

KII HII-WES 'II-NIM, 'II-NIM WEN 'IPT! (THIS IS MINE, MY SONG!)

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by

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Authorization to Submit

KII HII-WES 'II-NIM, 'II-NIM WEN 'IPT! (THIS IS MINE, MY SONG!)

This thesis of James A. Walker, submitted for the degree of a Master of Arts with a Major in Interdisciplinary Studies and titled "KII HII-WES 'II-NIM, 'II-NIM WEN 'IPT! (THIS IS MINE, MY SONG!)," has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates below, is now granted to submit final copies to the College of Graduate Studies for approval.

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of Christian Nez Perce translated hymns. The selected hymns within this research continue to have special meaning for the Christian Nez Perce still singing them in religious ceremony. This research is intended to show the healing nature of these hymns and their significance to culture, identity and spirituality of the Christian Nez Perce. Also, within this examination, there will be an explanation of how these hymns are being utilized and included in an educational experience.

Acknowledgements

This journey for knowledge continues to rely on the significant contributions from elders, community members, and the congregations of the six Indian Presbyterian Churches of the Nez Perce Tribe. Their stories and family histories are strong representations of the continued survival of the Nez Perce people and culture. It is with tremendous respect and appreciation, that I offer my gratitude for their support and willingness to share their heart knowledge. Their stories hold amazing reflections of the spirit found in our translated hymns, which still strenghtens me through this process.

It is necessary to acknowledge the members of my committee. To my major professor, Rodney Frey, I cherish your patience and belief in me to move forward with an Indigenous methodology and framework and the faith you have in the heart knowledge that we all seek. I feel privileged to have been one of the last graduate students to work with you upon your retirement. To Chad Hamill, I appreciate your encouragement to proceed with my path through higher education and earning a Master's degree. You convinced me to take my Native American Music final paper and turn it into a Master's thesis. It inspired me to move forward with this project and it was the confidence boost I needed to situate myself in academia as an Indigenous scholar. To Jan Johnson, thank you for the nurturing guidance through Native American Literature, which allowed me to find, understand and write my voice. To Harold Crook, thank you for demonstrating a passion and discipline in your field of study. Your work with the Nez Perce language and elders is appreciated and recognized by me and many Nez Perce people interested in the preservation of our language. To Barry Bilderback, thank you for solidifying my committee and dedicating your time to this important ethnomusicology project. Our work together allowed me to network at the

University of Idaho's Music Department and engage with projects bigger than us as individuals. This experience reflected the true nature of an Interdisciplinary degree and helped me gain a deeper appreciation of my time as a graduate student.

Lastly, I want to thank the students and staff at the Native American Student Association and Native House at the University of Idaho for being the familiar extended family, which resides in all of our home reservations.

Dedication

To my grandfather Lynus “Poppo” Walker. This work is inspired by your teachings and the way you lived your life.

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Preface

This thesis will focus on the nature and importance of Nez Perce Presbyterian hymns. As a Nez Perce myself and member of the Second Indian Presbyterian Church, I will be using an Indigenous methodology to examine the hymns, and an Indigenous style to present the research here. The translated hymns that are being examined will be presented in their original written form. They are specific selections from *Nee Mi Putimt Ki Wanipt: Nez Perce Presbyterian Hymnbook Religious Songs*, which is copyrighted by the Joint Session of the Nez Perce Indian Presbyterian Churches. These hymns were originally written in the Nez Perce language in an orthography developed by the missionaries based on American English.

The actual English translations for the hymn books were never written by the authors with the published text. In order to provide an English translation for each song, there will be an appropriate copy from work done by elders and linguists from the community. My spelling of the Nez Perce language in this thesis is done using the Nez Perce Tribe's practical orthography developed by Haruo Aoki and several Nez Perce elders, and which follows in part the International Phonetic Alphabet. Some of the source material will be given in the original missionary orthography and will be noted as such.

Many of the participants in this research own their own hymn books and many have their own English translations written for their favorite hymns. It is important to note that the literal meaning of each English hymn was not always conveyed in the Nez Perce language. The original translation from English to Nez Perce was done at a time when most Nez Perce

were fluent speakers and the old style of speaking was still in use. Therefore, many of the hymns have a cultural relevance that may vary from the English version. Also, with the reduction in Nez Perce speaking people, the meanings of some of the words, terms or phrases may have, subsequently, been lost.

These Christian worship songs are representative of syncretism. They combine the theology of Christianity with the Nez Perce culture and language to produce a syncretic song. In their article entitled “Musical Syncretism at the Missions,” Dr. Loran Olsen and Thomas Connolly, SJ, explain, “These songs of combination (which, for example, might exhibit texts from one culture over melody from another) we call syncretisms.”¹ Olsen recorded and compiled a significant sample of music from the Nez Perce which can be found in the Nez Perce Music Archives at Spalding National Historical Museum near Lapwai, Idaho. This process with Nez Perce translated hymns produced a unique worship song that remains in the Christian church but displays a distinct Nez Perce cultural aspect. The style of singing being the most evident.

The translation of the Nez Perce language in these hymns reveal a specific understanding of Christian theology for the Nez Perce people. The Nez Perce translated the commonalities of religious understanding to find a common ground with Presbyterianism. These parallels allowed for the new religious songs to emerge as being representative of two cultures melding. Olsen and Connolly state, “As the two groups converged, two ancient and complex musical traditions met. These musical repertoires remained individual and discretely separate; but a composite offspring arose, reflecting the realities of cultural interaction and

¹ Loran Olsen and Thomas E. Connolly, S.J., “Musical Syncretism at the Missions” in *European Review Of Native American Studies*, 15:1 2001, 13.

merging spirituality.”² This process of syncretism between the Nez Perce and the Presbyterian Church produced a new culture which has remained. These syncretic songs continue to be a source of identity for the Christian Nez Perce and they represent an aspect of culture which requires a sense of ownership in their continued customary practice.

This study and examination utilizes an Indigenous research framework. This is a framework involving place, language, respect, relationship, reciprocity and narrative. The primary source material for research methodology in this thesis comes from Margaret Kovach and Shawn Wilson. Their books describe the conceptual model of Indigenous research and the methodologies they utilize to conduct research in Indigenous communities. More importantly, they defend the space for Indigenous research and methodology within the scope of the western academy. Each author provides good insight for scholars interested in utilizing this type of conceptual framework in their own research models. Their work is inspiring for Native and non-Native researchers because it offers a choice or alternative for research strategy, particularly for research within Indigenous communities.

The knowledge I seek from my Nez Perce community is tied to our culture through place, language and the oral tradition. It is a holistic way of co-existing with the environment around us and offers a worldview which can be regarded as a beneficial contribution to the western way of knowing. In her book, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, Kovach provides an analysis of Indigenous research that supports aligning the research design with the spirit of the Indigenous communities to allow for the sharing of knowledge in a respectful way. She also speaks to the idea of reciprocity, which allows for the research to benefit the community it came from. Her analysis requires an ethical approach that is focused on maintaining a responsibility to the community being

² Olsen and Connolly, “Syncretism at the Missions,” 13.

researched. There is also a need for self-location which helped guide me throughout my research. I seek to honor my elders and teachers, embracing our interrelationships of support, and anchoring myself as a relationship within them and this research. My elders, to whom I am most grateful, will be introduced and fully acknowledged at various points within the body of this thesis.

Wilson addresses the application of an Indigenous research paradigm in his book, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. He stresses the importance of situating yourself within the research to allow for relational accountability. This requires that the researcher have a good heart and the awareness of building positive relationships with place, people and self. His book explores the way research can flow within the sacred circle of Indigenous culture and reveal authentic forms of knowledge from Indigenous communities. The knowledge revealed is best served to express our connection and relationship to ourselves, our earth and the cosmos.

The works of Kovach and Wilson has inspired the utilization of an Indigenous research paradigm by two Nez Perce scholars at the University of Idaho. Yolanda Bisbee and Arthur Taylor applied this conceptual framework to our own Nez Perce community and were blessed with producing authentic representations of teaching and learning through Nez Perce epistemology or ways of knowing. Their work speaks to the need for further Indigenous research projects. Their contributions add to the growing body of Indigenous research which only serves to improve and validate the use of an Indigenous research paradigm in the western academy. This thesis is a direct inspiration from the presentations of these Indigenous scholars.

This process has allowed me to consider my own story as “data” throughout the research. This opportunity to examine the “self” within the research offers a reflective narrative to emerge as an unfolding story. The flow of the thesis is as an epic oral story, with many characters (many voices,) and a plotline seemingly meandering as a great river (one thought flowing into another). There are italicized sections that reflect my own voice and experiences that are set apart from the more formal writing, and act as a framing and lead into the main body of text. This is an examination that relies on oral tradition and storytelling, interviews with knowledgeable elders and teachers, as well as, documenting the actual singing of the hymns. I also utilized my unique position within the tribe and Indian Presbyterian Church to engage with participant observation as a tool for gathering research information.

My role as a Native scholar is revealed through this research project as a personal journey seeking knowledge. This is an important aspect of the research because it relates to understanding the Indigenous framework approach. This relational accountability is reflected in the nature of the journey and provides an authentic perspective on and connection to the Nez Perce community. This is an accumulative piece which draws from my own story, oral tradition and family history. It is meant to present a unique story within which other Christian Nez Perce can identify and reflect upon with their own perspective, interpretation and life experience.

The significance of place is also a major component of this research. Every Fourth of July, the Nez Perce Presbyterian churches gather at a place called Talmaks to camp, worship and sing. The churches have been meeting at this location since 1910, where the songs, anchored to this place, remain as a powerful testament to their continued survival.

And finally, a vital component of this examination is the Nez Perce language. It is important to note that very few fluent speakers remain. There is an ongoing language preservation effort within the Nez Perce tribe and it is my hope that this study will benefit those efforts as a way of reciprocating and “giving back” for what I have received and cherish. This connection between language preservation and translated hymn resurrection will serve as inspiration for those concerned with changing Nez Perce tradition, and those dedicated to helping it remain.

Kii hii-wes 'ii-nim, 'ii-nim wen 'ipt! (This is mine, my song!)

Introduction

When I woke up it was raining. Raining like it always does at Talmaks. I think the church bell woke me up or maybe that was a dream. The camp outside was quiet except for the fire, which was still managing to burn in the rain somehow. So, I just lay there and listened to the tapping on the canvas. It became louder and the tempo sped up and then it died down again. After a while, I could hear the quiet wind shaking the last drops of rain from the pine branches above the tipi, sending them to tap on the canvas one last time. It signaled the end of the morning rain storm.

Then I heard them start to sing at the church. It was muffled at first, but then I recognized the song as it moved through the trees. It was “Blessed Assurance.” They were singing a Nez Perce translated hymn, one that I have always known. The song seemed to embrace my spirit and flow through my heart. It tells a familiar story that all Christian Nez Perce know, including my family. Waking up to the ringing of the bell for sunrise service or listening to the rain bounce off the tipi canvas is a familiar life experience of this place: Talmaks. This is my story, this is my song!

We travel to this prairie butte to pray through song. There is power in this place. It is difficult to describe in words but one can find it on this ridge top; this is where it exists in its purest form. It shapes who we are and connects us with our ancestors. It holds a piece of our identity as Christian Nez Perce. Margaret Kovach speaks of the importance of place in her book *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations And Context*: “Place links present with past and our personal self with kinship groups. What we know flows through us from the ‘echo of generations,’ and our knowledges cannot be universalized because they

arise from our experience with our places. This is why name-place stories matter: they are repositories of science, they tell of relationships, they reveal history, and they hold our identity.”³ This is true of Talmaks for us Christian Nez Perce.

When we participate in singing these sacred hymns at Talmaks, we know we belong here. The generations before us have done the work and made this place for us. We are aware of the sacrifices they made to ensure our survival today. Our people have endured through near genocide to continue on and it is important for me to re-visit this story and examine the pain and suffering in order to address the process of forgiveness. More importantly, the process will allow us to understand the necessity to heal the wounds of historical trauma, a trauma that still exists for our people today in many forms. We must continue to sing these translated hymns at Talmaks because they tell our story. This story holds truth, knowledge and power, which can heal.

For the Elders

First, I have to give an introduction of myself and a brief family history. It is the Indian way of respecting my elders and it is important that I acknowledge them in this manner. In this way, they already know who I am through my relatives that have gone before me. This acknowledgement and introduction serves as a formal request to have the honor of writing my story. This process allows for the community to be aware of my intentions and give me the proper blessing to go forward.

My great-great grandfather, *Husis Maqs Maqs* (Yellow Head), was a veteran of the Nez Perce War of 1877, and he was in every battle of the war. He was from the Salmon River and belonged to the White Bird band of Nez Perce, and a believer in the traditional Nez

³ Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, And Contexts*, 61.

Perce Dreamer religion. The terrible war between the United States and the Nez Perce ended with the surrendering of the Nez Perce after the battle in the Bear Paw Mountains of Montana. Most of the surviving men, women and children were further traumatized by being exiled to Indian Territory which is now Oklahoma and Kansas. Many people died there of disease and bad water, especially the old people, infants and young children. More of our people died while in exile than in the war. *Husis Maqs Maqs* converted to Christianity there and was allowed to return home to Kamiah, Idaho. He adopted the anglicized name of John Walker and raised his grandson Lynus in the Christian faith. This is my mother's father or *piláqa'*. We all called him Poppo. This is our family's history.

It is important for me to write this Nez Perce history, which has remained in our hearts, as a reference to the survival of our ancestors and their plight. My family and I have continued on with our Nez Perce way of being, allowing me this small written piece to acknowledge them as contributors to the extensive Nez Perce history in this place. My story today is only possible because of their survival and it is them that guide me in the writing of this story. My ancestors have chosen me in this way to write our story.

This story will emerge in the manner of a reflexive narrative. This narrative has the potential to be powerful in the context of family and culture awareness of the healing which can occur through story. Dr. Robbie Paul, a Nez Perce, writes in her dissertation, "It is time to begin the process of healing. But before we can heal, we need to know our story, the unspoken stories of history, and the unhealed woundedness that has been passed down through the generations."⁴ She expressed the need for all Nez Perce to examine historical trauma in order to understand the symptoms it causes which continue to plague our people

⁴ Robbie Paul, *Historical Trauma and its Effects on a Ni Mii Puu Family: Finding Story-Healing Wounds*, 9.

today. She wrote her story as a reflexive narrative to encourage other Nez Perce to do the same and I find myself in the position to take her lead.

Our culture has been preserved through the oral tradition, which includes storytelling, song and ceremony. Lori Lambert discusses this in her book *Research for Indigenous Survival*: “Stories or narratives are the origin of American Indian oral tradition and are the means for sharing knowledge and passing it from one generation to another. Stories build bridges between two interpretations of an event.”⁵ This understanding of oral tradition allows us to express ourselves and realize the importance of revealing this knowledge. Our identity as Christian Nez Perce lives on through our custom of singing translated hymns which have been passed down in the oral tradition and are an example of syncretism. The existence of these prayer songs are a direct result of two cultures merging, like two rivers flowing together. Within this process sits many stories, and within those stories there is knowledge. Linda Tuhwai Smith explains that

Coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges . . . Telling our stories from the past, reclaiming the past, giving testimony to the injustices of the past are all strategies which are commonly employed by indigenous peoples struggling for justice. On the international scene it is extremely rare and unusual when indigenous accounts are accepted and acknowledged as valid interpretations of what has taken place.⁶

⁵ Lori Lambert, *Research for Indigenous Survival: Indigenous Research Methodologies in the Behavioral Sciences*, 29.

⁶ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 36.

The motivation behind this work is to share our resilient story of survival with hopes of offering inspiration to those which have similar stories that need to be expressed. This opportunity may offer the potential for healing to all people.

There is still a historical trauma that exists within our family and our tribe because of the war. There is an inter-generational process that carries the trauma and it has been expressed through time as symptoms of the original trauma that occurred during the war and subsequent exile. For many of us, the origin of these symptoms is still a mystery and many Nez Perce do not realize they are a direct result of the traumatic events that happened to our ancestors a long time ago. The singing of our translated hymns has always provided us the power to heal. We use song as prayer and it connects us to spirit. Our ancestors still live within the spirit and the song allows for this connection to occur. Chad Hamill offers this from his book *Songs of Power and Prayer in the Columbia Plateau: The Jesuit, the Medicine Man, and the Indian Hymn Singer*: “At the center of this process often sits the song, serving as a catalyst and conduit by which power’s potential is realized.”⁷ We have found safety, serenity and a saving grace in these songs. The power lives within the ceremony itself. This is our testament and way of knowing and relating to it. It is why we sing the songs.

Second Indian Presbyterian Church

I awoke stuck in a dream. The moment was real to me and somehow this experience actually happened. It was a living testament for my life as a Christian Nez Perce. The landscape was familiar and the people there were family and friends. The place was Second Church in Kamiah. We were singing a round dance song or traditional music of the people.

⁷ Chad Hamill, *Songs of Power and Prayer in the Columbia Plateau: The Jesuit, the Medicine Man, and the Indian Hymn Singer*, 63.

This song doesn't belong in the old village. Why are we singing this song? We only sing translated hymns in the Indian way at this place.

My cousin Maple, our elder and leader was participating and her demeanor was happy and serene. There was a sense of unity and love about this event. It occurred to me that we weren't in the church, though, this event was happening on the church ground. I was witnessing something out of the ordinary, but somehow it belonged. The people were joining together and dancing in a circle. The drum was in the middle of the circle; in the old way.

Some of the people were unfamiliar to me, although, I knew many as our current congregation. The non-Indians were our friends of the community and they were expressing gratitude of this experience. Certain people stood out to me and my gaze became stuck on them. They were inviting me to the circle and their images came from the black and white photos which were on the walls of our dining hall. I suddenly realized they were ancestors and they were old. The men were dressed in coveralls and Stetsons and the women had shawls draped over their shoulders and moccasins on their feet. They assured me without words that it was okay. Come join us because you belong here. Come and dance in this circle.

My family belongs to the Second Indian Presbyterian Church in Kamiah. It is one of six Indian Presbyterian churches located on our reservation. It was established in 1890 as the result of a separation of two factions within the First Indian Presbyterian Church. First Church was organized in 1871 and is the oldest Protestant church in Idaho still in use.⁸ This division of the First Church congregation happened due to a power struggle between Sue McBeth, a leading missionary and government allotting agent and Archie Lawyer, a

⁸ Wanda Dunn, Dixie Ann Morris, and Vivian Seubert, interview by James A. Walker, March 16, 2017.

recognized leader through the old chief system and son of Chief Lawyer.⁹ Although their quarrel revolved around class, race and gender,¹⁰ the outcome allowed a mostly kinship faction to develop a new church. From his research on Nez Perce religion and politics, Deward Walker states “Kinship was important in the formation of the withdrawing faction, with nuclear and extended family solidarity being quite prominent.”¹¹ Walker’s book *Conflict & Schism In Nez Perce Acculturation: A Study of Religion and Politics* offers good insight and history of the Nez Perce Indian Churches. This kinship affiliation is still the tie that bonds within Second Church. My grandfather, Poppo, is a descendent of the Lawyer Band through his mother and this is why our family continues to gather here.

One of my earliest memories of the Second Indian Presbyterian Church in Kamiah, Idaho is of the old Indian ladies, with their shawls draped over their shoulders and handkerchiefs on their heads, peacefully singing the translated hymn “Blessed Assurance.” For me, these Christian songs have always sounded so beautiful when sung in the Nez Perce language. These songs have a spiritual significance within my soul. They hold a strong representation of the power of prayer in song within our Nez Perce culture and the translations hold a connection to the old way of speaking our language. Certain translated hymns are sung as favorites by the Presbyterian Nez Perce, some of which have survived for several generations in the church.

Song Number 96

BLESSED ASSURANCE

1. Jesus ekuin, kewas inim, hinau win tsitskeyitswit
Takeswit, sapukeswiyawat, itamyin Godnim, epnim

⁹ Kate McBeth, *The Nez Percés Since Lewis and Clark*, 117.

¹⁰ Bonnie Sue Lewis, *Creating Christian Indians: Native Clergy in the Presbyterian Church*, 126.

¹¹ Deward E. Walker, Jr., *Conflict & Schism In Nez Perce Acculturation: Study of Religion and Politics*, 68.

Spirit ipnim kikaat.

Chorus:

Kehewas inim, inim wanipith, watasih Savorna pala-
Hainpa, kekewas inim, inim wanipith, watasih Savorna
Palahaipa.

2. Tsaiyu namayalwanas, liloisnih, itamyin wako kaiyah
Hakeynaspa, Angels hutamakessih, akamkinikai, hitka-
Suksai musiyayaunkt hatawit.¹²

(1)

Ciisus 'ikúunu' hiiwes 'iinim
Jesus truly he-is mine

Kiinewin' cicqi'icwit teq'iswit
Taste greatness exaltedness

Sapóoq'iswiyaw'aat 'itam'yiin Godnim
Healer sold God-of

'ipnimki Spirit 'ipnim kike't.
His-by Spirit his blood.

(Chorus)

Kii hiiwes 'iinim, 'iinim we'nípt
This is mine my song

Watá'six Saviorna péeleheype,
We-praising Savior all-day

Kii hiiwes 'iinim, 'iinim we'nípt
This is mine my song

Watá'six Saviorna péeleheype,
We-praising Savior all-day

(2)

Cá'ya namáayalwan'as liloy'snix
No giving-up very-happy

¹² Axtell, Parsons, and Waters, *Nee Mi Putimt Ki Wanipt*, 96.

'itam'yiin wáaqo' k'ey'ix hekin'espe
 Sold already clear appearance-in

'éyncels hitéem'iksix 'aqámkin'ikaay
 Angels descending heaven-from

Hitqasáwqsa misiyéewkt héetewit.
 It-echoes mercy love.¹³

The chorus is the title of my thesis. I chose it because it conveys an ambiguous understanding of identity for me. It is a powerful testament for us Christian Nez Perce to sing, *this is mine, my song*. The phrase is stating an ownership within the Christian faith. The hymn is giving praise to my savior and expressing the desire to do it every day. This song allows me to express the joy of knowing my identity as a Christian. By singing this with other Christian Nez Perce, we are affirming our belief in a saving grace. Chloe Halfmoon, an elder from the Spalding Church in Lapwai, remembers her ancestors and their congregation singing a long time ago: “They would get so down and dedicated with the words they had said and meaning it, actually, really meaning what they were singing.”¹⁴ The connection to singing translated hymns has always represented a religious identity for us. It tells our story.

This memory of true faith from Chloe’s elders continues to inspire her Christian faith. She remembers that church life and worship at Spalding Church was morning, noon and night. This exposure to a disciplined life around the church led her to having a strong faith in Christ:

We have many old, old people I can remember, how sincere, in their faith, and I look at, uh, the descendants of some of those old people. How dedicated, the love they had for Christ and to try to bring people to the Lord. We used to have this one lady. I don’t know if you’re familiar with when we had

¹³ Harold Crook & Angel Sobotta, *Adult Nimipuutimt*, 2001-02.

¹⁴ Chloe Halfmoon, interview by James A. Walker, February 2, 2017.

invitations at church. But they would give the invitation that was expecting people to come up, forward, to accept Christ as your savior, to be forgiven of your sins and ask for forgiveness. But some of the ladies and men that were, kind of like, out in the world, you might say. We had this one older lady, she was just cute. Whenever we'd sing our hymns for; to come forward. And we'd see her get up, and she'd walk around, you know, going to the people that she knew that were in trouble and needed to go forward. She was cute. And we were younger girls back in those days. And I remember sitting down, oh, I hope she walks by us, you know, make sure she doesn't come by us! Like, as if we were really guilty of anything. We were little then! [laughs] But they were so sincere and so dedicated. All the old people, I can just see, just like, we had this one older man, Jonas Watters. That was Sam Watters' father. And he was a cute little man. He sat right up front and he wore a suit. Only time he wore a suit was on Sundays. And then seeing him, and then, the old, old people like Molly Pliter. She sat way in the back. That was, um, Jim Reynold's mother. And then we had Kathryn Cloud, the Pewaukee's, you know. I get lonesome when I go in the church, because as a kid, I remember where everybody sat. And how they sang and how they prayed and how dedicated they were. We had good memories at Spalding Church.¹⁵

It is not difficult to see the inspiration with her recollection. Chloe had many of these stories regarding the faith of her elders.

¹⁵ Chloe Halfmoon, interview by James A. Walker, February 2, 2017.

From a cultural standpoint, it is acknowledging the understanding of song within an individual. The ownership of a song has the ability to identify someone completely, in the Nez Perce way of knowing. This idea of protecting an individual came from spirit, but the song assisted in the process at any time during life. This is most evident in the ancient cultural practice of seeking a tutelary spirit, Walker explains “The central position in aboriginal Nez Perce religion was occupied by the *wéeyekin*, or tutelary spirit, and the notion of power. The *wéeyekin* was a spiritual assistant obtained by most aboriginal Nez Perce and was essential for anything other than a mediocre performance as an adult. Power, on the other hand, was defined as the supernaturally sanctioned ability conferred by the spirit.”¹⁶ This protective spirit was obtained during a person’s youth and carried throughout their lifetime. The *wéeyekin* came in many forms, but usually as an animal. Most often, it gave the person a song: “The single, most important aspect of having tutelary spirit power probably was possession of the song imparted during the quest and later re-learned when the individual had his power “straightened out” as an adult.”¹⁷ For thousands of years, the Nez Perce utilized song to express identity. This identity was associated with our relationship to the environment around us and the power centered in this place. The river, a chipmunk, or the night sky could all be sources of *wéeyekin* power for the Nez Perce.

This hymn, “Blessed Assurance,” is affirming this notion of a protecting and guiding spirit for us as Christian Nez Perce. A song has always held the power to provide a transport into a spiritual realm. It contained an element which could be utilized to access a place where protection was offered. This hymn has the ability to carry us closer to the spiritual realm of heaven, where we believe protection and forgiveness lie and provides “an alignment of a

¹⁶ Walker, *Conflict & Schism*, 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 21.

precontact sense of the sacred with a new spiritual savior.”¹⁸ The need for a savior was an important concept to the Nez Perce after the War of 1877. Accepting something with power as a protecting spirit, through song, was certainly not a foreign idea or change in obtaining a spiritual identity.

This hymn holds true to our faith, yet can express our lives and history on a personal level. Laurie Lynn Parrish recalls pondering the power of the chorus line, *this is mine, mine song*, while listening to her great-grandfather, Wally Wheeler, sing this hymn:

I have a recording of him singing “Blessed Assurance, in bed, it was probably two days before he passed. And that song, even when he was healthy, whenever he would sing that song, I would just get so emotional thinking of his life. You know, like this is, what is his song? Or, what is his story? Like his, you know, his parents are Harry and Ida Wheeler. They are, as we learned more about them, they are historians, they’re very well respected people, they helped Haru Aoki put together the Nez Perce dictionary. That this, kind of like, yearning for knowing the language, like it makes sense to me now. Because my great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents were a big part of that. You know saving, wanting to preserve our language and so it makes sense why I want to learn it. Anyways, like this Blessed Assurance, I would think of Grandpa Wally’s life. Like, all that he’s seen, WWII and you watch movies about it. Your just like, how did he ever make it home? I mean, how did he live through that? Or, how did he even come home and be a decent

¹⁸ Hamill, *Songs of Power and Prayer*, 51.

person? You know, how could you love life after all that you've been through or all that you've seen? And he is just a loving person.¹⁹

Laurie Lynn's recollection of her great-grandfather singing this hymn led her to contemplate an important family history and his life story. More importantly, it led her to a basic understanding of her desire to continue learning our language. It was inspiring for her to put critical thought and meaning to the custom of singing our hymns.

Poppo

Now that I have my driver's license, my mother has nominated me to drive Poppo to K-Mart. It is not that bad, though, I am a teenager for crying out loud. Doesn't she know that I have a girlfriend? Poppo does and he couldn't stop giggling when he seen she was Korean. I am sure he thinks she is Chinese. The more I think about it, he probably wants me to hook up with one of the Lee girls. Their father, Jack, is the owner of "Eng's: Chinese and American Food," my grandfather's favorite restaurant. The Lee sisters are all around my age.

Poppo likes having conversation with Jack Lee, who is from China. He has a great laugh and calls my grandpa "Chief" and feels like such an American doing so. In Idaho, the white people hold on to such stereotypical references for their Indian neighbors. In typical Poppo fashion, he replies, "How's it going Hong Kong Chief!" They both laugh and Jack walks back to the kitchen without asking what we will order, because Poppo orders the same thing every time.

Today, at K-Mart, we ran into Wally Wheeler. He and Poppo are speaking Nez Perce to one another. This is going to take a while. They won't quit with the language. Sometimes I

¹⁹ Laurie Lynn Parrish, interview by James A. Walker, February 16, 2017.

wish they had taught me so I could understand what they were talking about. It makes me curious of how they might translate “Blue Light Special” in Nez Perce. I know it wouldn’t be a literal or word for word translation. Most likely, they would make a reference to the sky or water. When the blue light special goes off in K-Mart it looks like a police car. I’m sure they have some old school police story to reference that would make them laugh.

On our way home, the song “You Light Up My Life” by Debbie Boone came on the radio. This is Poppo’s favorite song and he turned the volume up loud. The song is about Jesus being in your life. He really likes it, this is pretty cool, cruising and jamming out with Poppo! After the song was over, he turned the radio off and started in on his own Christian tune. He started singing a translated hymn, “Down At The Cross.” I guess he was inspired.

We have always called my *piláqa’* or mother’s father, Poppo. He taught me the importance of living a good Christian life. When he was on his death bed at my mother’s house, he requested the ministers of our churches to visit and administer one last communion. He had an everlasting faith in his heart and soul, and lived his entire life as a good Christian Nez Perce. He enjoyed listening to his old cassette recordings of translated hymns. When I was visiting with him one afternoon, he quietly sang along with his recording of “Blessed Assurance.” This song has always been my favorite hymn. He was a fluent speaker of our language, thus, he could translate a much deeper meaning with the hymns.

Mary Jane Miles, a member of First Church and our current Pastor, remembers sitting near Poppo at Talmaks to hear him pronounce the words within the hymns: “I used to like to sit in front of Lynus Walker at Talmaks and hear him sing, because he seemed to sang [sing] the words the way they should be sung, or said.”²⁰ When examining the hymns, this becomes an interesting point. The Nez Perce words were written phonetically in the hymnbooks.

²⁰ Mary Jane Miles, interview by James A. Walker, February 9, 2017.

These spellings are not the best way to allow for a reader to make proper pronunciations. The process, over time, has led to us singing many of the words incorrectly. Many of the words change in pronunciation when they are sung. This may be attributed to fitting the words into an easier melodic structure. However, with the decline in fluent speakers it may be that we are just mispronouncing the words due to the way they were originally written.

'lice' 'mother'

The year was 1956 and Elvis Presley was going to be on the television. Connie and Sal made plans to watch at their grandparents' house, since they did not own a television. They were typical teenagers growing up in Kamiah, Idaho. They were excited to see Elvis perform. They always had a place at their Mother's parents' house because that is the function of an extended family on the reservation. Connie and Sal had to know their Nez Perce language in their house because their great-grandmother lived there and she made them speak. They had a wonderful time translating "Ready Teddy" and "Jailhouse Rock." She could understand a simple translation like "Don't Be Cruel" and "Love Me Tender."

In their living room a picture sat on the piano. It was of their mother's younger sister, Lilly Moody. She was dressed in her Army nursing uniform; the photo had taken in the mid-1940's while she was away at the Army Nurse Cadet Program at Lewiston Normal Hill in Lewiston, ID. Everyone in the family was proud of her and this picture served as a reminder of the success of the youngest child. Lilly contracted tuberculosis and died at the Indian hospital in Tacoma, Washington. Connie often wondered what her Aunt could have been. The picture, a powerful image at her grandparents', served as an inspiration for her to become a nurse.

This small story of my '*tice*', or mother, is framed to show the way an educated person in an Indian family can inspire a journey into higher education. My mother did continue on with her education and became a nurse enlisted in the Army and served the country in the Vietnam conflict: "We were poor. We lived in crowded conditions, no plumbing and electricity, so for me, it was just getting off the reservation."²¹ She has an incredible story, which I cannot delve into for this thesis. However, her ability to rise out of poverty from the reservation certainly inspired me to be educated. The result for me contained an element of expectation, as well as a privileged position. It was always expected of me to do well in school and continue on into higher education.

In this story I inserted a language reference to help the reader contemplate the difficult process of translating ideas or concepts of western ways of knowing into the Nez Perce language. In this case it was popular American culture. The same can be said for a religious concept. Also, it is important to note the history of language decline in my family. My mother's oldest sister, Mary Jane "Tootsie" Souther, was the last in our family to experience the old tradition of child rearing in Nez Perce culture.

At a young age she and her brother, Jerry Walker, were sent to live with their grandparents. Tootsie was sent to live with Lizzie Moody, her mother's mother. This is the household described above. At this home, the primary language was Nez Perce. Certain instruction pertaining to a woman's role were taught and many oral traditions were passed down. She recalls coyote stories ever present with her grandfather Bill Moody. She was mentored in the sweat house and learned of old medicines, including a women's love potion.²²

²¹ Yolanda Bisbee, *The Native American Persistence In Higher Education*, 53.

²² Mary Jane Souther, interview by Steve Evans and Allen Pinkham, 2003.

My mother's parents were more concerned with the ability of their children to master the English language and literacy, thus, abandoning or reducing the Nez Perce language use in their home. Because of assimilation and relocation policies of the U.S. government, the Nez Perce language became regarded as a deficiency when striving for western educational goals. This attitude was prevalent in the church and educational systems, particularly with the Protestant beliefs and the Indian boarding schools. Melissa Parkhurst examined the boarding school experience in her book *To Win the Indian Heart: Music at Chemawa Indian School*:

Amid a reform frenzy sweeping through America's upper middle class in the 1870's, a variety of political organizations concerned with the treatment of Indians emerged, including the Board of Indian Commissioners, the Boston Indian Citizenship Association, the Women's National Indian Association, and the influential Indian Rights Association. While these early reform groups did not count Indians among their members, they did share a common vision of reforming Indian policy. The reformers were all from the upper echelons of eastern society and were almost universally guided by the tenets of evangelical Protestantism. Uplift of Indians was the fulfillment of one's Christian obligation to extend the blessings of Christianity to all the world's peoples.²³

This shift in Indian policy resulted in the breaking up of the traditional Indian family structure and is a major source for historical trauma for Nez Perce people today.

Fast forwarding my mother's career, after retiring from the Indian Health Service she became involved with the efforts of language preservation. I remember being dragged to language class starting when I was an adolescent. My parents would drive us to the

²³ Melissa D. Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart: Music at Chemawa Indian School*, 10.

University of Idaho to attend Nez Perce language class with Mari Watters, a Nez Perce elder. Closer to home, we consistently attended language class at Lewis Clark State College with another elder, David Miles Sr. When I was in preschool I remember listening to cassettes of my great-grandfather, Bill Moody, counting and saying basic words in Nez Perce. My mother still has these cassettes. She has always offered me the opportunity to learn as much language as she knows ever since I can remember.

Her passion for the language allowed her to become a student of the language. She became quite good at writing the language utilizing the Aoki Nez Perce dictionary. This discipline allowed her the opportunity to co-teach Nez Perce language at Lewis Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho with Horace Axtell in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Horace was fluent in the Nez Perce language and Connie is well versed but not fluent. They centered their teachings on the spelling used in the Aoki dictionary, along with the deep cultural understanding Horace had with the language. Horace stated the lessons in Nez Perce and Connie wrote them on the chalk board; they were a good team.²⁴

The work of Horace Axtell and Connie Evans to translate the literal meaning of the Nez Perce hymns is important to the preservation of the language. It gives specific insight to the spiritual aspect of song within the Nez Perce culture, and helps emphasize the role that song has upon worship and culture, especially with the first generational converts to Christianity. It is a slow process; emphasis is placed on the pronunciation, precise spelling, as well as the right verb tense. The song is replayed several times in order to get the words exactly correct. It is interesting how one word or verb can describe such an array of actions or meanings.²⁵

²⁴ Steve and Connie Evans video, family archives.

²⁵ Horace Axtell and Connie Evans, participant observation by author, 2011.

When listening to the old recordings of Steve Axtell, Johnny Frank, and George Moody it is possible to hear the similarity to the old traditional religious songs found in the archives. In a discussion I had with Horace Axtell regarding these songs he states that

They don't sing them [songs] like they used to. They made it sound so lively. He then told the story of a visiting Indian man so excited and inspired by the song service that he said, If I had a gun, I would've shot it off in the air. In the early 1900's it was not unusual for a man to shoot a gun in the air to express his excitement over a situation. This account by Horace is of his great grandfather, Steven Axtell and his grandfather George Moody. The traditional style of singing is what impressed him most, and the depth and power of their voices is what he remembered. I used to like listening to Grandpa George sing, he had a powerful voice. Another observation he made was the tapping of their feet in a drum beat fashion that kept the song lively.²⁶

The hymn they were working on was titled, "Down at the Cross Where My Savior Died," and it was sung by Watkins Ezekial and translated in the late 1800's by Rev. James Hayes, a Nez Perce minister. It was first heard at Spalding Church in 1884.²⁷ Because the original translations were written in the missionary orthography, it is difficult, with certain words, to get the exact pronunciation, or actual meaning of the words. They listened to words in the song many, many times. Sometimes the writing and the singing did not correspond with a translation that made sense, so Horace really had to think of different possibilities and pronunciations. This process revealed that the translation was more about finding Nez Perce ways of knowing and aligning it with Christian concepts.

²⁶ Horace Axtell in discussion with the author, 2011.

²⁷ Loran Olsen, Nez Perce Music Archives, Spalding National Historical Park.

Song Number 92

DOWN AT THE CROSS WHERE MY SAVIOR DIED

1. Inakananin nikatpelitespa, sapukeswiyawat tiniknin,
Hitsapakaikanyu kapsiswit, ts-itkeyitsiwit wanikt.

CHORUS:

Tsits keyitsiwit wanikt; Tsits keyitsiswit wanikt; Inim
Wakeswit hikukainu, tsits keyitiwit wanikt.

2. Saikanas papa hewwlata, in was liloinin at koumas
Jesusnim hinakniku kaih kaih, tsits keyitsiwit wanikt.²⁸

Down at the Cross Where My Saviour Died

1. *'ineké'nehnim nikaatpilit'aspa*
Taking down cross

Sapooq'iswiyaw'áat tin'ixnín
Redeemer (Saviour) dying

Hisapáakaykan'yo' qepsi'iswit
Cleanse body (of) sins

Cicqi'iswit we'níikt
powerful name (called)

Chorus: *Cicqi'iswit we'níikt, cicqi'iswit we'níikt*
powerful name powerful name

'iinim waq'iiswit hiqóoqana
My life pass away

Cicqi'iswit we'níikt
powerful name

2. *Sayqín'as páp'a hiwéelete*
Beautiful springwater coming out of ground

'iin wees lilóynin' 'áactan'as
I am glad(happy) going into

Jesusnim hinéek'niku' kayxkáyx
Jesus will keep clean

*Cicqi'iswit we'níikt*²⁹
powerful name

²⁸ Axtell, Parsons, and Waters, *Nee Mi Putimt Ki Wanipt*, 92.

²⁹ Connie Evans, personal translation notes.

The Nez Perce understood the way prayer songs emerged through their culture. Prophets would die or visit the other side and return with a song. These songs held power and reverence in regards to religious practice. This hymn describes Jesus, his song and name and the power he holds to offering forgiveness. This is a powerful message, especially when conferred through parallels or commonalities of religious concepts.

The Christian concepts of sin are translated into spiritual meaning already understood by the Nez Perce culture. The importance of washing the body clean with spring water is our practice with the sweathouse. This understanding is utilized to confer the Christian message of washing away sin. The original English version uses the term fountain. In order for fluent speakers to apply a deeper meaning to this term, it was a simplistic use of spring water and reference to place. This understanding that Jesus does this for us is easily understood through a reference to a familiar place and practice. It is a strong Nez Perce custom to cleanse oneself in the sweat bath always by a spring.

When listening to the old recordings, it is quite evident that the old Nez Perce singing style was also implemented in these hymns. The singing style represents the old Nez Perce way of song. This hymn flows in time as if there were a drum being played. The Nez Perce language naturally flows within this rhythm. Ezekiel's voice stays within a certain tone but he accents certain words at different times with a higher pitch and he seems to repeat this pattern throughout. The sound and style are comparable to the old traditional songs that are sung by Sol Webb in the Nez Perce Music Archives.³⁰ Ezekiel sings the hymn in this old style. Even though the songs are of different origin, the style of singing remains constant.

The syncretism is evident because the Nez Perce style of singing remains, while integrating the Christian understanding of Jesus through the lens of Nez Perce culture. This

³⁰ Nez Perce Music Archive, Spalding National Historical Park.

shows that the Christian hymn went through a transformation into Nez Perce culture and meaning, and combined with the new church and its religious message. Olsen and Connolly assert: “Thus a spiritual song repertoire combining both traditions became a necessity for worship.”³¹ This was a common practice of the Plateau at this time, the intertwining of Christianity and Indian culture.

Horace also commented on the ritual his grandmother followed in her daily life: “Every morning she would sing a song like that and sing every evening before we went to bed, the morning song and the evening song; no one knows those songs anymore.”³² She was a Christian Nez Perce and continued to carry on the custom of worship through song in her daily routine, which was obviously influenced by old Nez Perce religious customs.

Wistitám'o 'Sweathouse'

My first memory as a child is being in the sweathouse. The door opened, releasing a cloud of steam and revealing the naked breasts of my grandma and aunties. A peaceful and calm feeling of existence is all I remember, just like the snow floating to the ground on that quiet winter night. I was encircled by love and warmth, nurtured in the womb of mother earth. Is it any wonder that I love winter time? I'm most content when surrounded by the women of my family. In my prayers I'm grateful for “Wistitám'o”, the sweathouse.

When the steam rises and the sweat rolls off my body, I rub my skin to scrub the dirt away. This cleansing process works on me in a physical sense, but it also offers me a way to clear my thoughts and renew my spirit. It washes away my sins and there is an element of suffering involved. One purpose is to sweat for those that cannot participate. I listen to the hissing of the rocks, pis'we, they are old and wise. I pray to the Creator, Hanyaw'aat, in the

³¹ Olsen and Connolly, *Musical Syncretisms at the Missions*, 15.

³² Horace Axtell in discussion with the author, 2011.

sweathouse and thank him for my body, mind and spirit and ask for continued blessings for my family and friends. I pray for Mother Earth and all the life and creation she provides to us. Most importantly, I pray for those less fortunate, and ask, simply, for hope. Before the round is concluded, I throw water on for qiw'n or Old Man. He is the sweathouse personified and it is necessary to acknowledge his presence. It is a good day to be cleansed and made new again. In my prayers I'm grateful for Wistitám'o, the sweathouse.

The sweat lodge or sweathouse can be found on most Indian reservations in America. Every tribe has its own custom or ceremony surrounding this practice. The sweathouse is an important custom in our culture. We regard this practice as a purification ceremony, a cleansing of our body, mind and spirit. This way of cleansing ourselves is sacred to us and we Nez Perce sweat hot and often. There are general terms for this place, but we tend to just say sweat. We refer to preparing the ceremony as building sweat. Building sweat is an arduous task and usually takes several hours out of the day. It is a task for the men but women are also known to build sweat.

I was taught the sweat by my uncle Jerry, my mother's older brother. He was my teacher and made sure I learned how to do it right. He showed me the type of chokecherry wood to use in constructing the sweathouse frame and how to dig the pit and line it with flat rocks. We traveled to the prairie and gathered the specific types of rocks used to heat the lodge. He showed me how to build the fire in order to heat the rocks the best way.

Along the way he shared stories of my great-grandfather Bill Moody, his piláqa'. This was his teacher and I was learning in the same way: "Piláqa' use to dig these rocks out of the ground, now the farmers just stack them in piles for us!" We use red basalt rock the size of a softball or cantaloupe from the Camas Prairie, which have been baked in the soil for

thousands of years. Only recently through farming practices has these stones been removed in mass quantity. Before the arrival of the German farming families, our people had to dig each rock out individually.

The sweat has always been utilized to address cleanliness in our lives, both physically and spiritually. True, it is a bath. The steam opens the pores in our skin and we rub and scratch our skin as the dirt rolls off. Jerry taught my brothers and me to scratch each other's backs. The amount of dirt and dead skin that comes out is incredible, it is a deep cleansing for sure. As he would scratch my back, he would say, "Geez Tony, you could grow a garden back here," referring to the amount of dirt he had scratched off. It was not the best seat in the house next to Jerry, because he scratches so hard, but you would leave with a clean back and the scratch marks to prove it.

While it is important to stay physically clean, our minds need time to find clarity and this ceremony allows us the opportunity to meditate. Also, we utilize the time in the sweat to socialize with family and friends. Much of the Nez Perce language I understand comes from participating at the sweat. It is the most common place to hear it. Our language is an identifying aspect of our culture, so the actions, commands and elements of this place belong to our language. English is what we usually speak, however, the Nimipuutímt lives strongest at the sweat. While we are in the sweat and it is becoming very hot and people are ready to exit, Uncle Jerry always asks me, "Weet 'icwéyce? 'Are you cold?'" This is an old joke he taught us as kids. Our response is supposed to be, "Ehe, 'yes'," meaning that he should pour more water on the rocks, thus making it even hotter!

There is a symbolic meaning in the sweathouse that refers to the earth as our mother. The old traditional sweathouse was constructed into the earth. This is why we enter the sweat

house backwards, in order to crawl out head first, re-born. Dave Kane, a Nez Perce elder explains “Tradition says we go to the sweathouse to die a little of ourselves. Which means, we have to go into the sweathouse with no clothes. I mean this is the way we were born, so when we go into the sweathouse, we go back into mother earth’s womb.”³³ Engaging in the sweat bath and going through a rebirthing process allows us to be pure and new, *kímti*.

We know that the earth is our mother and provides us with the essentials for life, like water and air, sacred elements. These elements have an energy that we can acknowledge and engage with, and more importantly, that we co-exist with plants and animals that rely on the same creation. In his book *God Is Red*, Vine Deloria reasoned that “The world that he [Indian] experiences is dominated by the presence of power, the manifestation of life energies, the whole life-flow of a creation. Recognition that the human beings holds an important place in such a creation is tempered by the thought that they are dependent on everything in creation for their existence.”³⁴ This recognition of our place in creation allows us to accept the responsibility of being good stewards of this land where we were placed by the power of the Creator. Our identity is tied to the elements of nature and animals around us, and the wisdom we have is directly connected to our interactions with these influences.

The process of purifying in the ceremony reaches back through time to our ancestors. We ask them to help steer us back to these old ideals and ways of coexisting with the natural world. We as Nez Perce Indians still pray for all our relations in the sweathouse, and it is important to maintain the prayers of communication with our relatives. Deloria explains that “The phrase *all my relatives* is frequently invoked by Indians performing ceremonies and this phrase is used to invite all other forms of life to participate as well as to inform them that the

³³ Dave Kane, interview by James A. Walker, February 9, 2017.

³⁴ Vine Deloria, *God Is Red*, 87.

ceremony is being done on their behalf.”³⁵ Our world today has disrespected these other forms of life and they need help in purifying, in order to be re-born and made new again.

Song is an important part of the ceremony, however, it must be stated that not all the sweathouses engage in singing. The types of songs vary as well. It is a common courtesy to respect the custom in every individual sweathouse in regards to which songs are sung. I mention this because some songs which are regarded as religious are not always sung in certain sweathouses. Many Christian Nez Perce only sing the translated hymns at church, however, these hymns are sung in the sweathouse by certain individuals and families. Certainly, there may be debate on this subject, but I am not intending to initiate any argument here. The purpose for considering this occurrence is to reveal the melding process which occurs with an old Nez Perce custom and a syncretic song. This revelation may spark critical dialogue amongst the Nez Perce churches, but is done so to promote acceptance, rather than argument.

Song is considered prayer as much as the prayers spoken. A song can be shared at any time during the sweat, but on most occasions it is shared when the sweat is hot. The song is not only a prayer, but an opportunity to remove oneself from the laws of physical nature. This process enables an individual to engage with the spirit and leave their body and mind. McCoy Oatman, a member of Meadow Creek Church, sings in the sweat and offers: “I find at times when it gets really hot, that if you sung, or sang a song, some of that would just go away. It’s almost like mind over matter, I guess. You wouldn’t really feel the heat until the song would be over, and you would really start to feel the heat again.”³⁶ I would suggest that this type of suffering and need for spiritual assistance to ease the pain, parallels our

³⁵ Deloria, *God Is Red*, 84.

³⁶ McCoy Oatman, interview by James A. Walker, March 8, 2017.

understanding of Jesus suffering on the cross. And by singing a protecting song, help and salvation occur within the moment. I offer this as a view into the phenomenon of song in ceremony and the power it yields.

Tóota' 'father'

Man, I hate that kid! Sure, I feel bad for kicking mud all over Meagan's dress, but the reason I did that was because Big Jim called me a hatchet packer. I won this time; in our last fight on the playground he got the best of me. I don't even care that I kicked him in the knee so hard it put him down. Maybe I didn't have to hit him when he was on the ground crying. He deserved it though. It is what he gets for saying I am a wagon burner all the time. It sucks being in the principal's office again.

Today in class, we got to listen to some white, mountain man guy with his horse. He was cool, talking about the old ways of living, and dressed up in buckskin. He reminded me of Grizzly Adams. When he started talking about the Indians, he looked over at me and winked. That was strange to me, but I guess he knows I'm an Indian. He had a cool black horse. I should have told him that I had a horse my grandpa gave me: Shaggy.

This story comes from my first meeting with the man who would become my father. His name is Steve Evans, and he married my mother. He retired from Lewis Clark State College in 2001, where he was a history professor for thirty-three years. He earned his MA and Ph.D. from Washington State University. He has always had a passion regarding the history of the Nez Perce and Chief Joseph and made it his life's work. Passing on this knowledge to me became a natural connection for us and I was given a sound education in his field of work. This interaction remains as a unique bond for father and son.

There are two events in Nez Perce history, so well known that even the children can tell about them. These are the coming of Lewis and Clark in 1805, followed by their return in 1806 from the coast; and the going out of the four in search of the truth about God, twenty-five years later.

Kate McBeth

It is necessary to explain how Christianity arrived in Nez Perce country. Much of the written history on this era points directly to the trip to St. Louis, in 1831, by four Nez Perce in search of the Bible. However, Steve Evans and Alan Pinkham, in their book, *Lewis and Clark Among the Nez Perce: Strangers in the Land of the Nimiipuu*, assert the idea was initially developed with the first contact with Lewis and Clark in 1805.

Curiosity about literacy played an important role in the search for the Bible to the Nez Perce: “It is not surprising that the Nez Percés should link their interest in religion to ‘little marks on paper.’ The Nimiipuu saw that Lewis, Clark, Ordway, Frazier, and Whitehouse made marks on paper. The white men could write things down, and they could look at the marks and read their meaning. They also had books, collections of little pieces of paper with marks on them, and could read their words. What was the magic of the little marks on paper?”³⁷ These observations by the Nez Perce led them to yearn for this new, mysterious power they witnessed in reading and writing: “The curiosity about writing and the desire for learning made the Nimiipuu want the power that came with it. The Bible was purported to be proper religious instruction, the little marks would teach it, but they must be able to understand the marks. They wanted to know the mystery of writing, about literacy and, in that sense, they were truly touched by the American enlightenment.”³⁸

³⁷ Steve Evans and Allen Pinkham, *Lewis and Clark Among the Nez Perce: Strangers in the Land of the Nimiipuu*, 238.

³⁸ Ibid.

Twenty five years after Lewis and Clark, the opportunity for learning more about Christianity and literacy became a reality for the Indigenous people of the Plateau. The Nez Perce were aware of the missionaries to the north and the education that Spokane Gary received there. Evans and Pinkham state “In 1829, just three years prior to the Nez Perce fight at Pierre’s Hole, a Spokane Indian named Spokane Gary created a sensation when he began preaching the Christian gospel to all who would listen.”³⁹ This new sensation allowed an opportunity for Nez Perce leaders of that time to improve upon their status as it pertained to the new world approaching and the white people who were bringing it. History shows that

The Spokanes had sent Spokane Garry, a chief’s son, and the nearby Kutenai tribe, also Salish speakers, sent a young man dubbed Kutenai Pelly to the Red River School, run by the Church of England Missionary Society in present-day Manitoba. The religious fervor created by Garry’s preaching likely stirred the Nez Perces, who had already asked George Simpson of the Hudson’s Bay Company to send teachers and religious leaders to the Nez Perce. It was undoubtedly the hope and belief of the Nimiipuu that whatever learning they might acquire would only enhance their existing access to spiritual power. In other words, they were less interested in converting to Christianity than in adding more spiritual dimensions to their already rich spiritual lives.⁴⁰

The Nez Perce, always interested in advancing their political prowess and with their skill in adaptability, sent their own privileged contingent: “In 1830, two Nez Perce youths, Ellice and Pitt, were sent via Fort Colville and a Hudson’s Bay Company brigade, to the Red River School. Ellice was connected to the Lewis and Clark Expedition through his grandfather

³⁹ Evans and Pinkham, *Strangers in the Land of the Nimiipuu*, 234.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

xáxaac 'ilp'ilp (Red Grizzly Bear) on his mother's side, and his father was none other than Twisted Hair." This young man would become a chief in his own right, eventually espousing the role of Christianity amongst the Nez Perce people.

The historical record shows that a desire for Christian influence was initiated by the Nez Perce themselves. With all Nez Perce stories, there is a kinship factor involved at some level. The trip to St. Louis is no exception. Clark fathered a son during his time with the Nez Perce in 1805-06. The best alliances are strongest when the common bond is family. Evans and Pinkham state "The point is simply that, while the motive or motives for the journey have been widely debated, except for missionary McBeth, the relationship between these Nez Percés and Lewis and Clark has been overlooked or ignored. And yet she did not know, or refused to recognize, that the Nez Percés were more than mere trusted friends: Clark and Lewis were Nez Perce relatives, wealthy, powerful 'family' who could help in their time of need."⁴¹ The kinship factor was hardly a coincidence and difficult to ignore, especially when considering the Nez Perce emphasis on strong kinship ties.

McBeth produced important ethnography work with her book, *The Nez Percés Since Lewis and Clark*. She has a chapter dedicated to her favorite pupil, Jonathan "Billy" Williams, who became one of the earliest ordained Nez Perce elders. Jonathan's son Rev. Robert Williams (ordained 1879) was the first pastor of First Church of Kamiah. When Billy was asked about the Nez Perce who went to St. Louis (1831) in search of the Bible, he said, "No, they went to find Lewis and Clark and learn about the better way to worship God."⁴² This is a basic description of the intent regarding the trip by a man who witnessed the beginning of their epic adventure. Williams was a young boy at this time in history and rode

⁴¹ Evans and Pinkham, *Strangers in the Land of the Nimiipuu*, 239.

⁴² E. Jane Gay, *Alice Fletcher in the Field*, 1889-92, 150.

with the men one days distance then turned around to go back to Kamiah. Some say they went the southern Nez Perce trail and others contend they rode the Lolo trail. This trip was not a single purpose venture according to elder Williams.

When news arrived of this trip to Protestant circles in the East, they quickly sent missionaries to the Northwest. Clifford Drury explains from his book *Chief Lawyer of the Nez Perce Indians*: “Never before in the history of American Christianity had a delegation arrived from a foreign land or from a non-Christian group within this country petitioning for Christian missionaries and the Bible. The response of the churches was as quick and as generous as circumstances then permitted.”⁴³ The source for this action came from an educated Wyandot Indian named William Walker from Sandusky, Ohio. He was visiting St. Louis at the time and witnessed the Nez Perce there at Clark’s home. Two of the Nez Perce succumbed to illness and died and are buried there. Walker was so touched by the event that he wrote a letter which appeared in the *Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald*, on March 1, 1833. This article reached thousands with the message that the Nez Perce were in search of the Bible.

Most Christian Nez Perce continue to regard the trip to St. Louis as a quest for the Bible. There is a certain value attached to this interpretation that all Christians can appreciate. It is regarded as a symbolic gesture of our people’s desire to know the Bible and need for spiritual assistance. It continues to inspire and validate our Christian lives today and remains as a powerful testament to our Christian identity. The claim here is that the Nez Perce received the Bible and Christianity, but also gained access to this thing called literacy. Subsequently, the power of the written word recorded a language, which until then, was unwritten.

⁴³ Clifford M. Drury, *Chief Lawyer of the Nez Perce Indians*, 31.

I want to talk about this idea of literacy in the terms of social practice. The missionaries first utilized it to translate portions of the Bible and of course the translated hymns. The first to do so were Henry Spalding and The Lawyer or Ellice. They worked on the first published material in Nez Perce country. The implementation of literacy into the Nez Perce culture was originally done to introduce the concept of Christianity to fluent Nez Perce speakers. This work should be considered paramount to the work on the translated hymns being done today. It serves as a blueprint for preserving a syncretic process which offers potential for further work. The value of this preservation should inspire more ethnomusicological study in this process.

These two individuals did work that seriously shaped the potential for future Nez Perce Christians. The application for conversion is obvious, however, the implication regarding education may have not been fully realized. This new source of power through literacy has a lasting impact into today. The work they accomplished demonstrates how literacy was approached as a social practice. This was done as a team or a collective project to enhance upon translating a combination of foreign concept with an oral tradition or custom.

There is a history here that shapes the way Nez Perce language remains today, altogether written, spoken and sung: “Native accounts of incidents involving writing offer clues to the ways Indigenous communities have perceived, resisted, and appropriated literacy in their ongoing struggle for survival.”⁴⁴ This historical account of literacy needs to be in the forefront of language preservation efforts today. It can help forge a direction for Nez Perce communities to navigate in this ongoing social practice of language preservation. The impact

⁴⁴ Elsie Rockwell, “Indigenous Accounts of Dealing With Writing,” in *Language, Literacy and Power in Schooling*, ed. Teresa L. McCarty, 5.

on hymn resurrection can be felt when observing the use of translated hymns to guide special language preservation efforts.

The use of participant observation allowed me to see the way literacy is being implemented with the Nez Perce language today. The process of working on continued translations is an ongoing practice with the Nez Perce Language Program and the Circle of Elders and their work with translating new hymns. This practice is an example of the social aspect of literacy in Indigenous communities.

We have Indigenous scholars working with their elders in the community, along with educated non-Indians. The process is taking action to help educate through literacy on a cultural element which is fading away. This exemplifies the need to combine our strengths as Nez Perce people to preserve our identities. Now it seems as if it has gone full circle, the effort of literacy is to help the Nez Perce re-learn their own language. The awareness brought to the scope and scale of their work helps in the dissemination of my thesis. How does writing our language correspond with resurrecting the custom of singing the hymns? Lawyer and Spalding contributed an important piece of work with their collaboration. I am taking the position to follow their lead, and continue the important work with Nez Perce language and translated hymns to enable an easy flow of constantly merging waters.

Recently, researching the Nez Perce Music Archives at the Spaulding National Historical Museum, I came upon the collection compiled by Dr. Loran Olsen. He has preserved numerous Nez Perce translated hymns, allowing me to listen to hymns which otherwise may have been lost forever. The hymns that interested me the most are the ones I know and can sing. There are also hymns which I am familiar with but do not necessarily know very well. Typically, I will only sing the chorus to these hymns. Of course, there are

many songs in the collection which I do not know at all. It is my intention, through my research, to seek a better understanding of these translated hymns, both spiritually and grammatically, and share it with other interested Nez Perce.

During my participant observation with the elders at the Nez Perce Language House, I was able to work with Nez Perce elders, Bessie Scott, Florene Davis and Rosa Yearout, along with Dr. Harold Crook. The primary focus was to translate certain Nez Perce translated hymns back into English. At the same time, Dr. Crook re-wrote the phonetically spelled hymns into the International Phonetic Alphabet spelling system. We all sang these hymns using the old hymnbooks. Also, we listened to the way these hymns were sung on the old recordings from the Nez Perce Music Archive. We continued to learn and practice them in this manner. This small group of elders continued to translate the old Nez Perce words to English. We were engaged collectively in reviving an old custom, while simultaneously treading new ground with the translations.

The old hymnbooks were utilized as they were originally written for a century. There were never any music notations or English words printed in the old hymnbooks. Many of the people I interviewed during this research used their hymnbooks to keep notes, translate and re-write certain words or phrases and even entire hymns. Every person I interviewed practiced this or inherited a hymnbook which acted as a lyrical notebook. This exercise developed and preserved an educational approach to engaging with the hymns, and is continuing with the work at the Language House.

It reminded me of my time at Talmaks in June of 2016. Loran Olsen gave an archive presentation of old Nez Perce hymns. Many attended that evening for the song service and presentation. It is interesting to note the increase in attendance for such a presentation,

demonstrating the genuine regard for the effort and concern for hymn preservation within the congregations of the Indian Presbyterian churches. Olsen played recordings of hymns not heard in a while or at all by some of the younger people in attendance. He urged the congregation to sing along if they remembered the song and encouraged a revival of the old hymns with the comment, “Bring things back!”⁴⁵ This is worth mentioning because it projects a potential application for the continued efforts at resurrecting the hymns and shows the desire behind the congregation to do so. It will take these types of approaches to accelerate the re-learning process.

Upon hearing these hymns, I was instantly taken back to my childhood memories of hearing the hymns, particularly, “Blessed Assurance” which we sing frequently at Second Church. This hymn acts as a trigger memory for me, a memory of a spiritual realm this song has taken me to before. In *Songs of Power and Prayer in the Columbia Plateau*, Hamill emphasizes that “Song was power; song was prayer; and within communities where the presence of the spirit realm was pervasive, song was ever present”⁴⁶ I know this to be a reflection of my Christian faith and the power I have experienced through the Holy Spirit. I have known this experience since I was a child, but specifically, felt it with my congregation when we collectively sang the hymn.

The custom of singing song as worship enables a direct connection to the Creator. The connection to the spirit through song is an ancient custom with Plateau tribes. In describing the syncretism of the Catholic hymns by the Coeur d’ Alene, Hamill states, “Reconfigured and re-sung, the hymns became new vehicles for spiritual power, propelled by

⁴⁵ James Walker, personal journal, June 2016.

⁴⁶ Chad Hamill, *Songs of Power and Prayer in the Columbia Plateau*, 24.

a technology of song refined through the ages”⁴⁷ This is what has occurred with the translated Nez Perce hymns, and it supports the assertion of the Christian hymn being Indigenized.

The song “Looking Home” was my primary focus for the time spent at the Language House. I chose this hymn because it was an old one that we rarely sing. It was preserved in the Nez Perce Music Archive and we did not have a known English translation or re-write for it yet. The purpose of this assignment came from a discussion we had regarding one’s discipline in learning and teaching the translated hymns. Our discussion involved my intentions of *living a congruent lifestyle* through the process of researching my project. We thought it necessary for me to engage with my congregation and lead a translated hymn not sung frequently.

The purpose of this endeavor was for me to lead. I know from experience that it is not so easy to just request a song and expect the congregation to sing. The situation requires a leader that knows the song. The leader we all look to is Chris Porter of First Church.⁴⁸ She has acquired this position among us because she has been taught from a young age, and she has the voice, dedication, and faith. It required her to be dedicated and disciplined. She was chosen in that way and continues her work today. With her knowledge she shared the two ways in which we should sing “God Be With You.” At funerals, it is to be sung softer and slower and with farewells you just pick the tempo up and sing louder. This may seem like a mild distinction, but it holds to wisdom and custom with song and the oral tradition. We follow Chris’ lead.

⁴⁷ Hamill, *Songs of Power and Prayer*, 62.

⁴⁸ Christine Porter, interview by James A. Walker, February 23, 2017.

It is important to examine this idea of combining the knowledge found in orality and literacy to allow for a learning process which is representative of both. Rodney Frey discusses this in his book *Stories That Make the World*: “In distinguishing orality from literacy, however, we should not go as far as to see one form of expression as exclusive of the other. The particular language configuration of any given culture can, in fact, exemplify qualities of both orality and literacy.”⁴⁹ The custom of singing the hymns is passed down through the experience of singing them. The stories that accompany this custom serve as an oral tradition to carry on family history through memories of place, song and worship. The written hymnbooks are guides and reference for the literary preservation. The idea of progressing with these notions is up to the people still practicing or engaging with the process. The awareness of this opportunity is where we find ourselves with the current state of these translated hymns.

This is where my research on hymns has led me. The custom of singing translated hymns is a participatory practice. It allows the participants to read along and sing as a group or congregation. This group practice suggests an orality approach, because the songs can be learned by just listening and following the leader. A child can learn without reading from the hymn book. A literate person can follow along and begin to learn as they read from the hymnbook. This does not necessarily fit with a literary approach, because the group is required to know the melody and the hymnbooks do not contain any written musical notes. The hymns which are sung today have a significant meaning to members of the congregation, this is why they survived. It would be difficult to just request a hymn randomly from the hymnbook and expect the congregation to sing it. The hymns which survived remain as a testament to the power within them. Many hymns were written but not all have survived.

⁴⁹ Rodney Frey, *Stories That Make the World*, 142.

This is why the old recordings found in the Nez Perce Music Archives and family archives are so valuable. The desire to resurrect an old lost hymn can be done if a congregation or individual wants to. The melody preserved through recording and the hymnbooks serving as the written preservation offers us the opportunity to resurrect a hymn. Salish language instructor Johnny Arlee states that “My students that year commented that it was difficult to read the old version of the Hymn & Prayers book. Since the students were more familiar with the International Phonetic Alphabet, we began using the old hymn book and rewriting it into the IPA adapted to the Salish language. We found this to be a good way to teach the language. We broke down each word, wrote it out, read it, and sang it.”⁵⁰ When the hymn is re-introduced in this way it allows for an alternative method of experiencing the learning process. This enables and offers a fresh approach to re-connecting to the hymnbook, language and hymn.

Through examining these hymns, I have been able to expand my knowledge of the Nez Perce language. I observed the elders and Dr. Crook working to transcribe the hymns we were singing. The translations to English offered me a format to study the literal meaning of these hymns. Although, my Nez Perce language capacity has been minimal throughout my life, this project has inspired me to learn, understand and comprehend the process of spelling our language in a scientific manner. The majority of participants for interviews will be Nez Perce elders with a good understanding of the Nez Perce language. In order to understand what these hymns are saying, it is obvious one needs to have a good grasp of the language. This helps me see a practical application of working with the translated hymns, to promote teaching the Nez Perce language.

⁵⁰ Johnny Arlee, Instructor, Salish Cultural Leadership Program Salish Kootenai College, Pablo, Montana. (*Qwel m u Ncawmn: A collection of Hymns and Prayers in the Flathead-Kalispel-Spokane Indian Language*).

The analysis and application of my research project is what intrigues me the most. I like the fact that my work will have the opportunity to inspire someone other than myself. This research is specifically for Christian Nez Perce and their blessing has allowed me the opportunity to engage with this project. The inspiration for the work came from my own heart, and they realize this fact. My intent is to encourage others to further embrace the power and work to preserve it. Preservation or resurrection of singing our hymns is the primary goal here. The decline in singing these hymns is apparent, especially with the men in the church.

The men were always at the forefront, leading the congregation with their powerful voices. The elders can remember how their voices “raised the roof.”⁵¹ This is considered the old style of singing the hymns, which has been preserved in the Nez Perce Music Archives. If we are ever to hear the power of the men’s voices in our congregation again, it will take a continued effort of disciplined individuals that share a desire to preserve and revitalize the custom of singing them in this manner. Women are now the primary singers within the congregation, which demonstrates the way these hymns have survived. They have been the ones to continue singing and maintaining our custom.

This decline in the men’s participation and leadership role carries a lot of weight, and is a genuine concern for the current state of our churches and survival of this custom. It will take a considerable effort to preserve this custom of singing the translated hymns. This is not to say that an effort is not on going, but that this resurrection of the hymns must have an element of leadership from the men in the church. This will be a large portion to the dissemination of my work. Therefore, the intent of this examination leads me to the examination of my own heart through this research. My examination has led me to realize my

⁵¹ Chloe Halfmoon, interview by James A. Walker, 2017.

own desire to be a leader within this process of hymn resurrection. In *Research Is Ceremony*, Shawn Wilson asserts, “If research doesn’t change you as a person, then you haven’t done it right.”⁵² This realization confirms the change in me and assures me that the research has been conducted in a manner that aligns with the model of an Indigenous framework. I want the next generation of Christian Nez Perce to have access to the healing power of song, as I did, and I feel that it is my responsibility to carry out the tradition of passing this custom down.

In my interviews, many people pointed directly to the trail song, an old Nez Perce hymn they sang while on the Lolo trail during the War of 1877. This is not a translated hymn; rather, it is an old Nez Perce worship song.⁵³ It is included among the translated songs in the hymn book, titled *Salvation*, “Oh The Joyful Sound.” The singing of this song echoes the spiritual condition of the people at that moment in our history. The non-treaty Nez Perce were leaving their homeland for the last time in their hearts. They were leaving behind loved ones killed by the army in full pursuit. It is important to focus on this song being included into the Christian hymn book. This shows how the non-Christian worship song became a Nez Perce Christian hymn. In this process it can be said that an old worship song was Christianized. This would be the analysis in the western paradigm. For the Nez Perce, it is a simple combining that allowed for continued survival, an adaptation.

This type of religious syncretism was evident after the War of 1877 while many Nez Perce were in exile. They mingled with other tribes in Indian Territory and participated with sun dance ceremonies while continuing with their traditional Nez Perce religion, expanding on their spiritual boundaries. They also attended Christian services provided by the

⁵² Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, 142.

⁵³ Nez Perce Music Archives.

Presbyterian Nez Perce ministers, which included Archie Lawyer⁵⁴ This was to paraphrase Diane Pearson and she further states “Other Nimiipuu Christians repeated the Lord’s Prayer and sang old hymns learned before the war, in English or Nimiputimt.”⁵⁵ This is an example of how the Nez Perce combined the power associated with different religious customs. Worship through song was allowed to remain in a cultural sense and it was always an integral part of Nez Perce religious custom. Therefore, the use of the translated hymns was an acknowledgement of the parallels witnessed in worshipping God by both the Christians and non-Christians.

One can see why the people were able to adopt parallel religious beliefs and the new translated hymns, as opposed to a new religious theology altogether, particularly after the war and subsequent exile. In her book *Creating Christian Indians*, Bonnie Sue Lewis states that “The most important skills of Native ministers were their ability to speak to Native concerns, to interpret Native existence in terms of Indian and Christian concepts, and to provide for their people continuity, meaning, and hope in changing circumstances. They served to indigenize the church and make it their own”⁵⁶ This quote demonstrates the intuitive nature of Nez Perce leaders to navigate the complicated reality of living in two worlds.

It is important to address the syncretism of religious song which has occurred with these translated hymns. The Christian hymns were translated into the Nez Perce language and the product became a unique worship song: [A] “growing body of ethnohistorical research shows that North American Indians have often reinterpreted Christian ideas, rituals, and institutions, and that their approach to Christianity has been selective, creative, and

⁵⁴ J. Diane Pearson, *The Nez Percés in the Indian Territory: Nimiipuu Survival*, 238.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 244.

⁵⁶ Bonnie Sue Lewis, *Creating Christian Indians*, 182.

synthesizing. Christianity, as a result, frequently became indigenized.”⁵⁷ The melding of these two components allowed for a new culture to emerge.

The most significant part of this combination is the ownership and identity it provides for Christian Nez Perce: “Not only did Indian Presbyterianism reflect and build on Native cultural forms, but perhaps more important it also created new ones. Native ministers and their congregations developed unique blends of Presbyterianism and Indian ways. John Renville, Archie Lawyer, and many others took the Dakota and Nez Perce love of music into their churches. They wrote Christian lyrics to Native tunes and put Indian languages to Presbyterian hymns. They turned prayer meetings into extended song services and evangelistic meetings into community gatherings.”⁵⁸ The Christian Nez Perce played a vital role in implementing an Indigenous thread to this process. With that understanding, it is easy to see that the translated Christian hymn was more of an Indigenization process. In this way, the ownership of the hymns and Christianity became a natural occurrence. The custom of singing Nez Perce translated hymns holds an important identity piece for us, remaining unique and authentic to the Christian Nez Perce.

It is important to examine the love of music by the Nez Perce and this was noticed by McBeth: “They are good singers. Perhaps hundreds of our old songs of Zion are translated and in use in their churches, and they are constantly adding thereunto. Some of the ministers and mission pupils are quite able to translate hymns. The gospel has been sung into the hearts of the Nez Percés.”⁵⁹ Along with the introduction to new hymns through Christianity came an introduction to western music through religion and education.

⁵⁷ Antonio Gualtieri, *Indigenization of Christianity and Syncretism among the Indians and Inuit of the Western Arctic*, 1980.

⁵⁸ Lewis, *Creating Christian Indians*, 181.

⁵⁹ McBeth, *The Nez Percés Since Lewis and Clark*, 254.

The Nez Perce children sent away to boarding schools were the first to experience the push for education and get musical training outside of the church. The intent of such schooling rested heavily with government policy and their goal to replace Indigenous identities with new assimilated ones: “The reformers’ real purpose was to replace the Indians’ existing cultural life with a new one befitting a Christian, civilized, de-Indianized people. Indian people already had music; they just had the wrong music-music that was deemed uncivilized, savage, steeped in barbarism, and even prone to lead the practitioner towards Satan.”⁶⁰ The impact of boarding schools affected Indian students differently and on a wide range of experiences. My grandfather attended Chemawa Indian School and I only heard positive memories and accounts from him. However, it should be noted, that the overall legacy of Indian boarding schools remains as a terrible experience for countless of Native Americans who attended them.

Although, Nez Perce students endured the process of assimilation, they also experienced acculturation. Amidst this process they were able to meet a diverse group of other Indigenous students and interact with them, allowing for the pride of their own tribal identity to remain strong: “Students learned songs and music from each other, and the intertribal bonds that would later facilitate many Indian groups’ struggles for justice, federal recognition, and restoration were forged through these processes of acculturation.”⁶¹ This type of life experience allowed for these students to speak back to the oppressive nature of boarding school reform and the oppression they asserted. This process of speaking back is most notable in Indian political movements, such as the American Indian Movement, but is also accomplished in American Indian literature, art, and music.

⁶⁰ Melissa D. Parkhurst, *To Win the Indian Heart*, 21,22.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 26.

This is evident with the Nez Perce jazz bands of the 20th Century, many of whom attended boarding schools. Janis Johnson gives this description from her article “Performing Indianness and Excellence: Nez Perce Jazz Bands of the Twentieth Century” she states “During this largely oppressive era of Indian-white relations, Indian musicians found ways to re-present American Indian history, culture, and contemporary issues, and to imagine and construct liberatory identities and communities through a musical performative cultural politics.”⁶² They put their Nez Perce identity front and center by wearing their eagle bonnet headdresses while they performed: “These performances re-presented Native histories and identities in ways that challenged pervasive notions of the vanishing Indian, Indians as confined to the nineteenth century, or Indians lacking in active participation in contemporary American life.”⁶³ This shows the importance of keeping the Nez Perce identity intact, while maintaining their stature as good jazz musicians.

This comparison of Jazz musicians and Nez Perce hymns is viable in regards to the overall understanding of the intent of the U.S. government policy of assimilation. The government utilized the institutions of education and religion to forge their policies of eradicating Indian culture. In the same manner, the Indians were able to absorb the assimilation, while finding a way to speak back in a syncretic form, which served to preserve important identity pieces. These are true accounts of indigenization at play and they continue to manifest for the purpose of survival.

⁶² Janis Johnson, “Performing Indianness and Excellence: Nez Perce Jazz Bands of the Twentieth Century,” 199-221.

⁶³ Ibid, 204.

Talmaks

The Clearwater was still flowing high. It was summer time, and all of us kids wanted to go swimming at the river. So much for that, grandma said, "Wéet'u, you kids might drown!" So today had to be spent getting packed for Talmaks. Poppo needed help loading the wall tents and tipi. My cousins and I already know the drill. The girls had to help grandma weed in the garden, so I am happy being in the cool basement loading all the camp gear. As we work in the basement, Poppo tells us boys, "Tomorrow we will leave early, so we can get there and mow the grass one more time." It seems time spent with the grandparents is a lot of work. I don't mind though, we get the chores done and we can go fishing at the lake.

Uncle Pee Wee has a new pellet gun and he has been trying to shoot the woodpecker that likes the wall outside his room. Spooney and I are excited about it because we know he will bring it to Talmaks and we can run around and shoot squirrels. We have been practicing on the old empty beer cans and Thunderbird wine bottles down over the hill from the house. My uncle Bibo, Brenna's dad, threw them there when he was alive and drinking all the time.

I get to ride with Poppo this morning, along with Brenna, and Lizzie. We are cramped in the front of our grandpa's ford truck. Our journey is starting from Kamiah as we drive up Lawyers creek. Poppo starts telling us stories like he always does when we drive somewhere, "See the old wagon road across the creek there. It would take us two days to make this trip when I was a kid. The first day we would travel to Meadow Creek Church and camp there. The second day we would make it to Talmaks." I remember thinking how that would have been, going by a horse drawn wagon slowly up the creek.

Poppo's old Ford truck can gather speed. As we left Ferdinand, the gravel road going towards Talmaks is straight for miles, but it goes over the steep farm hill on one side and down the other side, then the next hill and the next. It is like a roller coaster ride. We can feel our stomachs launch out of our guts as we laugh on the crest of every hill. Poppo doesn't slow down, but goes faster. His blue Ford is howling by the farmhouses.

Lewiston Morning Tribune, Sunday, July 10, 1949.

“. . . Talmaks is a serene place. It's like an outdoor cathedral, the pines rising like great sculptured spires to an azure dome. A spring bubbles from the center of camp and Lawyer canyon creek tumbles downward just half a mile away. Here the Nez Perces, fresh from huddling over the steaming rocks of their native sweatbaths, can plunge into cool waters. Here with the abundance of water are growths of huckleberries, camas and "tsawit" root, staples of the Nez Perce diet. They were the deciding factors in the selection of Talmaks. The camp itself blends into its forest surroundings. Scores of tents and teepees are tucked away in the pines. In a clearing at the center of camp is the great white meeting tent."

Bob Smith, Tribune Staff Writer.

For us Christian Nez Perce, the power of place sits in Talmaks. We go there for a renewal in our Christian faith. We gather there for fellowship with family and friends. This place is located on the Camas Prairie, near the towns of Winchester and Craigmont, Idaho, and is situated at the head waters of Lawyers Creek. This gathering has been occurring here for the last one hundred and six years. The Nez Perce met prior to that during the Fourth of July at different locations, usually on the grounds of one of the churches. Starting in 1897 they gathered at First and Second Church in Kamiah, Idaho, the Stites Church, North Fork Church, and Meadow Creek Church, as well as in Lapwai until the first meeting near Mason Butte in 1910.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Henry Sugden, "Seventy Five Years Presbyterian Camp Meetings of the Nez Perce Indians 1897-1972," 13.

The early beginnings of the annual Fourth of July meeting was in response to the celebration in Lapwai held by the traditionalists or non-Christian Nez Perce. The celebration offered traditional parades, powwows and gambling. These activities allowed the Nez Perce the opportunity to dress in their finest regalia and gather to speak of the “good old days.” Chief Joseph was in attendance at the celebration in 1897, along with many other veterans of the war. Although the event was a peaceful social gathering, it worried the elders of the Presbyterian Churches because of the attraction it was having on its membership.

The Christians, both Indian and non-Indian, sought an alternative for the converted Nez Perce, since many were attending and enjoying themselves. These types of activities were considered a sinful way to live and seriously discouraged by the church. People of the day referred to those Nez Perce as heathens: “The older generations in this area, commonly and regularly, used words such as ‘heathen’ and ‘pagan’ to mean ‘non-Christian.’ These words are offensive today and are not in acceptable usage.”⁶⁵ This attitude towards other Nez Perce is an important aspect of this paper because it addresses the religious division within our tribe. This has been problematic for our people since the arrival of the missionaries. They were intent on converting Indians, who were regarded as uncivilized, and these terms were utilized to enforce the differences between an individual that was saved and one that was still practicing a traditional religious lifestyle.

On the last night of Talmaks we always sing “God Be With You Till We Meet Again” as the closing hymn for the services. It is meant to be the closing hymn for our time spent here. We sing it as a farewell song and it is meant to carry us back to our homes with the hope of returning the following year. Many of us live close and we will see each other throughout the following weeks and months, but many of the people travel great distances

⁶⁵ Ibid.

and we will not see them until the next year at Talmaks. Lori Picard, a member of North Fork Church, recalls a poignant example regarding the use of this hymn as a farewell:

I learned a good lesson from Grandma Pauline Samuels. So, when we have our prayer services we sing the Nez Perce Hymns every Wednesday night. And then, I really was liking that song “God Be With You Till We Meet Again,” so everyone take their turns, you know, picking their favorite songs. And so years ago we were at prayer service at my mom’s house, and then, I don’t know, we were picking songs and mine was, might have been the second song or something, and I chose “God Be With You Till We Meet Again” [laughs]. And anyway, we sang that song, and when we was done, Grandma Pauline said, “Are you saying you want us to leave?” You know what I mean? So, we started laughing and I said no. So now I know that we don’t sing that until, we’re ready to, you know, part. So really, we don’t sing it all the time, every Wednesday night, but if we do, it’s at the end of the service, you know.⁶⁶

This recollection by Lori is a good example of how a song or hymn is used to signify practice or custom in the Nez Perce culture. Essentially, we ask the Creator to guide, comfort and protect us as we part ways. Through this way of prayer we ask, God willing, that we will see each other again. In this way, the old Nez Perce custom of a farewell song and ceremony still lives with a high regard.

The *qillóowawya* serenade songs were once an important part of the Nez Perce way of life. This ceremony occurred before warriors departed for horse stealing raids or to buffalo

⁶⁶ Lori Picard, interview by James A Walker, February 16, 2017.

country, and was intended as a farewell. There was a deeper meaning felt with the women in regards to the loneliness they experienced as their men were gone. It provided comfort for them and they used the ceremony to give items to those leaving. These songs can be found in the *Hitting The Rawhide Qillóowawya* compact disc from the Nez Perce Music Archive.

The custom of singing “God Be With You” holds to the same idea of uncertainty. The song carries us in our travels much like the way a song is able to transport us in ceremony to a spiritual realm. Although our lives today may not be as dangerous, the need for hope and prayer remains. The need for a comforting song persists within our being and soul. The reality of death in our families continues at a higher rate than any other racial group per capita in the United States, particularly from suicide, alcohol and drug abuse. All families on our Indian Reservation have been deeply affected by these types of deaths. This is a product or symptom of historical trauma. The Christian Nez Perce utilize this song in the same manner as ancestors did with qillóowaya.

Song Number 120

GOD BE WITH YOU TILL WE MEET AGAIN

1. Godki pewakunyu hanaka, epinimpa piamktanu, sheep-nim suhailakinwaspa, Godki pewakunyu hanak.

Chorus:

Pewakunyu; pewakunyu; Jesusnim ahwapa nun,
pewakunyu, pewakunyu, Godki pewakunyu hanaka.

2. Godki pewakunyu hanaka, kaih kaihki waptaski hihika-taku, palahaipa hinakniku, Godki pewakunyu hanaka.

Gódki Píiwewkunyu' Héenek'e

(1)

Gódki píiwewkunyu' héenek'e
God-with we-will-meet again

'ipnimpé pi'amxtáano'
 him-with we-will-gather

Síipnim suuxeylekinwéespe
 Sheep's corral-at

Godki píiwewkunyu' héenek'e
 God-with we-will-meet again

(Chorus)

Píiwewkunyu', píiwewkunyu'
 we-will-meet we-will-meet

Cíisesnim 'exwéepe níun
 Jesus' feet-at we

Píiwewkunyu', píiwewkunyu'
 we-will-meet we-will-meet

Godki píiwewkunyu' héenek'e
 God-with we-will-meet again

(2)

Godki píiwewkunyu' héenek'e
 God-with we-will-meet again

Kayxkáyxki weptéeski hihikte'qu'
 Clean-with wings-with he-will-cover

Péeleheype hi'néek'niku'
 Every-day he-will-take-care

Godki píiwewkunyu' héenek'e
 God-with we-will-meet again⁶⁷

We recently had a death in our family from the effects of alcohol. My nephew passed away suddenly at the age of thirty. He was involved with the Nez Perce Language Program and the traditional drum group Lightning Creek, and his passion for the language and music inspired me. We sang “God Be with You Till We Meet Again” twice at his funeral. The first

⁶⁷ Harold Crook & Angel Sobotta, *Adult Nimipuutimt*, 2001-02.

time was in the church during the service itself. As we sang, I felt a sense of comfort and knew he was with those who have gone before us and that this hymn represented our prayers towards the promise of eternal life.

The second time was at the cemetery and actual burial. It took on a more symbolic nature as we waited to sing the hymn as the coffin entered the grave and his body was laid to rest. His spirit had gone to heaven and we know there is no dying there. The words in the hymn describe what I am struggling to express. I have felt this as a child upon first hearing these hymns. It is comforting for me and I know that the rest of my family feels this power and spirit as well.

In Sterlin Harjo's documentary film, *This May Be the Last Time*, Jimmy, an elder and Christian Indian from Oklahoma, describes the custom of singing at funerals: "When a loved one dies, one of the things we do is that we sing songs. And, we sing songs to help give comfort and point our people, that our help comes from God above."⁶⁸ This film was helpful for me in demonstrating a similar use of funeral hymns by other Indigenous people, it is the Indian way or *titoqandawit*. Jimmy offered a translation after singing the hymn, "Joy will never end and we will see each other."⁶⁹ Our custom of singing this hymn at funerals offers us access to a healing spirit. The song helps transport everyone to a sacred place and addresses the need for coping with grief and the mourning process.

Death

*My mother asked if I would let Bibo wear my choker that grandma Josie gave me for
my*

⁶⁸ *This May Be the Last Time*, directed by Sterlin Harjo, (Tulsa, OK: This Land Films, 2013), DVD.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Birthday. I was only seven years old, but I remember it well. Of course I would let my uncle have the necklace at his funeral. It made me feel special to be asked for such an honor. As I listened to my aunties talk about the upcoming services, one thing stuck out to me. Why does Poppo want to cut my uncle's hair?

Bibo was my favorite uncle. Mainly, because uncle Pee Wee was in prison, uncle Jud scared me and uncle Jerry teased me too much. But so did Bibo, he had a way of laughing with me that made me comfortable. He would tease me and say, "You are growing the wrong way! You're supposed to grow up, not sideways, aayy!" They all smelled like beer and cigarettes, but somehow I didn't notice around Bibo. I would jump around on one foot and he would say, "You're war dancing, now just do it on the other side."

That seemed so long ago, I still have dreams about him every once and awhile. Certain things still remind me of him. He was only thirty two years old when he died of liver disease from drinking. I remember seeing him lying in the hospital bed before he died. That was a terrible way to die. Bibo died in 1977.

My family experienced more death in the following years, uncle Jud in 1978, and then Grandma in 1979. This became a normal thing for me as a child, our loved ones going to the other side because they abused alcohol. It seemed like that was an acceptable form of death to me. When I look through old family photo albums, I see the picture of Bibo, lying in his casket, with the choker I gave him. The picture seems a little disturbing. Why is it necessary to photograph dead people?

NO DYING THERE

1. Watas in akitsa, hahautnin huisuh, haiwann, tinikipkinih, tiniksimaipa.

CHORUS:

Tiniksimaipa; tiniksimaipa; tosenih watas aisiniwas tiniksimaipa.

2. Lautiwama waukunu, liloiniwaspa, kunko yiyaunin hiusinm, tiniksimaipa.
3. Ateuna hikukaunu, sipus hitsapapikanyu, kunko lahainin hiwam, tiniksimaipa.⁷⁰

Tin'xsimeype, Tin'xsimeype
“No Dying There”

(1)

Wéetes 'iin 'eekíce haháwtin' hiwsinm haywáanin'
Land I see holy-ones they-are peaceful

Tin'kípxkin'ix tin'xsimeypa.
From-death to place-of-deathlessness

(Chorus)

Tin'xsimeypa, tin'xsimeypa ta'sníc wéetes
In-deathlessness in-deathlessness very-good land

'éysniwees tin'simeype.
Heaven in-deathlessness.

(2)

Láwtiwaama wéewkunu' lilóyniwaaspa
Friends I-will-meet in-happy-place

Kúnk'u yiyéewnin' hiwsinm tin'xsimeype.
Always merciful they-are in-deathlessness.

(3)

'éetxewn hiqóoqawno' sít'us hicapáakaykan'yo'
Troubles will-pass tears will-be-wiped-away

Kúnk'u léheyn hiwéem tin'xsimeype.
Always day it-is in-deathlessness.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Axtell, Parsons, and Waters, *Nee Mi Putimt Ki Wanipt*, song number 75.

⁷¹ Harold Crook & Angel Sobotta, *Adult Nimipuutimt*, 2001-02.

Family Support

When I was a baby, my aunt Sal called me Icky Pooh and the name stuck. This was to be my childhood Indian name. Yep, that's how it happens. In traditional Nez Perce fashion it was abbreviated to just Pooh. I was spoiled and apparently that is a bad thing and consequently all my fault. I have always been surrounded by the women in my family. They enjoy teasing me and making me blush. If there is any noticeable positive change in me it is because I'm in love. But I will hold true to myself and never tell. Besides, every time I fall in love with a Nez Perce woman, they always say, "Ii-yo! You two are related, she's your cousin!" I'm so embarrassed!

This type of teasing is common in our family and it is meant to keep me on the straight and narrow. It also keeps me accountable to the family circle. I have made mistakes in my life, but I always found forgiveness and an understanding heart within this circle of women. In her dissertation, *The Native American Persistence In Higher Education*, Nez Perce tribal member Yolanda Bisbee writes, "Native family support is communal, lasting, and supportive regardless of success or failure. This is what motivates Natives to persist."⁷² When the pressure is on in my educational journey or I find myself having to make an important decision, I always hear the voices and laughter of my Aunties and cousins. It is a reminder that I have to remain humble and always stay accountable to my family.

This heart of mine was developed through the love I received from family since I was a baby. Shawn Wilson teaches that "The source of a research project is the heart/mind of the researcher, and 'checking your heart' is a critical element in the research process. The researcher insures that there are no negative or selfish motives for doing the research, because that could bring suffering upon everyone in the community. A 'good heart'

⁷² Yolanda Bisbee, *The Native American Persistence in Higher Education*, 79.

guarantees a good motive, and good motives benefit everyone involved.”⁷³ When I speak of being privileged, this is what I mean. Through loving family support I have been able to embark on a journey through higher education. Bisbee states, “Through the balance of family, culture, and community, Native families have been able to support each other and to maintain their connectedness within their families and communities.”⁷⁴ This understanding allows me to realize that I am not alone on this journey. Also, I am aware that my success or failure is shared, so it gives me the extra inspiration to do well.

Write about the Knowledge gained and in the end, we will have completed what the Creator has asked us to do . . . that is teach and share what you have learned.

Téewispel’uu (Arthur Maxwell Taylor)

It is my intention to examine the nature of being a Native scholar engaging in an Indigenous research project and the responsibility that goes with this designation. The importance of giving critical thought to this heart check was something I did early on in my journey for knowledge. I had to realize that earning a Master’s degree was more about giving something back to family and community, rather than a personal achievement. It demonstrated to me how the process revolves in a circle. This is representative of an Indigenous conceptual framework within my research model: “An Indigenous research framework acts as a nest, encompassing the range of qualities influencing the process and content of the research journey.”⁷⁵ It was a necessary adjustment to give me the awareness of presenting a communal voice and the importance of the oral tradition.

This way is important for us Nez Perce. In his dissertation, tribal member Arthur Taylor says, “This Knowledge makes us Niimiipuu and it is our responsibility to share our

⁷³ Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, 60.

⁷⁴ Bisbee, *Native American Persistence*, 72.

⁷⁵ Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 42.

Knowledge with each other, to respect it, and give it to our children as a gift. Like myself, the Creator has chosen you to gain knowledge and you must now protect, teach, and share this knowledge with others in our/your Tribe.”⁷⁶ Much of what I know comes from Poppo in the oral tradition. We are from the Salmon River and our world view derives from this place. Our Indigenous knowledge resides here, so to speak; it represents “what is real”⁷⁷ to me. Margaret Kovach points out that “From this perspective, a conceptual framework gives researchers a tool to show how their methods are being aligned with a particular way of knowing.”⁷⁸ It was at this point in my journey that I found the opportunity to combine an Indigenous way of knowing with an academic writing style. Potentially, this could provide a relatable story that might help benefit the community. There are Nez Perce from the Salmon River who are Christians and participate at Talmaks. They know of this healing power residing in our translated hymns. The truth is that my writing is for them.

Writing about my own spirituality in a Master’s thesis is a unique situation and opportunity. I have one foot firmly planted in the reservation and the other trying to navigate the path of higher education. Along the way I have become somewhat of a “Native Intellectual”⁷⁹ At least, that is what they tell me. This opportunity arises through a lot of support from people in academia and other Natives within this field. I hold these individuals in the highest regard for their accomplishments and success in academia. They have been a source for inspiration throughout my journey in higher education and it is my intention to pass this guidance and support on to the next up and coming Native intellectual.

⁷⁶ Arthur M. Taylor, *Icyeeye Comes To School*, 3.

⁷⁷ Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, 33.

⁷⁸ Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 43.

⁷⁹ Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 62.

Certainly, there is a level of expectation and responsibility associated with this path. This journey for knowledge will ultimately reveal the contents of my heart, and my approach on this journey has been a delicate one: “An Indigenous axiology is built upon the concept of relational accountability. . . the Indigenous researcher has a vested interest in the integrity of the methodology (respectful) and the usefulness of the results if they are to be of any use in the Indigenous community (reciprocity).”⁸⁰ This journey has revealed knowledge from my family and community, which must be regarded as sacred. With their support and trust, I feel confident that I have produced an authentic piece. When I read the work of Indigenous researchers and scholars, I gained a better perspective regarding my comfort level in researching my own family and story.

The people in my family and community with the most knowledge on Nez Perce translated hymns are the elders. So it was imperative that I get their permission early on to conduct this research project. I formally asked the Circle of Elders, Talmaks Association and the Joint Session of the six Nez Perce Indian Presbyterian Churches. They are the keepers of this knowledge and it is up to them whether or not I engage with an Indigenous research project. Wilson writes that “We as Indigenous scholars who wish to participate in the creation of knowledge within our own way of being must begin with an active and scholarly recognition of who our philosophers and prophets are in our own communities. These are still the keepers and the teachers of our epistemologies.”⁸¹ I have to be respectful in this manner and mindful of what my elders advise me to do. Their teachings are sacred to me and their blessing was the first big step in my knowledge seeking journey.

⁸⁰ Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, 77.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 60.

They taught me through ceremony, a way to heal and forgive. Our custom of singing Nez Perce translated hymns is reserved for worship at our churches, Talmaks and funerals, or burial sites. These sacred places have significant meaning to us through the power of song, our family history and oral tradition. Arthur Taylor writes that “As an Indigenous scholar, it is from the lessons that I learned as a child, either from my parents, grandparents, family members, elders or mentors in my tribal community, that have provided me a Niimiipuu value system and education”⁸² This experience is purely a Nez Perce custom, so it has to speak the language of our people. This story has to hold true to the Christian Nez Perce tradition. Kovach points out that “The skill of making research methodology relevant and interesting to community rests largely with language. The ability to craft our own research stories, in our own voice, has the best chance of engaging others.”⁸³ This story is being told for the Christian Nez Perce in a way that they will be encouraged to access this power through their own stories, memories and dreams.

For this project, it has been necessary for me to engage in the practice of singing these translated hymns. However, singing by myself does not necessarily give me much insight. Through my experience, the songs are most meaningful when we are singing with our family and congregation. This process has given me the opportunity to evaluate my faith and place within the congregation of my church. It has allowed me to consider my position in telling this story and made me aware of the delicate nature of this powerful phenomenon I am attempting to interpret. This realization speaks directly towards what has been referred to as

⁸² Taylor, *Iceyeye Comes To School*, 16.

⁸³ Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 60.

“self-location”⁸⁴ This process put emphasis on my own personal reflection, and it allowed me to better examine the truth within our custom and religious practice:

Critically reflective self-location gives opportunity to examine our research purpose and motive. It creates a mutuality with those who share their stories with us. Critically reflective self-location is a strategy to keep us aware of the power dynamic flowing back and forth between researcher and participant. It prompts awareness of the extractive tendency of research. And it endorses tending to the personal and cultural in research.⁸⁵

While assessing my purpose and motive, I have come to the realization that this is supposed to be my work. There is a certain expectation from my congregation and community to write an accurate piece. I know this in my heart and realize that in order to stay true to the integrity of the research design I have to live a *congruent lifestyle* in order for relational accountability to flourish throughout the research process. Especially, now that the research is complete.

By doing this I can assure my project will be authentic. I can attribute this idea of knowing the truth to the concept of “cultural grounding.”⁸⁶ Kovach defines cultural grounding, “. . . as the way that culture nourishes the researcher’s spirit during the inquiry, and how it nourishes the research itself.”⁸⁷ My identity as a Christian Nez Perce has been nourished throughout this examination by the spirit surrounding our culture, held within the hymns themselves. As our stories have been revealed through this research process, the power we feel emerges through the spirit, which guides, protects and nourishes us. This spirit

⁸⁴ Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 110.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 112.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 116.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

inspires a continued effort with the research on Nez Perce translated hymns, not just for myself, but for the Christian Nez Perce that can identify with it.

This thesis has been written to inspire other Christian Nez Perce to consider self-location and cultural grounding in order to examine their own stories and experiences with this phenomenon. Much of my family story and experience has molded this thesis to acknowledge a Nez Perce way of knowing. It is not meant to be a linear piece, but holds true to the sacred circle or Indigenous epistemology. The result can only be measured through the reaction or perspective of the reader.

This project has allowed me to interview elders (teachers) with knowledge on these hymns. I have built on these relationships with a sense of trustworthiness and confidence in myself, in order to interpret the knowledge I sought. Shawn Wilson addresses this in *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, by stating, “The analysis must be true to the voices of all the participants and reflect an understanding of the topic that is shared by researcher and participants alike. In other words, it has to hold to relational accountability.”⁸⁸ It has been my task to remain true to the overall perspective of these teachers and other participants. I have translated this unique worldview in a manner that remains credible with the voices that sing these songs.

When my elders speak I make sure that I am engaged as a listener because their stories have lessons in them. They are much like a coyote story, carrying a message of truth and wisdom. Nelsen explains “This dynamic oral tradition-although severely threatened by waves of colonial disruption, forced assimilation, and cultural homogenization-is being maintained and restored by persistent language keepers and cultural bearers throughout the

⁸⁸ Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 102.

world.”⁸⁹ The elders of our churches possess such knowledge. Their teaching and knowledge cross sociocultural boundaries, bringing a message of understanding.

My curiosity and fascination with learning is something I regard as sacred. The elders have taught me to view all living things as being sacred. This Indigenous knowledge has a sacred place within me. In the realm of Indigenous pedagogy, there is an understanding that we all possess the ability to teach and learn from one another. We all possess our own sacred “bundles”⁹⁰ that help us interact with others. But teaching bundles are only part of the story. The other part is the learning bundles. In Indigenous pedagogy there is a great emphasis on learning. Chickasaw law professor James Sakej Henderson often refers to the “learning spirit” within each person. He earnestly asks us, “How do we awaken and sustain the learning spirit?”⁹¹ My journey for knowledge has allowed for my bundle to be revealed. It has been necessary for me to convey my story in order to allow for others, who can relate, to examine their own bundles: “Native American storytelling is an invaluable cross-cultural continuum that has no beginning and no end. All cultures can learn and be enriched by Native storytelling”⁹²

My teachers have taught me that the learning spirit that I possess comes from *Coyote*. He encourages me to shape my mind to emulate the roundness of the earth, my mother. I’m connected to her through all my relations and I am able to understand my place. The awareness of this truth has allowed me to position myself firmly in the institution of education. This privileged position gives me the opportunity to share my knowledge and speak for mother earth. The dominant culture is slowly becoming more accepting of an

⁸⁹ Melissa, Nelsen, K. *Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future*, 4

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 5.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 5.

⁹² *Ibid*.

Indigenous approach to education, and it has been an honor to offer my bundle as a contribution to this process.

My position within my church, family and tribe is to simply carry on what has been taught to me. Much has been lost, but I remain and so do my children and it is my responsibility to pass this knowledge on to them. Today, the oral tradition is heavily influenced by the presence of literacy. In this project I have found my place in language preservation and hymn resurrection. The combination of these two epistemologies has been occurring with the Nez Perce since they merged like a river, in 1834 when Spalding and The Lawyer published the first hymnbook.

“I notice this, Miss Kate, when I was away. It was only the wild whites who called us Indians. The Christians called us Nez Perces.”

Billy Williams

The acceptance of Christianity and the desire to be literate has given me a privileged position in life. Our ancestors experienced this melding process and the power it contains, and we understand it is our legacy to carry on as Nez Perce people with this knowledge close to our hearts. This is not a conclusive piece; it is not meant to show a scientific method and offer any sort of definitive answers. It is a story of survival and persistence, and it is presented here to offer hope.

The interview process opened a door for the participants to walk through. They expressed their own memories and emotions with singing the hymns. The result was a deeper understanding of the custom, held within their connection to our own story of Christianity among the Nez Perce. In *Creating Christian Indians*, Lewis explains, “Indian Christianity built on parallels. In response to personal or social crisis, Indians used Christianity to shape their own solutions and transform their lives. However, even when Indians claimed to have

renounced Indian religious culture in favor of the ‘missionaries’ Euro-American Christianity, American Indians went on to construct Christian Indian communities, with Indian leadership and vigorous Indian institutions that took pride in Indianness. Despite the cultural trappings of the new religion, Indian Christians recognized an essential Christian doctrine: the universality of the Christian faith.”⁹³ This worldview can only be expressed by those telling or re-telling their own family history, if they choose to do so. The power held in these hymns has a place in their hearts and souls. Revealing this space is reserved for them to decide. This spirit of sharing offers a universal understanding of healing.

There is a need for healing in our communities today. Telling my family’s history is of great importance, as it is representative of the historical trauma that my family and people endure today. By engaging with this personal search or journey, an actual process of healing takes place. The power we feel in singing the hymns is reserved for ourselves to contemplate in our own way. The hymns are a part of our spirituality and belong close to our hearts. Healing can be found here because that is what our ancestors have told us. In this way we hold the key to true forgiveness and reconciliation for America regarding colonization.

There is a definite decline in church membership and participation of the men, particularly with singing the hymns. This personal journey for knowledge has drawn me back to the spirit and power found in the custom of singing our hymns. My story is meant to inspire the Christian Nez Perce who are concerned with the preservation of these Nez Perce translated hymns and are waiting for the re-emergence of the men as leaders in this custom. Telling their own stories and engaging with their own journey may provide the necessary and continued healing from the symptoms of historical trauma which still exist in all of our families.

⁹³ Lewis, *Creating Christian Indians*, 26, 27.

This thesis is meant to be an identity piece. The focus and examination is on the preservation of the custom of singing our translated hymns. They are syncretic songs and continue to hold a unique representation of us as Christian Nez Perce. By continuing to embrace and practice this custom, we are re-affirming to ourselves that our identity as Nez Perce includes being Christian. And there is a saving grace and power reserved in practicing this way of life.

This Nez Perce way of living is very different than two generations prior, but it still draws from the fundamental understanding of a sacred connection to our land and to our ancestors. This connection holds my identity and has guided me through my life and this journey for knowledge. This sacred knowledge I have discovered has helped me to clarify my understanding of who I truly am. The wisdom I have gained has enabled me to embrace the expectations for my life which were written down as words in our language generations before I was born. These words and translations create stories and songs which I have heard in my dreams throughout a lifetime. The soft morning rainstorm has quieted enough to allow my story and song to emerge. This is my story, this is my song!

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