



*Nathan Adler*

*Orangeville, ON*

*Lac des Mille Lacs First Nation*

*29 years old*

## **ALL TEETH**

### **Boozhence**

little black kitty

side of the road puss

patch of grey grass beside the highway

cars whizzing paaast

looking lost and fragile

a few miles down the road

a hawk swirls on draughts of air

predatory eye scanning the fields

a birds gotta eat

too

### **Archival Notes to Treaty#3**

Tissue laminated

- brown stain on p.[1] located in the  
bottom left corner
- left edges of sheets torn
- 6 holes in the top left corner of  
each sheet, possibly used for binding  
document together
- red wax stains on top left corner of p.[3]

## **Last Spring**

Yellowed B&W photo

Leslie's not wearing gloves

they're lying in the foreground on the snow

A cigarette perched between his lips

Wicked evil grin

Agnes is wearing a skirt

She must be freezing

Geez these kids!

Bob is in a long coat

wearing his leather gloves

on the back

written in blue ink

my grandmother has written

Leslie, Agnes, and Bobby

My Bro's and Sis

Bob Drown Last Spring



LESLIE, AGNES,  
+ Bobby  
MY BRO'S  
+ sis  
Bob  
DROWN  
IN  
LAST  
SPRING

**"I Dare you to say this to an Indian person to their face!"**

- written on the margins of a 1<sup>st</sup> year

Canadian Studies student's essay

- "Democracy comes from here!

the Haudenosaunee invented it;

corn, beans, squash, tomatoes, tobacco, chocolate

it all comes from here!

So don't call Native People

'savages running wild in the prairies '!"

- "I didn't mean to offend you,

I actually just got that out of a book"

- "Don't tell me that!

that's even worse!

that's plagiarism and you plagiarized poorly"

## The Grocery Store Stand-off

They were in a store, shopping. When it came time to pay, Lilas pulled out her status card for the PST exemption, a small but helpful reduction in price. Every little bit helped. The man frowned, "I'm sorry Ma'm, but we don't accept those here". Her face darkened, like the shadow of a storm cloud passing over-head.

*Uh-oh, he's in for it now*, I thought. But instead of getting angry, or arguing with him or pointing out to the man that it was a *Treaty Right* and not up for discussion, she simply compressed her lips into a thin line and walked out of the store. She spent the rest of the day on the phone, making calls:

"Hello, Marie-Anne. This is Lilas . . . "

"Hello, Josephine. It's Lilas calling . . ."

At 7:00, later that evening, a horde of Anishinaabe women descended upon the store that wouldn't accept Status Cards for PST exemption. They loaded up their carts, filling them to the brim with products and household items, which their families used on a regular basis.

The angry phalanx of women advanced upon the checkout counter with military precision, fully prepared to make their purchases with Lilas in the lead. If they had had tails, they would have all been swishing. When it came time to pay, Lilas pulled out her status card for the PST exemption.

The man frowned, "I'm sorry Ma'm, but we don't accept those here".

The corners of her mouth turned up in a small smile as she turned on her heel and walked out of the store with a run-way model swagger, the angry phalanx of Anishinaabe women followed her, leaving their brimming carts standing there, ready for re-shelving.

## **Wabooz**

Baby Rabbit squished at the side of the road

The crows take turns pecking at it

Taking

one

piece

at

a

time

And the Mother Rabbit sits on the curb

Chasing them away

every time

Still trying to protect it

## **Archival Notes to the Shebandowan Adhesion to Treaty#3**

Tissue laminated

- blue stain on p.[3]

- left edges torn and pieces missing

- edges dirty

- brown stain on p. [1] near the top

left corner

- on the top of p.[3] is written

“Treaty 133 Indian office” which is

an incorrect number

- 6 holes in the top left corner

probably used for binding

documentation together

## **Barbara Stanwick**

sitting in my grandmother's living room

blue walls painted pink

"What's her name?" my grandma asks.

"I don't know, I don't recognize her", I say.

--Old black and white movie on t.v.--

"I forget. I think she's dead"

"I don't recognize her"

--Cowboys and Indians--

"Oh, what's her name?" brow furrowed in thought

--Cowboys start shooting Indians--

"He just shot that guy!" I say surprised.

"Barbara . . . Barbara Stanwick" grandma remembers.

"they're shooting all the Indians" I say,

my mom pokes her head in the doorway as she goes by

"Oh! Barbara Stanwick!" she says.

I laugh and then impersonate first my grandmother

And then my mom: "Oh what's her name? / Oh! Barbara Stanwick!"

Blue walls painted pink.

When she moved in, my old room became her living room transplanted.

On screen Barbara Stanwick gets shot.

"Oh what's his name? I think he's dead too!" my grandma says.

I don't recognize him

## **After the funeral**

I meet cousin David

he has numbers on his arm

He tells me the story

of how he watched

the execution

--no--

*not* execution

the *murder*

he tells me

the story

of how

he watched

his cousin

being murdered

--the uncle I am named for--

he tried to escape

the concentration camp

they hung him by the neck

he was eighteen years old

### **Early Sunday Morning**

We are woken up early Sunday morning  
to find my Mom's Blue Pontiac Sunfire  
parked *on top* of the neighbours' lawn  
Half-on-top of the hedge  
and sitting at a crazy angle to the road

A man is bleeding  
Holding a dirty rag to his slashed hand

He looks shook up

The cop takes one look at my brother,  
One look at the Blue Pontiac Sunfire,  
and one look at the man who is bleeding.

"How fast were you travelling",  
the cop asks my brother,  
"when you hit the gentleman's car?"

"What!" my brother asks, incredulous.

*"I was asleep in my bed,*  
and my car was *parked,*  
when the gentleman hit my car."

**Sexy little mountain stream**

**Ziibiin gtchi-zoshkojiiwan bishigwotis**

Little stream on the mountain top

Ziibiin kakiweing  
ogidaabik

you are the sexiest little stream I've ever seen

ngii-waabma gii-mno-na-gooziinh  
Gbishigwotise ziibiin

you taste like rocks and melted snow

mno-pogun dgo-azhaabik minwa  
zoogpo-aaboo

when I kneel down to put my lips into you

nwii-saandiweing nshining  
ndoonim gbiinj'iing

how you even exist, I do not know

gbemaadizi na?,  
Gaawiin kikendizi

It's like 35 below, with the wind-chill

niis'iing nsindimaa-shi-naanin, gsinaa  
gojing, ii'inge giikaach onji-noodin

It's a miracle that you aren't completely frozen solid

gmaankanendam  
gishkawaagojii

you rock my world and fill my dreams

gbaapagishkaa nakiim, minwa  
gbazhidebazz nbawaajiganim

with your guardian bird-spirit with hollow bones

gzhimaagnish bineshii-  
jiibay okanag-bizhizhigo

drinking, diving, trickling home

minikwewin, googii,  
bekaadizi-miigwan waaka-igan

You are the sexiest little living thing I've seen.

Ngii-waabma  
gii-mno-na-gooziinh

you and your crackling stream

minwa  
gzhiishiiganim zibi

my sexy little mountain stream

nmno-na-gooziinh  
ogidaabik ziibiinh

## **How To Say 'Sexy' In Ojibway**

Let me tell you

It was hard

Trying to translate the poem "Sexy Little Mountain Stream"

Into Anishinaabemowin

asking my Grandma

how do you say 'Sexy' in Ojibwa?

## **Aandeg**

Pecking around the edges

Feeding off the flowing steel river of metal death

Why let good meat go to waste?

Sitting out in the raw-meat sun.

Side of the road tragedy

Mamma Rabbit charging at them,

forcing them to take to the air

But not for long

They bide their time,

waiting,

inching closer,

wearing

her

down.

She can't stay awake forever.

Baby Rabbit's not going anywhere

## **The Camera's Red Glare**

is this what it takes

to get justice

someone has to get killed

for people to pay attention

someone has to die

so people can ask

who's fault is this?

Why did this happen?

Quiet deaths don't count

drugs, alcohol, diabetes

toxic polluted fish

while ten feet under water

people used to sit

maybe if I tell

the Scandalous Story

people will sit up and listen

and say: shame, shame on you

flooding those Indians

out of their homes

while non-native

property owners

were compensated

### **A Spell To Defeat Your Enemies**

The recipe called for a drop of Irish blood

“Where’r ya gunna get a drop of Irish blood?”

“Give me your arm”

“No way”

“Come on”, he said holding a pin that he was planning to stab me with.

“No, I’m not even Irish”

“I know you are, you told me you were part Irish on your mother’s father’s side”.

“Yeah, but a drop of Irish blood’s all I got, if I give you that I won’t have any Irish blood left”.

“Don’t be ridiculous, all your blood’s Irish, or at least some part of it. Now give it to me”, he said holding out his hand.

“Oowh!” he yelped.

“Stop being such a baby”

### **Bineshiinhag**

Blue jay sits in the tree

Screaming

“A Crow! A Crow! A Crow! A Crow!”

Sounding the alarm

Piece of grass in his mouth

All he was doing was building his nest

This time

I've seen them  
Attacking other bird's nests  
They Eat Babies  
--they're predators--  
I Found a baby bird on the ground once  
Dead  
Still warm

Thirty of them or more  
Out there  
Robins  
attacking a crow

### **Gerry Slushi**

Downtown waiting for Uncle Gerry  
Never met him before  
My brother goes to get a Slushi,  
I sit waiting for a few minutes  
Realize I don't know what Gerry looks like  
Old army photo of him as a young man sitting on our mantle  
Stars and Stripes  
"Who's that Chinese guy?"  
I remember a childhood friend asking me once  
He's not Chinese  
He went AWOL during the war and can't go back into the United States  
But what does he look like now?

Q: what does Gerry look like

I text message my brother

rubber necking around

A: he kinda looks like shawn but older

Shawn Shawn, hmmm, okay (our older brother)

*That* Indian guy over there *could* be Gerry

He keeps looking at me, why else would he be sitting there?

He looks like he's waiting. It *must* be Gerry.

I go over.

"Are you Gerry?" I ask

"Why?" he says, and laughs.

"Do you owe him money or something?"

"Uh, no" I say,

"I'm supposed to meet my Uncle here"

"There's lots' ah guys look like me in-town now,

the AFN is voting in a new Chief!"

I go sit back down on my concrete block.

my brother comes back with his Slushi

"is he here yet?"

## Nezaadiikaang/ Place of the Poplars

the water is RED

like BLOOD

Coca-Cola FIZZ

Hydrogen Chloride

Some say it has always been that COLOUR

Others say that it is the high IRON content

Or the Iron-Ore MINE Under Steep Rock Lake

(During the height of WWII

My father was fleeing Poland

while under the WAR MEASURES ACT

RESOURCES were being EXTRACTED)

some say it is the DAMNS

the DAWSON Damn came FIRST

the BACKUS Damn came SECOND

the ONTARIO Hydro Damn came THIRD

we are 3x damned

it raised the water level of the lake

so that the trees were standing in water

Poplar Trees

Occasionally used for tanning leather

Due to their high Tannic Acid Content

Staining the water

“human blood”

My mom tells me

“has the same salinity

as sea-water”

Maybe the place stained itself

## **They Argue**

about the up-coming Elders Gathering.

What makes an Elder? Is it merely age, or

something more? And whether or not

the age should be lowered

to fifty-five

in-line with Anishinaabe life expectancy

They argue

about what should be done

with the money from the Flood Claim

Compensation. Should it be divided up

amongst the membership, or

should the chief and council,

(with membership input),

decide how the money is spent,

and can they be trusted?

This issue divides us.

All the money,

couldn't put us back together.

They argue

about who is sleeping with whom,

a white man in a position of power.

nepotismgreedfavouritismcorruptiongossipjealousysuspicion

mixed blood "white children" running around the reserve

I've seen your grandchildren,  
You're one to talk.  
Your grand-kids are just as pale as mine.  
They have just as much a right to be here

Internal/external racism, fear, insecurity. 90210 on speed.  
In our community, no one feels like they belong  
Someone else, always knows more than you do  
Everyone feels,  
out of the loop

**Caution: Hidden Danger**

Someone once told me  
That it was the strangest lake  
Under the water  
That they had ever seen

Better not to go out on the water  
If you don't know your way around  
The lake is filled with un-foreseen hazards  
Shallow areas that used to be islands  
Sand bars in unexpected places

Better not to bottom-out  
At thirty kilometers per hour

## **Grandma Says**

that's what rabbits call us,

they call us

all teeth

because

it's

all

they

see

### ***Author's Statement***

The historical event I chose to write about isn't just one historical event, but a variety of moments, ranging from the signing of Treaty #3 to the present, weaved together to form a wider picture of our First Nation.

The physical condition of the Treaty #3 Document, which represents the relationship between First Nations People and the Crown, is an indication of the way Canada has historically "treated" and viewed its' relationship to First Nations People. The flooding of Reserve Lands has had a pervasive influence, dispersing the community so that even close relatives have never met, leading to funny and awkward moments. Each poem is like a small snap-shot that tells a story about our community, including both the good and the bad, both humour and harsh realities, and like a photograph, all of the poems are based on real events.

Some of the themes I explore involve the food chain as a metaphor for human interactions, human interference with the natural world, cruelty, memory, loss, racism, pain, and cultural identity.

The history of our First Nation is not unique, all the challenges that it has faced are similar to those faced by other nations, and speaks to the historical relationship

between Canada and Indigenous peoples. Hopefully telling these “Scandalous” stories will bring attention to, and help redress, some of the injustices which have been inflicted on our First Nations, and provide Canadians with a more accurate picture of what it means to be a First Nations person in Canada.