on the porch filled with greenery and a wall of ferns to protect from the sun during the hot days. On Saturdays, we spent our “night out” on the back porch in the cool of the night air. Sometimes my brother joined us, sometimes my nephew joined us, sometimes other family would join us, but the porch was (and still is) always a place of retreat for my sister and I to recuperate, rejuvenate, and say hello to the neighbors walking by, transgressing boundaries and creating community.

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## Appendix A

This is a transcription of the Letter my mother sent to the ACLU in 1998.

Dear ACLU:

In July 1995 I retired. I filed for my Social Security benefits and was shocked to find that I had not received credit for my most productive years of working. From 1970 to 1982, I was in the grocery business with my ex-husband. We operated this business on a percentage from 1970 through 1973. In December of 1973, we purchased the business in both our names. In 1982 we lost the business due to a fire. For all those years, I worked hard and put in many more hours than my ex husband. He is an alcoholic and is not dependable.

A joining income tax return was filed. The supplement to the 1040 Form on which you computed the self-employment taxes had room for only one social security number (copy enclosed). As a result, my ex-husband is receiving all of the social security benefits, while I am receiving none.

The social security office informed me that there is nothing that can be done other than my ex-husband signing over my half to me. Ms. Green of the Social Security office in Montgomery called him. He verified to her that we were equal partners in this business but he would not sign the form sent to him by the Social Security Office.

The attorney offices that I called require a large retainer to even hear my story. Since the **federal form was grossly discriminatory**, I was hoping you might have had such a case, or could at least let me know if there is any hope for me getting proper credit for the work I did all those years.

I was married for 40 years and had six children by my ex-husband. We were divorced in 1993 because for many years he has been an alcoholic. Since our separation he has been admitted more than once for treatment in a VA Hospital. I worked all these years under the old rules, when you get pregnant; you quit your job. When the pregnancy was over, you find another job and start all over at the bottom, thus the low amount of income I made throughout my lifetime except when I was in business with my ex-husband. This business made it possible for my family to live in one place for over three years. My ex-husband never stayed at a job for long and we moved around a lot until the joint venture. This was made possible because I took on most of the responsibilities of being there and running the business. Previous employees and customers can verify all this.

I am enclosing copy of my 1979 joint tax return; my social security earnings record and letter from the Social Security Administration noting I informed them I had been self employed from 1970 to 1982.

Thank you for reading this and I hope to hear from you.

Sincerely,

## Appendix B

Transcription of From my mother's archive: Poems for each of her children, 1969-1972 images. These are poems my mother wrote about her children when they were young before I was born. This first poem is about my eldest brother when he was a teenager:

Oct 5, 1971

he grew  
 not tall and graceful  
     as a willow,  
 he grew  
     strong and sturdy  
     as a warrior,  
 he grew  
     sensitive, loving  
     and playful,  
 full caring for nature  
     and with tender  
     heartiness he roams.  
 he is strong for work  
     with his body  
 his hurt is great,  
     but my love  
     for him shall  
     surely help him  
     grow  
 into a true and great  
     man to love and  
     be loved as I  
     have loved him  
     as he grew  
 My Mike

This next poem is for my eldest sister when she was a teenager:

She dreams  
 That she doesn't care  
 She cares the most  
 She is capable of more feeling  
 and deeper feeling than anyone

I know  
 The best for her even  
 if she pretends to herself  
 She doesn't care.  
 LOVE for all her years

This next poem is for the third child, my sister, when she was about twelve years old:

She is real  
 She will always be there  
 My LIFE  
 To her my heart aches  
 For in her realness  
 she will suffer  
 If only she can have  
 what I have missed

This next poem is for the fourth child, my brother, when he was almost five years old:

His face is beautiful  
     in its innocence  
 Capped by tawny brown  
     hair and eyes that  
     laugh merrily  
 He spies a cricket  
     dancing across the floor  
 He loves openly and  
     gently  
 Even the lively little  
     cricket  
 He has at last caught  
     in his little boy  
     hands.  
 Hands that have  
     touched his turtle  
     to pet it like a  
     kitten  
 Hands that have  
     found a lowly  
     worm

Watched it wiggle  
     in his palm  
 Never daring to hurt  
     it.  
 Gently he sets it  
     free again  
 To find its home  
     in the sweet earth.

Angels are portrayed  
     by little girls  
 But when he looks  
     up at night and  
 says "I love you"  
 He is a picture of  
     an angel.

My heart aches that  
     he will have  
     to grow up.  
 I will cling to him  
     as long as I can  
 For he is my darling  
     Matt.

This final poem was written for the fifth child, my sister, when she was about six years old:

She is tender  
 As she reaches out her heart  
 She reaches to empty space  
 There is a crack  
 A piece falls off  
 She is disillusioned  
 But the search continues  
 If only I could wrap that heart  
 in velvet  
 Cushion out all the heartache  
 For she is tender  
 My Missy.