

“Starlight” — 47 - 03

PAUSE TO CONSIDER: REFLECTIONS ON SESSION #3

1. Thanksgiving is approaching. We drove to Turner Valley on Oct. 3, then returned via the Ring Road including the new Tsuut'ina Trail. The fall colours were breathtaking and the new road quite the technological feat. Yes, we took a wrong exit and headed to Bragg Creek before we were able to turn around and head back into town. We have GPS and with it set at “Go Home,” we really irritated the ‘voice’ directing us to take the fastest route to which we didn’t pay any attention. In fact, I dropped Dave off at the bridge on Stoney Trail so he could climb down the steps and walk through Bowness Park. And, guess what? The sign saying ‘Parking Lot is Full’ really meant that there was not a single place to park to pick up my hiking husband.
2. Tying this preamble with our Session last night is easy. Emmy and Winnie were on a road trip, too, only they had a different destination in mind. They needed rest, safety, security in a world quite different from ours. The home awaiting them on a deserted, out of the way farmstead was a far cry from what awaited us on our return home. We have so much for which to be thankful and, as we follow Emmy and Winnie in their drive on Highway 16, we hope that their future improves. Note: it does!!!
3. From Chat - Session #3

I was concerned that the 8 minute “Song for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women” by the Coast Salish Singers would be a little disturbing. I was disturbed by the red handprints on the faces of the rowers, enthralled with the beauty of the west coast location, intrigued by the changing hours of the day, mystified by the ghost-like photography, and moved by the increased drumming as the song progressed. You might want to sit with that song again and empathize with the singers who lament to loss of a sister.

Ruth comments: “Overwhelming sadness; the injustice of it all.”

Cheryl comments: “The hands painted over their mouths was to silence them.” She adds: “The cooperation needed for the women to row in such

precision together is a metaphor for women's solidarity? But, she asks, why is there a man at the helm? Is it a man?...

Margie comments: "I see resilience in these strong and powerful women..."

Eldon comments: "An endless journey — no apparent destination — silence in the singing." (From me: I found this quite disturbing, too... Where do we go from here?)

Sheryl comments: "Very moving and intense emotions."

Mike summarizes his thoughts about the development of the characters: "Filling in the holes... part of what I feel is an inherent human dynamic. We all need a place to know. And we all need to know our place. We need to believe we have come from worth and that we are worth something. This, for me, is a universal human striving which can get twisted sometimes." (From Joan: "Very insightful." From me: That is truly a significant part of the experiences of Frank, Eugene, Viv, Emmy, Winnie, Cadotte and Anderson... as the opening prayer said, "What you think and talk about, expands into action.")

In large group, we discussed the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation events and reflected upon its significance for us. It is also a common belief that so far in our reading of Wagamese's book, we are reading more about the challenges of poverty rather than on being indigenous. Only Frank is indigenous and that is because he describes himself as such. However, the author is indigenous and his words come from his experiences in the same way that the characters in his story are developed through their experiences.

Interestingly, these chapters that we have read so far are part of BOOK ONE: Wild Things — 1980. I noticed this sub-title when I was preparing to write this "Pause to Consider." Four years have passed since Frank decides to stay home rather than leave after the old man dies. We know that Winnie is 8 and can only speculate how old Emmy is. She has been with Cadotte and Anderson for three years. We do know that she is very capable to risking her life to protect her daughter.

5. Don Braid's article in the Herald: <https://tinyurl.com/4r3w98xw> "Time to drop the shield of ignorance around residential schools" is well worth the read. Thank you, Eldon

6. Opening Prayer by Darlene McIntosh, Elder, Lheidli T'enneh Nation

- **Creator: Thank you for this beautiful day on Mother Earth. Thank you for the gift of community. Thank you for bringing all who are present, ready and willing to work toward building strong relationships with each other promoting and acknowledging our unique differences.**
- **It is said, “What you think and talk about, expands into action.”**
- **If each of us takes a piece of this unique puzzle, whether it be helping in youth leadership, honouring and listening to our Elders and Indigenous Knowledge holders, we together create a beautiful picture. Through putting the puzzle pieces together we honour each other. If one of us succeeds, we all do.**
- **Creator, Come – be with us today, giving us patience and understanding. May we clear our Mind, so we may know our Truth, May we clear our Ears, so we may hear our Truth. May we clear our Eyes, so we may see our Truth. May we clear our Hearts, so we may Feel our Truth, May we clear our Throat, so we may Speak our Truth from our Hearts.**
- **May our journey into today be filled with hope. May the voices of our ancestors come to us in the wind. Let us hear the sound of the drums. Let us dance freely. And may the voices of our hearts be lifted to Creator – Hear our Prayer.**

7. I continue to refer to the article that offers reasoned responses to the major obstacles standing in the way of truth and reconciliation, namely “Denialism.” It’s strange how much impact an ‘ism’ has to a familiar word. The article from which I’ll be quoting from time to time is written by Prof. Daniel Heath Justice from UBC and Sean Carleton from U of Manitoba.

So far we have explored “Cultural Genocide” and “Schooling.” Today I’ll pick up a third phrase used by denialists. This segment speaks to the issue of “Skill development!” — an important teaching during my early years to justify special schools. It was argued, but ‘these’ students needed to learn new skills essential to survive in our culture...

■ **“But they learned new skills”:** Given little meaningful academic or effective vocational instruction, “new skills”

taught in residential institutions included religious indoctrination enforced by corporal punishment and myriad forms of abuse, cultural and bodily shame, alienation from family, disconnection from subsistence economies and substandard orientation for wage labour.

■ Church and state officials often justify this “education” in humanitarian — even sacred — terms. But all of these “skills” directly supported the destruction of Indigenous ways of life and the ostensible training of children and youth for lower-class “productive” service positions. Indigenous children were not put on vocational or professional paths towards economic or social competition in Canada’s capitalist settler society.

Note: one of the “my truths” learned during last week’s National Day of Truth and Reconciliation was that the \$28 million offered in reparations by the R.C. church was used primarily to convert rather than teach.

Last night I listened to the audiotape of the **chapters 10 - 14** and, as requested by Wayne, asked myself as I listened (and read) **what does this reading say to me about Canadian indigenous cultures, its meaning and values..... To this I added listening for the challenges of child poverty and how Wagamese treats this in his book.**

Chapter Ten sees Emma and Winnie trying to survive on the deserted farm out of Endako, BC. She has tried to find work in town and has resorted to stealing to survive. Facing hunger, she and Winnie drive into town and set about a plan to steal groceries. Winnie is to distract while Emmy makes a run for it. The plan fails and Frank, waiting in the line behind Winnie with her grocery cart (Remember that she is an 8 year old)

becomes an observer and eventually, the rescuer of this single mother and her daughter. He concludes, “He likes Wild Things.”

Chapter Eleven reveals Cadotte and Anderson being released from an extended hospital stay. They are filled with vengeance and dedicate their future to finding and killing Emmy.

Chapter Twelve begins with Roth scolding Frank for his plan to hire Emmy as a housekeeper. We get a ringside tour of the farm house described by Roth as “a bachelor house” and watch Frank look at his house through Emmy’s eyes. We also meet government officials, Orr and Jensen, operating on behalf of Emmy and Winnie. We can feel Emmy beginning to make the most out of her opportunity.

They share a sit-down dinner before bed time and, worried about the coldness in Emma’s and Winnie’s bedroom, Frank and Eugene slip into their room in the dark with a couple of quilts.

Chapter Thirteen finds Roth and Frank joining Emmy in the kitchen with the fire roaring and coffee and porridge ready. We sense that the men are quite happy with their new situation. Emma, Frank and Winnie go to town for supplies and appliances to make housekeeping a viable undertaking on the farm.

It is in this chapter that we discover the Emmy is white. Frank handles himself admirably when Emmy’s character is called into question along with the new living arrangements at the farm. He finds support for what is happening and his visit with his agent, Elmer Deacon, proves to be very encouraging. Frank mentions again his love of “Wild Things.”

Chapter Fourteen has Cadotte and Anderson scheming as to how they will find Emmy and Winnie. The plot thickens and Book One — Wild Things-1980 — is completed.

Enjoy your read! (all the while thinking about our growing awareness of Canadian Indigenous culture — and even moreso, how poverty controls the lives of people like Emmy.) P.S. Emmy’s real name is Emma Strong.

Thoughtfully yours,
Brenda

