

## An Interdisciplinary Journal

*Honoring the Voices, Perspectives and Knowledges of First Peoples through Research, Critical Analyses, Stories, Standpoints and Media Reviews*

## How I Came to be Raised by Wolves

Denali YoungWolfe

<sup>1</sup> University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan, Canada

Author contact: denali.youngwolfe@gmail.com

My experiences have given me a foundation from which to understand the confluence of blood and magic in my origin story. I would like to share two parts of that story with you now.

### Mistik Ayisiniwak – The Tree People

The mistik ayisiniwak are my spirit protectors. When I was very little I learned to run from the blackout violence that left blood on our walls and bruises in our hearts. I remember hiding in the woods, crying out in silent desperation, and hearing the mistik ayisiniwak answer; they called to me and I climbed to safety in their highest branches. They cradled me and sang to me, they provided healing and protection and for many years were the only physical touch I knew that was not violent. I spent years nestled safely in their branches and could sleep without fear of falling. In that sleep, in the arms of the tree people I came to know a place, a language, and a people that exist in the fullness of time.

The mistik ayisiniwak sing - like a vibration - each one has their own voice. I learned that many of them have roots that see like echolocation, which is why it is important to walk gently on the earth. They have different dialects and some are very social while others are not. They taught me to ask permission because not all trees want you to climb them. When you are exposed to a language long enough you understand the words, even if you can't speak them. The mistik ayisiniwak have cared for me since I was very young and in my silence I hear the deafening softness of their song; it is a vibration that could separate all the atoms in your body if you listen too long. Asleep in their branches, wrapped in the vibration of their song I hear them say they are my relations, my origins and my future.

### Mahihkanwak - The Wolves

My kokum used to say I was born to my family; it just took some time for me to find them. After years of existing invisibly on the edge of everything, in and out of foster homes and empty apartments, not fully alive or dead, I met Wannetta Wolfe. She came to my house (to steal from me) and when she saw that I had no furniture and ate out of cans she invited me to her house, fed me and befriended me.

That winter, when the snow began to fall I had no jacket and was wearing broken sandals that I had stolen in the summer. The heels had worn away and I would curl my toes over the front to keep my feet off the snow. Wannetta saw this and invited me to go to the store with her after school; she had \$5 – a big deal. At the store she led me to a bin of \$3 tennis shoes. I cried. She showed me the first human

kindness I had known in a long time.

She showed me I was worth shoes.

One day soon after, we were beading our powwow outfits at her house when she announced to her family, “She has nothing, her mum beat’s her; we’re keeping her.” Her mum looked up from beading and said, “You girls do the dishes, and eat something.”

That was that, I was theirs. Years later I was adopted traditionally at our annual powwow and that is how I came to be raised by Wolves.