

## An Interdisciplinary Journal

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

## Editorial

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This special “Sixties Scoop” and Indigenous child welfare edition of the *First Peoples Child & Family Review* came about through a discussion with Cindy Blackstock at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indigenous Adoptee Gathering that was held in the summer of 2015 at the University of Manitoba. We were honoured that Cindy was the keynote speaker. I pushed my way through the crowds that were flocking around her after her talk with an agenda of getting her involved in Sixties Scoop research that I had been working on developing for over six years. She agreed and is now a co-Investigator of a 5-year project funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council entitled “A genealogical study of Indigenous adoption in Canada: A multifaceted examination of the removal of Indigenous children with a concentration on policy shifts between the years of 1950 and 1985.” The informal name of the project is the “Pe-kīwēwin Project.”<sup>1</sup> Cindy suggested that we launch our research collaboration with this special edition and I am pleased to present six articles and two creative submissions by students and academics across the country. While it is true that the history, the ideologies, and the apparatus’ underpinning the Indigenous child welfare system are disheartening, it is my hope that readers will also see the common themes in these submissions – strength and resilience, and a collective will to work towards positive change.

The special issue begins with a creative piece by Denali YoungWolfe, MA student in Indigenous Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. As a former foster kid, and a traditional adoptee, Denali has a strong grounding in her adopted *nehiyaw kiskeyihtamowin* (Cree knowledge). She has an intricate understanding of the anguish of familial loss and the joy of discovering a home. Her brief but poignant piece give us insight into how traditional adoption practices have worked since time immemorial, and also how Indigenous knowledge can provide a lifeline for survival and for hope. As an adoptee, works like Denali’s provide me with moments of healing to continue my work. My own contribution, which is much less poetic, but perhaps as profound, “The Indigenous Child Removal System in Canada,” provides a brief historical context of residential schools and colonial assimilation policies that have led to the disproportionate statistics of Indigenous children in state care. I focus on how legal precedents and bias in decision-making contribute to the ongoing removal of Indigenous children from families and culture. My intention in this article is to highlight key problematics of child welfare legal decision-making and to call for an overhaul of the child welfare system.

In the article “You’re Native but you’re not Native Looking,” Munira Abdulwasi, Marilyn Evans,

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<sup>1</sup> Interested readers can learn more about the research at [www.pekiwewin.ca](http://www.pekiwewin.ca)

and Lillian Magalhaes capture the adoption outcomes of Aboriginal veterans in Canada. These themes are echoed in virtually every dissertation and thesis written on the topic. Belonging, racism, and resilience represent the adoptee experience. Many adoptees have gone into the Armed Forces (myself included) and this article provides a bird's-eye perspective of the military experience for adoptees in addition to their adoption related identity and mental health issues. Barb Nahwegahbow, a highly respected Anishinaabe journalist, focuses on a single family and provides an insightful and compassionate rendering in "Transracial Adoption: One Family's Journey." The story would be considered a successful adoption because of the positive outcome, however, it also educates the reader about the harsh reality that even positive adoption experiences were fraught with emotional and psychological challenges. Barb's article spotlights the critical point that adoptive families must recognize that when they adopt a child of another culture, the whole family becomes bi-cultural, not just the child. The Lee family, who strove to "Indigenize" themselves long before Indigenization became popular, and their adoption story should be an exemplar for future adoptions and fostering of Indigenous children.

The second creative piece in this special edition is Celeste Pedri-Spade's poem "Our Time to Dance," which evokes the themes of loss, grieving, resilience, and hope. In some ways, this poem is an emotional interlude as we move into some challenging topics of parenting assessments, human rights, and trauma recovery.

Turning our attention toward the cultural relevance of Aboriginal parenting assessments, Gabrielle Lindstrom and Peter Choate, in "Nistawatsiman: Rethinking Assessment of Aboriginal Parents for Child Welfare Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," draw upon the knowledge and expertise of Blackfoot Elders to educate us about traditional Blackfoot perspectives on children and families, and to argue that current parenting assessment models are based on western child-rearing perspectives. This uninterrogated bias puts Aboriginal parents at a disadvantage because of cultural disparities and cultural disruption. We can understand these disparities better through theoretical articles like Clara Filipetti's "The Treatment of Aboriginal Children in Canada: A Violation of Human Rights Demanding Remedy" that analyze Canadian child welfare through a human rights lens. Clara teaches us the difference between universal, natural, and legal rights, and suggests that an integrated human rights framework will redress the current disparities in Indigenous child welfare funding and other services.

Lastly, Autumn Varley captures a theme that will resonate with adoptees far and wide in her title "You Don't Just Get Over What Has Happened to You: Story Sharing, Reconciliation, and Grandma's Journey in the Child Welfare System." Autumn provides an autoethnographic account of her family's history and experience with the Sixties Scoop, reminding us that the Indigenous child welfare era has been in operation for generations and each family's journey merits recognition. Her article is a perfect conclusion to this collection, by reinforcing that despite generations of trauma, many Indigenous families have survived through resilience, healing, and reconciliation with the past.

In closing, I will speak for all of us when I say that we write these words with love and respect for those who could not tell their own stories and we acknowledge and honour all those who did not survive the child welfare system.

*Ekosi. Kinanaskomitinawaw kahkiyaw niwahkomakanak.*