

*Meeting*  
*My* A Journey toward  
Reconciliation  
*Treaty Kin*

Heather Menzies

# Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <i>Prologue</i>                        | ix  |
| Introduction                           | 1   |
| 1 At the Fence                         | 18  |
| 2 Showing Up                           | 25  |
| 3 First Doubts                         | 40  |
| 4 A Chance to Really Engage            | 51  |
| 5 Who Do You Think You Are?            | 61  |
| 6 Showing Up Again                     | 67  |
| 7 Dwelling in Discomfort               | 76  |
| 8 Challenged                           | 83  |
| 9 Challenging Myself                   | 96  |
| 10 Conversations Deepen                | 103 |
| 11 Witnessing Denial                   | 111 |
| 12 Learning to Listen                  | 122 |
| 13 Witnessing Denial – and Possibility | 128 |

|    |  |     |
|----|--|-----|
| 14 | Surrendering Personally  | 138 |
| 15 | Living a Land Claim  | 148 |
| 16 | Connective Cadences  | 160 |
| 17 | Colonialism Ongoing  | 174 |
| 18 | Preparing to Leave   | 188 |
| 19 | The Poignant Blessings of<br>Relationship Building                     | 196 |
| 20 | Surrendering Professionally  | 208 |
| 21 | Helping Prepare a Spirit Plate   | 220 |
| 22 | Continuing the Journey: Toward a<br>Possible Settler Counter-Narrative | 230 |
|    | Epilogue: Lighting the Eighth Fire?                                    | 239 |
|    | <i>Acknowledgments and Important<br/>Sources</i>                       | 242 |
|    | <i>Notes</i>   | 249 |

# *Prologue*

*November 2018*

On a cool, grey day in late autumn, I stood outside the former Ipperwash army barracks where Cully (Carolyn) George-Mandoka has lived since 1995, the year her brother Dudley was shot by the Ontario Provincial Police. I knew this was where she lived because a former band council chief had brought me here, to what – beneath the army camp structures – was still the Stoney Point Reserve, to meet her. I'd stood at the bottom of the stairs leading to the small stoop outside the door as the former chief knocked on the door. I thought I'd seen the curtain over the door's window move, then nothing. The door never opened, and we left.

A week later, I now stood on the stoop by myself, with no one to introduce me and legitimize my presence. There were two hundred years of social, cultural, and political alienation between the woman on the other side of the door and me. Yet somehow, according to Indigenous ways of thinking about which I was starting to learn, this woman and I were related, as was Dudley, through a treaty. We were even treaty kin. I knocked on the door, my mouth dry, my heart thumping in

my chest. I waited, my eyes on the small square window set in the faded wooden door. The curtain moved. I stood there waiting, feeling conspicuous as a pickup truck drove by on the road just beyond where I stood, slowing down as it passed. Someone had noticed me. I felt self-conscious, clearly a white person (zhaganash) on this remnant of ancient Nishnaabe territory. I continued to stand there, not wanting to knock again, but not wanting to give up either.

The door opened a few inches. In the darkness of the opening, I saw a short woman, brown skin, dark brown eyes, chin-length grey hair.

“Yes?” she said, her voice hard.

I told her my name. I knew it was pretty late, I said. But I’d come to offer her my condolences at the death of her brother.

She looked at me hard. I held her gaze: brown eyes on blue, blue eyes on brown.

She stepped back, pulled open the door.

“Come in,” she said.

I entered the space: a big open room that had once been separate bedrooms for army cadets before the walls were taken out. The pale linoleum flooring was scuffed and worn through in spots. In the centre of the room stood a big Arborite and chrome table and, hanging above it, a Tiffany-style lamp with a Coca-Cola motif, bingo cards stuck along the edge.

“Have a seat,” Cully said. She went around to the other side of the table, sat down, and pulled a pile of fabric toward herself. It was a quilt. A bear-paw design, she said, opening it out so I could see the pattern.

# *Introduction*

---

I still can't identify everything that drew me to Cully's army-barracks home that day, or what prompted me to accept an invitation to help her and three others pull their collective stories into a book about the Ipperwash crisis and the broken treaty behind it. I can only say that, nearly five years into the journey, I'm glad I took up the challenge that accompanied their invitation: the challenge to learn to listen, and to change at a level deep enough to be called transformation. This memoir is the story of my journey, a very personal account of how I came to implicate myself in Canada's colonial history. Finally! I'd spent most of my life conveniently ignoring it.

I was probably fairly typical of my generation, growing up with a short, early history of Canada's Indigenous Peoples at school. The Indians, as they were referred to at the time, featured in the fur trade – the European fur trade. After that, they disappeared. Even when Section 35 of the 1982 Canadian Constitution came into effect, recognizing and affirming the treaty rights of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, these realities were just abstractions. Add-ons. Peripheral to what really mattered. I didn't consider the early treaties as founding

constitutional documents of this country, which is how the Anishnaabe legal scholar John Borrows describes them. I didn't even know about them. I didn't know there was a treaty part of my heritage; I only knew about the colonial part – and not much even of that.

I grew up in a tightly knit nuclear family in a post-war suburb of Montreal, with streets named after the species of trees that had been removed, their roots bulldozed away, to make way for the perfect pavement of Maple Avenue, Elm Street, and so on. There was no sense of history, and at the time I didn't miss it. The past was past, end of story. I didn't even think of myself as a “settler” at the time, just a Canadian pure and simple. And my sense of that – what it meant to be Canadian – was grounded in the time when European people like me came here, and the values and institutions they brought with them.

I knew that my father's people, the Menzies and the Crerars, originated in the Scottish Highlands and had settled in southwestern Ontario in the early 1830s and 1840s. I understood that they'd bought their original hundred-acre lots from the Canada Land Company in North Easthope Township, Perth County. I didn't question how the Canada Land Company had acquired all this land in order to sell it. I assumed it had just been lying there vacant. Empty. There for the taking.

I wasn't aware of anything missing from the story I'd been told, and it never occurred to me that there might be some avoidance going on – some dissociation and unconscious denial. The contradictions remained buried, blithely ignored and unexamined, even after I began to show up for social justice causes involving Indigenous people, and even when these involved land claims. Yes, I support you, I thought as I joined the Idle No More march to Parliament Hill in Ottawa on a snowy day in December 2012. Yes again, as I brought food and firewood to support Chief Theresa Spence during

her hunger strike in a teepee on Victoria Island in the Ottawa River, just behind Parliament Hill. Three years later, having moved to British Columbia, I travelled north to join a Paddle for the Peace protest against the provincial government's plans to flood the traditional territory of the West Moberly and Prophet River (Treaty 8) First Nations as it constructed the mammoth Site C dam on the Peace River. I spent some days at the Unist'ot'en Action Camp, also in northern BC, supporting the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs in their struggle to assert their sovereignty and, with it, their collective right – and responsibility – to protect their vibrantly alive territory against an invading pipeline project.

But even as I leaned in, wanting to be part of all this, I somehow remained on the outside. Each time, it was like jumping over a fence and landing in a different country. I couldn't map my being there against, or into, my map of Canada. There was no connective link to my narrative as a Canadian in this same space. But then I wasn't adding that other descriptor: settler Canadian. In other words, someone descended from people who had settled here. Here not being there, where my people's original home was; here being the place of origin of other people, then and now. Here being *their* place.

There was something unresolved here, two unreconciled realities latent with contradiction and unacknowledged truth.

I didn't confront this contradiction as much as sidle up to it. Around the time the Ipperwash Inquiry into Dudley George's death was winding down and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was being launched, a vague sense of being at a loss in my life had sent me to Scotland seeking my ancestral roots. I was flying home after yet another trip to the Highlands, this time exploring the glen where the Crerars – my father's mother's people, part of the MacIntosh clan – had lived out their lives, seemingly since before recorded time. I'd tracked the faint remaining evidence, dating from



around 1000 BCE, of their ancestors having built stone-circle huts on one slope of the glen, and knew these signified their transition from hunter-gatherers to hunter-gatherers plus farmer-herders. On the other side of the valley, I had wandered among the more recent (1830s) ruins of a *clachan* village where the people had lived as more settled farmers, especially as the surrounding common land began to be enclosed as private property; hunting and gathering then became “poaching,” a punishable offence.

As I drifted in and out of sleep, flying high above the vast Atlantic, I found myself wondering what had been going on in North America in 1832, when Peter Crerar and his family, and in 1842, when James Menzies and his family, had crossed the Atlantic by sailing ship. Had there been any people around when they landed and settled here? If so, how had those people lived out their lives on the land? It wasn’t much of a thought – just a small crack in the head space I had grown up in. But the questions lingered.

I started reading anything I could get my hands on, catching up on all the Indigenous history I’d missed without realizing it or paying attention. And as I read, I began to understand that North America wasn’t just First Nations *territory*, not just “native” space. It was native *mind space*, too, as Abenaki scholar Lisa Brooks puts it. A different way of thinking and being in the world prevailed at the time. A different world. It probably still did when my forebears arrived, I thought; it possibly still prevails in the here and now. Could my forebears have related to this then? Could I now? This fascinated me. It also kept me safely in the past, and conveniently in my own little world inside my head; it was all about me.

In *The Common Pot*, Brooks recovers the story of how the Indigenous peoples of the Atlantic seaboard negotiated their first relations with European newcomers, first through peace and friendship treaties, and then gradually through the sharing of land. She also reveals some of the thinking they brought

to these treaty-making or “treating” sessions, referencing what Indigenous leaders, including Joseph Brant, recorded at the time on birchbark scrolls, as well as the memory embedded in wampum belts, one of the earliest being the Two Row Wampum. The land itself is also a memory device, I learned; walking one’s ancestral land was, for Indigenous people, a way to connect with memories of that inhabited space.

I read that, to the Abenaki and the Haudenosaunee at least, these lands, often bounded by the slopes of a river valley, were understood as a “common pot.” It was a pot that all the inhabitants of the valley were part of, contributed to, and were fed from. Yes, I thought, sensing similarities to what I’d learned about how my ancestors had lived on commonly shared lands in their Highland glens.

I also learned that the treaties weren’t so much contracts as vows and covenants, even sacred ones. They were a way to formalize relationships that were both political and personal, understood as between kin. The relationships connected the people who shared a habitat over time. Moreover, the responsibility to maintain and regularly renew that relationship was ongoing, from generation to generation. Renewal began with gestures and rituals of condolence and reparation, both acknowledging harms done and restoring balance to the relationship.

I kept nodding as I read, identifying with this way of connecting with the land, with the idea of these intergenerational relationships, and the responsibilities too.

As my reading transported me across space and time, I found the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and its follow-up in the Treaty of Niagara, 1764, in which Indigenous leaders promised to live in peace with their British allies in return for the promise King George III had made in his proclamation: to respect the sovereignty and self-determination of the Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous nations in their territory, with any

ceding or sharing of that land subject to treaty making with the crown. Symbols stitched into the shell beadwork encoded these understandings in wampum belts made for the occasion. One of these was the Covenant Chain Belt depicted on the cover of this book. When its ends are brought together, they complete the second of two diamonds, symbolizing the council fires of two sovereign nations.<sup>1</sup> In the middle, two stick figures holding hands and with beaded hearts visible in their chests signified the closeness of the treaty relationship.

Next, I found and read what was recorded by colonial authorities about the 1827 Huron Tract treaty. Under its terms, somewhere between two and three million acres of fertile land in what became southwestern Ontario, mostly west of present-day London, were “ceded” and “surrendered” by the resident Ojibwe-speaking Nishnaabeg<sup>2</sup> to the Crown. One million of those acres were given to the Canada Land Company to sell to prospective settlers like my forebears.

Aha, I thought: the missing piece of the story! I took that in. But there was more involved in the treaty negotiations. Four large tracts of land, thousands of acres each and often on spots considered sacred – though representing less than 1 percent of the Nishnaabeg’s territory dealt with in the treaty – were set aside for their exclusive use, in perpetuity. One of these was at Sarnia, another at Walpole Island on the shores of Lake St. Clair, close to Windsor and Detroit. Two were bordered by an extensive stretch of fine-sand beach on the shores of Lake Huron, northeast of Sarnia. One was called Kettle Point; the other became the Stoney Point Reserve.

I felt a prickling in my eyes and a tightening in my throat as a memory surfaced. Stoney Point had been in the news in the 1990s, something about an army camp called Ipperwash being reclaimed as this reserve. Now it occurred to me: this might be part of my settler heritage, a heritage reaching closer to the here and now. It was a treaty side to my heritage about which I’d known nothing.

I found myself wanting to know and even claim this heritage, wanting to take on what it had to teach me about myself as a Canadian, including my responsibilities toward that treaty. I bought a copy of the 2007 report of the Ipperwash Inquiry into the 1995 shooting death of Dudley George during that land-reclamation action. I worked my way through its four volumes of comprehensive history and detailed account of what happened in the early 1990s.

In 1942, the federal government invoked the War Measures Act to legitimize its appropriating the entire Stoney Point Reserve to create an army training camp. It was understood that at the end of the war the land would be returned, and the people who had been displaced, including Cully and Dudley George's father, could get their homes back. But the land was not returned. Year after year, for decades, repeated letter writing, petitions, demonstrations, lobbying by regional and national Indigenous organizations, and even a report by a parliamentary committee urging the land's return changed nothing. Canada's Department of National Defence maintained it still needed the land.

In 1993, six elders, all of whom had been born and at least partly raised on the reserve and were by then getting old, decided they'd had enough. They simply moved back home, many of their children and children's children coming with them. At first, they lived in tents and trailers along the edge of the bush, some distance from the barracks, offices, mess hall, and parade ground where the army still ran its training programs, now for young army cadets. Someone's old hunting tarp sheltered a shared eating area.

Gradually they built more substantial accommodations, including small cabins and a council meeting hall. They revived their language and customs, such as the sweat lodge and peacekeepers, and they restored their self-governance traditions. They drew widespread support from non-native groups as well as from other reserves, in Canada as well as the United

States, support with which they tried to advance the return of their land. To no avail. In July 1995, they took over the by-then largely unoccupied barracks,<sup>5</sup> which, amazingly, prompted the remaining army personnel to leave. A few weeks after that, at the end of the Labour Day weekend, they went one step further. They extended their reclamation efforts into Ipperwash Provincial Park, a beautiful stretch of the lake-shore adjacent to the army camp, which had originally been part of the reserve. After Labour Day, the park was closed for the season.

The newly elected Ontario premier, Mike Harris, decided to treat this action as a law-and-order issue: these people were illegally trespassing in the park. The fact that they were Indigenous and reclaiming their homeland guaranteed to them in a treaty didn't matter. Two days later, on September 6, 1995, there was a police boat in the waters offshore, a surveillance helicopter hovering overhead, and a massive police presence throughout the area, with roadblocks on all the access roads. In the moonlit darkness of that night, a contingent of thirty-five body armour-clad provincial police – some with semi-automatic weapons on their shoulders and guns in their holsters, and all with special-issue steel batons swinging from their belts – marched down the road to the park. In the melee that ensued, the police opened fire. Dudley George, a short, slightly stocky, and unarmed man dressed in sneakers, jeans, and a T-shirt, was fatally shot.

I don't remember those details having been on the news at the time, or that Dudley George, like the others, was unarmed. I only remember that a native man called Dudley George had been shot. I remember thinking, that's too bad and, if I'm remembering right, making a donation to a peace group that was trying to help. But otherwise I carried on with my life. Now I didn't know what to do. But something had changed, something had gotten through to me. I'd found a

way through the fence; the Huron Tract Treaty was the gate. It was the connection between Indigenous people like Dudley and Cully George, and me – or at least a way of connecting.

This was my treaty heritage as a settler. I focused on that, not the fact that it was buried under a colonial heritage, an ongoing colonial heritage I was still shying away from. What had happened at Stoney Point was my way in; all I had to do was get there.

I'd been an activist all my life, part of the post-war generation of idealists who believed that direct action could change the world. At university in Montreal in the late 1960s, I'd joined anti-Vietnam war marches and Quebec sovereignty rallies. At the university itself, I'd been part of a sit-in at the sociology department to demand more critical (Marxist) perspectives in what we were being taught. In 1970, the year I graduated, I participated in a teach-in on the North American Indian, with Harold Cardinal as keynote speaker denouncing the 1969 White Paper proposal to abolish the Indian Act and, with it, the things that formally recognized Indigenous peoples as nations, including treaties.

The impulse, and with it the confidence, to just show up had served me well both in my career as a journalist and writer, and in my continued involvement in issues of the day as a peace and social-justice activist and a feminist. So why not implicate myself in what happened at Ipperwash? I was retired now and had more time.

Dudley George had been shot not so much because people like me had chosen to deny his treaty rights and heritage, though some in decision-making authority certainly had, but because, at least in part, people like me had remained indifferent: ignorant of this heritage and the responsibilities flowing from it. And at some level, I was now willing to admit (at least privately, and only to myself) that remaining ignorant had been a choice. I was determined to repudiate that choice.

This book tells the story of what happened next, starting in the moment of my first contact with the Nishnaabeg, with whom I hoped to establish some sort of relationship and learn what my treaty responsibilities toward them might be. Starting with that glorious hour when I arrived, unaware of how I might be intruding, unaware that there might be protocols of approach when entering their territory – or that small remnant of it that was the Stoney Point Reserve. Unaware of my white settler privilege in presuming that my turning up would matter to anyone beyond my own smug and righteous self.

Page by page, chapter by chapter, I chart my often-painful experience as I entered Nishnaabe space and mind space, a space of unknowns and unknowing; my initial procrastination, being locked in self-consciousness and the need to prove myself; the anxiety of stumbling around in the darkness resulting from all I hadn't learned or had wrongly learned; the struggle to break out of my own apartheid; the compulsive need to make the unfamiliar into something familiar and comfortably under my control. I wrestle with that need to control and my colonial heritage operating through it. I share moments of embarrassment and shame when I responded defensively to being challenged, with excuses or obfuscating bullshit under the cover of which, and unbeknownst even to my conscious self, I was asserting my "professional" authority – even my white, privileged superiority – in controlling the conversational agenda. I relive the panic of being lost in not knowing; the confusion I felt as I let what surfaced in conversations with the Nishnaabe I was getting to know unsettle me, rattling the cage of my unconscious assumptions. I relive my discomfort and self-doubt, revisit moments when I wrestled with guilt and self-recrimination to the point that, to end the pain, I nearly left. The desire to do this was strangely seductive.

Over the course of many visits in the next four years, each lasting between one and two weeks, I began to face up to what I had denied: that colonialism was alive and well and at work inside me, replicating the larger harms of colonialism in the minutia of how I related to the Nishnaabe I was encountering. I challenged myself to confront this, to take responsibility for changing. As I did, I began to learn to listen to my Nishnaabe hosts on their terms. I learned to listen deeply enough that I could take in the cadence of their voices and the rhythms of their lives. And I began to change. In what I can only describe as a raising, expanding, or transformation of my consciousness, I began to sense the Nishnaabe way of life that has persisted through all the annihilating actions of the Indian Act, the Indian agent, and the local residential school. I began to learn how to tune in to it, this way of being in the world. I did this by becoming the minority person in the room, the non-native, the zhaganashi-kwe, the white woman. I left the comfort zone of my familiar.

This book is a memoir in the personal-is-political sense, building on all I've learned in the women's movement, which started with some often awkward "consciousness raising" circles in my early twenties. After a lifetime of reading, thinking, and engaging, I've come to understand the power dynamics of gender and how these operate, not just through institutional power structures but through the stories we're told about ourselves versus those we tell ourselves, and in the narratives of daily-life relationships as we conform to what's expected or dare to break free and speak a truth that has been suppressed or sugar coated. Not only does the personal reveal the flexing of sometimes lethally powerful forces like patriarchy built into the structures, systems, and narrative lines of lived life, but it's in the realm of the personal that the contradictions are experienced and felt, and can therefore be named and challenged. And it's in the realm of the personal,



particularly personal relationships, where change often begins. Relationships can be healed and repaired here; counter-narratives can be explored and brought to life as words and institutional action.

I'd carried that personal-is-political credo into my work as a journalist and author, always seeking out direct experience, always looking for the people whose voices had been silenced, trying to surface if not a counter-narrative then at least ways to show that the mainstream storylines weren't the whole story: family farmers being squeezed in the rise of agribusiness, small-town telephone operators losing not just their jobs but their place in the community to automation.

I'd always identified myself as something of an outsider to the status quo, without really considering how affiliated I was with it because of the circumstances of my life and upbringing. I felt comfortable (and safe) seeing myself on the side of the oppressed rather than the oppressor. Being a woman also seemed like a *carte-blanche* membership card. In the back of my mind at least, I allowed it to excuse me from how as a settler I was in fact on the side of the oppressor, inside the systems that adjudicated these roles.

I'd learned enough to take my settler hat off, ready to smudge, to acknowledge being on unceded territory, and to condemn racist stereotypes and slurs. I wasn't yet aware of how settler colonialism was stitched into the patterns of my thinking, even into my posture and how I walked into a room. I didn't realize how much this blocked my ability to see and to hear, let alone to move beyond mere words and symbolic gestures of so-called reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous Peoples. When I began the journey that is the subject of this book, I hadn't a clue about how daunting it was going to be to take up the challenge to really change, and how much inner resistance I was going to put up – my colonial capacity for control unwittingly at work in the subtlety of my self-deception. I only knew that mere words and gestures had

grown hollow with repetition, and this was a chance to get real, to grapple with the hard realities.

And so while I begin by concentrating on the Nishnaabeg and the treaty relationship I assumed I could walk into simply by turning up at Cully's door offering condolences, the focus of my journey, and this account of it, gradually shifts to myself in my own journey as I came understand how my colonial heritage as a settler – in other words, the power dynamics of colonialism – stood in the way of any authentic relationship building. That was the real work to be done here and is the heart of the story I'm sharing. The real work I had to do was on myself, not the book I was helping Cully and others write. And work it was. It was a struggle, a shame-laced, sometimes excruciating, and long, drawn-out struggle to recognize the colonizer in myself, to acknowledge it at play in the relationships I was starting to form, and to take responsibility for dismantling its scaffolding in my mind. It was a struggle to endure the anxiety of letting go of the old and familiar, and of letting the new in.

Decolonization as personal experience is not easy. What kept me going, though, was the relationship building, my determined desire to nurture real and lasting relationships with the Nishnaabe I was encountering, who might one day regard me as treaty kin. It was their hesitation or silence, always polite but signalling that I'd said something inappropriate, that knocked me off my pedestal, that challenged me to change. These budding relationships were the context in which I came to see and to struggle to dismantle colonization in myself, and also the incentive to keep at it. All that stumbling-into-being of relationships became the crucible of decolonization, or my experience of it.

Becoming involved with the Stoney Point Nishnaabeg as a writer, helping them weave their stories into an oral-history account of the Ipperwash tragedy, complicated things enormously. On one hand, it gave me an excuse to keep visiting,

to come back to see them again and again, and that was good. It was a means to the end of forming relationships. But it also insulated me from the work I had to do on myself, forestalled it, and made it more complex. Because being the writer (even as I scrupulously defined myself as their “writing assistant”) was loaded with colonialism disguised as professionalism and expertise. As a successful writer, I knew how to express things, how to organize thoughts into coherent order. I knew what publishers would want, and what might best guarantee that the book would be reviewed. Or did I? And, if so, on whose terms?

I knew I wasn’t appropriating their stories, trying to steal them or take them over. But still, I wasn’t the appropriate person to be there helping, because of all my professional assumptions – the arrogance of them, the inherent sense of superiority that I carried with them into the project – and because I was white. The Canadian cultural space I was familiar with had largely been filled by people like me for most of my adult life. Its ways of telling stories and conveying what matters were second nature to me, and the almost total absence of Indigenous voices telling Indigenous stories was just the way it was. It wasn’t easy considering – let alone acknowledging – that colonialism was part of this; this might diminish the legitimacy of my own status as an “award-winning author” in that space. So I resisted, a lot, hiding behind this supporting role I’d welcomed their invitation to play. It was a convenient mask, behind which I hid even from myself.

It was only as I began writing the book and encountered resistance from some of the Nishnaabe co-authors – not so much as I recorded their stories as when I showed them the first drafts of the book – that I began to really question my role. It didn’t matter if my intentions were honourable. Good intentions weren’t good enough; not if my mind was still steeped in colonial thinking.

It wasn't appropriation of story that was at issue, but appropriation of voice. Can a non-Indigenous person serve a supporting role in situations like this? I am still struggling with the question. Meanwhile, in the messy particulars of lived reality, I struggled to get out of the way of their telling their story, struggled to listen with integrity, because as two years of visits became three and four, I had come to deeply care for Cully and the others. I'd come to respect them and to feel fully accountable to them. And so I stayed the course I had embarked on, stayed even while remaining uncertain, full of self-doubts that kept me awake at night. I wrote draft after draft after draft, sending each by mail and then flying back to Ontario to review them. Slowly the co-authors took charge, and I truly became their assistant, not just in self-designation. It felt as if I were graduating from a school I hadn't even been aware I was enrolled in.

Being a writer became an additional lens through which I learned to look at myself, to question myself, and to change. Writing has been my life's work. It's been how I have engaged with the world: as someone who names things, as an author with published authority. In my journey of unlearning and opening myself to the new, I've changed as a writer, becoming more responsive to, accountable to, those whose stories I'm helping to tell. (I also look back at my career and regret how much I presumed to speak for others, to think that I knew how their stories should be told.)

Working for the Nishnaabe co-authors also helped me move from the personal to the political, and realize how important it is for the momentum of change to move this way for it to be lasting: from the private realm of relationships to the more public realm of institutions. As I changed, I brought my committed sense of accountability in the relationships I had with the Nishnaabeg to the editors I was working with at UBC Press. From past experience, I knew that publishers,

as the authority figure behind the author, reserve final say over a book's title, its cover design and art. They will consult with the author, but that's all. Over the course of my writing career, I'd sometimes chafed against this, but had never seriously challenged it. Now, though, having been deputized by the Nishnaabe co-authors as their go-between with the publisher, I found myself doing so; being shown options was not enough. The Nishnaabe co-authors felt strongly about what the title should be, what image and feel the cover should convey. They rejected the choices the publisher came up with. On yet another visit to their territory, I sat with the co-authors as they came up with the options they preferred. Then I championed these to the publisher. And the editors listened. They put the respect for Indigenous voices to which they'd committed in principle into practice. They changed their practice.

And so this book is about my transformation not just as a settler but as a writer engaged in the institutions of culture in this country. Toward the end of the book, I explore the implications of what I learned: for the changes needed at this level, and for people like me to feel implicated in those changes, even at the cost of privileged status.

I don't know if my experience of decolonization has anything to teach others. If it does, perhaps it will be by modelling the journey of decolonization, or part of it.

I began to change and to take on the implications of being part of a larger change, not because I'd decided this was the right thing to do, although it certainly was, but because justice demanded it and genuine reconciliation requires it. I found myself being changed because I wanted to be worthy of a treaty relationship with the Nishnaabe women and men I'd set out to meet. To get to even the possibility of this, I had to acknowledge their colonial heritage - everything from colonial authorities' lip-service commitment to treaty promises to the genocidal agenda at work behind the Indian Act

and its ongoing amendments, the residential schools, and child-welfare agencies still scooping children. I had to acknowledge it as ongoing lived reality not just for them, but for me too. As I helped them write one part of that heritage into a book, the relationships I was forming around this work also forced me to acknowledge colonialism as an ongoing dynamic, including in myself and, through me, in institutions of power that shape reality. And as tentative early and ongoing working relationships deepened into friendships and I began to really change, I also became more motivated to advocate for larger change.

So much hinged on the dynamics of relationship and communication. I wanted to fully take in all that these would-be treaty kin were saying as a way of respecting them for who they are. And this meant letting myself be touched, affected, and then motivated to change.

It was a case of I see you, I hear you. I–thou. In the messy particulars of the relationships that were developing, in which I allowed myself to be moved by what they were sharing with me about the traumatic past through to the troubled present, they challenged me to change my thinking – about practically everything. And so even though I began by seeking a treaty relationship for some very suspect, self-deluding reasons, I’m glad I did. Because it brought me into the realm of encounter and of relationship building, where I could get on with the necessary work of decolonization and truly prepare myself for reconciliation and the new and renewed treaty relationships that will be part of this.

I end the book with a few thoughts on this longer journey of reconciliation. But first, how the journey began for one person: me.

# 1

## *At the Fence*

---

It was a humid, hot day when I set out, and I was glad there was air conditioning in the car I'd rented. I hadn't bothered with GPS, an option for which you had to pay extra. I had my old paper road map on the seat beside me; that would do. I knew where I was going, sort of. I was heading for the Stoney Point Reserve, or the former Ipperwash army camp. Neither was marked on the map, though Kettle Point was, and I knew that the neighbouring reserve, Stoney Point, which had been turned into the Ipperwash army camp, was slightly north and west of there. Somewhere along Highway 21, on the shore of Lake Huron.

A family gathering in Dundas, outside Hamilton, had brought me to Ontario. I'd had to rent a car to get to the event, so it was easy to tack on some extra days, and I could visit my long-time friend Dona Harvey in Waterloo as well. She'd packed me some leftovers from last night's supper and wished me well as I'd set out after breakfast. She'd also Google-mapped Kettle Point, and how to find the band office there. But my instinct told me to go straight to the site of the 1990s action, to get my bearings from there.

I was going on little more than instinct, really, or rather acting on it before this impulse to just show up withered with too much rational thought. And here I was, passing Amulree, where both the Crerars and the Menzies had settled, named after the town at the end of Glen Quaig, in Scotland, from which they'd come in 1832. I drove down the road where they'd originally farmed. I'm in treaty territory, I thought. Huron Tract treaty territory.

The roads were a mishmash, with some running southwest and others running northwest. So I followed the zigzag pattern and finally emerged on what I guessed must be Highway 21. Good, I thought, getting close. But then, what to look for? The report of the Ipperwash Inquiry had recommended that the government "immediately return the former army camp to the peoples of the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation."<sup>1</sup> That was over ten years ago. Had this been done? If so, would any visible sign of the former army camp remain? Would there still be an official entrance gate where I should go to make inquiries? And even if there was, should I? Probably not.

As I drove, I noticed some dilapidated, look-alike buildings in a big open area. They were long and white, and low to the ground. Barracks? I'd never been close to an army base before, and of course this one dated back to the Second World War. I slowed down. Someone was driving what looked like a John Deere lawnmower across the grass on this side of them. I slowed down more, then pulled over and stopped the car. I should check this out; maybe this guy would talk to me.

I crossed the ditch and approached a rusted barbed-wire fence. A sign on one of the fence posts read "Danger: Unexploded Munitions. UXOs." I leaned across the sagging fence, felt the jab of one of the barbs pressing against the bare skin of my arm and pulled back. I placed my hands, carefully, between the barbs and leaned forward against the fence again. I kept my eyes on the man driving the big green lawnmower, willing him to notice me. He kept going back



and forth, coming close, turning and going away, coming close again, but then turning and driving away. It was nearly noon by then, and the sun blazed down on me. I looked at my hands clutching the top strand of the old fence. Releasing my grip, I noticed rust on my sweaty palms. I wiped them on my jean capris and stepped back. I wanted to walk away but didn't. The guy was approaching another turn. He was closer now; each turn brought him closer. But then he completed the turn and moved away.

This was ridiculous! I should give up. Sweat was running into my eyes, stinging. What was I doing here, really? I watched the man on the mower move toward me down the line of grass, bumping up and down on the uneven terrain. Then, instead of turning, he drove up, turned off the machine, and walked toward me.

I watched him approach: not much taller than me, slight of build, black hair, a Blue Jays baseball cap pulled low over a lean, dark face. I didn't have a clue what I was going to say. I hadn't thought anything out, had laid no groundwork for this visit, going through my usual routine of getting someone to introduce me, to vouch for me being worth talking to. I'd just assumed I could drop in here, and whoever I encountered wouldn't mind.

He stopped a couple of feet from the fence. He looked me in the eye, gave a nod, said something like "Howdy," and I launched in. I didn't introduce myself at first. Plus, well, he was only the guy mowing the grass.

I tried to explain what had brought me to this fence: something vague about treaties and Ipperwash being a breach of one, and wanting to find out how things stood. I really can't remember what I said; I was nervous.

He told me that I wasn't the first one to stop by the fence. Once, he said, there was an old gent who had trained at the camp in 1942. The man said there was a house they'd started using for target practice back in the bush, and a woman had

come out the door, a couple of children with her. “And he tells me he’s been all over, Second World War, Korea, and this is what’s stayed with him, haunts him” – that they were shooting at that house, thinking it was empty, when a Nish-naabe woman and her children were still inside.<sup>2</sup>

He knew the stories – the stories of what happened here! I’d arrived. I stuck out my hand and introduced myself.

“Kevin Simon,” he said, shaking my hand briefly.

I’d heard of that name, just couldn’t place it. I started to say something, to ask him a question. But he was already stepping away.

“Well, best be getting back,” he said, half turning toward the lawnmower.

He took off his baseball cap and gestured down the road. There were a couple of campers permanently parked inside the fence but also along the highway here. I might find some people to talk to there, he said. Then he whacked his ball cap against his leg, pulled it back on, and gave it a good tug. He looked me in the eye again, quick nod, hint of a smile, and he walked away.

Back in the car, I found my list of names, people whom I hoped I might meet who’d been mentioned a lot in the Ipperwash Inquiry report. Kevin Simon’s name was on the list. He was sixteen in 1993, when the elders led the way to reclaim their ancestral homeland at Aazhoodena/Stoney Point, and he followed, determined to support them. His grandfather Daniel and his grandmother Melva had been active in the efforts to regain the land after the war, organizing protests, writing letters, raising funds for lawyers. His mother, Marcia, had grown up surrounded by this, became part of it, and followed her aging mother back home in 1993 herself. Kevin was there that night in 1995 when his friend and cousin Dudley was shot. And he was still here?

I looked out the window and spotted him on his John Deere lawnmower. I started getting out of the car. But he

must have just finished mowing the grass because he was driving off toward where the barracks and some other buildings were.

Ah well, I thought, closing the door again and starting the car. I'd get his number somehow, talk to him another time perhaps. I drove on and passed what looked like the official entrance to the camp. There was a barrier across the road and a gatehouse beside it. I carried on past the entrance, looking for the campers where Kevin had suggested I stop.

The first wasn't a camper; it was a container unit normally hauled behind a truck. It had a "Smokeshop" sign so big that it covered half the length of the unit. As I got closer, I noticed another sign, this one on the side door. It said Closed, so I carried on. Farther along, there was a sign for Medicines of the Earth, with a couple of marijuana flags fluttering beside a small camper, and a row of bright-red plastic cups along one side of it, the tips of marijuana seedlings visible above their rims. There was an Open sign in the window, and someone coming out the door. I waited till they'd driven away, and then I approached.

Inside, there was a set of deer antlers on a table, a Mohawk warrior flag covering the back window. Toward the front, there was a makeshift counter with jars of bud and leaf displayed under it, a tiny electronic scale on top, and a big man with scraggly long black hair standing behind it.

His name was Hubert George. In between customers, we talked. I told him that I'd been reading about his people's efforts to get their land and way of life here back.

"I'm assimilated," he told me. "We lost our heritage. We lost everything." Then he surprised me. He gestured toward the land behind the trailer, the terrain of the reserve where, he said, his grandfather and grandmother had grown up. "But the land's coming back," he said.

I asked if I could maybe drive around and take a look. "Sure, go ahead," he said. The events I'd read about had happened

twenty-five years ago. It was ten years since Justice Sidney B. Linden, commissioner of the Ipperwash Inquiry, had submitted his report, recommending that the land be immediately cleaned up and returned. It was two years since the Final Settlement Agreement was signed. Had anything happened? Here was a chance for me to see for myself.

I simply drove through the back of the pot-shop's parking lot and there I was, facing the inside road. I was in the former army camp. It was as easy as pressing my foot on the accelerator of my shiny rental car.

I looked down the road to my left. There were remnants of what might have been a big sign for the camp on a spot set back from the road. Chunks of stone and cement littered what had been the base of it, looking jagged and sharp. Whatever had been on top had clearly been knocked off, violently. I could almost feel the force of the blows by the sledgehammer or whatever it was that had bludgeoned it to pieces. I didn't want to go any closer.

I turned right instead, and soon was driving past old barracks. The paint was chipped, and pieces of clouded old vapour barrier flapped from window frames, gray and opaque, like ghosts trying to get free. Kevin lived in one of the barracks, I learned later.

Meandering lines of grass and weeds filled cracks in the pavement, creeping in from the edges where the pavement had fallen apart. On either side of the road, mowed grass gave way to weed-filled – and even brush-filled – fields. In the middle of one, half hidden by weeds and bushes, there was a small, half-collapsed building standing by itself. I wondered if this might be the Nishnaabe council hall they'd built in 1993. It looked abandoned. The whole place looked abandoned, though I could see it wasn't. There was a children's play structure outside one of the barracks, the frame for a sweat lodge tucked beside a four-wheeler behind another. There was a vegetable garden nearby, with what I recognized

as beans, squash, and corn growing together, the traditional Three Sisters. Clearly people lived here. This is their home, I thought. I was in their space.

I felt like an intruder. I was an intruder. I turned around and left.

I drove five kilometres down the road to Kettle Point, where the Kettle and Stony Point band office was located. After the shabbiness of Ipperwash, the smoothness of the stone and brick, the neat, clean lines of the building, struck me. Money had been spent here. I parked in the neatly marked parking lot and headed for the front door. Inside, there was a second, heavy door leading to the reception area. There was a counter with a plexiglass sheet running its length from countertop to ceiling, except at the centre, where a panel was slid back.

A woman came forward; how could she help me? I told her my name and explained that I was trying to locate some people. She asked if I had any names. I read from my list, mentioning Kevin Simon and also Bonnie Bressette, a former chief of the Kettle and Stony Point band council. Justice Linden had referred to her repeatedly in his report. He'd also singled her out as one of the "respected and trusted people" who might have helped resolve the Ipperwash crisis before it became a tragedy. The woman said she could give me one of the numbers, Bonnie Bressette's, because it was in the phone book. I didn't tell her that I wouldn't have known what phone book to look in – just took the number, thanked her, and left.

© On Point Press, an imprint of UBC Press 2023

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior written permission of the publisher.

### Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Meeting my treaty kin : a journey toward reconciliation /  
Heather Menzies.

Names: Menzies, Heather, author.

Description: Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20230486061 | Canadiana

(ebook) 20230486711 | ISBN 9780774890663 (softcover) |

ISBN 9780774890670 (PDF) | ISBN 9780774890687 (EPUB)

Subjects: LCSH: Reconciliation. | LCSH: Canada – Ethnic relations. |

LCSH: Indigenous peoples – Canada. | LCSH: Menzies, Heather

Classification: LCC E78.C2 M46 2023 | DDC 971.004/97—dc23



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des arts  
du Canada

Canada



BRITISH COLUMBIA  
ARTS COUNCIL



BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

On Point Press, an imprint of UBC Press

The University of British Columbia | Musqueam Traditional Territory  
2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

[www.ubcpres.ca](http://www.ubcpres.ca)