Trauma Worlds: More-than-Human Stages of Recovery

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ABSTRACT

This portfolio builds on Judith Herman's three stages of recovery, detailed in *Trauma and Recovery* (1997), to explore healing from childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Questions of what a more-than-human, survivor-centric model of trauma recovery could look like are explored in three sections. The first section includes six artistic works dealing with remembering and mourning trauma. The second section is a literary analysis of two novels that explore CSA, and community responses. The importance of both human and more-than-human witnessing for the health of individuals and community is emphasized. The third section is a modified collaborative autoethnography which details the role of CSA survivors, and the more-than-human in the 2018-2019 Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3903 strike.

FOREWORD

In my Major Research Portfolio, I examine sexual violence in a way that privileges the voices of female-identified survivors. By centring their voices, my research offers a framework that moves beyond the victim/perpetrator, patient/therapist paradigm, to explore more-than-human survivor relationships. Further, my research contributes to a greater understanding of the importance of nature and more-than-human relationships to human communities impacted by sexual violence.

In my Plan of Study I examine sexual violence in relation to the human disconnect from nature, and explore the historical aspects that have led to the prevalence of sexual violence. I argue that if this sexual violence is both the result and the symptom of our loss of connection with the natural world, and with our deepest selves, then surviving chronic sexual trauma, particularly when considered through a post-human lens, also offers an opportunity for healing and (re)connection. According to Judith Herman (1997), trauma causes people to act and feel disconnected from the present. Thus part of the healing process necessitates a (re)connection with the present, but the survivor cannot return to the present unchanged. It is this disconnection that creates a possibility for a deeper (re)connection, a connection with the present that is more expansive.

DEDICATION

To my 14-year-old former self, CJ, and all abuse survivors who deserve only great relationships.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank:

Cate Sandilands, from the first undergrad class, to the impassioned rants, the phone calls during the summer of my court case, the awards and PhD applications, you were an unwavering source of support. Your belief in me (along with your excellent editing and mentoring skills) helped bring this project to fruition. I am grateful to you beyond measure.

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B Wrauley, the pictures of my art are beautiful and haunting. Exactly how I wanted them to appear in my portfolio. You are one of a small handful I trust up close with those paintings.

Finally, to my more-than-human community. I would not be alive without you. Childhood sexual abuse is dark, and you all held space for me when I had nothing to give myself. I see you, and I remember. Thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

Discovering Judith Herman's seminal text *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence — from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1997) was life changing for me. In her work I found a text that gave voice to experiences that for me, at the time, had no language. The abuse I survived felt unspeakable. Further, the text was written from a feminist perspective. I felt like Herman was on my side. She made the connections between the trauma of war and the trauma of childhood sexual abuse (CSA), but she went further acknowledging the additional burden that CSA survivors face: isolation and little public support. It was a roadmap to healing that I could follow.

Moreover, Herman was the first to systematically outline the concept of a "spectrum of conditions rather than a single disorder" (2003, p. 119) for people who were chronically abused. While many clinicians have acknowledged the need for a diagnostic formulation that goes beyond simple post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and have used different names (see Brown & Fromm, 1986; Goodwin, 1990; Horowitz, 1986; Kolb, 1989; Kroll, Habenicht, Mackenzie et al., 1989; Krystal, 1968; Terr, 1991; & Van Der Kolk, 2014) Herman was the first to argue for an official, recognized name so that "those who have endured prolonged exploitation [are granted] a measure of the recognition they deserve" (1997, p. 122). Herman's proposed diagnosis for the chronically abused is "Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" (C-PTSD).

While *Trauma and Recovery* was written from a medical and scholarly perspective, it is not without problems. While Herman's work continues to be relevant, she sometimes falls into the trap of what Bonnie Burstow (2003) names the "deficiency model." Under a deficiency

model, survivors of chronic abuse are viewed as deficient in important ways relative to non-traumatized people. Burstow critiques the constructivist bent (which includes Herman) that views trauma survivors as "insufficiently trusting," and that a return to "normalcy" necessitates a trust in the goodness of others. She argues the two problematic assumptions inherent to this logic are that:

1. The world is essentially benign and safe, and so general trust is appropriate, and
2. people who have been traumatized have a less realistic picture of the world than others. (2003, p. 1298)

Additionally, Burstow challenges the "coercive application of a psychiatric text and the pathologizing of clients who do not want the text to be applied to them" (2003, p. 1299) with regard to Herman's proposed C-PTSD diagnosis. The tendency to label survivors with a disorder/ diagnosis takes away their power to name their own experience. Further, it clouds the fact that most people who would qualify for the C-PTSD diagnosis are victims. It puts the responsibility on the victim to heal their "disorder," and neglects the roles and responsibilities of the perpetrator and the community in the trauma and subsequent healing.

In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016) Donna Haraway asks: "What happens when human exceptionalism and the utilitarian individualism of classical political economics become unthinkable in the best sciences across the disciplines and interdisciplines?" (p. 57). Given the continued prevalence of CSA and its devastating effects, I argue that current theoretical frameworks that favour rugged individualism and human speciesism have reached the limits of what they can offer, and are thus "unthinkable." As Burstow (2003) argues, the impetus for healing is placed almost exclusively on CSA survivors.

This obscures the importance and responsibility communities have to survivors. Further, CSA healing paradigms neglect more-than-human worlds all together. María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) argues against human exceptionalism, asserting that care circulates throughout the natural world and necessarily includes more-than-human worlds. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) offers stories of multispecies relationships and webs of reciprocity to heal our broken relationship with the earth. Lee Maracle (2014) and Shani Mootoo (1996) wrote novels that contend with CSA and more-than-human relationships, and problematize frameworks of human speciesism.

In response to these questions, my research portfolio consists of three sections that explore what an intersectional, more-than-human theory of trauma recovery could look like. In the second half of *Trauma and Recovery,* "Stages of Recovery," Herman outlines a path to healing from CSA. My work (re)interprets Judith Herman's "Stages of Recovery" through a feminist, survivor-centric, more-than-human lens.

The three stages Herman (1997) outlines for recovery from trauma are 1) safety, 2) remembrance and mourning, and 3) reconnection. She cautions that the stages are a "convenient fiction, not to be taken too literally" (p. 155). In the second half of *Trauma and Recovery,* Herman dedicates two chapters to the first stage ("A Healing Relationship and "Safety"), one chapter to the second stage ("Remembrance and Mourning"), and two chapters to the third stage ("Reconnection" and "Commonality"). The reality of recovery is complex, it resists a linear path. Survivors oscillate between stages, though over time gradual shifts become noticeable. Herman likens the journey to a spiral, where the survivor will revisit issues from different stages at higher levels of integration

The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. In the second stage the survivor tells the story of her trauma. In this stage the survivor confronts the horrors of her past and learns to transform intrusive traumatic memories (which are wordless and static) into a "fully integrated life narrative" (Herman, 1997, p. 184). In the third and final stage, the survivor "reclaims her world" (Herman, 1997, p. 196). Herman explores the various types of reconnection the survivor must explore, reconciling with herself, as well as reconnecting with others. Further, Herman outlines the importance of group bonds to the recovery journey.

My initial plan was have each chapter of Herman's "Stages of Recovery" represented in my portfolio. That plan was overly ambitious, and beyond the scope of what I could hope to accomplish within the time constraints. In "A Healing Relationship," Herman outlines the importance of the therapeutic relationship, and the problems that may arise within therapy. While therapy is certainly helpful, and trauma-specific therapy has been an invaluable asset to my recovery, it is not the only healing relationship of importance. Further, there are numerous barriers to CSA survivors accessing trauma therapy (see Haskell, 2004). My plan for this section was to centre the role of non-human animals for survivors in recovery from trauma. There are numerous studies confirming the therapeutic benefit of animal(nonhuman)-human bonding in trauma recovery (see Yorke, Adams, & Coady, 2008; Germain, Wilkie, Milbourne, & Theule, 2018; & Barlow, Cromer, Caron, & Freyd, 2012). Additionally, Peter Levine (2010; 1997) a somatic trauma theorist, explores the effects of trauma through animal ethology. Levine contrasts trauma experienced by domesticated non-human animals and human animals with wild non-human animals. He argues that human animals have an innate wisdom to heal from trauma that has been interrupted due to the disconnect in Western culture from our instinctual, self-protective

selves, an experience shared with domestic animals (2010; 1997). Further, Carol J. Adams' (2016) feminist-vegetarian critical theory further solidifies the relationship between CSA and animals; and Sunaura Taylor's (2017) exploration of human and animal disability problematizes the concepts of "less-than-human" and "more-than-human" as they currently exist in CSA discourse.

Herman's second chapter "Safety" focuses on the survivor establishing safety in their body and in their environment. However, this only considers environments in terms of other humans, and not more-than-humans (Herman, 1997, pp. 162-172). In this section I planned to explore the importance of relationships between CSA survivors and forests, water, and ancestral places. Using post-humanist texts such as Astrida Neimanis' *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (2017) and Peter Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate* (2016), I intended to speak to the different types of consciousness and relationship held by trees and water. Neimanis understands that as human bodies are largely composed of water, as is the earth, this water binds us all together and makes us a part of nature, and no-more or -less than any other part. Wohlleben's study of forests points to a model of community-oriented relationships that exist in certain forests, not planted by humans, that are multi-species and capable of co-creating ecosystems where organisms thrive. These terms are precisely the ones used in psychology and rape crisis centres imparted to victims of sexual violence: thrive, not just survive.

Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) writes about becoming "naturalized to place" which involves knowing "that your ancestors lie in this ground" (214-15). In trauma theory "grounding" and "anchoring" are outlined as methods for survivors to find safety in their bodies

(see Herman, 1997; & Muller, 2018), without ever mentioning actual places. In this section I planned to outline the importance of familiar forests, lakes, and land that I cultivated relationships with. Before I reclaimed my body, moments of safety were fleeting and always tied to places. When I finally settled back into my body, it was entirely tied to my safe places. Further, these places held my spirit until I was ready to be in my body again.

The Process

The second stage, "Remembrance and Mourning," and third stage "Reconnection" are the stages I ended up covering in my portfolio. The process undoubtedly would have felt more grounded if I had been able to include the first stage of recovery, related to safety. Nonetheless, the concepts I proposed to explore through "A Healing Relationship" and "Safety" were integral to my writing process.

I knew going into this research that this would be much more than an intellectual endeavour. Writing about CSA would require me to intentionally visit dark places from my past. All humans have the capacity to enter trance states, however traumatic events powerfully activate this capacity. Before I was sexually abused, my ability to daydream, to enter "trance states" was highly functional — but also within my control. "Normal" trance states are controlled by choice and circumstance, whereas "traumatic trance states occur in an uncontrolled manner" (Herman, 1997, 44). As a result survivors of chronic CSA can experience an altered sense of time (Herman, 1997, 43, 89, 195). This particular consequence of trauma meant that

sometimes during the writing process, I experienced depersonalization, derealization, and the feeling I had time traveled to the past.

There were challenges particular to each section of the portfolio that tied to directly to the stage I was re-visiting. For "Remembrance and Mourning" the challenge was in re-visiting the actual memories of the abuse, and all the losses that followed. In this section of the portfolio I included works of art related in the chronological order I made them. Along with the temporal order of creation, the works mirror how my understanding of the trauma evolved. The paintings are frozen snapshots of terror. The sculpture implies movement, but is largely inwardly focused. The viewer can choose whether to see the effects of trauma. The assemblage conveys the survivor's movement, and shows the inaction of the indifferent bystander. The story becomes more complete with each piece.

This was the section I felt most in my body. Particularly when I worked on the artist statement for the sculpture, *Almacide*. An undercurrent of low-grade nausea pervaded nearly every aspect of my life. This lasted for nearly a month. *Almacide* reminds me of a time when my sense of reality was tenuous. Trauma theory argues,

> In order to know who we are — to have an identity — we must know (or at least feel we know) what is and what was "real." We must observe what we see around us and label it correctly; we must also be able to true our memories and be able to tell them apart from our imagination. Losing the ability to make these distinctions is one sign of what psychoanalyst William Niederland called "soul murder." Erasing awareness and cultivating denial are often essential to survival, but the price is that you lose track of who you are, of what you are feeling, and of what and whom you can trust. (Van Der Kolk, 2014, p. 136)

Further, the sculpture brought me back to a time and place where I felt contaminated and unsafe in my body. I cried a lot working on this section. I couldn't decide if the sensation I felt was

more like being stabbed in the heart and left to bleed out, or punched in the sternum, wherein my heart stops beating.

As challenging as "Remembrance and Mourning" was to work through, it also afforded me some insights. The feeling of contamination was visceral. After writing at the library, I would often go stand on a rock, face the sun, and open my arms wide to expose my sternum to the light. I remember when the cloth diapers I used for my baby would get stained. When bleach wouldn't remove the stain, the sun's light would. Though it was comforting this time around to have friends sit with me, and assure me that I am not dark, and there is no contamination I need to protect anyone from, that feeling in my chest is/was real. Along with sunlight, I would lay on the ground with my chest and one ear pressed to the earth. The weight of my body combined with the pressure from the ground helped me hold the sensations.

The "Reconnection" chapter examines CSA through two novels *Celia's Song* by Lee Maracle and *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mootoo. Herman's (1997) chapter of the same name focuses exclusively on human relationships. In this section of the portfolio, through the novels the devastating effects of colonization, CSA, and human communities disconnected from more-than-human are examined. In both novels the importance of witnessing is stressed, but how the human communities respond to sexual violence are very different. The consequences for survivors are explored.

Because this section was less apparently autoethnographic than the other sections, it was the easiest for me to work with. However, in both novels there is a time when each of the young girl experiencing CSA calls for help, with devastating consequences. Writing about the need for

other humans to witness and support survivors caused me to revisit all the ways I have felt abandoned, ignored, and shamed by the reactions of other people to CSA.

The “Commonality” chapter explores the 2018-2019 Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 2903 strike through a modified collaborate autoethnography. Along with myself, two other CSA survivors participated in this section through interviews I conducted. This section centres survivor voices, and challenges the deficiency model of trauma by examining the role CSA survivors and more-than-human worlds played in the well being of the picket lines.

This section took the longest to write. I spent a lot of time working with the interviews. As emotionally heavy as this section was, it was never as isolating as the other two sections. When I would finish working on a particularly difficult passage, I could always get one of my strike friends to read the section, and they would affirm “Yes, this is really heavy.” The strike was hard. Can we cut the Orwellian bullshit tactics and speak the truth? There is an enormous sense of comfort in not having suffered through the strike alone, in having a group to acknowledge and affirm the reality of the situation. Human and more-than-human allies existing and working together makes everything seem more bearable.

Discomfort

Though I did not write this portfolio with the intention of creating discomfort for the reader, feelings of discomfort may arise. Especially if you have not experienced CSA or childhood neglect, try to stay with the feelings for at least a little while.

REMEMBRANCE AND MOURNING

> *In the second stage of recovery, the survivor tells the story of the trauma. She tells it completely, in depth and in detail. The work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story…The choice to confront the horrors of the past rests with the survivor. The therapist plays the role of a witness and ally, in whose presence the survivor can speak the unspeakable. The reconstruction of trauma places great demands on the courage of both patient and therapist…Avoiding the traumatic memories leads to stagnation in the recovery process, while approaching them too precipitately leads to a fruitless and damaging reliving of the trauma…The [survivor] should also expect that she will not be able to function at the highest level of her ability, or even at her usual level during this time. Reconstructing the trauma is ambitious work. It requires some slackening of ordinary life demands, some"tolerance for the state of being ill."…The narrative includes not only the event itself but also the survivor's response to it and the responses of the important people in her life. As the narrative closes in on the most unbearable moments, the [survivor] finds it more and more difficult to use words. At times the patient may spontaneously switch to nonverbal methods of communication.*
>
> — Judith Herman (1997, 175-77)

In trauma literature, verbally speaking the trauma narrative is privileged above any and all other means of communication (see Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2017; Herman, 1997; & Muller, 2018). Additionally in trauma theory the telling of the trauma narrative is relegated solely to therapy, and then other humans. For me, verbally speaking my trauma narrative feels like it feeds into a cultural desire for survivor porn, wherein the human community gets to indulge in a voyeuristic viewing of atrocity without feeling an empathy or the need to act/witness.

Herman noted above that survivors' typically switch to nonverbal methods to communicate the most unbearable moments of their trauma. Privileging verbal narrative is problematic, not just because it removes choice and imposes a false hierarchy of communication styles. If 1) Communicating atrocity requires all a survivor's internal and external resources, why

should we be limited to one style of communication? 2) Other methods of communication, such as dance, sculpture, are much more embodied than verbal communication. Since the site of the trauma is the body, shouldn't the body be allowed to participate in the trauma telling? 3) Other methods of communication allow the participation of more-than-human elements. For example using clay and wood to help tell the story, also invites further allyship into the telling. Why should we restrict ourselves to human allyship?

This section includes images of four untitled paintings, one ceramic sculpture, and one multimedia assemblage. The paintings were shown in a group therapy session, once. The ceramic sculpture was on display at the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art for twelve weeks. The multimedia assemblage was on display for a month at the Faculty of Environment Studies' Wild Garden Media Centre as part of Professor Andil Gosine's Cultural Production class.

UNTITLED

This series of four paintings was my attempt to communicate the terror of intrusive flashbacks in ways that felt true to the experience. Ideally these would be viewed sitting in a damp, dark cave with little light. No sounds accompany this series.

Untitled 1
2008-2019
digital print of paintings,
acrylic on paper.

Untitled 2
2008-2019
digital print of paintings,
acrylic on paper.

Untitled 3
2008-2019
digital print of paintings,
acrylic on paper.

Untitled 4
2008-2019
digital print of paintings,
acrylic on paper.

This series explores themes of repressed memory, remembering, and terror in relation to childhood sexual abuse. So-called normal memory is fluid, and more like a story. Traumatic memory is frozen and without words (Herman, 1997). I wanted to convey the static quality of these memories, while extending an invitation to ally with survivors through the act of witnessing.

The works in this series experiment with layers of bright colour scratched out from under varying layers of black acrylic. The depth and intensity of childhood sexual abuse is conveyed through these dark overlays. The nail scratches that reveal the layers of colour are indicative of the clawing through amnesiac barriers to repressed memories a survivor often faces in order to remember and confront the horrors of the past. The creased lines on the paintings are the expression of repressed memories, as the paintings were folded and buried for years.

The first painting conveys the wordless aspect of traumatic memory through the deliberate obfuscation of the perpetrator's spoken words, captured here as text. The little girl has no mouth, and no eyes as she is unable to speak or see through the dark storm surrounding her.

The second painting captures one of the sites of trauma. Pain and terror are expressed through the nail scratches that mar the surface of the painting. The act of remembering, although painful, allows colour to bleed through.

The third painting uses eyes to convey the terror that is omnipresent when repressed memories remain un-remembered. Here, nail scratches seek to unmask terror by inviting colour to counter the darkness.

The fourth painting implies growth through remembering. Symbolically, this painting exposes more colour. However, red slashes to the surface of the plant and black in the stems illustrate the damage of abuse persists.

ALMACIDE

This sculpture was inspired by something I said in a therapy group when discussing CSA. I told the group that I felt like there was a poison or darkness that didn't belong to me moving through my body. Something left from the man who hurt me. The psychiatrist and psychologist running the group chuckled (not unkindly) and asked me if I thought a creature would come bursting out of my body. That is not what I meant. The rest of the women in the group (all CSA survivors) understood, saying they felt the same way.

In the same therapy group, but on another day. The psychiatrist told a story to our group about trauma symptoms:

> A person is walking down the road and falls down a pothole. They climb out and go on their way. The next day they're walking down the same street, and again fall down the same pothole. They climb out and go on their way. The third day, they're walking down the street, but this time they cross the road to avoid the pot hole.

The point being, presumably, that we'd all learn to avoid falling into trauma holes? I was really sad, because I was expecting this story:

> A person is walking down the road and falls down a pothole. They call for help. A priest passing by throws down a Bible, and keeps walking. Then a psychiatrist walks up to the pothole, looks down, writes a prescription, and throws it down the hole, and keeps walking. Finally, a friend is passing by, they take one look and jump down into the hole. The first person says, "Oh no, now we're both trapped!" The friend says, "Yes, but I've been down here before, and I know the way out."

Shortly before my soul came back to my body, I was ill and vomited up a lot of green slime. There are things that survivors know, that are not recognized by Western culture. Look at this piece first in silence for several minutes. Then look at this piece while listening to "Bleed it Out" by Linkin Park.

Almacide
2017-2018
digital print of sculpture,
glazed ceramic.

Almacide
2017-2018
digital print of sculpture,
glazed ceramic.

Almacide
2017-2018
digital print of sculpture,
glazed ceramic.

Almacide is a term coined by Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1997) that means the murder of one's soul.

This sculpture explores themes of contamination, boundaries, and perception. Childhood sexual abuse, particularly in its penetrative forms, denies children control over their most intimate geographies. As a result, survivors often feel contaminated (Willis, Prior, & Canavan, 2016). This sculpture uses the metaphor of contamination and projects it outward in a literal sense.

This sculpture conveys the invisibility of traumatic wounds. It asks the viewer to consider the ways in which they overlook or are inattentive to the effects of trauma in their life/community. From a certain angle, this sculpture is merely a raindrop and rainbow. However, the place where the rainbow meets the raindrop is precarious and will fall clattering to the ground if jostled. It is neither stable nor permanent. Only through work (in this case movement) does the viewer see the other side.

Inside the teardrop is a being representative of all the violence — emotional, physical, psychological, spiritual — that childhood sexual abuse encompasses. The figure is deprived of any rights, and thus reduced to what Giorgio Agamben (2003) refers to as "bare life." The slime/vomit/bile is the contamination forcibly inflicted on the survivor when their boundaries were decimated. The gaping hole in the once-intact boundary allows for the possibility to expel the perpetrator's toxic influence. On this side the rainbow is steady and secure.

THE BURDEN OF PROOF

This assemblage relates to memories of community during my court case. I lost a lot of friends through the court process, and didn't get much support from the wider human community. I did take comfort in forests, my garden, and long swims in the lake. Originally this piece was accompanied by a recording of my heart beat. It starts off slow and steady, and then becomes erratic and quick. You'll have to use your imagination.

The Burden of Proof
2017
digital print of assemblage,
wood, steel,
paper, plastic.

The Burden of Proof
2017
digital print of assemblage,
wood, steel, paper, plastic.

The Burden of Proof
2017
digital print of assemblage,
wood, steel, paper, plastic.

This assemblage explores themes of in/justice, visibility, and abandonment. This piece uses a box of files from my court case (including the transcription of my 7-hour deposition) and pyrography to convey the burden childhood sexual abuse imposes on its victims. Further, that the justice system rarely provides resolution or restitution to survivors. The burden for survivors is heavy.

The act of burning the wood was ritualistic. The process was violent and required two pyrography pen nibs to complete. I felt more like I was gouging the wood than drawing. As I burned the pine, sap bubbled to the surface. The entire piece is designed to convey heaviness, movement, and scarring.

The indifferent bystander is represented by the large maple figure off to the side. For me the figure of the bystander is the focal point of this piece. When I originally showed the piece in Fall 2017, the questions from the public were majority about the outcome of the court case. The interesting question is why is there a much larger person (who could surely shoulder the burden or at least offer *some* help) sitting off to the side, ignoring the small, injured person dragging a heavy load directly behind them?

I fixed the court documents to the pine plank using steel brackets. No matter how hard I tried, the small maple figure could not support the weight of the files. In all positions she was crushed by the box. The metal frame is screwed to the wood, giving the appearance that the small figure is bearing the weight of the files. However, she has help, just not from the indifferent bystander. The ground, like the survivor, is scarred by the process.

RECONNECTION

> *Having come to terms with the traumatic past, the survivor faces the task of creating a future. She has mourned the old self that trauma destroyed; now she must develop a new self. Her relationships have been tested and forever changed by the trauma; now she must develop new relationships. The old beliefs that gave meaning to her life have been challenged; now she must find anew a sustaining faith…In accomplishing this work, the survivor reclaims her world.*
>
> — Judith Herman (1997, 196)

According to trauma psychologist Robert Muller, adult survivors of childhood interpersonal trauma are rarely securely attached. A securely attached individual has a coherent, balanced, consistent, and objective view of their early relationships, whether the experiences were favourable or not (Muller 11). A lack of secure attachment profoundly affects the way survivors experience every aspect of their interpersonal world, including parenting (7-8). One of the markers of a securely attached individual is that they are "balanced and flexible regarding relationships" (Muller, 6). Moreover, according to trauma experts, one of the ways an individual is considered to have healed from their trauma is if they are able to tell their trauma story in a fluid and flexible manner (Herman 175-181, Muller 8-16). At this stage, the survivor moves beyond the "frozen" quality of traumatic memory to tell their story in a way that includes their perspective and feelings. Herman likens it to the movement from a silent movie or still snapshots to a film with words and music (175).

Telling a traumatic story is no simple task, not least because a welcoming audience is hardly guaranteed. Public acknowledgment of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) is particularly fraught with silence. Tony Martens argues "the most universal taboo about incest and child sexual abuse is not primarily that these acts do not occur; rather it is against discussing such

matters" (1). According to Muller, the "silencing of traumatic experiences, feelings, and relationships is part of a larger prohibition that runs through modern Western culture" (96). Along with the refusal to discuss CSA, there is a larger, Western cultural amnesia that surrounds trauma (Herman 7). This amnesia means there are moments where acknowledgment of trauma arises in the public consciousness, as with the #metoo movement, but they are ultimately fleeting because the desire not to talk about it is more powerful. Thus, when the political moment fades, so does our collective memory that the trauma ever existed (Herman 8-9).

As public acknowledgement of trauma is erratic at best, CSA survivors are forced to adapt, usually without much human support. Herman notes that survivors of CSA often develop "extraordinary capacities, both creative and destructive" (96) that foster their ability to attain "abnormal" states of consciousness. Although scientific discourse banished the language of the supernatural over three hundred years ago, it "still intrudes into the most sober attempts to describe the psychological manifestations of chronic childhood trauma" (Herman 96). The altered states of consciousness and resulting somatic and psychological "symptoms" experienced by survivors cause observers/clinicians to rely on such language to describe the manifestations of trauma they witness. The "abnormal states of consciousness" mentioned above, are only abnormal insofar as Western concepts apply. If we step outside of Western perceptions, they are merely altered states of consciousness, free from the "abnormal" label.

María Puíg de la Bellacasa defines more-than-human worlds as comprised of "other than human such as things, objects, other animals, living beings, organisms, physical forces, spiritual entities, and humans" (1). These worlds communicate as well, but humans need to shift their perception to access their ability to communicate with more-than-human worlds (Kimmerer 59).

One of the abilities chronically abused individuals develop is "an exquisite attunement to unconscious and nonverbal communication" (Herman 139). I argue, it is this skill that allows survivors to tap into the more-than-human support systems.

More-than-human support is often necessary for victims of abuse. The first stage of recovery is establishing safety (Herman 155). Thus, establishing a safe environment through connection to place is one of the first steps a survivor takes. The land is the survivor's first support. Victims require a bystander to bear witness — to take action, engage, and remember — with respect to the trauma. Perpetrators ask the bystander to do nothing (Herman 7-8). The temptation to side with the perpetrator, to do nothing and look away from the truth, out of a misplaced sense of loyalty to the family and/or group is prevalent in Western culture (Muller 32-34). Nonetheless, a witness is required, and there is no requirement that the witness be human.

Western culture's turn away from both more-than-human worlds and survivors of CSA can in part be explained by the West's material and conceptual foundation in colonialism. The violence of colonization creates and maintains the hierarchical category of who/what we are (Wynter 330), described below. Sylvia Wynter explains that through the process of colonization the "reduction of indigenous peoples to being a landless, rightless, neo-serf work-force…will be made to seem just and legitimate to its peoples" (290). In this way the hierarchical category of Man, which "overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself" (Wynter 26), devalues and disavows other modes of being human. This disavowal of other modes of being human results in human communities that move away from/refuse to acknowledge the "supernatural," which, as I maintain, is actually the more-than-human world. Embrace of this world is necessary for the

health of human communities, especially regarding the prevention and healing of childhood sexual abuse: the violent, colonizing ascendance of Man escalates interrelated forms of sexual and ecological harm. Eco-feminists such as Glendinning (1994) have argued that the rift between people and the environment has traumatized everyone who is part of Western civilization.

Wynter argues that the natural sciences leave us "half-starved because they remain incapable of giving us any knowledge of our uniquely human domain, and have nothing to say to the urgent problems that beleaguer humankind" (328) I maintain that CSA and the neglect of the more-than-human are urgent, interrelated problems facing humankind: they are part of the ongoing unfolding of colonizing forms of violence, in particular harming our ability to have stable, meaningful relationships. Elizabeth Povinelli describes relationships as "an effort of mutual attention…in the activity of endurance" (28). Further, she proposes the idea that the entities in relationships can change state and turn away from each other by withdrawing care, which results in an abandonment of the relationship. For example, Povinelli outlines the importance of smell to determining right relationship, stating:

> Smell was the primary sensory system of most forms of existence…And most forms of existence used smell to discern what people were proper to what country—reacted positively to those whose smell was correct and negatively to those whose smell wasn't… A person needed, therefore, to watch and smell and listen to how one was being watched and smelled and heard (121,123).

The Stó:lō people in Lee Maracle's novel *Celia's Song* are able to enter into relationship with the more-than-human world around them, through smell, song, dance, ceremony and ritual. Their ability to witness and connect is indicative of the care Povinelli speaks of in her principles of relationship. Further, they exist in defiance of Wynter's "human" as the community does its best to value other ways of knowing and endures despite attempts to destroy their way of life through

colonization. In contrast, the protagonist Mala in Shani Mootoo's novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*, survives largely in spite of the human community, also impacted by colonialism, that turns away from her. It is her connection with the more-than-human, and eventually the queer community, that offer her the connection and witnessing necessary to counter the harmful effects of CSA.

The novels *Celia's Song* and *Cereus Blooms at Night* delve into the complexity of CSA in resistance to the societal taboo against discussing abuse and the Western cultural amnesia of trauma. The sexual violence that is central in each of these novels highlights the effects trauma and colonialism have on human and more-than-human communities in relation to both the perpetrators and the survivors/victims. The perpetrators of sexual abuse in both novels are victims of colonization: this fact does *not* justify their behaviours, but it does point to the complexity of determining responsibility for CSA. Colonization is a contributing factor in both novels, but colonization considered alongside community relationships provides a fuller picture of the structures that allow CSA to occur.

In this paper, I will examine how the narrators, perpetrators, human communities, and more-than-human communities from the novels *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Celia's Song* respond to CSA. Additionally, I will comment on the importance of witnessing for CSA survivors and more-than-human communities.

Cereus Blooms at Night

Cereus Blooms at Night by Shani Mootoo tells the story of Mala Ramchandin. Though Mala is the protagonist, the story is told by the narrator Tyler, the nurse who cares for Mala when she is forcibly removed from her home. Tyler is, in literary terms, "unreliable" as a narrator because he

struggles to maintain control of the narrative, and often becomes distracted with his own issues of sexual identity (Casteel 19). Further, when Tyler meets Mala she is an old woman, living at an alms house in the fictional town of Paradise, on the fictional Caribbean island of Lantanacamara. Tyler's narration is interspersed with flashbacks to Mala's disturbing childhood, details which Tyler could not reliably obtain given that at the point when they meet, Mala no longer speaks any language recognizable to humans. *Cereus Blooms at Night* asks the reader to bear witness to the violence Mala suffers at the hands of an abuser, and a largely indifferent human community.

Tyler builds his narrative from a number of sources including his grandmother's oral memories about the gossip surrounding Mala's troubled incestuous family; letters recovered at the end of the novel from Mala's sister Asha; stories from Mala's childhood friend and lover Ambrose (Boyie) and his son Otoh (who was born Ambrosia, and eventually transitioned); and pieced together stories from Mala herself. Despite the numerous sources, the "degree of interiority afforded to the persons of the story, together with the paralleling of experiences" (Ashworth 36) would be impossible for Tyler to ascertain. Nevertheless, Tyler asserts "I am the one who ended up knowing the truth, the whole truth, every significant *and* insignificant bit of it" (Mootoo 7), affirming both his willingness to attempt the witnessing of Mala's trauma story and his "supernatural" understanding of her story based on his highly sensuous, empathic and intuitive capacities.

The relationship between Ramchandin (Mala's incestuous father and the antagonist of *Cereus Blooms at Night),* and colonization is very much central to the story. Ramchandin is the son of an indentured field labourer from India, whose dearest wish is that Ramchandin be educated "out of the fields" (Mootoo 28). The Reverend Thoroughly, a white male minister from

the “Shivering Northern Wetlands” (aka England), is sent to convert the island’s inhabitants to Christianity. He offers to adopt Ramchandin to raise and educate as his own, provided Ramchandin’s parents convert to Christianity. In this way, and also in the word that spreads about Ramchandin’s “envious” position in the Thoroughly’s household, Ramchandin “was unwittingly helping to convert Indians to Christianity” (Mootoo 31).

In his time with the Thoroughlys, Ramchandin develops a distaste and disdain for his own “background and the people in it” (Mootoo 34). Meanwhile, Ramchandin notices his “sister,” Lavinia, the Thoroughlys' daughter, and desires a romantic and sexual relationship with her. Reverend Thoroughly and his wife attempt to put a stop to Ramchandin’s romantic notions. The Thoroughlys explain that Lavinia is his sister, and it is inappropriate, but it’s really not that at all: it’s Ramchandin’s non-whiteness that causes the Thoroughlys to take issue with a romantic relationship. This invokes a sense of self-loathing and hatred in Ramchandin for “his looks, the colour of his skin…and his real parents” (Mootoo 33).

Meanwhile, Ramchandin hides his feelings for Lavinia, and also notices that he is the only man of Indian descent attending the seminary. He envies the mannerisms and dress of the Shivering Northern Wetlanders and begins to emulate them (Mootoo 41). All the while, Ramchandin harbours the hope that Lavinia will love and marry him. These hopes are crushed when Reverend Thoroughly informs Ramchandin that Lavinia will instead marry her cousin from the Wetlands. Reverend Thoroughly’s hypocrisy is exposed as he dismisses any incestuous concerns because Lavinia’s cousin is white. He tells Ramchandin that Lavinia’s intended is not her “true relation” (48), uncovering his racist colonial undertones. Even though the Throughlys claim to have adopted Ramchandin as a son, the reality is that he is not their male white ideal.

The Thoroughlys treat the Indian converts of Lantanacamara as "their children" (Mootoo 53), instead of their equals. Thus, even though Ramchandin lives, dresses, speaks, prays, and behaves as the Thoroughlys, he is still only and can ever be a brown Indian man. Due to his non-whiteness, he can never belong.

Though Ramchandin never overtly acknowledges this difference, he surely feels the sting of Lavinia's marriage to a cousin who, like him, is not a true relation but is, unlike him, white. He slowly recedes from life with the Thoroughlys and marries Lavinia's Indian friend Sarah. Ramchandin attempts to "collapse in the security of a woman…from his own background" (Mootoo 49). Together they have two daughters, Mala and Asha.

Colonization has devastating effects on Ramchandin, as he comes to alternately loathe himself and his people, thinking his "children's skin…too dark and their manner of talking crude" (Mootoo 55). His desire for Lavinia is an integral component of his desire to be accepted by the Thoroughlys, his desire to be white. When Lavinia runs away with his wife, Sarah, with whom she has been in an intimate relationship for some time, the rage Ramchandin has bottled up explodes one night when he rapes his daughter, Mala (Mootoo 70). He continues to rape and torture his daughter until his death, years later; Mala protects her younger sister, Asha, from his ongoing abuse by substituting her own body for Asha's, and Ramchandin is too drunk to notice

Early in the story Ramchandin turns away from the smells of his people, the smells of his mother's house—camphor, incense, pooja smoke, and spices—in order to belong with the Thoroughlys' "smarter-looking, smarter-actin" (Mootoo 32) religion. The disconnect from his people's smells foreshadows of his turn away from right relationship, his desire to emulate Man rather than engage in humanity. In contrast, Tyler, shortly after meeting Mala describes her as

having “an aroma resembling rich vegetable compost” (Mootoo 12), hinting at Mala’s relationship with the plants and insects who comprise her more-than-human community, and opening the door to a rich array of nonverbal, empathic, and intuitive modes of communication.

While Ramchandin is not welcomed by the island community of Lantanacamara, in the town of Paradise, after Sarah leaves, the people do not take action against him. When the community initially hears about Sarah running away with Lavinia, they express some concern for the children (the reader also cannot help but wonder how the women could leave the girls in his hands), but ultimately they do nothing as they feel guilty discussing matters any further. The community is aware he rapes Mala (and probably assumes that he also rapes Asha) and yet many of the community pay him respect, as he was once the teacher of the Gospel, and pay him a decent wage (Mootoo 211).

Their inaction makes visible both the reality of trauma and the power of colonization. The respect Ramchandin is accorded is in large part due to his association with the Thoroughlys. The villagers felt as though any “idle chatter” involving the Thoroughly name would be against not only their Reverend, but their “church and their God” (70). Maintaining the Thoroughly name, representative of the ideal white man, is more important to the human community of Lantanacamara than the protection of two children.

Rather than confront the evil in their midst — which would mean acknowledging the trauma, bearing witness to the trauma — they vilify Mala. The children of the village call her names and throw mango seeds at her (Mootoo 121). While the villagers pity Ramchandin and some shun him, ultimately they do nothing to stop him from harming his daughters. The villagers

turn away from Mala, they withdraw care. Their inaction causes tremendous harm to Mala as she endures years of rape and psychological torture from Ramchandin.

Mala's life is characterized by multiple withdrawals of care. Of course, Mala is abandoned by her mother first. Sarah runs away to be with Lavinia, a relationship that certainly would not have been accepted by Ramchandin or the community at large. Mala's abandonment by her mother is the ultimate withdrawing of care. The choice Sarah must make is an awful one: whether to stay with Ramchandin and her daughters, subject to violence, or run away with Lavinia and leave her daughters with Ramchandin. Although Ramchandin never really seemed to value his daughters until Lavinia did, the relationship with him is twisted and warped by rape and violence. The larger community of Lantanacamara, through their inaction (as discussed earlier) withdraws care from Mala. When Asha runs away from Ramchandin,and does not write Mala (or so we believe), this is another withdrawing of care. The final straw for Mala is when her childhood sweetheart, her last hope in humanity, Ambrose (Boyie), runs away from her. When he realizes the violence she has survived at the hands of Ramchandin, he is unable to confront the reality and instead recoils in disgust. He abandons Mala and does not seek help. Ambrose "shrank with the thought that a call for help would expose the shameful goings-on in the house, to which he had become connected" (Mootoo 246). Mala is devastated. She calls for Ambrose "Ambrose, don't go. Don't leave me, Ambrose" (Mootoo 247). She whispers for any of her human connections, "Asha? Aunt Lavinia? You there? Mama? Boyie?" (Mootoo 247). No one comes.

It is at this point that Mala -- who has sent PohPoh, her younger self, away for protection -- kills Ramchandin and turns away from verbalization. "Eventually Mala all but rid herself of

words" (Mootoo 136). Sunaura Taylor writes, in *Beasts of Burden*, about the millenia-old privileging of spoken language, and the dire consequences this has had for those who communicate otherwise, human and nonhuman alike (47-55). Spoken language is not the only means of communication, and to ignore this fact is to foreclose communication with more-than-human worlds. Mala did not lose the ability to communicate; instead she deepens her relationship with the inhabitants of her garden and communes with nonhuman animals and plants.

Mala (with Boyie as her accomplice) spends her childhood protecting all living creatures. Years later, when she experiences the final betrayal by Ambrose, she barricades herself in her garden. "Mala's companions were the garden's birds, insects, snails and reptiles. She and they and the abundant foliage gossiped among themselves. She listened intently" (Mootoo 137). In addition, Mala is keenly aware of smells, and uses them (as plants do) to communicate. Although these more-than-human relationships are what cause the villagers to consider Mala a madwoman, in reality these are the relationships that sustain her. Further, Mala cares for, and is cared for by, a vast array of plants (especially by the eponymous cereus), insects, reptiles, sights, sounds, and smells. Catriona Sandilands argues that Mala's ability to identify with her multispecies friends is a survival skill, which

> can be understood as responses to her experiences of being denied the kinds of autonomy, speech, and mobility that are more often afforded to mammalian life forms (mostly, exclusively to humans): she discovers possibilities for growth, change, resistance, and movement in a small conspiracy of invertebrates and plants because she is treated like a mere snail or succulent in both intimate and public interpersonal encounters. (102)

Later, through her relationships with Tyler (also a keen listener, smeller, and observer), Otoh, and eventually Ambrose, humanity begins to turn towards Mala and offer care. Not coincidentally, it is a queer human community that begins the process of reconnecting with Mala. John Carr notes that it is this shared element of being queered by their human communities that links them together. Characters who are queered by experiences of childhood sexual abuse and transgender self-discovery; identities which are "constructed as 'naturally' disgusting by dominant segments of culture" (Carr 69).

Tyler, who recognizes an affinity with Mala from the outset due to their "common experience of being queered" by everyone else, is ostracized from his community for being "excessively feminine" (Corr 69). Additionally, Tyler reveals that as a child and adolescent his burgeoning homosexuality was shaped in relation to shaming gossip that circulated the village about Mala's CSA. Though Tyler was never sexually abused as a child, the rumours about Ramchandin's incestuous relationship with Mala served as his only reference in coming to terms with his own desires and feelings of shame (Corr 76). This does not clarify matters for Tyler, but further complicates his own queerness. He reveals, "Ramchandin played a part in confusing me about these roles, for it was a long time before I could distinguish between his perversion and what others called mine" (Mootoo 51). As Tyler grows to accept his sexual identity, in part through his friendship with Mala, in part through his relationship with Otoh, Tyler moves toward a place of acceptance. In accepting his identity, he is better able to accept Mala.

Mala's betrayal by Ambrose was devastating. Later, Ambrose marries and has a child. Tyler describes how Otoh, born Ambrosia, changed:

> The transformation was flawless. Hours of mind dulling exercise streamlined Ambrosia into an angular, hard-bodied creature and tampered with the flow of whatever hormonal juices defined him. So flawless was the transformation that even the nurse and doctor who attended the birth, on seeing him later, marvelled at their carelessness in having declared him a girl. (Mootoo 118)

It is Ambrose's son, "who refuses to conform to the constraints of his 'God-given' gender" (Corr 78) who eventually enters Mala's garden. It is Otoh's courageous refusal to submit to Paradise's oppressive gender binary, that helps him disregard the cultural shunning of Mala. After decades of no human contact, Mala perceives Otoh as Ambrose, and it is to Ambrose (actually Otoh) she reveals the fate of her father.

This process can be read through the lens of trauma theory as a reenactment. Psychiatrist Madi Horowitz proposes that trauma shatters the human mind's intrinsic ability to process new information; our human tendency to integrate new information and situations through updated inner schemata of both the self and the world is disrupted. Thus, the traumatic memories are stored in a special kind of "active memory," where they have a tendency to repeat. The trauma is resolved when the survivor develops a new mental "schema." Through reenactment, the survivor attempts to resolve the trauma; what is reproduced is "what the person needs to feel in order to repair the injury" (Herman 41-42).

When Mala whispers to Otoh/Ambrose, "It's all right, Ambrose. It's all right. He won't hurt you" (Mootoo 173), she is back in the moment when Ambrose abandoned her. She leads Otoh/Ambrose to the basement, and encourages Otoh/Ambrose to "look, come and see" (Mootoo 176). When Otoh sees Ramchandin's rotting corpse, he flees Mala's house and garden. This time, though, Otoh, unlike Ambrose, calls for help, and it is the police that take Mala away to the alms house where she meets Tyler. Otoh also sets fire to Mala's house, destroying the evidence of

Ramchandin's murder, and affording Mala some protection. Prior to this crucial scene, it was the titular cereus that protected Mala: plants and snails and moths are very much part of Mala's queer community.

The larger human community's response to PohPoh/Mala's rape was devastating to read. I felt so keenly all that PohPoh/Mala endured. At first, my anger toward the human community that failed her by willfully ignoring Ramchandin's violence kept me from seeing the important relationships that did support her. The hierarchy of humanity and the privileging of "human" knowledge can be challenging to overcome. The humans in *Cereus Blooms at Night* take a long time to take any action (even then, not all the humans do so). If things had gone differently, PohPoh/Mala could have been lost. There was no human enraged on PohPoh/Mala's behalf, and in the end she saved herself from Ramchandin. The cereus and moths helped cover her crime. And Ramchandin finds no redemption in his death, except that the blanket of moths that eats him is (grotesquely) beautiful. There is a rightness in Ramchandin's death.

In the end, we discover that Asha did not cut all ties with Mala (she did not, however investigate why the letters remained unanswered), and has been writing to her the whole time. Her letters were cruelly withheld by the postman, who deemed the Ramchandin house a place of sin and corruption (Mootoo 263). Ambrose, who has been nearly comatose this long time, is eager to make amends to Mala and reengage their relationship. As Mala turns towards a particular human community, namely Otoh and Tyler, she speaks for the first time in the novel "Poh, Pohpohpoh, Poh, Poh, Poh," (Mootoo 269) calling to her younger self, hinting at a desire for re-integration.

Celia's Song

Celia's Song by Lee Maracle, is a story about a Stó:lō community that comes together to confront the childhood sexual abuse of five-year-old Shelley. It has, in contrast to *Cereus Blooms at Night*, multiple, highly "reliable" narrators. This narrative choice challenges the reader to bear witness to violence, and to acknowledge the importance witnessing has for CSA (Beard, 153). Lugones refers to this strategy as "faithful witnessing," a method of "collaborating with those who have been silenced, a feminist philosophical concept that is also a political act" (qtd. in Beard 153). Whereas *Cereus Blooms at Night* is an excellent example of the considerable harm caused to survivors by a human community that refuses to witness (and relatedly perpetuates violence against more-than-human nature), *Celia's Song* demonstrates how integrated human and more-than-human communities can support survivors. The act of faithful witnessing, according to Yomaira Figueroa, is a decolonial, feminist tool that makes visible otherwise unseen effects of colonialism (Beard 153).

The story's first-person narrator is Mink, a mythic, animal-spirit creature. We learn the identity of Mink several pages into the first chapter when Mink announces: "I am mink—the shape-shifter, the people's primary witness. I know things others don't" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 5). Mink's narrations are almost always in italics, which helps the reader to distinguish the Mink's voice from the other narrators. Thus from the outset, *Celia's Song* already announces the importance of more-than-human worlds to witnessing.

Celia, the titular character, is a Stó:lō woman. Mink informs the reader that Celia is a seer. As a seer, she has visions that she refers to as delusions. The reader is introduced to societal perceptions of these visions early on, when Mink notes:

> The delusions convinced her family and her fellow villagers that she was half-crazed; even in her own mind they mark her as odd. They come more often now. Disruptive as they are, she ought to reject them. But she feels compelled to embrace them, or at least to get used to them. Controlling them never seems to work. Not having them is not an option. There is no sense fighting what she can't change. (*Celia's Song* 11)

The Mink responds, "*I want her to know they are not delusions, but have no way to reach her*" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 11, italics in original). This is one of many instances of the more-than-human world attempting to reconnect with the human world.

Celia's Song is the sequel to Maracle's 1993 novel *Ravensong.* In this first novel, Celia is a young girl who has visions from other times and places. Even then she questioned her visions (Maracle, *Ravensong* 41-42). Mink acts as both a healer and a witness, helping Celia, and her nephew Jacob, learn their roles as both witness and seer (Beard 159). Though Mink acts as a helper, Mink cannot create the necessary change: it is the human community that must take responsibility by looking to both the past and the future to reconcile their new life and the old traditions (Beard 162). The difficulties Celia and Jacob experience with witnessing are a reminder of the difficulty in getting individuals and institutions to acknowledge and respond to CSA. Through the course of the novel, both Celia, Jacob, and the community (human and more-than-human) must learn to contend with and respond to the horrific violence of CSA.

From the outset, *Celia's Song* directs the reader's attention to the present-day hierarchy of beings and knowledge. When Mink jumps to the "newcomers," four Western scientists working

in a lab, the scientists are examining evidence, and arguing about whether to further examine a shadow that appears on the film they are examining. The reader knows it is film of a two-headed sea serpent. The serpent's two heads, Loyal and Restless, argue over their obligations to the longhouse they had long ago made a contract with humans to protect. Restless argues that the people's intentions were to honour them, and that the serpent's obligation was to provide protection in exchange for honour. Since the people – long dead from communicable colonial diseases – had not fulfilled their side of the bargain, Restless argues the contract was broken. Loyal counters that the serpent's obligation is only to uphold their end of the bargain, regardless of human neglect. The heads of the serpent continue to argue, until the house, unoccupied for the past two centuries, crumbles to the ground. The serpent slithers out to sea.

The scientists who witness the film of the giant serpent continue to argue whether they should test the film for defects. One of the scientists, Sam, who may have Indigenous ancestry, argues that "we aren't the only people who know things" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 18). Sam reminds the other scientists of the belief held by science in the 1940s that only humans had language, while Indigenous peoples believed that whales had language too. The past Spring, Sam tells that three whales were stuck in Arctic ice, and the Inuit offer to walk the whales out was rejected and forbidden by the marine biologists present at the scene. Instead, ice breakers were hired to clear a path to the whales. Only when that failed and one of the whales died were the Inuit allowed to talk to the whales. "Those old hunters drilled holes in the ice one hundred metres apart, they went to where the whales were trapped and started humming. They walked across the ice, humming. The whales followed" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 18). The belief in the superiority of scientific rationality (a key component of Western Man's assertion of dominance over animals

and colonized peoples) is called into question. Further, after Sam speaks, Mink says, "*People aren't the only beings who know things. I am standing right outside the window in full view, talking out loud, but these guys don't see or hear me*" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 18, italics in original).

Maracle emphasizes that more-than-human worlds wish to reconnect with humans when Mink states:

> The plants lack lush leaves. Bent and withering, they died looking crippled before they had a chance to mature — as though the loneliness for humans had affected their ability to grow straight and strong…but for the crippled cedars, twisted arbutus, faltering alders, fir and spruce and the odd berry bush, nothing much lives here anymore; the old camas fields and riparian vegetation are dead. More sea asparagus, sea cabbage, not a single sea vegetable. Coyote, bear, wolf, and deer fled after the people died. They never returned. I am the only visitor. I keep coming back to reminisce. Like the sea, the people who once lived here were by turns vivacious and steady, peaceful and vicious, consistent and variable — hardworking and lazy. I love them. I can't seem to live without them. (*Celia's Song* 3)

The desire for human connection expressed here, from the plants, trees, nonhuman animals, and Mink, challenges the Western viewpoint that states of "supernatural" connection – including, crucially, forms of consciousness experienced by survivors — are "abnormal." Instead, Maracle's layering of conventionally realist, natural, and supernatural activity lays the foundation for a new understanding of these so-called altered states as a way to reconnect with more-than-human worlds.

In *Celia's Song,* the antagonist, Amos, was forced into the residential school system and sexually abused when he was younger (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 255). In turn, Amos grows up to sexually abuse and torture Shelley, a five-year-old girl, who is Stella's daughter. Contrary to popular notions of "generational cycles" of abuse, the majority of survivors neither neglect nor

abuse children (Herman 113). However, there is a minority of victims who do become perpetrators, as is the case with Amos. Perhaps more importantly, though, is the ongoing and multidimensional colonialism of which Amos' experience of CSA is a part, including the residential school system. The bitterness Amos feels towards colonization is concrete and acknowledged. We see this when Amos interacts with Steve, a white man (he is also the partner of Stacey, the protagonist from *Ravensong*):

> Hate tangles his insides…Steve's people spent a century and a half alienating him and his family from their knowledge, banning his people from using it… *Of course, Steve did not know his people had done this. It was orchestrated so that no one understood what was going on. It would have been beautiful, if the result were not so ugly.* (Maracle, *Celia's Song 33,* emphasis in original)

Colonization disconnects Amos from his responsibilities to the community, the land, and the culture (Beard 169). This scene underscores the damage from residential schools that still reverberates though Indigenous communities as institutionalized children were denied secure, loving relationships (Beard 171).

In *Celia's Song*, Momma talks with Celia about what has happened to Shelley. Momma tells Celia that there are words in their language for domestic violence, physical violence against a child, and a father who "takes his grown daughter as a wife," and that all of these acts result in the perpetrator being ostracized and/or killed. However, there is no word in their language for what happened to Shelley, there are no words in the Stó:lō language for the torture she endured at the hands of Amos (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 150*)*. The implication is that childhood sexual abuse did not occur amongst the Stó:lō, as it has no name (rather than it occurred but was not named). This raises the question: what is it about colonization that introduced childhood sexual abuse? In reading Maracle, childhood sexual abuse seems to involve living outside the law of nature.

The shapeshifter mink in *Celia's Song* says "*Amos is dislocated from himself*" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 40, italics in original). Throughout the novel, Amos' smell is noted: the smell of toxicity, of alcohol, of abuse, of hatred (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 254-255). Prior to abusing Shelley, Amos had already been ostracized from the community because of previous unwelcome behaviours toward children, we presume some type of sexual abuse. When Jacob, Stacey's son, has a vision of Amos torturing and raping Shelley, he becomes afraid that he could end up like Amos. Jacob realizes that "the difference between him and these men is a matter of them having taken the wrong path when faced with a fork in their journey" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 123). Jacob tells his Uncle and Grandfather about the vision, and his fear. Uncle Jim tells him:

> Men sometimes have thoughts they aren't supposed to have. We are supposed to take them to our fathers, who will tell us where they come from and how to get rid of them. You don't have a father, so you kept this secret, and then you acted on it…now you are afraid you might turn into the old snake. You could, if you don't go see your old grandpa here every time you have them thoughts. You got that? (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 123)

This is a clear strategy to help boys and men who have violent thoughts and feelings from inflicting damage on their communities. It also complicates simplistic perpetrator/victim dichotomies by inviting other men to share responsibility for prevention of childhood sexual abuse. This is also a strategy that is disrupted by the violences of colonization.

Colonization, for the Stó:lō people, includes the past practice of forcibly removing children from the families and placing them in residential schools (although other practices of family disruption continue). Still, although Amos is a product of residential schools, which were designed to erase knowledge and ties to Indigenous communities, he is ultimately is saved by Jacob and the traditions of his people that remain strong. At the end of the novel, Jacob plans to

dance Amos into his "comeuppance" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 251), which sounds menacing, but the end result is beautiful. Jacob, with the help of many (his grandfather, uncle, ancestors, mountain, cedar, and animals) moves toward his humanity and finds "ceremony to restore his path." (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 180). Once Jacob is traveling in the right direction (unlike Amos), he takes it upon himself to deal with Amos, stating "this can never happen here again" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 234) in reference to Shelley. Jacob rebuilds the longhouse, which according to Mink means "*restoring the position of the serpent as protector"* (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 234, italics in original). Mink rejoices whenever they perceive the humans returning to old ways, stating "*now they're getting somewhere. Ceremony, witnesses: the Sto:lo way of doing business"* (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 73). Within the longhouse Amos dances, sweats, and sings, all the memories, all the toxicity, and all the hate from his spirit. He begs his ancestors to take him home as he dances "away from his toxic insane life" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 255). This stops Amos from harming others, and it also brings him back into right relationship with himself and the world around him.

Shelley's mother Stella is both a victim of sexual violence and a perpetrator. Stella nearly kills Shelley, nearly kills herself, and then sticks around to try and make things better for the both of them. This redemption is made possible by Ned, Jim, and her ancestors' support: though no one condones Stella's actions, they hold space for her to clean herself up and make different choices. After an attempted suicide Stella has a dream where she speaks with her father.

> "I went mad," she tells herself. I deserve to die. I don't deserve to live…I don't deserve this child, this life, this anything…What's that voice? What's it saying? "Get some snarl, girl. You are going to survive. You are going to get though this and you are going to straighten up and live." There is a threat in that voice. (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 210)

The community does not approve of the choices she makes, but it still offers a site of enduring relationship and does not withhold care. This support is stunningly non-punitive: even Ned manages kindness. While angry, he thinks, "this is his clanswoman. She has no right to be this way. It outrages him to see what she let happen to her child — his blood, his great-niece. He is determined to will his rage along a path to sober Stella up, exactly as the women in his house instructed him" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 165). This support, based on community and obligation rather than forgiveness, is pivotal in Stella's ability to dream and gain a new perspective on life.

Shelley was not allowed to speak. When she cried, her mother would cover her mouth. Once she learned to speak, her mother backhanded her if she talked too much. When Stella took Shelley back to the reservation, Shelley's grandmother spoke with her, and she would talk back (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 157). Even though she learned to be silent, when the man who raped her came home, she cried and would not stop. Eventually, Shelley began to speak more, and the man and her mother tortured her as a result. Shelley's attempts to verbalize and call for help end with her near death. Both Mala and Shelley ask for human help. When Mala asks Ambrose, he abandons her. When Shelley asks for human help, she is nearly murdered. There is a (mistaken) belief in Western culture, that simply breaking silence will end CSA. However, there is also a requirement that someone be willing to listen and act. Otherwise, speaking the truth can result in even more punitive consequences for victims, as they experience further isolation and violence.

When the people in the village rally to save Shelley, they use "what modern medicine's proponents refer to as magic, witchcraft, voodoo" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 147). They also use Judy and Steve's knowledge of Western medicine. They call Shelley's spirit to fight and stay in her body. Further, they refuse to take Shelley to the hospital. When Judy questions Stacey, who

also attended a Western school, how she reconciles science with what the women are doing to save Shelley, Stacey's response is:

> I went to our school with several pounds of doubt. Tons of it, in fact…Look at what we're doing, not how we're doing it. We are patching a child who has been tortured by one of our own. Someone of us birthed the child who became the beast who did this. We didn't see it coming. We didn't watch that child, didn't see the twists inside the boy who became this hateful man. We need to have some grave doubts, not about what we are doing now, but what we have been doing. We need to doubt who we have become, because Shelley needs to be healed. (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 147)

This passage is interesting for several reasons. First, it shows the opposite of siding with the perpetrator, but it also resists the perpetrator victim/dichotomy. Instead, Stacey puts the onus on the community and the rapist as opposed to the victim/survivor, as is often the case even in cases of childhood sexual abuse. Second, the passage calls into question science as the exclusive method for handling issues of abuse. Instead, the Stó:lō community struggles, and ultimately engages in relationships of care not just with Shelley, but with her mother, Stella, Amos, and the more-than-human community. The characters in the novel resist not only the dichotomy of trauma (by refusing inaction), but also the hierarchy of humans in which trauma is perpetuated. Instead they begin the important work of witnessing.

Most significantly, the passage redirects the focus onto saving Shelley, through group efforts (which includes more-than-human collaboration). This group effort is the community's caring attention turned towards Shelley, to help her heal. They understand that it is more than just the overt physical violence that has harmed Shelley, but also the lack of care, the lack of attention. They draw strength through the elements of community like song, cedar, mountains, ceremony, and dreaming. Although the community in *Celia's Song* has been devastated by

colonization, epidemics, residential schools, and alcoholism, the community manages to endure. There is, in this novel, a strong response to sexual abuse, one that is far better than any I have encountered in my considerable experience with interdisciplinary literatures on responses to CSA.

Near the end of the novel, just before Amos' death, the narrative is again given to the two-headed serpent. Restless dreams "he ate the sense of choice from everybody in the village" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 253). One of the human ancestral spirits responds that it won't be long before Restless is "back under the ground where you belong" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 254), implying that the community's handling of Amos, Stella, and Shelley has restored ceremony, and hence right relationship. Mink has the final word in the novel, telling us, "*I am done here. This is all I committed to tell. You know what to do with the story now*" (Maracle, *Celia's Song* 269). These words are to the reader, signifying that now that we know what is required of us, we must act on this knowledge.

Conclusion

Both novels revolve around the sexual abuse of girls, Shelley (*Celia's Song*) and Mala (*Cereus Blooms at Night),* and how the communities around them respond, including more-than-human communities. Both novels have a named antagonist who perpetrates the violence against the young girls; his identity, and even his story, are never in question. The reader knows exactly who acted and on whom, and also that both rapists are products of colonization. Sexual violence is directly linked to colonial trauma in both novels. The authors' descriptions of the perpetrators' internal sense of self are shame-filled.

However, the two communities respond very differently to the pedophilia. The human community of *Cereus Blooms at Night* ignores Mala's abuse, so that she is left, with the help of her more-than-human community, to contend with Ramchandin and his toxic aftermath. The human community of *Celia's Song*, in contrast, rallies to care for Shelley, Stella, and Amos, in ways that are appropriate to their circumstances. This human community is sensitive to the many more-than-human agents – ecological, supernatural — that form and support caring, resilient relationships. Where, at least until arriving at the Paradise Alms House, Mala found support *only* in the company of snails, moths, and cereus plants, Shelley's community was able to respond in a loving, powerful way at least partly because of their persistent traditions of more-than-human attentiveness and accountability.

Communities are formed and held together by webs of interconnecting relationships. Sexual abuse, while devastating, can also be a source of strength if a community is able to repair, reflect, and re-direct in the face of violence, as in *Celia's Song*. However, communities decimated by colonialism, and subject to Wynter's hierarchies of the "human" who do not act in the face of sexual violence, further decimate these community relationships. The end result is a turning away from relationship and a withdrawing of care, as is the initial result of *Cereus Blooms at Night.* Western paradigms of healing could stand to learn something from both these novels: they offer a blending of the strengths and knowledges, rather than a hierarchy and privileging of only certain types of knowledge. As we see in both novels, it is ultimately both human and more-than-human communities that save Amos, Jacob, PohPoh/Mala, and Shelley, and it is time "humans" recognize this interdependence and attempt to connect before all forms of life/non-life withdraw their care and attention, for good.

Figure 1. Mala's Friends

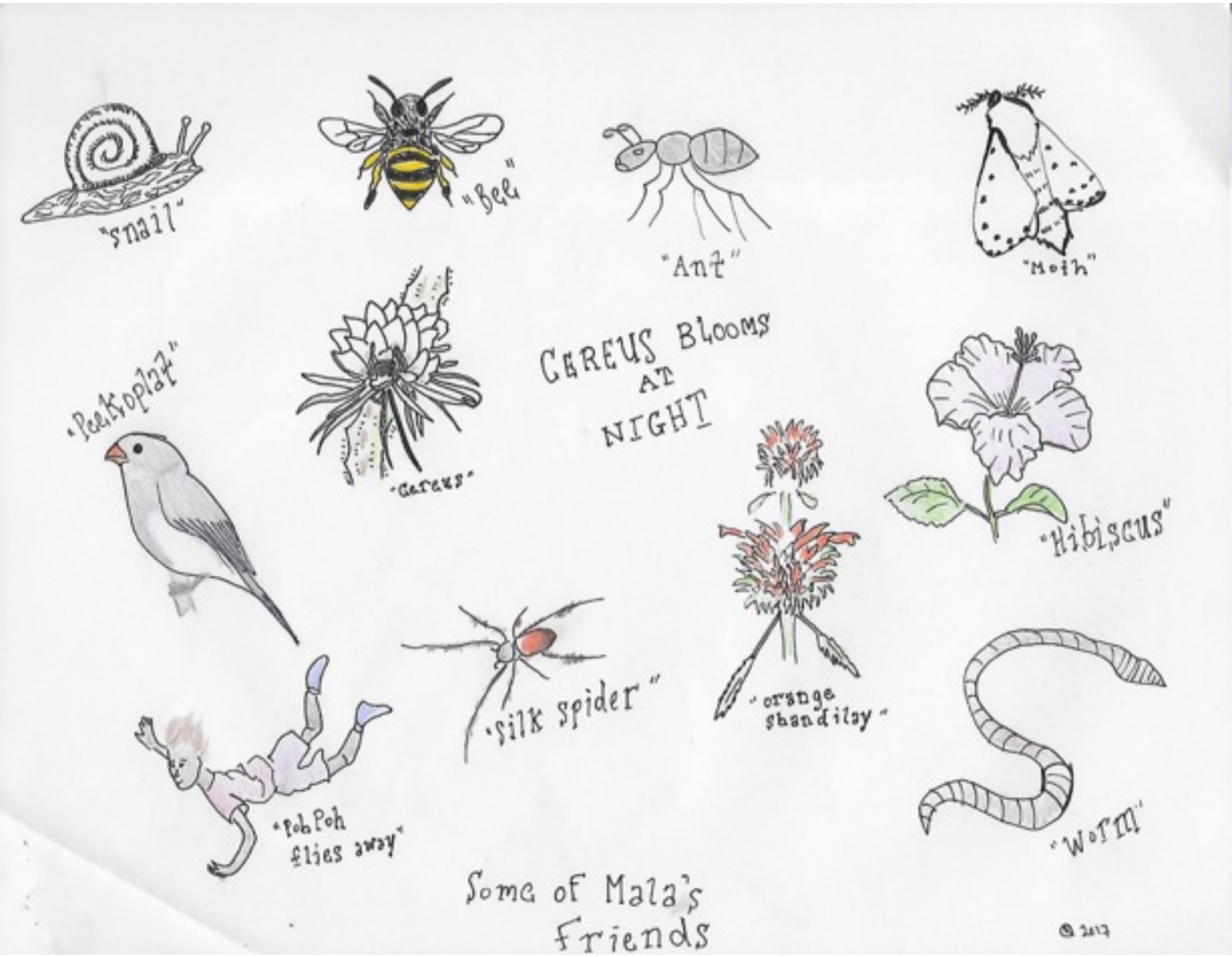
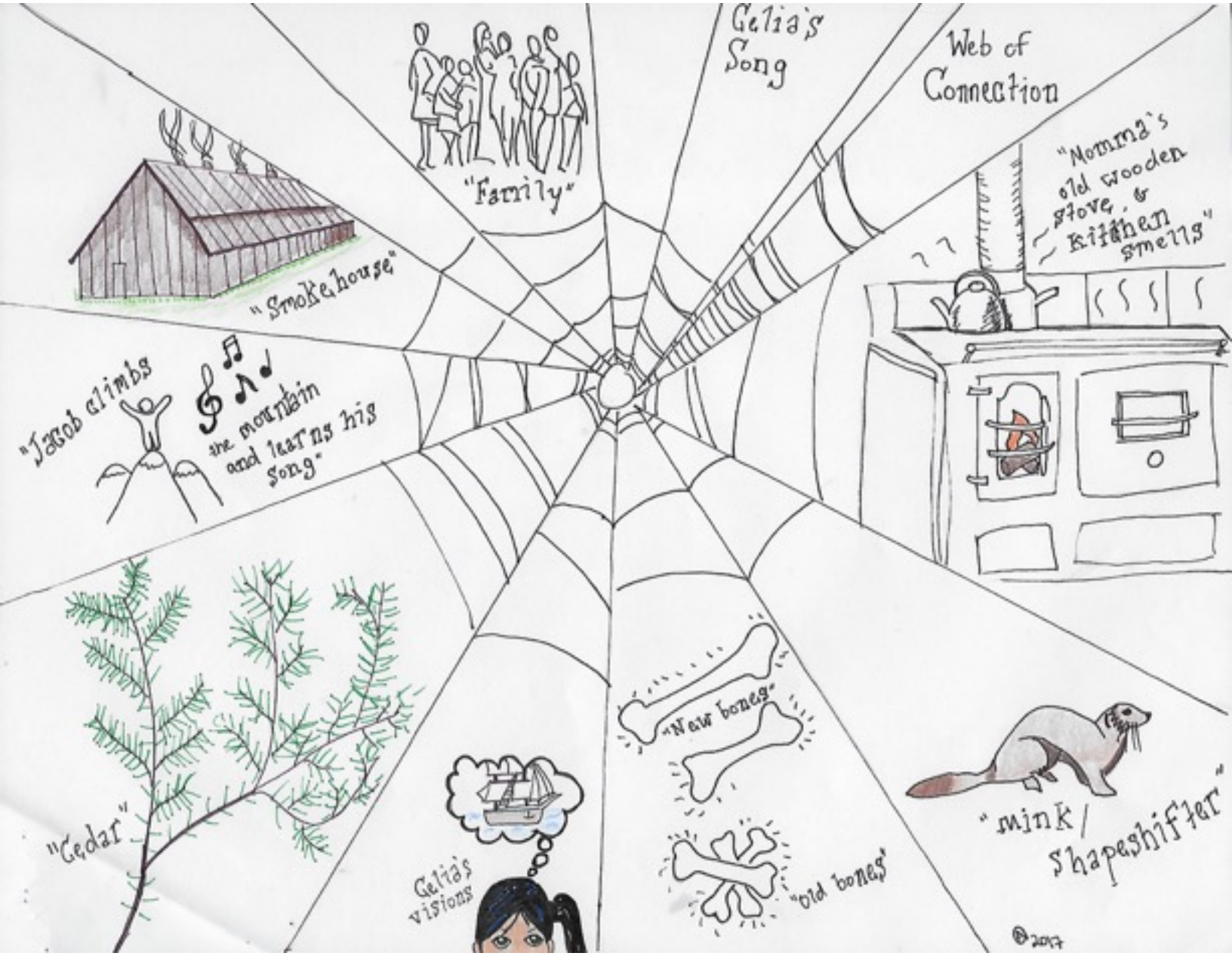


Figure 2. Web of Connection



COMMONALITY

> *Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group recreates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity.*
>
> — Judith Herman (1997, 214)

Introduction: CSA on the Picket Lines

On March 5, 2018, some 3,000 members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3903 (CUPE 3903) went on strike at York University. Union membership comprises teaching assistants, graduate assistants, and contract faculty. The union's demands included, among other things, a fund to support survivors of sexual violence and money for childcare on campus. The strike was the longest in Canadian academic history, lasting until July 25, 2018, when the newly-elected Doug Ford Conservative provincial government legislated the striking graduate students and contract faculty back to work. The union's legal strike persisted across two academic semesters, five menstrual cycles,[1] and three seasons.

The strike began less than a year after the court case against my abuser ended. The court process lasted over six years, and taking the perpetrator to court was one of the most isolating experiences of my life. As the strike progressed, I started to wonder what the aftermath of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) could look like if it were to involve a more integrated, collaborative, group effort. I observed how the dynamics on my picket line and within the union

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[1] Five of my menstrual cycles.

evolved. I also reflected on the role location (outdoors versus indoors) played on my mood and my ability to participate in strike activities. Additionally, I noticed that the strengths I had cultivated to navigate the aftermath of trauma might be particularly useful on the picket lines. Moreover, one of the commitments I made to myself was that after the court case I would start to discuss the effects of CSA more publicly. Due to the union's demands for a sexual assault survivors' fund, the picket line seemed like a good place to start. Also, it afforded me the time to get to know, with some degree of certainty, which picketers were potential allies. Disclosures require a vulnerability that I do not confer lightly; they are a calculated risk.

This paper evolved from connections that developed on the picket lines. Through sharing stories and conversation as we walked, stood, froze, and sweated, commonalities of experience and reflection emerged. Through out-loud discussions of our CSA experiences, several of us strikers fostered friendships that strengthened our bonds within our academic striking community. Collaborative autoethnography (CAE) encourages the development of an ongoing narrative, which in turn draws us closer together, in both scholarship and friendship (Blalock & Akehi, 2018). Through modified CAE, I was able to document our experiences of the strike and CSA. This section demonstrates the importance of solidarity in groups for CSA survivors, *and* the important role CSA survivors can play in group care. Further, that group care necessarily includes more-than-human relationships.

While there is consensus about the pervasiveness of CSA in Eurowestern nations, exact numbers are unavailable (Willis, Canavan & Prior, 2015). Although the World Health Organization undertook a meta-analysis of published research on CSA in an attempt to determine its global prevalence across all age groups, only three regions (Australia and New Zealand, a

subsection of European states, and Canada and the USA) had studies of sufficient quality to provide enough data (Andrews, Corry, Slade, Issakidis & Swanston, 2004). Rates of abuse in these regions varied from 1 in 7 to 1 in 4 females and 1 in 25 to 1 in 15 males. Using these region-specific rates along with national population estimates for 2004, the sheer number of survivors of CSA, in only these three regions, approaches 100 million. Willis et al. note "if all the survivors from just these three regions were to form a state of their own, its population would rank 13th in the world" (2015, 1483).

One of the most damaging (false) assumptions in Eurowestern culture is that a child who has been sexually abused is "damaged goods" (Goodyear-Brown, 2012). This belief often follows survivors into adulthood (see Goodyear-Brown, 2012; Herman, 1997; Muller, 2018; Willis, Prior, & Canavan, 2016). The long-term impacts of CSA are well documented and can include post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), sexual behaviour problems, emotional effects (anxiety, depression, guilt), substance abuse, and eating disorders (Goodyear-Brown, 2012). Categories more specific to CSA than PTSD have been proposed, for example Judith Herman's "Complex Post-traumatic Stress Disorder" (1997) and Bessel Van der Kolk's "Developmental Trauma Disorder" (2005), as CSA has particularly harmful and insidious symptoms different from other forms of trauma. Still, there are many key symptoms of CSA that are comparable to the experiences of other trauma survivors, such as war, forced migration, natural disasters, genocide (Finkelhor, 1987; Herman, 1997): and, I argue, lengthy labour justice events such as the CUPE 3903 strike in 2018-19. Thus, CSA survivors, who actively grapple with the after-effects of their trauma, are well-suited to comprehend the effects of other forms of trauma.

Bonnie Burstow challenges the "deficiency model" that often runs through trauma theory, where trauma survivors are viewed as holding "distorted" views. She argues that "people and groups who are most traumatized see the world more accurately—not less accurately—than their less traumatized counterparts" (2003). Survivors of CSA often develop an extraordinary capacity to read non-verbal and unconscious cues. Having become accustomed, over a long period of time, to reading their perpetrators' emotional and cognitive states, survivors bring this ability into all their relationships (Herman, 1997). This capacity allows survivors to read humans and non-humans more readily than most. This skill is particularly suited to a picket line, where danger must be quickly assessed.

One argument is that CSA survivors' ways of perceiving the world are "both necessary and realistic" (Willis et al., 2015). In the recovery process, the survivor must first reclaim their body, in order to secure a safe space. This safety must then be extended outward to secure control over "their wider geographical context" (Willis et al., 2015). Only then can a sense of safety be restored. Thus, survivors are well-positioned to consider and ensure issues of safety for bodies and spaces: for themselves, and for larger groups. Survivors offer an indispensable perspective when it comes to matters of safety.

Fowler, Gudmundsson, & Whicker (2009) have called for more studies on people's coping mechanisms during long-term strikes, as well as on their lasting psychological impacts. CSA survivors, with their finely tuned senses of internal and external safety, are uniquely positioned to comment on the effects of a strike. CSA survivors' voices are potential sources of invaluable insight into current understandings of trauma, community, and collective, solidarity-based activism.

This paper centres on the experiences of three of the striking members of CUPE local 3903. All three are graduate students, female-identified, mothers, and adult survivors of CSA. In considering the themes of boundaries, communities of care/disclosure, more-than-human connections, and naming trauma this paper asks: what crucial insight survivors of CSA provide on the experience of a lengthy strike? While this paper underscores the importance of considering the worldview of CSA survivors, it also calls for greater care in communities in supporting and uplifting CSA survivor voices. How does the ability to play a critical role in a lengthy strike allow survivors to counter any assumptions around beliefs of deficient or damaged status (internal and external)?

Method: Collective Autoethnography

As a method, autoethnography incorporates elements of both ethnography and autobiography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Autoethnography emerged in part to address ethical concerns arising from writing about other cultures: it is the study of the researcher's own culture, integrated with their inner and relational experiences. While autoethnographic researchers incorporate themselves into the writing, analysis is undertaken as though it is of the "other," (unlike in autobiography), creating a kind of objective distance. Thus, authoethnograpy attempts to resolve the "crises of legitimization (who can speak for this culture?) and representation (how can you speak for this culture?)" (Davis & Ellis, 2008) that often arise with ethnographic research.

CAE is a form of autoethnography that involves a research team pooling, analyzing, and interpreting their collective experiences of a chosen sociocultural phenomenon (Hernandez,

Chang, & Ngunjiri, 2017). Traditionally, autoethnographies have been written as first-person accounts of the author's own experiences. Though the autoethnographer links personal experience with that of others, the ethnographer's own "truth" tends to be privileged as the main voice of the study (Davis et al., 2008). With CAE "multivocality and research rigour" counter the individual perspectives of autoethnography (Hernandez et al., 2017). In CAE, multiple ethnographers work together to enrich the texture and detail of the story, to give multiple perspectives on the issue in question.

A strength of CAE is that it invites a transparency into the research process; ideally, it also involves all participants in the writing, ensuring multivocality is maintained. Since CSA thrives on silence, both on an individual and community level (Herman, 1997; Willis, et al., 2015), CAE holds the potential to shatter this double silencing: participants, speaking and writing together, are able to give shared voice to their experiences. Moreover, the multivocality of CAE

> holds potential for engendering power-sharing in the research process, inviting people who might otherwise be in hierarchical relationships to become part of a mutually enriching process. This holds such potential for relational authenticity, democratizing qualitative research, and engaging in emancipatory research. (Hernandez, et al., 2017)

This aspect of CAE is particularly important, as studies that involve CSA are typically enmeshed in hierarchal relationships, with the researcher studying the CSA survivor; the CSA survivors are the objects of such studies, with no involvement in process design, content analysis, or final write-up (see Diehl & Prout, 2002; Greene & Navarro, 1998; Jones et al., 2013; Lamoureux, Palmieri, Jackson, & Hobfoll, 2012; Loeb, Gaines, Wyatt, Zhang, & Liu, 2011; Loeb et al., 2002;

Messman-Moore & Long, 2003; Miller, Downs, Gondoli, & Keil, 1987; Noll, Horowitz, Bonanno, Trickett, & Putnam, 2003; Thibodeau, Lavoie, Hebert, & Blais, 2017).

While there is a tradition of CSA survivor-penned narratives/autobiographies (see Allen, 1980; Angelou, 1969; Armstrong, 1996; Bass & Thornton, 1983; Brady, 1979; Fraser, 1989; Matthews, 1990; Spring, 1987; Ward, 1984), such accounts are often subject to social and cultural deconstruction processes. This tendency to "deconstruct" survivor narratives, whereby the researcher locates the "causes" and "cures" of problematic experiences within individuals, turns the text into an object to study, wherein academic communities are morally and ethically implicated in interpreting survivors' voices (Crossley, 2000a, 2000b). This interpretation is an exercise in Foucault's (1984) concept of pastoral power and "truth" construction, wherein knowledge of the inside of CSA survivors' minds, souls, and innermost secrets is implied by the researcher. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it. Further, academia continues to "deny the existence, extent and impact of CSA" (Willis et al., 2015). I argue that this denial is in part due to an absence of survivor-led scholarship. I echo Willis et al. (2016) as they urge researchers to avoid writing "expertly" *about* survivors, and to instead *think with* survivors in order to advance survivor voices.

This paper privileges the knowledge of three scholars, all of whom experienced both CSA and, in 2018-19, the lengthy CUPE 3903 strike. Over the course of the nearly five-month long strike, the questions we eventually used in this study emerged as we walked the picket lines together. Through discussions between Priscilla, Laura, and me, along with other members of CUPE local 3903,[2] it became clear to us that there was a particular, important viewpoint on the

[2] All names and identifying details are changed to protect anonymity (except, obviously, mine).

strike informed by our subject-position. The study takes a modified approach of CAE due to time constraints. While Priscilla and Laura were involved in the generation of questions (see Appendix A), and participated fully in the interactive interviews, due to external time constraints their collaboration in the write-up is less involved than it could be.

Along with CAE, a key "method" of this study is friendship. According to Tillmann-Healy (2006) friendship as method means that "our primary procedures are those we use to build and sustain friendship: conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability." This research is only possible because of friendship: the relationships with my two collaborators, along with all the other members of my picket line. Friendship as a method of inquiry also demands that we research at the natural pace of friendship (Tillmann-Healy, 2006). One of the most damaging aspects of CSA is the loss of control with regards to one's personal boundaries (Herman, 1997; Willis et al., 2016). Friendship as method, in contrast, allows the research issues to arise organically (Tillmann-Healy, 2006). In situating the research in the context of friendship, we could remain attentive to each other's boundaries, and further collaborative efforts in a way that respects how much/little we wished to share.

The excerpts included here were transcribed from two semi-structured, interactive interviews. Interactive interviews provide an "in-depth and intimate understanding of people's experiences with emotionally charged and sensitive topics" (Ellis, et al., 2011). The interviews were each an hour and forty minutes long. The first interview with Laura happened at my home. The second interview with Priscilla happened at her home. The interviews were taped and transcribed.

I listened to the recorded interviews three times in their entirety, making notes on key themes. I transcribed the interviews verbatim and sent the transcripts to Laura and Priscilla for review. The source material was vast: over 60 pages single-spaced. I struggled to present the interviews in a way that both challenged the duality of subject/object, knower/known, and honoured the importance of our friendship relationships (Munro Hendry, Mitchell, & Eaton, 2018).

I analyzed the transcripts for broader thematic content using thematic narrative analysis. This approach is primarily concerned with *what* is said, rather than *how* it is said. Speech from the interviews is transformed to make it easily readable (Riessman, 2008). I read through the transcripts multiple times, narrowing down the themes. I cut and pasted the passages mentioning these themes into a document, creating a single narrative for each survivor. I then edited the stories for continuity and clarity, without regard for the chronology of the original interview (see Appendix B). This approach allowed me to focus on the stories we were trying to tell, and to organize them into individual stories. In this way, I am able to present the main themes that I identified in our interviews, while respecting the voices of my friends/collaborators and maintaining their anonymity.

This approach has been championed by Riessman (2008) and Willis et al. (2016) as it foregrounds the relational aspects of the self and its embedding in broader social and cultural contexts. This approach also enabled me to take a "personal-as-political approach" to examining the psycho-social links between CSA and the strike. Further, this method ensures that the stories are the focus, and that the integrity of each survivors' story is maintained.

Discussion: CSA Insights on the Strike

For the purposes of this first attempt to present the collected stories and wisdom of three CSA survivors (to read the full stories see Appendix B) and our perspectives on the protracted CUPE 3903 strike, I identified four themes that emerged very clearly, to me, in the interviews: 1) Boundaries, 2) Cultivating Communities of Care/Disclosures, 3) More-than-Human Connections, and 4) Naming Trauma. For the next stage of this work, I plan to return to my colleagues in order to discuss the interviews again and identify additional themes that they may find important, with the goal of publishing a collective (CAE) reflection on CSA and the strike. What follows is, then, both an important element in this ongoing collective process, and a strong indication of the value and richness of survivors' experiences, perceptions, reflections, and narratives. For each theme, I begin by presenting a significant story from each of the three participants: our words and narratives lead the way. I then elaborate on some of the elements of our stories through the addition of secondary interpretive materials.

Boundaries

Laura:

> I think one of the consequences of being a child sexual abuse survivor is at some points I transform myself into a superhero. And I was discussing this with a friend from home, and I asked, "How is this possible that people act so unfair to each other?" and she said to me, "but you feel like that because you feel you have to protect everyone. To avoid, what happened to you, happening to them in some way." And that made it clear, that yes, sometimes I feel like I am a superhero. I remember pretty clearly, when this huge white lady in a white truck got super angry. And this woman was pushing the driver to cross the picket line. This woman was so violent. And she yelled the entire 50 meters, maybe 75 meters, until she got to the gate. I remember this woman getting out of the truck, and screaming and yelling, and I felt a shield. Like, you cannot touch me. You cannot

touch me. And that is something that I realized for myself, that will possibly be with me for the rest of my life. I think that is one of the shields I'm never going to easily get rid of.

And I felt this boldness, a crazy boldness, because I remember that Charlie came to me after. Charlie decided to let them through the gate early. And I said, "I'm not letting them in, there are three more minutes here." And I was putting my body literally in front of the gate. Because I was angry too. But I was angry at the unfairness of all the yelling of this person. I remember he was the Captain. He said, "Look at me, okay, let them go in." I just moved and they passed. And I remember that he came to me immediately after. And he hugged me. And he said, "I was worried for you. I didn't want to lose you." And I was like, "but you weren't going to lose me." And then I was like, "What the fuck?" Maybe if that women decided to press the accelerator and run me over. At that point and some points when the anger was so intense, I just detached. And I assumed this position of, you cannot touch me, you literally can't. And I think it's irresponsible, on so many levels, to myself, to put me in those levels of danger. I have to take care of myself. At the same time it is difficult because I feel in these situations that I can literally face death unsalted.

What really pissed me off was when cars cheated. Once this car just drove up onto the sidewalk and Anna and I almost got hit. I felt so bad. So extraordinarily overwhelmed because of that. It was like, "you're not even being fair. You're not facing me at the gate. You're not making this a fair fight, you against me. No, you decided to come behind us. Put a lot of people at risk, pedestrians and CUPE members on the sidewalk, just to get what you think you deserve." And that that really got me. It wasn't the yelling. It was that irresponsible act of just running the barriers, because they can in their vehicle.

Priscilla:

Some people felt entitled to the buildings they needed to get to, and to the roads. And it was frustrating, because I felt like, "no, actually, this area belongs to the union right now. We've taken it over. And now you're the outsider, because you don't support this action." And it felt like a violation. Like with the cars, when we had to let angry people through. It bothered me that they weren't willing to go through what everybody else was and wait their turn. That they just needed to intrude and disregard what we were out there fighting for.

When a driver or pedestrian would express rage at us outside, it was definitely triggering and reminiscent of childhood abuse. It was shocking. And all of a

sudden, I would feel on high alert. And I had to remind myself that, even though this person is behaving in an unsafe way, I am safe. I can always back up, I can always run away. There are lots of places to go. Whereas when I would face that when I was a child, and I couldn't get away from it, I had to stay in our small house and do what I was told, and go where I was told, I couldn't just run away in the field behind our house. So I liked that I was able to manage how I needed to respond as an adult to the situation.

One of my strengths was literally walking during the strike. I felt, I know how to do this. I know how to get through hard times. And times where I don't know, I'm not able to predict what's going to happen or how long is this going to take? I'm really familiar with that feeling. And so in that way, I had a lot more patience than some people who gave up. I was in it, until it was finished. I have a pretty thick skin and a high tolerance when it comes to fighting for justice. And so that was definitely a strength. But a weakness was that sometimes I did take things on more than was necessary. Although I was a member of the union, sometimes I would let things affect me more than they needed to. And sometimes I had to tell myself, this is a job, this is a phase of my life, I need to pull back a bit and not be so invested. So the tendency to do that was a weakness of mine to get too sucked in.

Noreen:

There was so much learning that happened for me during the strike. With drivers, for example, quite often, when there was a driver who was very angry, or a situation I would get sent in to talk to the person. Because I'm good at de-escalating. I think that's one of the things I had to learn at a young age, was to face tremendous rage. And if you can't try to mitigate that rage? How do you survive? And I would see when other people were triggered. I remember this one particular man who was just walking through our picket line, and he was, starting to get really upset, yelling “why are you holding these people?” And I went up to talk to him. And I could tell right away, he didn’t see what we were actually doing. He thought we were detaining people and forcibly holding them indefinitely and so I just started to basically point out the reality of what was happening, saying, “I'm a student here too, these are all my colleagues, who are mostly students, some of them are professors.” I would say, “we’re not stopping anyone who's walking. You can walk across the picket line, if you choose, we’re not going to stop you. Look over there at those people walking onto campus. And in fact, we're not stopping cars from entering campus, we're holding them, that person there is timing how long we hold the cars for, and they'll blow a whistle.” I was using this therapy technique of naming things you see and hear. And by the end of when I was talking to him, he ended up shaking my hand and saying, “Oh, I hope you win the

> things you're asking for." And when he left, I thought, you know, I don't know, what has happened in his life, but I can almost guarantee that he has been in some type of a war zone or has been forcibly detained. And so his response had nothing to do with our strike. And then, there were other people who were just angry, and there was no talking to them, there was no getting through to them. And rather than expend my energy, I realized this is not a conversation to have. This is a don't escalate the situation, but remove myself. Either we're going to make a call to let them through because they're going to cause harm or we just don't engage with them, and they wait there two to five minutes, then we let them through.

One of the most damaging aspects of CSA is denying children control of their boundaries, their intimate bodily autonomy (Willis et al., 2016). In their stories, Priscilla and Laura both reference their anger and frustration when drivers demanded access to the university campus. These drivers refused to follow the protocol of the picket line's established wait times. The breach of the picket barrier by drivers who drove over sidewalks and grass circumvented traffic laws. While the drivers endangered pedestrian foot traffic, they were immune to the law since the police claimed it was York property, while York security claimed it was police responsibility.

The lack of consequences for drivers who refused to obey the rules of traffic, and to respect the union's legal right to strike and detain vehicles as established in *Cancoil Thermal Corporation v. Abbott* (2004), is reminiscent of women's experiences within the legal system, where in theory rape is against the law, but in practice it is simply regulated (Ehrlich, 2001; Herman, 1997). Laura observed that the discomfort many picketers had with holding cars for longer than a minute, went against the purpose of the picket line. Ultimately for Laura, this led to a realization that the invulnerability she projected occasionally led her to act in ways that were unsafe and unfair to herself. Herman details this particular coping style, noting that along with survivors' finely tuned senses, there can also be a dissociative coping-style. This particular dissociation involves the survivor ignoring or minimizing social cues that would usually alert

them to danger (1997). Laura was able to reestablish safety and reflect on her own "shield" and the violation of the picket barrier.

Along with physical boundaries and barriers, there is the question of emotional boundaries. In my story I talked about boundaries as matters of both strength and weakness, and about learning when to maintain a firm boundary (in the case of expressed rage) and when to cultivate an open space so that emotions can run their course. When abused children notice signs of danger, they either avoid or placate their abuser. Further, emotional states of chronically abused children range from a baseline of unease, all the way to panic, fury, and despair, which result in difficulties with emotional regulation (Herman, 1997). The strike provided an opportunity for me to turn the ability cultivated unwillingly during abuse (to mitigate rage), into a conscious choice, while also demonstrating the progress I made with regulating my own emotional states and maintaining a separation between myself and others.

Cultivating Communities of Care/Disclosures

Laura:

> Well, this was not my first strike, not even at York, but it's different than where I'm from. The first feeling is the sharing of beliefs and understanding that what you experience is also experienced by somebody next to you. And you can see through those other eyes and you don't need to ask "did this really happen?" You look at the other and they say, "fuck this really happened." It's an affirmation from the other. And it was traumatic. And we managed trauma through the picket line so well, that we actually could care for each other. At some point, I remember Anna, coming directly to me crying and saying, "You know what, I cannot hold the pylon this morning." And I said "it's okay." Nothing else. Nothing freaking else. "It's okay. Go ahead." It was: you don't need to justify, to explain, to cry, I understand. You're crying and I'll hold you. And that is so valuable and unique to this strike experience. It was valuable, the way we were able to acknowledge

trauma in a way that's real, that it exists, that it's a scar in your body…on many, many levels.

This time around we established our bond early on. And I think the difference was in the personalities of our group. Charlie, Noreen, me, people that we know. People who suffered some kind of abuse, violence, and you know, trauma. The opportunity to have these kinds of disclosures, partially, limited, personal, but real, they transformed everything. One of the first conditions for childhood sexual abuse to happen is the isolation of the victim. It's like, this is happening to you, and only you and no one else in the world. And the act of disclosure to others, allows the flow of information to start. This happened to me too, this happened to me too, and oh, my God, you start to hear the voices, the crowd of voices, singing together. And you feel like, what was I believing? That I was alone all these years? I actually wasn't. This happening in the picket line, in this specific strike was amazing. But I think it is possible, because we are changing the way we understand childhood sexual abuse. You know, the trauma, the survival, the implications, and the conditions that perpetuate this. And we have to fight the conditions that perpetuate this isolation.

Maybe this is a good time for having this conversation, even academically speaking. It is a good time because people are more sensitive to trauma-informed kinds of activities, and connection with others that suffered this or went through this and acknowledging their humanity, their experiences and supporting them in the ways they can. Though they aren't perfect, but in the way they can, that is important. And I think this kind of research is rooted in a good time for these conversations. Because let's be honest, the strike before this one, that was my first strike in 2015, we were all together FES, engineers too and others, like the composition of people from Founders. And I don't remember feeling anything similar to this 2018 strike. Nothing. It was traumatic. It was isolated. It was dry and awful. It was violent. We were at Main Gate. And that is not a friendly picket line. And we received a lot of media pressure and stuff like that. We did it. But I cannot say that we offered trauma-informed solidarity and support to each other at all.

Priscilla:

I was abused by my mother. And I'm aware that I'm triggered by women who remind me of her, not the way that they look, but the way that they speak to me, and their level of anger or aggression. So there were a few times when I tried doing the role of car talking, and there were angry women. Or there was one time that a woman was passing by leaving the subway, and she was swearing at us at the top of her lungs. And in those moments, I was definitely triggered, and

reminded of my childhood abuse. But it was different having the support of people around me and I would actually talk about how I was feeling. And sometimes they didn't necessarily understand why I was so impacted by women yelling at me. And it was definitely good to just be able to process that with people to say, “wow, that, that really threw me off. Maybe need to just like sit down for a little bit.” And while I felt comfortable opening up to my friend George about what was happening, with others, it was more of a vague thing. I didn't tell them specifically why it was triggering for me, but they just thought, they probably thought that it was just because it was a violent encounter.

I definitely heard a lot of discussion about sexual abuse and the issues that we were striking for. But in my case, there's a lot of stigma, misunderstanding, and ignorance about the type of abuse I suffered. So I didn't feel comfortable sharing it on the picket line, and just in general, because being sexually abused by one's mother, it's a form of incest, it’s mother-daughter abuse, its female-female abuse. And it's almost a niche form of violation. And a lot of the comments that I heard on the line were directed at “men are bad. Women are always victims. And we need to go against the patriarchy.” And so although I felt supported, when I would hear those comments, it did stir something up within me. It sometimes led me to think, “Why am I so different, that I wasn't even abused the right way.” So it did isolate me. Not withdraw completely, but not want to open up about it. Because in addition to disclosing to someone, which is already hard, there's also that fear of being judged or misunderstood or not believed. Because it is difficult for people to believe that a mother could do that. That a mother is capable of sexually abusing her child.

When I did my accommodated picket work, I was isolated, I was at home alone, after I put my child to bed. I was doing the social media work, so I would be on Instagram, acting as the union. And I had to field all kinds of questions. I had to learn a lot, so that I wasn't constantly having to report to the higher ups, and I could just answer questions myself. And then I was also trying to diffuse a lot of negativity, and even harassment from students, and outside community members who were angry about the strike. And to them, it probably didn't feel like an attack to an individual, they were just taking it out on the union, probably not thinking that there's a single person responding to them. So it took a toll on me in different ways than when I was outside picketing. That was more physically laborious, but I had the support of my friends and colleagues out there. But when I was home alone, sitting in my bed, it was a lot. And sometimes I think it mentally drained me, in a bad way; it took a pretty big toll on me. I eventually had to stop doing it. And another thing is that I had to deal with a lot of union members. I felt like I was I was having to be a support system for union members who would talk to me on the account and ask questions about what was going on, or if I knew anything,

and just talking about how it was hard being on strike, and so I kind of took on it like a therapist role, in a way as well.

Noreen:

I found on my line, there was not all the time conversation around sexual abuse. But we all ended up talking a lot, just when we were walking around in a circle. People talked about their various reasons for being upset. And there were quite a few people on Founders who had been sexually abused. And it wasn't common knowledge to the entire group. But lots of disclosures happened on an individual level. And I definitely talked about, not the details of what happened to me, but that I was a survivor, and that there'd been a court case, and why it was so important that the union be on strike for a fund for survivors. And I felt much safer within the union and within my picket line, because the major issues, and wages too, that's important as well, but so many of the issues were, feminized issues like having the space to nurse, giving money for childcare, and a fund for survivors of sexual violence. Those issues really fueled our line. And some of the people who were on strike in the 2015 strike said that there was a different flavor to this strike because of that.

When FES had a Faculty Council meeting, most of the Environmental Studies students from Founders attended the meeting, and many of us spoke, and cried. There was a lot of emotion in the room. I remember one particular moment, when one of the tenured professors declared that the CUPE red lines were ridiculous, saying CUPE's being foolish. And that really infuriated me, that's what spurred me to speak. I talked about how York withdrew counselling services from me because I was involved in litigation, no matter that it was against a pedophile. I talked about the expert testimony against me, was from a professor at York. How even though that professor has no relationship to me, except as a professor at the school I attend, it's not a conflict of interest for him to accept money to poison my educational environment and testify about so-called false memory syndrome. Which is really the one defense adults who rape children can use. Hard to call a child a slut or crazy. There were a few people who spoke and disclosed their experiences as survivors and why it was important to them.

I think a lot of the conceptions that people have around sexual violence are coming from their understanding of adult sexual assault. Childhood sexual abuse can be perpetrated by siblings, step-siblings, other children, parents, family friends, aunts/uncles, anyone who has access to the child really. It happens way more often than we think. Somebody who has gone through chronic childhood sexual abuse, is going to have completely different responses and coping

> mechanisms than somebody who was raped as an adult. And quite often, those of us who have been sexually abused as children, have been raped as adults too. Because there's just such a capacity to dissociate. It's so normalized that, I didn't even think of some of the things as rape. I just assumed that this is what happens. One of my girlfriends, when I was telling her and she said, "that's rape." I remember thinking "I was blacked out and unconscious and that's rape?" Because, though it's a little bit better now, the idea, especially in our legal system, is that it needs to involve an extreme bodily resistance on the part of the victim, punching, scratching, biting. The rapist needs to be a stranger. It's not that it's someone you know. And the general public is so incredibly ignorant about the realities of childhood sexual abuse, about the aftereffects. It can be exhausting.

One of the key differences between Priscilla's story on one hand, and Laura's and mine on the other, was that while Laura and I felt as though we could choose to disclose experiences of CSA to our line, Priscilla did not. One of the most healing aspects of a group is the ability to disclose and to be vulnerable. Further, because of the nature of the strike, it was really in the best interests of the line to care for one another; the closer knit the group, the safer we were out on the line. The more we could communicate with each other, verbally and otherwise, the better we could sense danger on the line, and maintain a bond that helped to contain anger, rage, depression, sadness, despair, and anxiety.

Moreover, as Fowler et al. (2009) has illustrated, the more involved union members are in strike activity, the greater their general mental health, and the less they experience symptoms of depression and anxiety. Research on trauma also demonstrates the powerful healing ability of a group to provide "mutually rewarding relationships and collective empowerment" (Herman, 1997). Since people who are chronically sexually abused as children demonstrate an uncanny ability to attune to non-verbal cues (Burstow, 2003; Herman, 1997), and that Laura, Priscilla, and I all discuss our strong desire to protect the vulnerable, I echo Laura's belief that CSA survivors are potentially unrecognized in our ability to cultivate environments of support and care.

This same ability was recognized by all three of us as a potential weakness. The balance and support of the group prevented this caring from becoming overly exhausting in the way that it did for Priscilla when she took on the accommodated duties. Psychiatrists found during World War II that separating combat soldiers from their units compounded the traumatic effects of combat exposure. If soldiers could remain with their unit, their risks of experiencing post-traumatic stress were greatly mitigated (Herman, 1997). Thus the support of the picket line acted as a salve to both the trauma of CSA and the harsh conditions of the strike.

More-Than-Human Connections

Laura:

> Let me tell you something. Now I remember when I felt connected. It was not the winter. It was the transition to spring. It was the rain. Where I'm from, rain is everywhere. You cannot stop your life because it's raining. No, you have to continue on living your life. You cannot evade the rain. So I remember I went to the supermarket with L.C. and we bought extra food for the picket line. And we were bringing the food because of the weather, we were bringing in cookies. And I remember the table was full of food and the soup. If it wasn't for the people that were thinking about the rest of the friends that were on the picket line, and were bringing food, they would have had only watery soup to eat. I remember that was the day I really felt connected with everything in a different way. It was a cleansing moment. And it was a connection that I hadn't felt before with nature until it was raining. And not just because of my background. It was just that winter is foreign to me. But the rain is the way it is. It is life for me.
>
> The passing of time was so slow. And maybe that is something that I perceived differently. I know, because we were outside a long time. It was the conspiring the three seasons, happening in the same place, that was so isolated. There was not even a single building that was close to us. I didn't feel like, until the weather was a little bit better, that we could actually take rest and protection in some way from the trees around us. And it was the end of winter. And that for me, is an environment that is not hostile exactly, it's dead. It's just lying dormant until it wakes up and comes alive. The surroundings and the environment and the beings around me, were on hold. Holding their breath. That is the only description I have

because I couldn’t feel them. I remember when the sun started to get intense. And we had the trees around. And we were caring about sunscreen and how we used the shadows just to keep us safe. I feel maybe that picket line was for me too connected with the environment in the way that I can feel the presence of others, more-than-human in that case. I think the conflict, the struggle of the strike was too intense. It was humming in my senses so much that I couldn't perceive what else was happening around me.

Priscilla:

I liked the location of my picket because it was a bit removed from buildings. So we were outside, there were lots of places to go and just sit and look at trees and nature around us. And then at the same time, I did envy the picket lines that were near coffee shops and restaurants. And they had that reprieve to go indoors. Whereas the more northern picket lines, we had to tough it out a bit more. Later when we consolidated the lines, I remember people almost grieving the loss of their picket line. And my group, we felt almost, not violated, but it was like, people were coming into our space. And they didn't understand it the way we did.

As for self-care, the first thing that came to mind is my routine when I would drop my child off at daycare. It was a trek to get to my picket line. I enjoyed those walks, especially in the winter, it was just the time for me to listen to my music. I would feel the weather. And it was my time alone that I took to prepare for what was about to happen. I would wait until my song ended, then I would take my headphones out. And then I was in it.

Another role I took on while picketing was DJ, when we had speakers. People liked my playlists. I picked songs that were uplifting and, I listened to a lot of Muse because they're very, FIGHT the power, fight the system. And we're going to get through this, stand together and win. So we listened to a lot of Muse, I would say that they were my theme.

I also found a lot of comfort in coffee, and food. I looked forward to those moments where I could take care of myself and feel comforted by the warmth of the food. I was impoverished during the strike. So I was happy for anything. I would store up on food. And sometimes I would even take fruit and granola bars for my child for later. Because I was always fearful for the next meal.

I remember one time, I had my child out there. And this woman yelled to one of my friends who was doing the gate. And she said, “You shouldn't have a child out

here, It's too dangerous. What is that mom thinking, having her kid out here?" And he yelled back and said, "she knows what's best." And then she drove off. And I felt empowered as a mother. And it was kind of a reminder to me that I'm different than my mother was, and that I'm a good mother. And I do know what's best for my child. And then also it, it made me want to give back to others around there.

And in a way I kind of did take on a bit of a mothering role, like when the food would come, I would often serve it to people on my picket line, and I would keep the table tidy. And so I think people did rely on me and in a way to be that sort of role there.

And there were a few times that there were other children on the line as well. And a dog too. And it was a reminder. I think even to people in the cars that, we're real people. We have real lives. And some of us are vulnerable. There are people and animals who need to be protected.

Noreen:

I actually feel very attached to Founders. I don't get any anxiety or a bad feeling from our picket location. We just spent so much time there. Now, even if I don't know where I am near campus, I can find Founders. It's as though magnetic north, for me anyway, has moved. And yes, we spent a lot of time at Main gate as well. But that was more symbolic. There was not as much work. It was almost a respite.

I preferred when we were picketing and it was warm. When we were wearing shorts and in the sun. But there was something about being in the cold that I connected with. A cold icy day made me feel like I needed to be out there on the picket line. I remember I started wearing my snow pants because this is what's going to keep me warm. And it was bitterly cold. And it became this symbolic defiance, to be out there, no matter the temperature. One of the things I remember from winter was burning these chemically treated planks on the line. And they would give me headaches, so that I actually couldn't walk near the burn barrel. So it didn't provide me any warmth. I actually would have preferred if we didn't burn anything. One day, when the winds were fierce a tree blew over. Sydney Harris, Lola, and I went over to the tree. They took tobacco and gave it as an offering to the tree while it was blowing over. Eventually the maple tree was cut down, and we were able to burn that wood instead of the planks. And then the wood smelled like a campfire, which had such good memories of my childhood with my family at campfire singalongs. I love that smell. And it could keep me warm. And I felt cared for, because it was so cold. And the tree blowing over, gave us all this wood. And I remember feeling grateful to that maple, like that tree had, sacrificed its life

> for us. And it was so lovely that Sydney Harris and Lola actually went over and did a ceremony for the tree. It made such a big difference. To me anyway, because those chemically treated planks smelled disgusting.

It was not just the support of the people on the line that affected us. Connection to more-than-human worlds also informed our ability to cope under conditions of duress. Puíg de la Bellacasa defines more-than-human worlds as nonhumans as well as "other than human such as things, objects, other animals, living beings, organisms, physical forces, spiritual entities, and humans" (2017). While CSA is typically experienced in isolation from other humans, as was the case for Priscilla, the ability to survive the abuse and maintain a sense of compassion is often only maintained through connections to more-than-human worlds, since humans have spectacularly failed to protect the child in cases of chronic CSA. Though the importance of more-than-human connections is typically not given the same status as human relationships, it is still present in trauma theory (see Herman, 1997; Muller, 2018) in discussions of animal-human alliances, spirituality, groundedness, and attunement to surroundings.

During the strike, all three of us were able to draw on these connections to strengthen our ability to navigate the stress of the picket line. Priscilla's morning routine, my gratitude to the maple, and Laura's closeness to the rain are some of the ways more-than-human support sustained us. The fact that the picketing occurred outdoors was significant. Along with isolation, chronic CSA often entails captivity. As Herman (1997) notes, the barriers are often invisible, but the psychological domination is how the perpetrator controls their victim. Outside on the picket line, we created a visible barrier, and when it/we were threatened the space around us provided the freedom to notice our reactions as adults, instead of as captive children.

For me, the connection I felt with Founders Gate as a supportive place, allowed me to remain present with my own emotions, but also with the emotions of my fellow picketers. Here I was able to harness my "exquisite attunement" (Herman, 1997) to nonverbal and unconscious forms of communication to discern when to engage with others, and when to strengthen my own emotional boundaries and walk away. Connection to place saved me from fragmenting completely when I was a child, and during the strike it became more of a help than a hindrance.

Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) challenges scientific biases regarding the abilities of plants, trees, nonhuman animals, and the land to communicate with each other, and with humans. Kimmerer details the ways in which traditional knowledge about webs of reciprocity, for example the ways trees in a forest care for each other, are starting to be recognized by science. Trauma theory recognizes that "activating sensory experiences" (Muller, 2018) in order to tune into the physical surroundings, and thereby connect to the earth, is necessary for healing. However, the possibility that the landscape may communicate back is never once considered in any of the trauma and CSA texts mentioned in this article.

CSA creates a disconnect from the body (Herman, 1997; Muller, 2018). The body is the site of the original trauma(s); one of the necessary steps after CSA, then, is to reclaim the body. Priscilla's use of music helped her picket line connect with their auditory senses, a skill she undoubtedly picked up in her own healing journey. Both Laura and Priscilla used food to comfort themselves, and their picket lines, thereby engaging the sense of taste. Whether intentionally or not, Laura and Priscilla repeatedly called the people on their picket lines to reconnect to the earth and to their physical bodies.

Before I could trust any human connection reliably, I could trust more-than-human worlds for support. The lake by my childhood home, the forest in the nearby conservation area, the tree outside my window, and my best friend, Langley, a toy poodle. Similarly, during the strike I relied on the wind, the ground, and the sun, to keep me safe. Gradually, as my relationships with the humans on my line strengthened, I started to notice how the strike affected the energy of my fellow picketers and the energy at Founders.

When an angry driver came through our line, they would leave behind a vortex of energy. I noticed most people who passed through the place of lingering emotion became similarly irate. Laura spoke about a spectrum of light that we cannot see. It is as though the anger left an imprint, that I could sense but not see. The same skills I used to de-escalate angry drivers/ pedestrians, I used to help clear the anger; here, however, I communicated with the landscape and the wind to diffuse the anger.

Kimmerer proposes that students with a Western education are being raised so that they "cannot even think of any beneficial relationship between people and the environment…as the land becomes impoverished, so too does the scope of their vision" (2013). Western culture also has a long history of denial and suppression when it comes to knowledge of CSA (Herman, 1997; Muller, 2018). CSA survivors who actively grapple with the events and aftereffects of their trauma, are also forced to contend with the cultural amnesia surrounding trauma. According to Kimmerer, the land shows the "bruises of an abusive relationship" (2013). She argues that in order to heal the land, we must first heal our relationship to the land; We must hear its stories (2013). CSA survivors are often able to provide this connection, as the combination of surviving

the trauma and healing from the trauma provide the necessary conditions to reconnect with more-than-human worlds.

Naming Trauma

Laura:

> We had to explain to people, we are on a strike for this reason, every time we sat together to talk. I cannot believe this. I cannot believe the degree of disconnection from the rest of the York community. And it wasn't solidarity, it was the opposite. And remember, we had to repeat, "it is a strike. And the strike, I have to remind you is a strike, and not a labour disruption. And it's our right, by the way." And I remember at one of the Faculty of Environmental Studies Faculty Council meetings we attended. And I remember I had to speak, "you know what, I am a sexual abuse survivor. And I'm putting my body on the line out there for you too." It was similar with my family. When I disclosed to them about my abuse, I had to say, "I have to remind you that this happened to me. I have to remind you that even in my condition, that in many ways, I feel broken, incomplete, hurt. You are not, and I'm the one doing this? Come on, like come on." But yes, I felt that in many situations, I had to remind people that we are doing this, how is it possible that you, you claim to need to be educated about this? No, I know that you know, very well know what is happening out there on the lines.
>
> I think one of the things to remember is that okay, there was an amazing picket line, a healthy environment where we could disclose and talk and feel support. Okay, but at the same time, the conflict and the struggle of the picket line with the people that wanted to cross, that we delayed. There was a portion of the population that didn't have a single clue about what was happening. Nothing. And they had their opinions. Badly informed, terrible opinions about what was happening. And it was impossible for them to understand the purpose of a strike and that shocked me. The amount of people that yelled at me or said stupid shit about what was already happening. And they moved through the picket line and continued to believe that was true. I can't even.

Priscilla:

> The main thing I heard from drivers and pedestrians was "get back to work." It seemed as though the people who were acting the most violently, especially in their cars, felt entitled because they were "working" and not on strike. Because we were on strike, we were somehow lesser value humans. Because we were

> choosing to withhold our work. And this can relate to sexual abuse, because often there is not enough sensitivity about when somebody needs to adjust their life around the abuse and the aftermath of it. And just this push to get on with your life. Just go back to work. Just move on, like the rest of us. Deny and repress.

Noreen:

> There was this real disconnect around the strike, that I also feel around childhood sexual abuse and the aftereffects, where it's almost as though people think, if it's not happening in front of their eyes, they can pretend it's not real. And calling the strike a labor disruption infuriated me. I felt ill in my body, whenever I heard "labour disruption." I can remember when I decided to start using the word rape, which is, a powerful word. Whereas when you say sexual assault and sexual violence, there's something a little more sanitized about that. And I remember saying rape in one of my therapy groups with other survivors of different types of trauma, not all rape. And one of the women asked me, "well, are you sure you want to be using that word? It's very violent, and it makes me uncomfortable." And I said, "yeah, it's actually really important for me to use this word, because it's the truth of my experience, and it was violent, and it was horribly uncomfortable. So there's something powerful about calling it what it is." And a labor disruption to me is, pipes burst in your workplace, so you go home for the day. Your labour has been disrupted. We were on strike, our labour was more than disrupted, we were removing ourselves from our place of work. What we were experiencing on the picket line was quite violent. And so to repeatedly disrespect us exercising our rights, and having people talk over our use of the term "strike?" It didn't sit well with me.

Naming traumatic experiences validates them. "To take suffering seriously, it's important to name it" (Muller, 2018). The need to validate suffering is emphasized again and again in trauma literature (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2017) Moreover, Muller details the harm inherent in invalidating environments that refuse to acknowledge the suffering caused by trauma (2018). Burstow (2003) outlines the inherent violence, however benign the intentions, when we take away people's "power to name their experiences."

Survivors are often denied any sort of formal restitution or public acknowledgement of the abuse they have suffered. In fact, there is generally no acknowledgment from the wider

community that the abuse even occurred (Herman, 1997). Naming and validation are key for CSA survivors, some of the most empowered moments in my life are the times when I named my experience. Along with the example above, of naming my experience rape, during my court case the defense attorney repeatedly referred to rape as "intercourse." Each time I stopped him, refused his (grossly inappropriate and incorrect) term, and redirected him to the appropriate language. When he said "intercourse" for the third time, and I corrected him (again), he apologized.

The term "labour disruption" is problematic as it is a deliberate obfuscation of the actual events. Laura, Priscilla, and I all refer to the nearly five-month long event as a strike. The Canada Labour Code (Part I–Industrial Relations) recognizes our legal right to strike. When I read through the Canada Labour Code (Part I–Industrial Relations) the term "labour disruption" never appears: the correct term is "strike." In order for chronic CSA to occur, the perpetrator must create sufficient doubt in the child's ability to perceive the reality of the abusive situation. Truth-telling must be avoided at all costs (Herman, 1997). Laura, Priscilla, and I all survived situations where to some degree, this denial of reality was required. As adults, we are (rightly) sensitive to abusive tactics that prevent us from speaking our truth. This is perhaps the point I feel most strongly with regards to the strike.

Reflection and Conclusion

This paper was challenging for me, in every aspect. As I conceived, researched, and wrote it, I tried to remember Dillard's concept of the sacred in research: that the work is "honoured and

embraced as it is carried out…that the work embodies and engages spirituality and is carried out in sacred ways" (2012). Dillard asks the researcher to remember their ties to the humans involved in the study, and to maintain a sense of intimacy and humility to those relationships. The attempt to capture the essence of the interviews, the flavour of the strike, and the experience of CSA is indeed sacred work. It is also heavy.

The collaborative aspect of this autoethnography helped me persist through and with the heaviness of the subject matter. Priscilla read the paper at multiple stages and validated the difficulty and heaviness I experienced. Laura sat and ate with me when I lost my appetite. They both gave me lots of hugs. Many of my former picket line members are consistent sources of support in my life. I could not have attempted this without them.

Even the studies of CSA that are well done (see Owton, 2016; Willis et al., 2016) still speak for survivors in terms of results and analysis. Snippets of interviews, poetry, and stories are included, but they are not the bulk of the material. It was important to me that Laura and Priscilla's voices be present in the paper, rather than reduce our nearly four-hours of interactive-interviews to a one-page summary. Please do read Appendix B for the full stories.

Laura, Priscilla, and I were able to care for ourselves, and our picket lines. Additionally, the perspectives we have to offer are not universal to all CSA survivors, nor to all who participated in the strike. However, our intersectional identities — women, mothers, graduate students, picketers, and survivors — afforded us the opportunity to reflect on boundaries, cultivating communities of care/disclosure, more-than-human connections, and naming trauma. CSA survivors are potential untapped sources of knowledge in how to navigate challenging group situations, like a strike.

On a more personal note, Herman (1997) ends *Trauma and Recovery* with this passage:

> Commonality with other people carries with it all the meanings of the word *common*. It means belonging to a society, having a public role, being part of that which is universal. It means having a familiarity, of being known, of communion. It means taking part in the customary, the commonplace, the ordinary, and the everyday….The survivor who has achieved commonality with others can rest from her labours. Her recovery is accomplished; all that remains before her is her life. (236)

While I'm not certain the task of recovery is ever complete, I certainly feel better equipped after the events of the strike. Solidarity Forever!

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

These questions evolved from informal discussions held on the picket lines during the strike with many other survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The two people interviewed are grad students, both adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Both these individuals (of their own accord) disclosed the circumstances and events of their abuse to me. These questions are a guideline only, as I will be actively listening to the interviewees and responding to their level of comfort, and the direction their answers lead me towards.

Guiding questions to consider before the interview, based on previous discussions: In what ways did being a survivor of childhood sexual abuse affect your experience of the strike? Do you think driver/pedestrian rage stemmed from the denial of access of a piece of property they considered theirs? Does this rage remind you of the rage of abusers? What was it like encountering this level of anger as an adult? How did different communities/environments (human, more-than-human, outdoors, indoors) help you survive/mitigate the effects of the strike?

Tell me about being on strike for nearly five months? Now that over a year has passed since the beginning of the strike, what memories/moments have stuck with you?
How did you experience your 8th line (accommodated) picket (indoor) versus your outdoor picket duties?
As an adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse(CSA), how did it feel to be involved in a more collective, solidarity-based traumatic event versus the isolation of your earlier traumatic experiences? What was it like to freely discuss the events of the strike with other people on strike? What was it like to discuss the strike with other people (professors, staff, administration, family members)? How did this compare to disclosures of abuse (made when you were an adult) and how they were received?
Did you feel that CSA gave you any particular strengths and/or weaknesses throughout the strike? How did the surrounding environment (people, animals, trees, location) affect these strengths/weaknesses?
What, if any, threats of violence were made towards you? Did you witness any threats of violence? How did the involvement of cars change these threats?
How did gender and race factor into these threats? Did you notice any trends in terms of who was threatening, and who was being threatened?
What was your self-care routine during the strike?

APPENDIX B

Laura's Story:

When I walk through Founders (one of the picket lines), it's isolated and empty. And if I have a memory, a physical memory and a practical memory to describe Founders, for me, it's that emptiness without our presence. We populated that piece of York. We gave life and humanity to a piece of York in the middle of a conflict. Yes, in a war zone literally. In a line that held two different worlds from colliding. But for a time there were people there. And that's something. An image that I have, in my mind is that we cannot see all the spectrum of light that exists. I feel there are pieces of our energy, or something that is not exactly flesh, that's still at Founders. Founders is like an anchor. I think York after the strike for me, York spins around Founders. That the central axis to York transformed in that corner, and I feel peripheral now. Doing a lot of things around something that was so primal and important for us for five months. In that specific piece of street, and I think that everything gravitates now, around Founders.
Even after a year, I still don't feel comfortable walking through Founders, literally physically. If I need to cross through Founders, I feel immediately sad and anxious. Then I can manage other memories. But the first the first feeling for me is "ughhhh this is still toxic in some way." It's like a toxic waste was laid there and it was cleaned. And maybe public health tells you "no, no, no it's okay, you can walk through there." But you still can smell it.

The passing of time was so slow. And maybe that is something that I perceived differently. I know, because we were outside a long time. It was the conspiring the three seasons, happening in the same place, that was so isolated. There was not even a single building that was close to us. I didn't feel like, until the weather was a little bit better, that we could actually take rest and protection in some way from the trees around us. And it was the end of winter. And that for me, is an environment that is not hostile exactly, it's dead. It's just lying dormant until it wakes up and comes alive. The surroundings and the environment and the beings around me, were on hold. Holding their breath. That is the only description I have because I couldn't feel them. I remember when the sun started to get intense. And we had the trees around. And we were caring about sunscreen and how we used the shadows just to keep us safe. I feel maybe that picket line was for me too connected with the environment in the way that I can feel the presence of others, more-than-human in that case. I think the conflict, the struggle of the strike was too intense. It was humming in my senses so much that I couldn't perceive what else was happening around me.

Let me tell you something. Now I remember when I felt connected. It was not the winter. It was the transition to spring. It was the rain. Where I'm from, rain is everywhere. You cannot stop your life because it's raining. No, you have to continue on living your life. You cannot evade the rain. So I remember I went to the supermarket with L.C. and we bought extra food for the picket line. And we were bringing the food because of the weather, we were bringing in cookies. And I remember the table was full of food and the soup. If it wasn't for the people that were thinking about the rest of the friends that were on the picket line, and were bringing food, they would have had only watery soup to eat. I remember that was the day I really felt connected with

everything in a different way. It was a cleansing moment. And it was a connection that I hadn't felt before with nature until it was raining. And not just because of my background. It was just that winter is foreign to me. But the rain is the way it is. It is life for me.

I think one of the consequences of being a child sexual abuse survivor is at some points I transform myself into a superhero. And I was discussing this with a friend from home, and I asked, "how is this possible that people act so unfairly to each other? and she said to me, "but you feel like that because you feel you have to protect everyone. To avoid, what happened to you, happening to them in some way." And that made it clear, that yes, sometimes I feel like I am a superhero. I remember pretty clearly, when this huge white lady in a white truck got super angry. And this woman was pushing the driver to cross the picket line. This woman was so violent. And she yelled the entire 50 meters, maybe 75 meters, until she got to the gate. I remember this woman getting out of the truck, and screaming and yelling, and I felt a shield. Like, you cannot touch me. You cannot touch me. And that is something that I realized for myself, that will possibly be with me for the rest of my life. I think that is one of the shields I'm never going to easily get rid of.

And I felt this boldness, a crazy boldness, because I remember that Charlie came to me after. Charlie decided to let them through the gate early. And I said, "I'm not letting them in, there are three more minutes here." And I was putting my body literally in front of the gate. Because I was angry too. But I was angry at the unfairness of all the yelling of this person. I remember he was the Captain. He said, "Look at me, okay, let them go in." I just moved and they passed. And I remember that he came to me immediately after. And he hugged me. And he said, "I was worried for you. I didn't want to lose you." And I was like, 'but you weren't going to lose me.' And then I was like, "What the fuck?" Maybe if that women decided to press the accelerator and run me over. At that point and some points when the anger was so intense, I just detached. And I assumed this position of, you cannot touch me, you literally can't. And I think it's irresponsible, on so many levels, to myself, to put me in those levels of danger. I have to take care of myself. At the same time it is difficult because I feel in these situations that I can literally face death unsalted.

What really pissed me off was when cars cheated. Once this car just drove up onto the sidewalk and Anna and I almost got hit. I felt so bad. So extraordinarily overwhelmed because of that. It was like, "you're not even being fair. You're not facing me at the gate. You're not making this a fair fight, you against me. No, you decided to come behind us. Put a lot of people at risk, pedestrians and CUPE members on the sidewalk, just to get what you think you deserve." And that that really got me. It wasn't the yelling. It was that irresponsible act of just running the barriers, because they can in their vehicle.

There is a writer, she wrote 12 short stories, from a feminist perspective about women's lives and feminism. And one of them was a description of how one guy in the government wanted to create a peripheral route around a valley. But a lot of small towns were getting split because of this huge highway, just going around the body. And during the strike, I was reading this story. And in

the story, a women is at a standstill in front of a truck, and the guy there was next to the driver. And he yelled “just run her over, go over her!” And the driver said, “but no, she's a woman. And this is a human being,” “I don't care!” And the guy just pushed the pedal and rolled over the women. And he got an erection from this action, in the story. And I was like, you know what, in some way, I was remembering that story, that those mother fuckers all of them will really enjoy sexually to run me over with their cars. It was like, I'm not even sure at some point that they are angry because we won't let them pass, or that we had the audacity to be happy. Come on, you're in a car, just stop. This is perverse.

Well, this was not my first strike, not even at York, but it's different than where I’m from. The first feeling is the sharing of beliefs and understanding that what you experience is also experienced by somebody next to you. And you can see through those other eyes and you don't need to ask “did this really happen?” You look at the other and they say, “fuck this really happened.” It’s an affirmation from the other. And it was traumatic. And we managed trauma through the picket line so well, that we actually could care for each other. At some point, I remember Anna, coming directly to me crying and saying, “You know what, I cannot hold the pylon this morning.” And I said “it's okay.” Nothing else. Nothing freaking else. “It's okay. Go ahead.” It was: you don't need to justify, to explain, to cry, I understand. You're crying and I’ll hold you. And that is so valuable and unique to this strike experience. It was valuable, the way we were able to acknowledge trauma in a way that’s real, that it exists, that it’s a scar in your body…on many, many levels.

We had to explain to people, we are on a strike for this reason, every time we sat together to talk. I cannot believe this. I cannot believe the degree of disconnection from the rest of the York community. And it wasn’t solidarity, it was the opposite. And remember, we had to repeat, “it is a strike. And the strike, I have to remind you is a strike, and not a labour disruption. And it’s our right, by the way.” And I remember at one of the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES) faculty council meetings we attended. And I remember I had to speak, “you know what, I am a sexual abuse survivor. And I'm putting my body on the line out there for you too.” It was similar with my family. When I disclosed to them about my abuse, I had to say, “I have to remind you that this happened to me. I have to remind you that even in my condition, that in many ways, I feel broken, incomplete, hurt. You are not, and I'm the one doing this? Come on, like come on.” But yes, I felt that in many situations, I had to remind people that we are doing this, how is it possible that you, you claim to need to be educated about this? No, I know that you know, very well know what is happening out there on the lines.

But one of the things now I see from perspective of the time is that the picket line was a good exercise on when we say no. And I felt especially uncomfortable in managing when somebody else from my picket line, that has spent time with me sharing the picket line said, “well, but let them just go. Just once. She’s a mom, and then she has to go to pick up the baby.” And we say we are already speeding up the waiting time one minute, for them. “Well, yeah, Let's let's just go open the the gate.” And now that I think about it, it’s like you're not listening to me. When I say no. And you were saying to me, even when you say no, let's say yes. And I felt like you cannot

cheat yourself. For me it was an exercise in no. Every single time we closed the gate, we wait five to one minutes, wherever the time was. That is a clear “no” and you have to deal with that on the other side. And we are not going to move on that decision, no is no. And I remember finding it difficult to understand why these people didn't understand, this is the time we agreed. This is not negotiable. And the negotiations are not going to be good for us. And that was something, you know, that people didn't understand very well. And maybe I felt excessively intense just because what happened with me.

I remember Bob saying to me, one of the days I was picket captain, “if we make these people wait one single minute more, I'm just gonna leave.” And that was so freakin shitty for me to hear that. But at the same time, I understood this is how you feel in this moment. This is your reality.

The other picket captains, they sent people to our picket line when they were burnt out in their own lines. And not because ours was easy. On some of the other lines, there was racism, and there was violence, and there was violence against women of color. And it was like, what the fuck? We should be thinking better. Otherwise we are repeating the worst of the society that we claim to understand and are trying to change. Our picket line was so humble, and its origin, that a bunch of engineers, that aren’t supposed to have any idea of how the world works beyond the laws of physics, and then a bunch of, chemistry and software engineers, and then environmental studies, crazy hippie people. And we were dancing and speaking and talking to trees. It was unbelievable how it worked in the end. And I really liked how it worked.

Maybe this is a good time for having this conversation, even academically speaking. It is a good time because people are more sensitive to trauma-informed kinds of activities, and connection with others that suffered this or went through this and acknowledging their humanity, their experiences and supporting them in the ways they can. Though they aren't perfect, but in the way they can, that is important. And I think this kind of research is rooted in a good time for these conversations. Because let's be honest, the strike before this one, that was my first strike in 2015, we were all together FES, engineers too and others, like the composition of people from Founders. And I don't remember feeling anything similar to this 2018 strike. Nothing. It was traumatic. It was isolated. It was dry and awful. It was violent. We were at Main Gate. And that is not a friendly picket line. And we received a lot of media pressure and stuff like that. We did it. But I cannot say that we offered trauma-informed solidarity and support to each other at all.

This time around we established our bond early on. And I think the difference was in the personalities of our group. Charlie, Noreen, me, people that we know. People who suffered some kind of abuse, violence, and you know, trauma. The opportunity to have these kinds of disclosures, partially, limited, personal, but real, they transformed everything. One of the first conditions for childhood sexual abuse to happen is the isolation of the victim. It’s like, this is happening to you, and only you and no one else in the world. And the act of disclosure to others, allows the flow of information to start. This happened to me too, this happened to me too, and oh, my God, you start to hear the voices, the crowd of voices, singing together. And you feel like, what was I believing? That I was alone all these years? I actually wasn’t. This happening in the

picket line, in this specific strike was amazing. But I think it is possible, because we are changing the way we understand childhood sexual abuse. You know, the trauma, the survival, the implications, and the conditions that perpetuate this. And we have to fight the conditions that perpetuate this isolation.

About collective care, what I want to say is, even when we are talking about a group of people, a number of whom are open, saying that they experienced abuse, was pretty high. The people who took the roles, the leading positions, on keeping this an informed safe environment, were the people that actually experienced trauma. How many of us take a role that actually exhausts us? Because nobody else has taken it, but we have, because of what we suffered, because of this sensitivity, this sensibility of understanding feelings, seeing what others are not seeing, and feeling. And that leads us to put ourselves in a position of helping others, organizing, even organizing around traffic, taking time, but doing it in a way that allows others to exist. And even at the end of the day, open up saying, you know what, this happened to me, too. There is another way to see survivors. To see them in a different way. Look at who is doing this unsung, under appreciated, extremely valuable work.

I think one of the things to remember is that okay, there was an amazing picket line, a healthy environment where we could disclose and talk and feel support. Okay, but at the same time, the conflict and the struggle of the picket line with the people that wanted to cross, that we delayed. There was a portion of the population that didn't have a single clue about what was happening. Nothing. And they had their opinions. Badly informed, terrible opinions about what was happening. And it was impossible for them to understand the purpose of a strike and that shocked me. The amount of people that yelled at me or said stupid shit about what was already happening. And they moved through the picket line and continued to believe that was true. I can’t even.

Priscilla’s Story:

There are certain places on campus that bring back memories, especially the location of my picket line. And those memories are usually pretty good, because I felt very connected with the people on my picket line. And we had a lot of solidarity and some good times. For the most part, I have good memories. I mean, there were definitely moments where it was difficult — the weather, the angry people. But it was good to have supportive people around.

I liked the location of my picket because it was a bit removed from buildings. So we were outside, there were lots of places to go and just sit and look at trees and nature around us. And then at the same time, I did envy the picket lines that were near coffee shops and restaurants. And they had that reprieve to go indoors. Whereas the more northern picket lines, we had to tough it out a bit more. Later when we consolidated the lines, I remember people almost grieving the loss of their picket line. And my group, we felt almost, not violated, but it was like, people were coming into our space. And they didn't understand it the way we did.

As for self-care, the first thing that came to mind is my routine when I would drop my child off at daycare. It was a trek to get to my picket line. I enjoyed those walks, especially in the winter, it was just the time for me to listen to my music. I would feel the the weather. And it was my time alone that I took to prepare for what was about to happen. I would wait until my song ended, then I would take my headphones out. And then I was in it.

Another role I took on while picketing was DJ, when we had speakers. People liked my playlists. I picked songs that were uplifting and, I listened to a lot of Muse because they're very, FIGHT the power, fight the system. And we're going to get through this, stand together and win. So we listened to a lot of Muse, I would say that they were my theme.

I also found a lot of comfort in coffee, and food. I looked forward to those moments where I could take care of myself, and feel comforted by the warmth of the food. I was impoverished during the strike. So I was happy for anything. I would store up on food. And sometimes I would even take fruit and granola bars for my child for later. Because I was always fearful for the next meal.

When I did my accommodated picket work, I was isolated, I was at home alone, after I put my child to bed. I was doing the social media work, so I would be on Instagram, acting as the union. And I had to field all kinds of questions. I had to learn a lot, so that I wasn't constantly having to report to the higher ups, and I could just answer questions myself. And then I was also trying to diffuse a lot of negativity, and even harassment from students, and outside community members who were angry about the strike. And to them, it probably didn't feel like an attack to an individual, they were just taking it out on the union, probably not thinking that there's a single person responding to them. So it took a toll on me in different ways than when I was outside picketing. That was more physically laborious, but I had the support of my friends and colleagues out there. But when I was home alone, sitting in my bed, it was a lot. And sometimes I think it mentally drained me, in a bad way; it took a pretty big toll on me. I eventually had to stop doing it. And another thing is that I had to deal with a lot of union members. I felt like I was I was having to be a support system for union members who would talk to me on the account and ask questions about what was going on, or if I knew anything, and just talking about how it was hard being on strike, and so I kind of took on it like a therapist role, in a way as well.

When I was doing accommodated work, it did feel reminiscent of how I would cope with my abuse. Since I was in my bed, at night, usually doing my eighth line work, it reminded me of being a child and feeling trapped in my room; dealing with painful emotions alone, and not having somebody to talk to about it.

Some people felt entitled to the buildings they needed to get to, and to the roads. And it was frustrating, because I felt like, “no, actually, this area belongs to the union right now. We've taken it over. And now you're the outsider, because you don't support this action.” And it felt like a violation. Like with the cars, when we had to let angry people through. It bothered me

that they weren't willing to go through what everybody else was and wait their turn. That they just needed to intrude and disregard what we were out there fighting for.

The main thing I heard from drivers and pedestrians was “get back to work.” It seemed as though the people who were acting the most violently, especially in their cars, felt entitled because they were “working” and not on strike. Because we were on strike, we were somehow lesser value humans. Because we were choosing to withhold our work. And this can relate to sexual abuse, because often there is not enough sensitivity about when somebody needs to adjust their life around the abuse and the aftermath of it. And just this push to get on with your life. Just go back to work. Just move on, like the rest of us. Deny and repress.

When a driver or pedestrian would express rage at us outside, it was definitely triggering and reminiscent of childhood abuse. It was shocking. And all of a sudden, I would feel on high alert. And I had to remind myself that, even though this person is behaving in an unsafe way, I am safe. I can always back up, I can always run away. There are lots of places to go. Whereas when I would face that when I was a child, and I couldn't get away from it, I had to stay in our small house and do what I was told, and go where I was told, I couldn't just run away in the field behind our house. So I liked that I was able to manage how I needed to respond as an adult to the situation.

I was abused by my mother. And I'm aware that I'm triggered by women who remind me of her, not the way that they look, but the way that they speak to me, and their level of anger or aggression. So there were a few times when I tried doing the role of car talking, and there were angry women. Or there was one time that a woman was passing by leaving the subway, and she was swearing at us at the top of her lungs. And in those moments, I was definitely triggered, and reminded of my childhood abuse. But it was different having the support of people around me and I would actually talk about how I was feeling. And sometimes they didn't necessarily understand why I was so impacted by women yelling at me. And it was definitely good to just be able to process that with people to say, “wow, that, that really threw me off. Maybe need to just like sit down for a little bit.” And while I felt comfortable opening up to my friend George about what was happening, with others, it was more of a vague thing. I didn't tell them specifically why it was triggering for me, but they just thought, they probably thought that it was just because it was a violent encounter.

I definitely heard a lot of discussion about sexual abuse and the issues that we were striking for. But in my case, there's a lot of stigma, misunderstanding, and ignorance about the type of abuse I suffered. So I didn't feel comfortable sharing it on the picket line, and just in general, because being sexually abused by one's mother, it's a form of incest, it’s mother-daughter abuse, its female-female abuse. And it's almost a niche form of violation. And a lot of the comments that I heard on the line were directed at “men are bad. Women are always victims. And we need to go against the patriarchy.” And so although I felt supported, when I would hear those comments, it did stir something up within me. It sometimes led me to think, “Why am I so different, that I wasn't even abused the right way?” So it did isolate me. Not withdraw completely, but not want

to open up about it. Because in addition to disclosing to someone, which is already hard, there's also that fear of being judged or misunderstood or not believed. Because it is difficult for people to believe that a mother could do that. That a mother is capable of sexually abusing her child.

I remember one time, I had my child out there. And this woman yelled to one of my friends who was doing the gate. And she said, “You shouldn't have a child out here, It's too dangerous. What is that mom thinking, having her kid out here?” And he yelled back and said, “she knows what's best.” And then she drove off. And I felt empowered as a mother. And it was kind of a reminder to me that I'm different than my mother was, and that I'm a good mother. And I do know what's best for my child. And then also it, it made me want to give back to others around there. And in a way I kind of did take on a bit of a mothering role, like when the food would come, I would often serve it to people on on my picket line, and I would keep the table tidy. And so I think people did rely on me and in a way to be that sort of role there.

And there were a few times that there were other children on the line as well. And a dog too. And it was a reminder. I think even to people in the cars that, we're real people. We have real lives. And some of us are vulnerable. There are people and animals who need to be protected.

One of my strengths was literally walking during the strike. I felt, I know how to do this. I know how to get through hard times. And times where I don't know, I'm not able to predict what's going to happen or how long is this going to take? I'm really familiar with that feeling. And so in that way, I had a lot more patience than some people who gave up. I was in it, until it was finished. I have a pretty thick skin and a high tolerance when it comes to fighting for justice. And so that was definitely a strength. But a weakness was that sometimes I did take things on more than was necessary. Although I was a member of the union, sometimes I would let things affect me more than they needed to. And sometimes I had to tell myself, this is a job, this is a phase of my life, I need to pull back a bit and not be so invested. So the tendency to do that was a weakness of mine to get too sucked in.

And, you know, I said that I felt supported on my line. But now that I'm recalling there was this one particular incident, there was a period, a long period of time, where I didn't feel supported on my line. And I would be aware that people were speaking about me while I was there. And there was definitely a group that formed against me. Very obviously, and I had very few people who had my back, and they weren't always there. There was one person who drove in from Pickering. And he was only there maybe two days a week. And so without him, I often walked alone.

Noreen’s story:

I remember I looked into applying for accommodated picket duties before the strike started. They requested proof that there was a need for an accommodation and so I sent my letter from Disability Services that says, ‘“Noreen has a permanent disability.” When there was a request for further proof, I got so triggered. I’m exhausted from proof giving. My disability is episodic, it’s not predictable, it’s invisible, and it’s entirely related to childhood sexual abuse. Often I don’t

know when I'll need to use accommodations. And though I don't like using accommodations simply because I often don't find them all that accommodating, there is a certain sense of safety to have them to fall back on. In this case I decided to go picket. And part of what made being on strike tolerable for me was being outside and having the picket line. Every time I visited headquarters, I thought I couldn't be trapped inside in this space. At least when I'm outside, even when it's freezing cold, if there's something upsetting, I can feel the wind on my face to keep me grounded and in my body. And the sun, even if I can't see the sun, if I'm outside, I can feel it's still somewhere out there.

I actually feel very attached to Founders. I don't get any anxiety or a bad feeling from our picket location. We just spent so much time there. Now, even if I don't know where I am near campus, I can find Founders. It's as though magnetic north, for me anyway, has moved. And yes, we spent a lot of time at Main gate as well. But that was more symbolic. There was not as much work. It was almost a respite.

I found on my line, there was not all the time conversation around sexual abuse. But, we all ended up talking a lot, just when we were walking around in a circle. People talked about their various reasons for being upset. And there were quite a few people on Founders who had been sexually abused. And it wasn't common knowledge to the entire group. But lots of disclosures happened on an individual level. And I definitely talked about, not the details of what happened to me, but that I was a survivor, and that there'd been a court case, and why it was so important that the union be on strike for a fund for survivors. And I felt much safer within the union and within my picket line, because the major issues, and wages too, that's important as well, but so many of the issues were, feminized issues like having the space to nurse, giving money for childcare, and a fund for survivors of sexual violence. Those issues really fuelled our line. And some of the people who were on on strike in the 2015 strike said that there was a different flavor to this strike because of that.

When FES had a faculty council meeting, most of the environmental studies students from Founders attended the meeting, and many of us spoke, and cried. There was a lot of emotion in the room. I remember one particular moment, when one of the tenured professors declared that the CUPE red lines were ridiculous, saying CUPE's being foolish. And that really infuriated me, that's what spurred me to speak. I talked about how York withdrew counselling services from me because I was involved in litigation, no matter that it was against a pedophile. I talked about the expert testimony against me, was from a professor at York. How even though that professor has no relationship to me, except as a professor at the school I attend, it's not a conflict of interest for him to accept money to poison my educational environment and testify about so-called false memory syndrome. Which is really the one defence adults who rape children can use. Hard to call a child a slut or crazy. There were a few people who spoke and disclosed their experiences as survivors and why it was important to them.

There was this real disconnect around the strike, that I also feel around childhood sexual abuse and the aftereffects, where it's almost as though people think, if it's not happening in front of

their eyes, they can pretend it's not real. And calling the strike a labor disruption infuriated me. I felt ill in my body, whenever I heard “labour disruption.” I can remember when I decided to start using the word rape, which is, a powerful word. Whereas when you say sexual assault and sexual violence, there's something a little more sanitized about that. And I remember saying rape in one of my therapy groups with other survivors of different types of trauma, not all rape. And one of the women asked me, “well, are you sure you want to be using that word? It's very violent, and it makes me uncomfortable.” And I said, “yeah, it's actually really important for me to use this word, because it's the truth of my experience, and it was violent, and it was horribly uncomfortable. So there's something powerful about calling it what it is.” And a labor disruption to me is, pipes burst in your workplace, so you go home for the day. Your labour has been disrupted. We were on strike, our labour was more than disrupted, we were removing ourselves from our place of work. What we were experiencing on the picket line was quite violent. And so to repeatedly disrespect us exercising our rights, and having people talk over our use of the term “strike?” It didn’t sit well with me.

I think a lot of the conceptions that people have around sexual violence are coming from their understanding of adult sexual assault. Childhood sexual abuse can be perpetrated by siblings, step-siblings, other children, parents, family friends, aunts/uncles, anyone who has access to the child really. It happens way more often than we think. Somebody who has gone through chronic childhood sexual abuse, is going to have completely different responses and coping mechanisms than somebody who was raped as an adult. And quite often, those of us who have been sexually abused as children, have been raped as adults too. Because there's just such a capacity to dissociate. It's so normalized that, I didn't even think of some of the things as rape. I just assumed that this is what happens. One of my girlfriends, when I was telling her and she said, “that's rape.” I remember thinking “I was blacked out and unconscious and that’s rape?” Because, though it's a little bit better now, the idea, especially in our legal system, is that it needs to involve an extreme bodily resistance on the part of the victim, punching, scratching, biting. The rapist needs to be a stranger. It's not that it's someone you know. And the general public is so incredibly ignorant about the realities of childhood sexual abuse, about the aftereffects. It can be exhausting.

One of the things that would happen on the picket line, is when say, a pedestrian, would come up and start talking to me, somebody on my picket line at a certain point would step-in and take over the conversation. So, nobody was left to have to answer questions or defend their point of view in isolation. There were always other people from the picket line, who would take over so it was like stepping-in and stepping-out. Because there were a lot of people who didn't understand why we were on strike, or were against why we were on strike or didn't even understand that it was legal for us to be on strike. There was this diffusion of the responsibility to explain or to defend. So it wasn't as exhausting. Whereas around childhood sexual abuse, so many people are so uneducated, and it's too much to take it all on alone. And oftentimes, what’s the point? What's the point in explaining, most people are not going to understand, or for me to get them to a place to understand is going to require so much emotional labor and vulnerability. Or perhaps worse,

they'll want to be reassured that our justice system works, or they'll ask if I have a good therapist to avoid any actual need for responsibility or support on their part. No benefit.

I really loved my picket line. I felt like there was like such a high level of care for each other. There were a lot of people who were noticing and supporting. And people would get if something happened that wasn't okay. I didn't have to get upset about it on my own. My picket line got upset with me, for me. I remember one of the mom's from the daycare my child attends yelled at me, really screamed and went off on me. I had been so compassionate to parents waiting in the picket line. And at no point is anyone entitled to scream at me, especially with that level of rage. Along with the general support I received when I came back behind the gate from car talking, James also emailed the daycare and was all, "you need to send an email out. Parents need to know they can't get rushed through on our line, we don't have that capacity. It's not okay, we're on strike to get funds for the childcare and it's unacceptable that our members are being yelled at by parents from this daycare." And I felt so supported.

I preferred when we were picketing and it was warm. When we were wearing shorts and in the sun. But there was something about being in the cold that I connected with. A cold icy day, made me feel like I needed to be out there on the picket line. I remember I started wearing my snow pants because this is what's going to keep me warm. And it was bitterly cold. And it became this symbolic defiance, to be out there, no matter the temperature. One of the things I remember from winter was burning these chemically treated planks on the line. And they would give me headaches, so that I actually couldn't walk near the burn barrel. So it didn't provide me any warmth. I actually would have preferred if we didn't burn anything. One day, when the winds were fierce a tree blew over. Sydney Harris, Lola, and I went over to the tree. They took tobacco, and gave it as an offering to the tree while it was blowing over. Eventually the maple tree was cut down, and we were able to burn that wood instead of the planks. And then the wood smelled like a campfire, which had such good memories of my childhood with my family at campfire singalongs. I love that smell. And it could keep me warm. And I felt cared for, because it was so cold. And the tree blowing over, gave us all this wood. And and I remember feeling grateful to that maple, like that tree had, sacrificed its life for us. And it was so lovely that Sydney Harris and Lola actually went over and did a ceremony for the tree. It made such a big difference. To me anyway, because those chemically treated planks smelled disgusting.

There was a particularly difficult week on our line, and it culminated in a truly awful day. After that week, when Founders picket reopened. It was so clear, our entire line, that everyone was experiencing some post traumatic stress from that day. We were almost terrified to hold people. Sydney Harris was timing. And Bob was out on his usual gate. Bob was getting really upset with Sydney Harris about the timing, and in response Sydney Harris was starting to get agitated. And Sydney Harris had been away on field work for the bad week. I could see so clearly what was happening. Bob was just terrified to hold people because of what he had gone through. And Sydney Harris was saying, "I'm doing the timing, and, the timing is just the timing." And he was starting to get mad at Bob. And I kept talking to Sydney Harris because I felt, okay, I need you to see, I want you to see what I'm seeing, because if you see what I'm

seeing, you're not going to be mad at Bob. Your heart is just going to break for this member of our community. And so I kept going in to talk to Sydney Harris and saying, “Bob doesn't care about the timer. This isn't about the timer. You weren't here last week. This is about what happened last week.” And Sydney Harris wasn't getting it. And then all of a sudden, and I don't know what it was, but all of a sudden, it clicked for him. I kept backing in and out, reminding him, it’s not about you. And when he got it, he just went and hugged Bob. They just hugged, for at least a minute. And I thought, we have such a beautiful line.

There was so much learning that happened for me during the strike. With drivers, for example, quite often, when there was a driver who was very angry, or a situation I would get sent in to talk to the person. Because I'm good at de-escalating. I think that's one of the things I had to learn at a young age, was to face tremendous rage. And if you can't try to mitigate that rage? How do you survive? And I would see when other people were triggered. I remember this one particular man who was just walking through our picket line, and he was, starting to get really upset, yelling “why are you holding these people?” And I went up to talk to him. And I could tell right away, he didn’t see what we were actually doing. He though we were detaining people and forcibly holding them indefinitely and so I just started to basically point out the reality of what was happening, saying, “I'm a student here too, these are all my colleagues, who are mostly students, some of them are professors.” I would say, “we’re not stopping anyone who's walking. You can walk across the picket line, if you choose, we’re not going to stop you. Look over there at those people walking onto campus. And in fact, we're not stopping cars from entering campus, we're holding them, that person there is timing how long we hold the cars for, and they'll blow a whistle.” I was using this therapy technique of naming things you see, and hear. And by the end of when I was talking to him, he ended up shaking my hand and saying, “Oh, I hope you win the things you're asking for.” And when he left, I thought, you know, I don't know, what has happened in his life, but I can almost guarantee that he has been in some type of a war zone, or has been forcibly detained. And so his response had nothing to do with our strike. And then, there were other people who were just angry, and there was no talking to them, there was no getting through to them. And rather than expend my energy, I realized this is not a conversation to have. This is a don't escalate the situation, but remove myself. Either we're going to make a call to let them through because they’re going to cause harm or we just don't engage with them, and they wait there two to five minutes, then we let them through.

There was this day, Jane, she was so upset, I could feel her anxiety, and I just wanted to take it away. I just wanted to take it for her. And I stopped for a second. And I realized, but that's not my place to take Jane’s anxiety from her. The best thing I can do to support Jane is give her anxiety space. Give her space and support, and she’ll work through it. But that, wanting to save people and this, “here, let me take this sadness/anger/anxiety/discomfort this for you.” That's actually not helpful to anyone. And so there was something about learning about space and allowing people their painful emotions and being able to be in that space with them. And to offer support that I think was valuable. Also, learning when to walk away from someone's anger and when to work with it.