

*the ever good*

by Nadia McLaren

*the ever good*

A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Fine Arts in  
Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design  
Ada Slaight Gallery, March 1 - April 6, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2026

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## ABSTRACT

This MFA research is a practice of world building through the merging of Anishnaabe cosmology and quantum physics theories and while looking to the cosmos in wonderment, it remains grounded in Anishnaabe Kwe, Bear Clan worldview. The works and research reaches for, gathers, carries and shares pieces of familial memory, stories and acts of care shaped by *the ever good* which is inspired by a phrase my grandmother, Theresa McCraw always said, “Ever good!” The result is works presented precisely as they are. The written works (including this paper) and gallery exhibition components explore from within a metaphorical possibility: *Is Sky Woman still falling? Is humanity falling together, through and inside a black hole?*

Keywords: Interdisciplinary artist; Indigenous storytelling; multi-media art; multi-media arts research; autoethnography; love as methodology; Granny; Indigenous Elder knowledge; Indigenous research methods; Indigenous perspective; Anishnaabe cosmology; Anishnaabe worldview; wholistic; Medicine Wheel; northwestern ontario; Biigtiigong FN; acts of care; kitchen table; decolonial methods; Sky Woman; possibilities; non-possibilities; black hole theory and quantum physics.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These acknowledgements first turn to the two advisors that encouraged and supported my MFA thesis journey: Peter Morin and Jay Irizawa, miigwech to you both for your guidance, direction and care. Thank you to the IAMD Program at OCAD University for welcoming me into the program and for the opportunity to meet and work with a truly amazing and inspiring cohort. Their talent, feedback, support and friendship will never be forgotten.

My success and completion rested heavily upon financial supports and scholarships from the following sources: Ontario Graduate Scholarships (both institutional and provincial); Laptop Bursary; OCADFA Bursary; Ahasiw-Maskegon Iskwew Bursary; OCAD U (TSA) Bursary for Indigenous Students; Mary McLean Bursary for Indigenous Students; William and Nona Heaslip Foundation Project/Travel Grant; and the IAMD Thesis Support Grant. Special thanks also to Indspire for their generosity in awarding me with a scholarship two years in a row. I'm so honoured.

I remain forever grateful to Rebecca Diederichs and Inder Sidhu for their immense patience in helping me write this thesis paper! And, I hold in my heart my beautiful community of moms who helped this single mom through in too many ways to count, but especially with laughter. Shannon, Michelle, Rei, Leah, Tanya, Melissa, and Nichole, I love you all so much.

Miigwech dearest Uncle Chuck (Lionel McCraw) for allowing me the privilege of showing your astoundingly beautiful wood carvings. And Barb Taylor for your hard work and care in making our "Moonlight" quilt. Cuzzie, Braunson McCraw and dear old friend Mark Vogelsang for making Granny's Kitchen Soundscape possible. My son, Leo. I thank you too for your help with the "Katie Rose" video, along with other technological 'issues' (I'll call them). Teo Paul, miigwech for helping me in the building of Granny and Grampa's chipboard wall. The

life, beauty and success of *the ever good* installation and exhibition was held and carried through by each of your hard work collaborations.

There are those who go above and beyond with their acts of care and generosity of Spirit like Darren and Susan Corbiere. Miiwech for your help in sending the wood stove to Toronto from Sioux Lookout (!) - and my Pops, John McLaren for all the preparation and hard work it took to make it happen. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, to my sister Melanie McLaren who is a rock steady presence of unwavering love and support; and to my beautiful mom, Priscilla (Teddy) McLaren for literally *everything* but most of all for your unconditional love and reminders to stand strong in who I am.

*the ever good* is not something anyone can do and live alone. I'm humbled by all the elements and acts of care that have brought me to this moment - that *are* this moment. Birds at my window and the little dog, Reba at my feet remind me to thank my non-human family as well, including the ancestors. The meaningful coincidences that have led me to each and every beautiful Indigenous Elder who offered their care, ceremony, teachings and love are pure magic.

Granny and Grampa always and forever. My wonderful family.

And.

A special thank-you to my two children, Leo and Elizabeth who have my whole heart.

This is for you.

There is a story I like to tell. It's a love story I've been telling my whole life. It's one I am not able to tell alone because none of us can live our stories in solitude. And though I tell it many different ways, it remains essentially the same story. My story is constant like a river, present and fleeting all at once.

This love story, *the ever good*.

## INTRODUCTION

I'll begin with a narrative of the story of this paper. It is a telling of the offering of a love story and at the centre, a portrait of Granny and her famously stated expression *ever good*. In a recent publication artist Tannis Nielsen states,

I'm just an artist, using my art as a way to try and understand the Universe, and this is just a story... (Nielsen)

My offering is slightly different: *I'm an artist, using my art as a way to try and understand my role in the Universe, and this is a story I am telling that adds just a drop to the infinite ocean of stories told. But each of our stories have the ability to cause mutli-generational and multi-dimensional ripples across spacetime, and they matter, deeply.* This is just a story within a Universe of stories that I happened to reach for, protect and hold long enough in order to understand why it's too important to keep to myself.

It begins with Granny. My Granny's name is Theresa McCraw (Anishnaabe from Biigtigong FN), born March 10, 1930 in Heron Bay where the Pic River meets the Great Lake Superior. I always admired the way she was with people, observing her welcoming nature and her willingness to love unconditionally. I believe that she understood this to be an intentional practice of care, making her a wonderful theorist in my eyes. She is my co-collaborator; I follow

her example of intentional care. For this paper and presented works, I'm experimenting with format and structure. Pulling from multi-dimensional spaces that return to a centre: Granny, her kitchen table and the warmth of loving memories and home. I move through personal narratives including dreams and personal connections; multi-generational perspectives; teachings shared from Indigenous Elders; thought provoking, poetic quotes; and Anishnaabe cosmology/creation stories. Because I see a connection between Black Holes and Sky Woman stories<sup>1</sup> I wonder and explore how all these possibilities relate to each other and *the ever good*. In order to map these relationships, I will work with quantum theories as a metaphorical framework, and as a place of world-building. Although I do not claim expertise or specialized knowledge of this field, I do invoke my artistic right to explore that which expands, excites and challenges my imagination. I offer my position as authentically here, at the beginning of this work, my work. My approaches are centred around stories and acts of care and Indigenous methods of research<sup>2</sup> that work to move away from the common Eurocentric knowledge systems pervasive throughout academia, that have continued to grapple with the acceptance and fulsome understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Battiste and Henderson). It is not an intention of mine to move away from Eurocentric models, but rather a result of intentional care and attention given to what Indigenous Elders have taught me about pedagogy and knowledge dissemination. I carefully link my research and knowledge acquisition to their authentic sources that support and respect

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<sup>1</sup> Sky Woman (or Spirit Woman) is a central figure in Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) creation stories who originated from the Sky World, fell to Earth, landing on a Turtle's back.

<sup>2</sup> Anishnaabe-based as shown, taught and modeled through community relevant protocols and Indigenous governance structures, such as the clan system and wholistic theory that includes Emotional; Mental; Physical and; Spiritual knowledge systems, led and guided by Indigenous community Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

research ethics and protocols of Indigenous knowledge structures (OCAP<sup>3</sup>), which also includes the practice of storytelling as understood by my Indigenous community.

Throughout the paper, I highlight works in my thesis exhibition that support or compliment this movement through these ideas. My intention is that they become added guidance and support through the story and an understanding and faith in the ways that stories connect and continue. My hope is that viewers and readers feel welcomed into my stories and their attempts to communicate *the ever good*.

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<sup>3</sup> The First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession – OCAP® – assert that First Nations have control over data collection processes, and that they own and control how this information can be used. It is a registered trademark of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC (<https://fnigc.ca/>)).

## METHODS & METHODOLOGY

From the very beginning of this MFA thesis research, I have been holding onto two guiding forces: First, that love is a powerful methodology; and second: A goal to illuminate *the ever good* so that others can participate in what Granny has offered me, my family and every person she has encountered. In order to follow these forces my methodologies walk side by side with the acknowledgement of my own positionality as Anishnaabe, Bear Clan Kwe,<sup>4</sup> and are firstly rooted in deep observation. Secondly, observations lead to search/research in order to find points of recognition and connection and to discern their alignment with acts of care, which is love. Thirdly, I identify how and where these connections arise while my studio process fills out these explorations physically, through the works I make and media research that will best demonstrate these connections. And by connections, I also mean relationships; and by process, I mean a wholistic<sup>5</sup> process of coming to know that engages my emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual knowledges (Absolon). I'm also very interested in how works/ideas/pieces speak to each other when presented side by side and the movement and thought processes that happen between, inside the spaces. Like editing for film and like storyboard panels in a graphic novel, sometimes what's interpreted in the blank spaces between are just as powerful as what's being shown (McCloud, pg. 66-67). All together, these help me to make meaning of and tell stories of *the ever good* as I go. The research component can mean many things and to be specific (yet not limited to) ceremony (Wilson, pg. 124), search for ancestral knowledge and guidance,

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<sup>4</sup> Anishnaabe, Bear Clan Kwe (which is translated to mean 'woman' in English) is not only a lens from which I see and observe the world around me, it's also a governance structure as taught to me by Anishnaabe Elder, Ralph Johnson. He explains that with this connection, my gifts/talents are recognized by the community but are also a responsibility I carry for my community. Bear Clan people are known to be protectors of community and knowledge systems as well as community healers.

<sup>5</sup> Kathy Absolon made the spelling of the word 'wholistic' more popular, yet specific to Indigenous Wholistic Theory. The "W" emphasizes the "whole" circle, as in a 'balanced whole' (ex. Emotional, mental, physical and spiritual parts of a whole person). I was personally taught about Wholistic Theory through Medicine Wheel teachings in my late teens, that I received from my mother, Priscilla McLaren who received them from Elder, Robert Kakeway. Certainly the Indigenous Elders in my life and throughout the subsequent years have continued to add to my knowledge and understanding.

multi-faceted exploration of colour and light and the way they signal feeling and emotion, recognizing recurring themes in both theory and practice and identifying them. This isn't a single direction. It's a multi-dimensional awareness of self, place and the tools I'm using in order to make meaning from all the pieces that begin as thoughts, feelings, intuitions (Fisher pg. 11-29) or memories and for an indescribable reason need to become something outside of myself. The phrase, 'multi-dimensional' is used here as a way to describe the many layers of awareness present in the process of making works and, the multitude of ways the acts of making and bringing together (with intention), like curation, can transform spaces to invoke personal experiences and connection unique to each individual. Multi-dimensions are summoned through memories, emotional responses and a kind of *remembering* that is linked to Spirit<sup>6</sup> (Elder Geraldine Standup). Experimentation happens when I bring my singular works and other elements together into a unified space (in this case a gallery at OCAD University) to see how the works interact with the space and environment (which includes a community context) because I can never really know what the resulting story will be. As I understand it, it all overlaps, repeats and makes circular connections back to home, to Granny. My methodology develops from the process of observation, acknowledges that these observations become knowledge over time that is then shared and discussed with Indigenous Elders I know which leads to understanding(s) I then wish to share broadly. In a nod to Bob Dylan who sang, "But I'll know my song well before I start singing" (Dylan), I hold a commitment to a care full and deep understanding of what it is I am sharing.

For this research, I struggled with how I would communicate Granny's *the ever good*. Being authentic is a guiding principle for me –This is about embracing the experiences that I

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<sup>6</sup> Anishnaabe Elders call this "Adizokan" which means *a remembrance of Spirit or a Spiritual being that carries wisdom*. Adizokan is also about stories and our connection to them.

have lived (am living) and bringing those to this project of work while following my intuition central to my process of coming to know (Fisher, pg. 260) in my practice. This is my world-building.

Throughout the course of my life I have kept journals, records of my experiences, observances, thoughts and feelings about the world around me that I continue to try to make sense of. Autoethnography as a research method enables me to frame relational, immersive and personal stories recorded over time into substantive data that impacts and informs greatly my growing understanding of *the ever good*. And the way in which I share this knowledge, through personal perspective and experiences, rooted in *who I am* and where *I come from*, is a relational practice and framework used by Anishnaabe storytellers since as far back as we can remember (Borrows, pg. 17).

Yet the timeless in you is aware of life's timelessness,

And knows that yesterday IS but today's memory and tomorrow IS  
today's dream.

And that that which sings and contemplates in you is still dwelling  
within the bounds of that first moment which scattered the stars  
into space.

(Gibran, pg. 70)

## THE EVER GOOD

Something I will never forget is how my Granny famously said, “Ever good!” when she was proud, impressed and/or pleased with whatever was happening at the time. *the ever good* is a story I’m always trying to tell as an artist and as her granddaughter. I have thought long and hard about these words and with this thesis work, I wish to honour them, their meaning and the sentiment from which they came by grounding it in theory - Granny’s theory. How can I make *the ever good* my grandmother spoke about something that can be held, shown or described and practiced?

As a first attempt (somewhat poetic) description, I think of *the ever good* as the “stuff” that can never be taken away, lasting throughout generations. It’s what stays with us (as people, spiritual beings, families, communities and humans born into our own stories and surrounded by life and the experience of living), transcending time and space, and can be found to be with both the heart and stars. *the ever good* is both the possibilities yet to be and wishes, thoughts and hopes sent out into the universe that are born from love. Whispered in every possibility existence affords, it is both memory and the light that is stored inside our memories. *the ever good* shines in dark places, despite the dark places, and like water, it is held, carried and protected.

In conversation<sup>7</sup> with my cousin<sup>8</sup> Charmaine on the subject, she offered her own beautiful words about *the ever good*:

On the surface, her words, “ever good” can sound like praise,  
reassurance, or acceptance. But when Granny said, “Ever good, my

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<sup>7</sup> This conversation occurred shortly after the opening of my Thesis Exhibition, *the ever good*, April 2, 2026. My cousin, Charmaine travelled to Toronto, Ontario to attend the exhibition and offer her support and see my work and installation, but to also see her father’s works displayed as well (see figures 10, 18 and 24). In anticipation for the completion of this paper, I had asked her what, “Ever good,” meant to her when our Granny said it.

<sup>8</sup> Charmaine McCraw, whose dad (my uncle), Lionel contributed his wood carvings to this thesis exhibition. There is great care and intention to honour the ways in which my family’s voice, shared experience and love is a collaborative force and inspiration we share within our own ways and work.

girl,” it was something deeper - it was a truth being spoken - a grounding of sorts. Her words carried me to a place within myself that is steady, whole, and untouched by circumstance. To me, *the ever good* is a place, a knowing where we come from and what lives within us, regardless of what we face. Now, I find myself offering those same words to others. Not simply to reassure them, but to remind them that they are already good, already worthy, already whole.

Charmaine and I agree that it carries with it a sense of being rooted across time - past, present, and future where love, identity, and belonging remain constant. She adds, “It is both a blessing and a truth.”

In order to ground *the ever good* as theory, I’ll begin first by explaining how it relates to acts of care. When Charmaine offers the same words to others the way Granny did to us, she is continuing a practice of care that knowingly activates a deep sense of belonging within the person on the receiving end of *the ever good*. *the ever good* is both the intentional activation and the place it brings people to within themselves. The activation made through intentional acts of care carries those to a place of knowing that every person is born with because each person holds a deeply personal and intimate relationship with Creation<sup>9</sup>.

Care can be a complicated thing as shown and described in María Puig de la Bellacasa’s book, “Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds” published in 2017. In this book she re-imagines and describes (and re-describes), through a lens of feminist theory and the study of environmental humanities, care to be “not just as a human emotion or labor” but as a

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<sup>9</sup> Creation as in *life* but as Indigenous Elders I’ve encountered in my life and name throughout this paper explain Creation as its own entity of being connected to the beginning of all beginnings, unfolding through us, with us and around us all at once. Everything is still and currently in the process of becoming, of being created, eternally.

transformative and vital force in a "more-than-human" world, carrying with it deep ethical considerations. Through explorations of *the ever good*, I can't help but wonder about the possibilities of transformation and transmutation made possible by acts of care, rooted in love. I appreciate de la Bellacasa's careful look at care within its many contexts and perhaps *the ever good* can add something to this important discourse she states is needed in her opening introduction. She explains care as an entanglement with human and non-human implications and invites "speculation exploration" while cautioning against the reductive nature of definitions (Bellacasa, pg. 219-221). I imagine care to be an ongoing conversation where the description(s) of care are altered depending on who is offering it, for the better or worse, and their intentions behind it. I speculate care to be dependent on environment, experience, positioning<sup>10</sup> and story. There is so much to consider and hold with regards to thinking of care.

With regards to *the ever good* I wish to offer that care is a practice like any other where the practitioner becomes better at it over time. Granny over the years of her life as daughter, mother, friend and auntie, to grandmother and community Elder, became an expert at her craft of caring. And I had the privilege of watching her be cared for as well by both human and non-human entities throughout my life. Embedded in Anishnaabe identity is an understanding of the many ways the waters and lands of the Northern Ontario Boreal forest has held and cared for us too. Our ontology speaks of humans being held within a middle world, cradled by a world above and one below, inside an expansive universe, suggesting a vast cosmological system of care. Ancient Birchbark scrolls depicted these systems as ceremony, maps, portrayals of connections to the Spirit World and multi-dimensional ways of communication (Dewdney, pg.

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<sup>10</sup> The idea of positionality is commonly used in de-colonial work. A person's positionality is their own stated, critical self-awareness of who they are, who they represent, their privileges and awareness of power dynamics involved (to name a few).

161-162, 186). Anishnaabe artists like Norval Morisseau and Roy Thomas<sup>11</sup> continued the depiction of these stories, ceremonies, Anishnaabe frameworks, connections to nature as well as to the Spirit World in their own painted works<sup>12</sup>. Anishnaabe models of learning and coming to know such as Medicine Wheels (Borrows, pg. 17) have existed on Turtle Island<sup>13</sup> since time immemorial and they continue to teach us about the balance and reciprocity of care as a relational and wholistic<sup>14</sup> practice, never separating the human experience from the non-human (Absolon).<sup>15</sup> So, I will add that care is a process of coming to know that is deeply relational and acknowledges that the delicate balance of all things is to be greatly revered, respected, honoured and celebrated.

*the ever good* can be received and given. It is a practice of care and an experience of care unique to the individual(s). My Granny's acts of care were too many to count. From masterfully peeling potatoes for dinner to the ways she made everyone feel important and welcomed. ALL her acts of care were intentional, rooted in her love - *the ever good*. With my work, this exhibition and thesis, *the ever good* is imbued within each piece. My own acts of care are the offerings I make that show up as paintings, writings, poems and installation works. They are practiced, and though I realize I cannot make every piece of art successful, I can make every piece intentional with its offering of love.

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<sup>11</sup> Both Norval Morriseau and Roy Thomas have close connections to Granny and our family. Norval was my grandmother's first cousin, while Roy was my uncle Roger McCraw's best friend growing up. Norval and Roy were also friends.

<sup>12</sup> Their works of art and style of painting is known as The Woodlands Style.

<sup>13</sup> Indigenous name for what we also know as North America.

<sup>14</sup> Wholistic theory encompasses the Emotional; Mental; Physical and: Spiritual being with a multi-directional framework that is all encompassing, speaking to the balance and existence of everything shared in the Spirit of Life.

<sup>15</sup> Absolon is widely known for introducing Indigenous Wholistic Theory into a broader and academic context through her extremely important publications around Social Work. My own knowledge of Medicine Wheel frameworks have come to me mainly from Indigenous community Elders that include my mother, Priscilla McLaren, Robert Kakeway, Silvia Maracle, James Carpenter and Juliette Blackhawk.



Figure 1: "Theresa McCraw (Granny)", 2024

Acrylic on Wood Panel 36" X 36"

One of the first pieces I painted, as an offering of love made for this exhibition, was a portrait of my Granny, sitting on a ladder, leaning up against a boat located behind their house (in Caramat, Ontario), that is up on blocks. Here, I'm lending people the warmth of her smile and presence as I remember and cherish it while she enjoys her cigarette. *the ever good* is activated with this depiction of a memory, by the act of painting my grandmother as a means of honouring her, and the telling of a story of *the ever good* through symbols. The story being told in the painting is about vessels as means of carrying what is gathered, held and protected, like water and like *the ever good*. In this image, the little boat behind Granny is being repaired and serves

as a prop to suggest Granny, herself, is also a vessel with the juxtaposition. I communicate that she is the means (vessel) and the water (as symbolized by her turquoise sweatshirt) all at once. She is the container *and* its contents - both are *the ever good*. The ladder she sits on, symbolizes intention and steps made, and brings the viewer's eye to the blank board above her, bleached by the sun symbolic of mystery and possibilities - a 'blank canvas' if you will. As the composition guides your eye to Granny and the Thunderbird<sup>16</sup> at her chest, it takes you back up the ladder, into the white space, then back to Granny - *Always back to Granny*.

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<sup>16</sup> In Anishnaabe stories and culture the Thunderbird is a being that can move between the physical and spiritual realms. Through thunderstorms, rain and lightning the Thunderbird is present as a powerful healing entity, bringing a sense of renewal while replenishing the earth.

## STORIES TOLD IN SEARCH & RESEARCH OF CONNECTION

I cannot speak of *the ever good* without telling stories. Storying *the ever good* theorizes it. Stories are a necessary means in which I can exemplify the deep observations I name as part of my methodology. The stories, personal experiences and journal entries I share<sup>17</sup> are important to communicating *the ever good* because *the ever good* must first be understood through what Haudenosaunee, Elder Diane Longboat calls *Heart Knowledge*<sup>18</sup>. As I understand it, heart knowledge is a deep sense of knowing within a person's own Spirit. Heart knowledge is linked to who we are and all the circumstances that have made us who we are. I am my stories and my stories are the closest *I* have to truth. They are what has brought *the ever good* my way, and they are what will pass *the ever good* on when I am no longer able to.

Throughout this paper I tell stories. Stories that share memories and personal experiences as a process that unfolded into knowledge gained and shared. These stories are meant to be autoethnographic in order for links to be made to *the ever good* and links are there for connection and stories are there to bridge understanding.

Another story that relates to *the ever good* is that in my childhood I held a deep interest in the stars. Anishnaabe Elder Juliette Blackhawk<sup>19</sup> explained to my mother and I (in my late teens) in Sioux Lookout, Ontario that children are born with everything they need to fulfill their life's purpose and that their talents are evident at an early age if we pay close enough attention. She added to this that our role as adults is to nurture and protect these inherent gifts<sup>20</sup>. We know that

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<sup>17</sup> Autoethnography uses personal experiences and storytelling as a research method.

<sup>18</sup> This phrase and its meaning was shared with me in person during several conversations and ceremonies held inside Diane Longboat's healing lodge in Six Nations of the Grand River, Ontario.

<sup>19</sup> Juliette Blackhawk was a beloved Elder and Anishnaabemowin educator in Sioux Lookout. She also shared with me her story for my documentary, "Muffins for Granny." I loved her very much.

<sup>20</sup> I never forgot this teaching because I was struck by the way children were seen to already carry wisdom and knowledge of who they are and I was impressed with the perspective that the responsibility was placed on the adults to protect this. Western models of Education had only shown me that the only knowledge of value, was the knowledge given to me by my educators and where the burden is placed on the students to learn it exactly the way it was taught to them - somewhat erasing a child's agency and self-knowing.

as Indigenous people, thinkers, scholars and Knowledge Keepers there is much work to do in the reclamation of our own ‘Star Stories’ and ‘Star Knowledge’ (Chizen). And I wonder about the deepening of connections and what will be made possible with the continued reemergence of these star knowledge systems. Broadly stating, it is a natural human phenomena to look to the stars in wonderment and to also know they have guided our (both human and non-human relationally speaking) way in this world since the beginning of time. The word “Anishnaabe”, when broken down into its parts, actually means *lowered from the sky* (Banai, pg.4). My own sense of connection and wonderments of the stars held within the cosmos grew with me into adulthood. And these curiosities then led me to explore basic Quantum physics ideas and theories, bringing me joy perhaps because it links me back to a time in my childhood, where I stood alone in the dark looking up. But I was not alone, because I was visiting with the stars.

All these years later, I could not have predicted that these curiosities would lead me to a significant point of connection made with regards to my creative practice. I watched a video posted by astrophysicist and popular science educator, Neil DeGrass Tyson (uploaded in June 2025), titled, “Is Our Universe Inside a Black Hole?” And, to be clear, I am highlighting the moment in which a personal connection was made. The connection I was making was rich with metaphor. *If* we are all falling through a black hole (in our universe), then in this space of falling (that can be another metaphor for the human experience), maybe *the ever good* is identified as the ‘things’ we bring through, catch hold of that are protected and carried. While I aim to describe *the ever good* in more detail later on in this paper, I consider all of this in my thesis project of work – using deep observation, connections, and concepts of multi-dimensionality within a multi-generational understanding, as tools of research, storying, making and building.

Scientists tell us that at the centre of a black hole all laws of physics disappear (Rovelli, 2026). While not really a methodology, I imagine the gallery space I'm working with to be like the center of the black hole. A place in spacetime where memories are suspended in a forever moment and *the ever good* sits at Granny's kitchen table, the woodstove is warming and what matters most is discussed, tended to, cherished, held steady with purpose and care. A place where we are set free over and over again by a sense of belonging and where we remember who we are.

Figure 2: Family photo of me (aged 4 or 5) with Granny at the kitchen table, 1980



## WHO AM I?

Then there's me - Who am I?<sup>21</sup> Difficult for me to answer this without first thinking about the stars and the cosmos we are all held within. Life is precious. While here on Earth, we are being hurled through space inside a galaxy and the odds of any one of us existing at all is practically zero. This makes being human, by definition, a miracle (Bowler). Dear friend and Anishnaabe Elder, Traditional Healer and Residential School Survivor, Ralph Johnson delights in reminding me the astronomical odds of each of our ancestors surviving what they had to survive in order for any of us to be "here" today. He invites us to think about the "meaningful coincidences"<sup>22</sup> that have brought and guided us to this moment. I become aware of the expansive possibilities that reside inside my chest, and wonder about my purpose. I'm but one little light, inside this expansive universe and if I'm to trust what Ralph Johnson reminds me, then I have no choice but to believe that my life, a miracle, matters.

A little bit more about me: My sister and I were born in Sept-Iles, Quebec located on the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, surrounded by a wonderful family. I carry a lifetime of beautiful memories from Sept-Iles, the beaches, smelt fishing, whale watching from the pier with our mom. I remember family members playing the fiddle and guitars while singing our hearts out together in the kitchen after dinner. I remember my grandfather, Pepe. He had beautiful, shining and kind blue eyes and was an incredible carpenter. For fun he made marionettes that 'walked' into the room and they were so alive they made my sister and I giggle. I credit my grandfather for recognizing that the 'spirit of art'<sup>23</sup> was alive in me then and for patiently teaching me all he

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<sup>21</sup> A very important part of Anishnaabe protocol requires that you state who you are and where you come from as a relational practice..

<sup>22</sup> I visit Ralph every summer when I return home to Sioux Lookout and we talk for hours. He also holds an online circle on Sundays, every two weeks where each circle highlights a topic to be discussed - Meaningful Coincidences was discussed in one of the online circles I attended. But we often speak about it, expanding on the conversations, in person.

<sup>23</sup> Anishnaabe Artist and family friend Roy Thomas talked about this in my documentary (Muffins for Granny, 2007) how although he had left 'the spirit of art' as a young, troubled man, 'the spirit of art' never left him. I often think about this.

could for those first years of my life. After a bit of back and forth, for reasons I could only understand as an adult, my mother made the difficult decision to leave my father, along with our family in Quebec. She brought us back to her hometown, Caramat, Ontario (about 3 hours north as the Raven flies), north shore of Lake Superior. My mother is amazing<sup>24</sup>. Over the course of her career, she became a counselor for abused women, an Indigenous court worker, an Indigenous family support worker and worked many years with Indigenous communities and their families offering support and guidance filled with love and care she inherited from her parents. I watched her take great care with people and I saw how it encouraged them to transform their lives. My mother first taught me about Medicine Wheel models and wholistic theory she learned from Elder Robert Kakeway as well as through her work at Indigenous friendship centres<sup>25</sup>.

Both my mom, Priscilla McLaren (nee McCraw) and her mom, my Granny, Theresa McCraw (nee Desmoulins), were born (mom in 1953, and Gran in 1930) in Biigtigong, First Nation, where the Pic River flows into Lake Superior's north shore. My Granny Theresa McCraw had a lot of love to give to everybody her whole life. After their tragic and beautiful love story unfolded, she married my grandfather, Roger McCraw, a French-Canadian, born in Thetford Mines (1926), Quebec. My Granny's father, Abraham Desmoulins, made Grampa promise that he would never take her so far away that the family couldn't visit her, and my grandfather kept his promise. My Gran and Grampa raised my mom, aunts, and uncles in Caramat, Ontario, a little forestry town that is tucked inside the Boreal Forest. I am tremendously thankful for this because its location saved my mom, and her siblings, from having to attend an

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<sup>24</sup> My mother was the first in her family to graduate from college with a Broadcasting degree from Confederation College in Thunder Bay. At the time, she was a single parent to my sister and I, and although we didn't have furniture in our apartment (other than a kitchen table, chairs and our beds and side tables), she kept our place sparkling clean with shiny floors. She bought us rollerskates and allowed us to rollerskate inside! My sister and I loved it.

<sup>25</sup> Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) are urban community hubs that offer a variety of support for Indigenous people, their families and communities. I began working at friendship centres when I was 17 and continued, off and on in a variety of capacities where my latest position was that of Cultural Resource Coordinator and the Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre in Peterborough, Ontario between 2015 and 2018.

Indian Residential school as children. The Indian Residential Schools (IRS) in Canada were a government-imposed policy of assimilation that enforced the removal of every single Indigenous child (many as preschoolers or younger) from their homes, families and communities starting in the late 1800s, to the last school closing its doors in 1996. Regional churches were put in charge of running the 130 residential schools across the country. The negative and devastating effects of these policies continue to reverberate across the continent to this day<sup>26</sup>.

I'm grateful to be able to say I knew my grandmother's siblings (as well as any little girl could) because of their ability to visit each other often. My Granny's sisters reminded me of magical, chubby, Ojibway wood nymphs, so utterly mischievous and hilarious. The fun never ended with my Great Aunties. Some of my favourite memories are of the laughter and playful teasing I witnessed, partook in, fell victim to, and fell asleep to as a child. We were held there, with love, inside the forest and outdoor kitchens, with pristine lakes to jump into and laughter. So much laughter. My cousins and I were surrounded by family who collaborated with the forest in order to provide for us in ways that continue to amaze me. For this reason, along with many others that had nothing to do with money, I believe I grew up rich. Come to think of it, my childhood was pretty magical. As children we were never "shooed" away from adult spaces and conversations. As an adult, I understand this as being a cultural, Anishnaabe trait - A way of life that nurtures multi-generational sharing and connection.

Granny, among many miraculous things, was herself an Indian Residential School survivor. At the age of 4 she was taken to St. Joseph's Boarding School after her mother Sarah passed away of Tuberculosis. St. Joseph's Boarding School was located in what we now call Thunder Bay, Ontario; about 4 hours away by train from her home community of Heron Bay. I was 4 or 5 years old when she first told me about her experience as a child in the Indian

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<sup>26</sup> Please visit the NCTR website at <https://nctr.ca/about/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-of-canada/> for more information.

Residential School system, run by Catholic nuns and priests - She broke down and cried when she opened up to me as I expressed my concern. Granny shared heartbreaking details about her experiences in residential school during that quiet afternoon together. I think she was banking on me forgetting. Although I couldn't have understood it all at the time, I NEVER forgot it.

This intimate and quiet moment with Granny remains with me to this day. I remember my feet could not touch the ground as I sat on the chair close to her and that the kitchen table top between us was shiny like some kind of a portal. Granny wept and somehow I could sense the faraway places she was visiting with her tears. *the ever good* is present with these memories that stop time. How could one explain this moment? Our connection that transcended our ages? She meant the world to me even then and I was proud to know she could trust me with the details of what she went through, even though I couldn't possibly understand them.

Granny often spoke Anishnaabemowin<sup>27</sup> with her siblings, cousins and friends. When I asked her what they were talking about, she simply shrugged it off,

“Never mind my girl.” She'd say.

And sometimes my feelings got hurt by what felt like an exclusion from the conversations. I carried this confusing matter throughout high school and into my first sweat lodge ceremony in my early twenties. I carried it throughout my undergrad at OCAD University where I studied drawing and painting and, what I heard around me, in various circles and in varying capacities, was a narrative that spoke repeatedly about the “loss of culture and identity” Indigenous peoples have faced. I did not understand “loss” in this way, until later on, with a project I set out to do titled, “Muffins for Granny” to better understand Granny's residential school experience.

There was so much I couldn't possibly understand about her tears. But I could understand and see for myself the way she took care of the tears, scrapes, bumps and bruises (both

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<sup>27</sup> Anishnaabemowin is the 'Ojibway' language.

metaphorically and literally speaking), of her fellow residential school survivors and their families. She even took care of their children without ever thinking twice about it. I could see her ease and soothe the effects of all the ways the Indian Residential School system tried to break (and too many times succeeded in doing so) families and communities apart. Again, her concern and care was intentional. I have no doubt Granny would have been a powerful medicine woman, had she not had to shoulder the pain and sorrow of the devastating impacts that racist policies and systems left us all with. But *the ever good* was present in her ability to heal and soothe quietly, knowing nobody could ever take *this* away.

### AN EXAMPLE OF HER CARE

It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

And there are those who have little and give it all.

(Gibran, pg. 23)

When I was 4 or 5 years old, while staying at my grandparent's house, a stranger came to the door. Granny, loved by all who knew her, was rarely ever called by her first name. I was accustomed to her being called Auntie, Mom or Granny and my curiosity piqued when her actual name was used. This man at the door called her Theresa when she opened it yet she welcomed him with the same care and warmth as any family member. That was her superpower. She had the ability to make anyone in her presence feel loved and important. Upon seeing him at first, my little-self cringed and immediately cast a judgement. His clothes were dirty, his appearance disheveled and he was smelly.

“Come in my boy. I've got some coffee on. Here. Sit down, I'll make you breakfast.” She pulls out a chair for him and he thanks her,

“You're the only one who doesn't turn me away.” Her response,

“Yah yah, sit my boy. I'll fix you something to eat.”

All the while, I'm shooting the man with dirty looks. After all, he was infringing on precious time I was spending with my cherished Granny, and maybe I felt a little protective too. I followed Granny as she began to tend to him and asked,

“Who is that man Granny?”

With a cigarette hanging from her mouth the way it did, she looked at me from the corner of her eye – a look I understood to mean that it was none of my business. I watched from a distance and heard him explain himself a bit, sensing even then, his shame. My Gran never let him sit in it though. Literally. To my surprise and shock she tells him,

“Here,” throwing my grandfather’s house coat at him.

“Take off those pissy clothes. I’ll wash them now and you can wear Roger’s robe.” The stranger had no choice but to oblige by making his way to the washroom to change. I asked again,

“Granny, who is that man?”

And again, she ignored me and went about her business of puffing cigarettes, cooking and caring. Throughout my life, I watched her do this often. And, while preparing his breakfast, I was amused and baffled by how much food she made him. I realize now that that has always been an enigma for me: How did my grandparents manage to feed (financially speaking) the community the way they did? Granny didn’t concern herself with my judgement of the smelly, messy stranger who could barely muster any dignity to look her in the eyes. She turned her intention to caring for someone that may or may not have deserved her care. Why? Because it was at her door that he arrived. And my beautiful blue-eyed grandfather, Roger, supported her wholeheartedly in her caring endeavors. *I remain forever inspired by this.*

I had given up on whether she would answer me with regards to who the man was. Instead, I continued to watch her hands masterfully wrap the sandwiches she made for him, while he cleaned himself up in the bathroom after breakfast. More food. The wax paper that held the sandwiches was folded with perfection and the paper bag that held the wrapped sandwiches was crisp and bright. She had a way of making these seemingly benign acts feel sacred in some

way. Completely transformed, the now handsome man exited the bathroom and a new man stood before us. I was amazed. He thanked her again and she offered him the bag full of sandwiches and then he left. I was quiet for a while longer. I understood now and with a changed voice and perspective, I asked one last time.

“Granny, who was that man?” She turned to me and tenderly responded,

“Just somebody going through a hard time, my girl.” *Ever Good.*

In her act of generosity, kindness and compassion I believe Granny knew exactly what she was doing. She didn't concern herself with my judgement upon the smelly, messy stranger who could barely muster any dignity to look her in the eyes. She instead, turned her attention and intention to caring for someone that may or may not have deserved her care. Why? Because it was at her door that he arrived. And my beautiful blue-eyed grandfather, Roger, supported her wholeheartedly in her caring endeavors. I will remain forever inspired by this. Granny knew gestures like these save lives. I saw for myself what a little bit of time and compassion could do for one person, and learned that offerings of love and care are transformative.

Today, I aspire to make work that explores the possibility of transmutation and transformation made possible by acts of love. I hope my offerings bring warmth to those living and non-living who visit the exhibition. I hope it eases some of the pain imprinted on those affected by violence, colonial or otherwise. And I hope it ignites a remembrance of *the ever good* already present inside those who might have needed a Granny like mine.

## MUFFINS FOR GRANNY & BELOVED ELDERS

In 2003, on April 26th, Granny followed my grandfather to the Spirit World just months after he passed. It happened on the day I presented my final, undergrad thesis. I had never considered a world without the shine of her big brown eyes, the glow of her skin and the sheer comfort and safety of her presence. I remembered our time at the kitchen table, when she confided in me stories of her time in residential school and realized so much of her *whole* story had passed with her. That's when I decided I needed to try to tell her/our story. Although I had no prior filmmaking experience, after 5 tumultuous years I managed to complete<sup>28</sup> a feature-length documentary, "Muffins for Granny" in 2007<sup>29</sup> that I made in her honour. The research consisted of over 40 interviews that were conducted with Elders and residential school Survivors/Warriors and to this day, their stories continue to guide me in profound ways. I remain completely struck by the courage that each storyteller had in order to tell their story; and for many it was the first time they shared their residential school experiences. It was through this work that I realized that Granny was not excluding me from conversations held in Anishnaabemowin all the years prior. She was actually trying to keep me safe because throughout her life, all she knew from her own experiences was that being and speaking Anishnaabe made her a target of much violences<sup>30</sup>.

The project brought together the stories of 6 residential school survivors along with that of my Granny's: Garnet Angecone, Ralph Johnson, Alice Littledeer, Eulalia Auntie Michano, Delaney Sharpe and Roy Thomas. Naming each of them is very important because of the profound ways they have guided me and the work I do. We visited for many years after the

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<sup>28</sup> Seed funding for the project was offered by the Ontario Arts Council, which led to a completion grant offered by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

<sup>29</sup> Today, Muffins for Granny (Mongrel Media 2007, Criterion Collection 2012) is a learning resource for many institutions across Canada.

<sup>30</sup> Her experiences in Residential School were often violent and discriminatory to say the least, anti-Indigenous racism was everywhere growing up (although Caramat was a diverse community) and the effects the Residential School system had on my grandmother imposed upon her a great deal of shame she would later overcome.

filming of the documentary and although most have now passed on<sup>31</sup> I can still hear their voices, and I carry their stories wherever I go - an act of care that I have made intentional in everything I do and represent. *the ever good* is a path to courage made possible by their friendship, love and guidance. And courage is needed while we continue to navigate colonial harms present to this day. They inspire me the same way Granny did. They're stories and teachings help contribute to my sense of self. Sometimes the teachings that Indigenous Elders offer are carried with you for a long time, sometimes years, before they are fully understood. It's more like an unfolding of many little teachings that happen over time, until they become resolved in understanding.

Although I believe that every Elder I've ever worked with has helped shape who I am, the following is a list of Indigenous Elders and their accompanying teachings that have become the bedrock in which *this* body of work is held upon. Their teachings have been held, protected, carried, and passed on by generations of Elders that came before them - and I'm grateful for the privilege of being a part of it. The Elders I have encountered and built relationships with bring back to me a piece of Granny (which is also a piece of myself). They have taught me the immense gift of each sunrise and sunset, because none of us are guaranteed our next day<sup>32</sup>. If I can liken my life flowing like water, then their teachings are the sparkle of sunshine and moonlight dancing upon it - Light (love and knowledge) I didn't quite know I was so thirsty for. And now, my life and this light (the knowledges they have shared with me) cannot be separated.

In the following sections, though their teachings are vast and awesome, I highlight only the core that have helped me to build stories and frameworks connected to and around *the ever good*, and in particular, this thesis exploration.

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<sup>31</sup> Ralph and Auntie Eulalia are still with us and both do amazing work as Elders in our communities.

<sup>32</sup> A teaching I link back to Elder James Carpenter. We shared many hours in ceremony where I had the honour of helping and witnessing his *ever good*, through his work in helping people, families and communities through traditional Indigenous healing methods.

Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair (Anishnaabe)

Indigenous Elders I have had the privilege of meeting and knowing have taught me that it's the questions that move us, not the answers and that great wisdom can be found in pursuit of answers to the most basic questions. Before serving as Chair of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 2008-2015) the Honourable Murray Sinclair delivered a speech in Aylmer, Quebec to the Aboriginal Justice Learning Network, in April 1997 entitled, "The Historical Relationship Between the Canadian Justice System and Aboriginal People." Early in his speech he states:

The most important thing that we as human beings have to come to grips with, is who we are. That is the biggest question in life, who am I? The biggest question of life necessarily leads us to ask other questions, such as, Where did I come from? And; Why am I here? And probably the most important question is, Where am I going, and what's going to happen to me after my life is over on this earth and (will) I go to the next world? What happens to me over there? And our Elders always tell us that those questions are very basic for every human being.

(Sinclair, pg. 1<sup>33</sup>)

Roy Thomas (Anishnaabe)

In 2004, when I interviewed Anishnaabe artist Roy Thomas<sup>34</sup> for *Muffins for Granny* Roy shared this:

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<sup>33</sup> This speech was delivered only one year after the closure of the last government-run residential school.

<sup>34</sup> Roy Thomas was a dear friend of the family and knew my Granny very well. He passed away shortly after filming his interview for *Muffins for Granny* in 2004.

I know who I am because I studied the four directions that the Elders have taught me. I studied the directions of: Where I've been; Where I am; Where I'm going; and Where I come from... And I thank them for that. I thank them for remembering the things that I need.

(Thomas)

These words struck me because just weeks before I had read Murray Sinclair's transcribed speech when my Granny's doctor, Dr. Dean gave me a photocopy. With both Sinclair and Thomas offering the same teaching offered to them by their community Elders, this resonance helped me to connect the significance of understanding *who you are* and I continue to learn from this to this day.

Answering the question, "Who am I?" is a sophisticated, relational Indigenous framework in and of itself. It announces your relationships and positions you in an authentic and grounded way. We all come from somewhere and we all bring with us an important story to tell (Elder Ralph Johnson). I have learned in my twenty years of research, practice and guidance with Indigenous Research methodologies that being able to answer this question, authentically, is integral to the roles you play in any community you may find yourself in. Knowing of self and being true to your own story - lived and living experiences, is what's needed for truly respectful and reciprocal relationships to flourish. Answers to this question are not stagnant. They build and grow every day, expanding outward from a centre core of being<sup>35</sup>, and these answers are connected to and move with the universe.

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<sup>35</sup> I've heard various Elders, through personal, face to face conversations that this is where the Spirit centre is. A *forever fire* as described by Diane Longboat.

Ralph Johnson (Anishnaabe)

In 2019, my dear friend Ralph Johnson accepted my tobacco offering when I asked him to help me to understand a ‘hunch’ I had. I was offered an opportunity to write and direct episode five, of the APTN (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network) series about music, “Amplify” that was to be filmed in my home town of Sioux Lookout, Ontario. My inspiration for this episode was Nibii (water) because during the scheduled production time in April during Spring Break-up, the lakes begin to thaw and the rivers start to run. There is a profound connection with musical vibrations, water, and intuition. I held a feeling (Fisher pg.14) that my direction about water was somehow also connected to the universe. Ralph spoke of *Debiinaawe Giizhigon*, when translated within the limitations of the English language means, *sound at the centre of all Creation*. He explained there was a time before the known physical universe, long before Sky Woman, when the Gitchi Manitou<sup>36</sup> existed alone inside a Great Void. Gitchi Manitou had a thought filled with love and sent it out into the void, only to have nothing return. Then, Gitchi Manitou had a vision of light, a flash accompanied with a sound resembling the rumbling made from a sacred rattle. At that moment his thoughts were transformed into a trail of stars and planets, while the flash of light became the first fire(s), followed by the creation of the sun and moon.

I imagine *the ever good* being the movement and path between all these elements, Creator’s great love that began everything.

Geraldine Standup (Mohawk from Kahnawake)

An immense guiding force in my life, a medicine woman and traditional healer, Geraldine reminds me about the ancient memory we all possess and have stored within us at the cellular level. She continues to describe our potential to access powerful and ancient knowledge

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<sup>36</sup> The Great Spirit.

inherited through our mothers' mitochondrial DNA. I first met Geraldine at Anishnawbe Health Toronto<sup>37</sup> when I was a young university student. She was the first person to help me understand the deep and very real, multi-dimensional connection I have (we all have) with my (our) ancestors.

*the ever good* exists as a deep sense of knowing present within us all since the day we are born, not only in our spirits, but also at the biological, cellular level.

James Carpenter (Anishnaabe/Mississauga, Chippewa and Oneida)

I first met James, traditional healer and medicine man, at a healing ceremony he was conducting at Anishnawbe Health Toronto. I was in my late 20's. We have since worked together over the years in varying capacities, and much like Granny, Ralph and Geraldine I am struck by his approach rooted in love. James Carpenter has helped me beyond measure. He has been there through every significant event in my life, offering insights that fortify my sense of self, purpose and place in the cosmos. He taught me the word "Adizokan" pronounced *ahh-odds-zo-khan*, that describes; Ancestors, Stories; a traditional story; and remembrance of Spirit. The word can be translated to mean, *a spiritual being that carries wisdom and knowledge*. He offered this word in a conversation when I was trying hard to explain a feeling and deep sense of knowing I had with regards to a project I was working on and I was grateful to learn this word existed in Anishnaabemowin<sup>38</sup>.

I have known Ralph, Geraldine and James for many years and trust these teachers and their loving guidance very much. I am often (re)thinking about their words sometimes for years after the conversations were had as I had mentioned before. Connections I'm making within this

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<sup>37</sup> (AHT) was first envisioned by Elder Joe Sylvester, opened in the 1980s in downtown Toronto that integrated traditional Indigenous health care methods with Western medicine to better serve Indigenous people and their communities.

<sup>38</sup> The Anishnaabe (Ojibway) language.

thesis work are intuitive (Fisher 2006) as previously mentioned. I believe Elders when they say I'm being guided and trust that there exists a source of knowledge that comes from somewhere outside of myself, a source of knowledge that pours like water into each of us in our own way. There is so much to consider in my efforts to make connections and in the practice and work of *piecing together*, without really knowing why I need to.

When I say, "... in the practice and work of *piecing together*, without really knowing why I need to," I speculate that *the ever good* is found here too. It's a pull, in forward motion to something important, something meaningful, even though I may not yet know *what* and *why*. It's as if I'm only meant to keep going and that the learning and insights will be revealed at the end of the actual doing. *the ever good* is knowing that there is something 'there'.

### Basil Johnston

I had the privilege of working with beloved Anishnaabe Elder, writer and storyteller Basil Johnston<sup>39</sup>, along with other Elders on an art project, entitled, "The Ever Unfolding Journey" where as the artist, I was tasked with interpreting their descriptions of what the healing process looks like, resulting in a painting we were all proud of. In his book, "Ojibway Heritage" (1976) Johnston shares a story about a lonely Sky Woman already pregnant with twins, who left her Sky World by falling through a hole in the sky, through seven stars Anishnaabec call *The Seven Sisters*; which are the Pleiades in Western astronomy. With the help of a flock of Geese she descended to Earth, landing safely on the back of a giant Turtle. Long after the Creation of the universe, and after the Creator deemed Earth to be suitable for life, the way it was first imagined, the Earth had suffered a great flood and mostly all life on Earth had perished except

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<sup>39</sup> Johnston is a celebrated Anishnaabe Elder known for his many books that celebrate Ojibway ways of being and knowing, including *Ojibway Heritage*.

for a few animals and Nanabozhoo<sup>40</sup>. On the back of the turtle, surrounded by vast water, Sky Woman asked the animals to retrieve for her some soil from the bottom of the water and the animals were keen on helping her. The following excerpt is from Basil Johnston's version of the Creation story:

Gladly, all the animals tried to serve the spirit woman. The beaver was the first to plunge into the depths. He soon surfaced out of breath and without the precious soil. The fisher tried, but he too failed. The marten went down, came up empty handed, reporting the water was too deep. The loon tried. Although he remained out of sight for a long time, he too emerged, gasping for air. He said that it was too dark. All tried to fulfill the spirit women's request. All failed. All were ashamed.

Finally, the least of the water creatures, the muskrat, volunteered to dive. At this announcement the other water creatures laughed in scorn, because they doubted this little creature's strength and endurance. Had not they, who were strong and able, been unable to grasp the soil from the bottom of the sea? How could he, the muskrat, the most humble among them, succeed when they could not?

Nevertheless, the little muskrat volunteered to dive. Undaunted, he disappeared into the waves. The onlookers smiled. They waited for the muskrat to emerge as empty handed as they had done. Time passed.

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<sup>40</sup> Also Nanabush, a central character half spirit, half human, and trickster in Anishnaabe Creation stories as an example.

Smiles turned to worried frowns. The small hope that each had nurtured for the success of the muskrat turned into despair. When the waiting creatures had given up, the muskrat floated to the surface more dead than alive, but he clutched in his paws a small morsel of soil. Where the great had failed, the small succeeded. (Johnson p.14)

Upon her falling, she was met with the kindness, compassion and generosity of the animals who saved and cared for her. Their intentional acts of care, like Granny's acts of care, ensured her survival.

#### Kawennanoron Cynthia (Cindy) White

Admittedly, the teachings I've encountered about Sky Woman have been blended between Anishnaabe and Mohawk stories. Haudenosaunee Elder, Kawennanoron Cynthia (Cindy) White shared a great deal with me about Haudenosaunee cosmology perspectives. We worked together at Women's College Hospital<sup>41</sup> and she held a profound gift of creating sacred, ceremonial spaces anywhere, enabling those present, including myself, to invite in our ancestors for guidance. Although her methods were grounded in Haudenosaunee ways of being, Cindy held space for us to trust our inner wisdom and it was easy to feel good about and be connected to every story she told. On many occasions while working together, she spoke of Sky Woman and taught me that when Sky Woman fell, she did not come empty handed. She was able to grab at and bring with her medicines, including sweetgrass and strawberries, from her beloved Sky World. She used these *seeds* and *medicines* to create new life on Earth, in collaboration with her animal kin. Sky Woman's seeds and medicines are *the ever good* she brought from her Sky

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<sup>41</sup>We worked together for 3 years at the Women's College Hospital at Ganawishkadawe, the Centre for Wise Practices ,a leading force in Indigenous Health and Indigenous Health Research.

World that she carried and protected in her falling, until she could see where they belonged. I imagine this to be like knowledge as well. We carry it for a while until we understand their meaning and purpose.

For certain, I'm not the only artist who thinks about Sky Woman<sup>42</sup>. I think: How many generations does my bloodline and mitochondrial DNA trace back to her as an ancestor? I also wonder if she ever missed her Sky World. I imagine her standing on a shoreline, on the back of a Turtle, like I have done many times here on Turtle Island, looking up to the stars in awe, grateful and determined never to forget where she came from.

### MEANINGFUL COINCIDENCES

A few years ago in a vivid dream. I was 'shown' by the guides or teachers in the dream, a teaching about possibilities and non-possibilities. Literally how *they* put it. Three times in three different ways to be sure so that I would remember upon waking. Thankfully, I did remember

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<sup>42</sup>Mohawk artist Skawennati blazed trails for "Indigenous Futurism" and her film *She Falls for Ages* (2017) and Shelley Niro (Mohawk) and her Skywoman piece (2001) just to name a couple.

and I wrote it down.

I do not shy away from accepting my dreams as knowledge received. I trust the teachings of Elders Geraldine Standup and James Carpenter who speak of multi-dimensional realities as fact. As truth. Ancient Anishnaabe birch bark scrolls show documented accounts of interactions with multi-dimensional realities (Dewdney, pg. 21-22) in a variety of ways. I personally have entered in and out of these dimensions (very literally) through my dreams (Castaneda, pg.16), sacred Indigenous ceremonies and in waking life. Colonization and violent policies of assimilation (for power gain and land dispossession) inflicted upon Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, targeted more than our family and community structures (NCTR). Indigenous ways of knowing and being, ceremonies, sophisticated structures of education and governance, our intimate and powerful relationship to land and each other (nations of both the human and non-human kind) were also targeted and systematically undermined, dismantled and met with brutal efforts to erase (Elder Ralph Johnson, 2026<sup>43</sup>). *the ever good* also states that all Indigenous systems and knowledge(s) and all our ways of being, still live within us, ready to be reached for and become again. Adizokan is a remembrance of Spirit and it exists wholistically, in every way (Elder James Carpenter).

As I reflect back on my dream, this is what I'm understanding from it (so far). As depicted by the dots, or particles (a mark that shows them as some thing), possibilities and non-possibilities exist, together. The lines connecting, are pathways to each possibility and/or non-possibility.

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<sup>43</sup> Teachings he provided at the "Ishpiming" healing conference, held in person, in Toronto, February 2026.

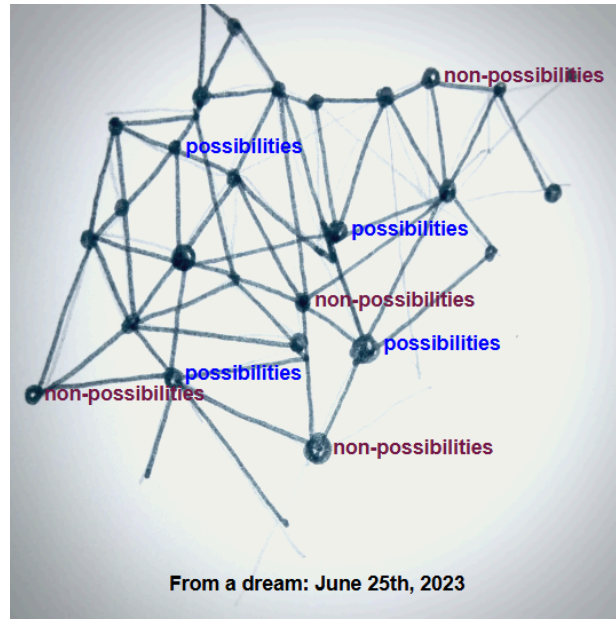


Figure 3: Possibilities & Non-possibilities Rough Sketch 2026

The teaching is this: It's not difficult to think of "possibilities" existing there as some 'thing' right? There they are - labeled. Yet, also labeled are the non-possibilities. The moment a non-possibility is identified it immediately *becomes* some 'thing' too. In other words, it already exists and a path to it also exists. The dream felt important and I am now in search, or research, for its meaning. It's related to *the ever good*, because these possibilities and non-possibilities are also up for grabs, for reaching and for becoming. I can speculate further that perhaps it's *the ever good* that is the connecting factor between possibilities and non-possibilities, linking them into becoming.

I was curious to find out if there was any actual scientific substance (other than my own philosophical view) to my dream. I also wanted to explore Ralph's teaching of *Debiinaawe Giizhigon*, while thinking of water and the ways it can teach us about the universe, life and connection. Do forgive my novice approach to these concepts. There is a reason that I believe that as an artist, I make connections to quantum physics even with only some knowledge of it –

this is my authentic voice – seeing the connections and considering them in my work and thinking. I’m grateful to be asking these questions. When questions are asked, they spark collaborative thinking and invite meaningful coincidences. So if the Creator made the universe from within a Great Void, and non-possibilities can become possible the instant they are assigned, then space is not nothing (Musser).

As a multi-disciplinary artist, maker and thinker I believe I’ve always looked for connections and meaningful coincidences all around me. The Creation story Ralph shared about the origins of the Universe got me thinking deeply about how thoughts were put out into nothingness and then became something. The thoughts were followed by vibration and a sound, “like the sound of a rattle,” he describes. Then there was light and a manifestation of the vision. It’s a meaningful coincidence, that what he described sounded a lot like the Big Bang<sup>44</sup> theory and I wondered about the connections of quantum physics theories and the vibrational waves of spacetime<sup>45</sup> and the universe. And then I remembered Water.

Over the course of a weekend, in Peterborough, Ontario at the Nogojiwanng Friendship Centre<sup>46</sup> where I worked, a group of women gathered for ceremonies and to receive Water Teachings from Anishnaabe Elders Shirley Williams and her niece Elizabeth Liz Osawamick. Ralph’s teaching got me thinking about water (or was it that water got me thinking about Ralph’s teaching). Once I made a (personal) connection between water and the universe and how vibrations become something, I could not undo it within my own mind. So I kept exploring.

My research brought me to quantum entanglement and quantum field theory. A poetic way to describe the concept of quantum entanglement is thinking of space as an entangled ocean

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<sup>44</sup> A well known and accepted Western scientific explanation for the origin of the universe that began from a singularity causing the expansion of space some 13.8 billion years ago.

<sup>45</sup> The term was first coined by mathematician Herman Minkowski in 1908 to describe Einstein's theory of relativity with time and space into a four dimensional concept. (Wikipedia)

<sup>46</sup> I worked as the Cultural Resource Coordinator at the friendship centre where I met Liz and Shirley. I really loved this work and the community.

of particles linked throughout the entire universe that exist in order to *become* something (Tillman). Albert Einstein famously described quantum entanglement as "spooky action at a distance" in 1935 because he found the concept highly unsettling as it suggested that two entangled particles affect each other instantaneously, regardless of the distance between them. As an Anishnaabe artist, I love the description<sup>47</sup> of "space as an entangled ocean" because, for me, it brings theories of quantum physics research in conversation with Anishnaabe Water Teachings as it also speaks to the vast connection<sup>48</sup> of all things (Tillman). I use this as a metaphor rich in possibilities, as I imagine *the ever good* as sparkles of inter-generational and dimensional knowledge, loving intentions, prayers and acts of care dancing on the waves of spacetime. I wonder if *the ever good* has something to do with the entanglement and the ways that particles behave. It's amazing to me that these scientific discussions complement the questions and explorations of Indigenous Creation stories. The process of linking my own curiosities and lived/living experiences to basic quantum physics concepts is bringing me a lot of joy. It feels like a gift I'm giving to my child self, who wondered endlessly about the stars and who is so pleased that my present self is finally beginning to understand<sup>49</sup>. I'm picking up again the things she had to leave behind because of all the reasons that life (and survival) can complicate the whims and longings of a child's spirit. With this thesis, I wanted to make the things that mattered to my child self, matter again now, with intention<sup>50</sup>. Throughout these explorations, I have been profoundly moved by the impacts of mattering. Mattering can mean two things. The first being through a science lens where Einstein's theory states that matter as energy and mass are

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<sup>47</sup> Also a meaningful coincidence is the description of "space as an entangled ocean" and the easy connection I'm making with Anishnaabe water teachings.

<sup>48</sup> Quantum entanglement was also described as an underlying, "ghostly" fabric that holds spacetime together, connecting to Einstein's quote about "spooky action."

<sup>49</sup> That my present self is finally beginning to understand her joy matters too.

<sup>50</sup> With intention means bringing to the forefront what my child self felt mattered, paying it the attention and care now that it so rightly deserved then.

interchangeable with his famous equation  $E=mc^2$  (Turner). The second, philosophically, refers to a personal distinction of something of importance ‘what matters’ is brought to the forefront or ‘brought to light’ and held in a distinct regard. Both are a process of conversion in which something becomes something else.

As I hold these ideas, at once, I imagined what I would make matter, by means of the work I’m creating for the exhibition and the stories I’m choosing to tell. Energy like *the ever good* can not be destroyed and is interchangeable with mass, like intentional acts of care. What I bring to matter are like Sky Woman’s medicines and seeds - they are the ‘things’ I have chosen to grab at and bring with me. I see them as my offering(s) and maybe their energy and intention is interchangeable. Acts of care, like Granny’s teachings, vibrating through spacetime in an “entangled ocean”, causing a ripple effect and reaching someone or something (somewhere) with *the ever good*.

Work is love made visible.

(Gibran pg. 30)

### BUT WHY MEDICINE?

Life can feel like falling sometimes. During this thesis work there exists an unbearable amount of heartbreaking and horrifying news we’re currently witness to globally<sup>51</sup>. If not careful,

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<sup>51</sup> 2026, the world is experiencing and witnessing several horrifying, high-intensity armed conflicts and civil wars, including the active genocide of Palestine, spilling over to Sudan and Lebanon, while the Russian and Ukranian war continues (just to name a few).

it can become emotionally crippling at times as so many of us can't help but feel absolutely helpless in affecting any sort of positive change. When I can catch myself<sup>52</sup> from being swept away by these feelings, I grab hold of the teachings from the Elders I've encountered while remembering quantum physics and what can come of a single particle. And I also remember Sky Woman. Ralph Johnson is always eager to remind us/me about the miracle of our/my existence. So that means my life, just as it is, *must* matter. Because like Sky Woman, we are not empty handed. While juggling all these thoughts and feelings, with so many possible ways I could write this thesis, a meaningful coincidence appeared by way of a You Tube video, "Is Our Universe Inside a Black Hole?"<sup>53</sup> DeGrasse Tyson explains:

The average density of matter contained within the size of our cosmic horizon, matches right on with what you get for a black hole this size. That's intriguing. Maybe it's just a coincidence.

What would it mean anyway for us to be inside a black hole? How would that work? Well it turns out if you run the mathematics of Einstein's general theory of relativity into a black hole, it turns out a whole new spacetime opens up on the other side.

(Tyson)

I had to pause here and consider a glaring metaphor. DeGrasse Tyson explains that the horizon of our universe, which is as far as we can see, mathematically corresponds to the behaviour of the event horizon<sup>54</sup> of a black hole. *Everything that comes near a black hole gets*

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<sup>52</sup> Sometimes I need to surrender to the grief and, as James Carpenter puts it, I "partake in the sacred ceremony of shedding tears."

<sup>53</sup> Uploaded June 19, 2025, this is the link (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKeCr-MAyH4>).

<sup>54</sup> The event horizon of a black hole is at the edge of the opening, the point of no return like a waterfall's edge where the velocity is so strong that everything gets sucked in, including light.

*pulled in and falls through*. And at the centre, is a point of singularity, a point of expansion much like that of the Big Bang! *Debiinaawe Giizhigon, sound at the centre of all Creation*. I wondered about the possibility of the centre, the place of singularity being Granny and Grampa's kitchen table where *the ever good* lives (where our memories and questions about our life's purpose brings us back to every time). Where our belonging is reassured by a warm fire put precisely there in an act of care<sup>55</sup>. And then, I wondered about what to me, felt obvious: *Is Sky Woman still falling? What's on the other side of falling?*

And you look behind you and the entire future history of the universe unfolds relative to your timeframe. And so the universe you came from basically ends and a whole new universe opens up in front of you.

(Tyson)

Maybe this explains how quickly time seems to pass us by as we experience this one life. Maybe our universe falling through and inside a black hole explains all the emotions of life. *Of falling*. In the story of, "She Falls for Ages," a pregnant<sup>56</sup> Sky Woman is falling while Skawenneti, the artist, brings us through the falling with her narration/guidance:

She falls for ages. She falls for *so* long that she has time to scream.

To cry. To pray. To lose and regain her sanity. And, finally, to sleep.

(Skawenneti)

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<sup>55</sup> A collaboration between my Grampa and the non-human kin intentionally caring for and tending to *the ever good*.

<sup>56</sup> Sky Woman is pregnant. She too is a vessel carrying life from her Sky World as well as her knowledge and memories. She carries love and every possibility with it.

This part of the story struck me also as a metaphor for the experience of being a human in these current times. Sky Woman goes through all the feelings while falling, then finally, she sleeps. This is when her helpers with wings enter her story. A flock of geese worry about her well being and catch her and proceed to place her safely on the back of a giant turtle. In Skawenneti's version, it's the Otter that brings her the earth from the bottom of the sea. She gives thanks and places her seeds inside the little mound of earth. Then, Sky Woman begins the ceremony - she begins to dance. In her expression, through ceremony and joyous dancing, Sky Woman (literally) grows her world in what we now know as Turtle Island<sup>57</sup>. I pause to think about how joy and gratitude expands our worlds and how, this too, is *the ever good*. How they open us up to encounter more meaningful coincidences and see this one life we have as so precious.

Skawenneti is one of many, brilliant Indigenous thinkers and makers that inspire and drive a good part of my thinking of the cosmos. At the beginning of this paper, I quote Tannis Nielson from an article she wrote in May of 2025 entitled, "How the Lands, Waters, and Universe Speak to me Through the Science of Story, Flux and Frequency." Humbled by the title alone, I appreciated immensely how through personal narrative she welcomes the reader into mind bending, scientific phenomena that she then offers back to us through her art works. Her work with<sup>58</sup> static, explaining that it's, "leftover radiation from the Big Bang," is like a collaboration with the very beginning of our solar system, 13.8 billion years ago! (Nielson) This is amazing to me. Through this MFA journey some of my favourite visits in search of (and research of) my place and purpose in the cosmos as an artist, have been with multi-disciplinary artists Peter Morin and Jay Irizawa. They offer many joyous and intriguing perspectives and

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<sup>57</sup> Turtle Island is otherwise known as North America.

<sup>58</sup> Tannis Nielson actually collaborates with static in her multi-media art works.

introduced me to what it means to be a *Trouble Maker*<sup>59</sup> - a disruptive force (thinker and maker) needed to bring balance, correction and healing in unjust places. Their multi-dimensional thinking, seeing and knowledge sharing that imagines the dark matter that escapes black holes, *causing trouble* all over the universe and ask, “Could star seeds be information escaped from other worlds?” (Irizawa) The term *Star Seeds*, offered by Peter Morin, came about in a conversation with Jay Irizawa, during their musings about Stephen Hawking and dark matter.

Trouble is also given other names. Star seeds. Star Seeds. This theory of radiation emitting from the collapse of suns into black holes suggests virtual particles dream of matter like information, seeding the universe. Star seeds find their way in an unmappable fluidity of dreams, seeping beyond the containment of space inscribed in imagined lines. They coalesce with desire, because Trouble Makers are often working alone and yearn to touch across the void. And yet, we see each other so clearly. Trouble is the void-not-void of emergent possibilities, a dark matter in touch with bodies yearning to connect, already embodied through knowledge, knowledge in-body, body as knowledge.

(Irizawa )

It's *the ever good* that not only carries us through but also empowers us every day and leads us to experience more meaningful coincidences. When I set out to learn about what *the ever good* was and how I could honour it, I could not have known the connections I would start making for myself, my work and in my life. I'm a single parent, in the city (Toronto) with two

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<sup>59</sup> Link to Trouble Maker website is [troublemaking.org](http://troublemaking.org)

kids<sup>60</sup> and I'm proud of all of our accomplishments (mine and my kids'), but single parenting can often be a lonely journey. I want to acknowledge that in times that felt like falling to me, I was met by helpers like Tannis Nielson, Jay Irizawa and Peter Morin who shared their understanding and knowledge and who reached, "across to touch the void" helping my falling to feel more like flying with regards to my work and artistic practice. Their incredible gifts, knowledge and insights inspired me the way the Elders have. These artists and Elders in my life have helped me find a place (or places) where I could offer what I had been gripping onto (in protection and safety) for so long because I had been *falling for ages* (Skawenneti) - maybe even for generations.

Falling, through and inside a black hole, is the only way that helps me understand this one fleeting life we get to live. There is so much beauty, knowledge, experience and memories to reach for, yet the falling only allows for but a fraction of what we can hold and do. So we are careful to reach for, hold and carry the things that matter. Falling helps me explain how desperate I feel when so many in this world are suffering, and being of service to them, offering acts of care the way Granny showed me feels beyond my reach. But then I remember the Creator's first thoughts. I remember quantum entanglement and the resonance of my love, my acts of kindness as inspired by the little Muskrat and his fist full of dirt. His offering of love and the incredible ripple effects of his legacy had and the caused impacts on a new spacetime reality that has become what we know. I imagine Sky Woman being so grateful to her animal kin for providing her a place she could stand on while looking to the place from whence she came. All she could do, all that was left to do was surrender to this place of falling. To accept it. And I wonder, is this where flying begins? I now trust that we all survive the falling. At no time did Sky Woman lose herself, her memories, because she carried them with her, she held and protected them. She, a

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<sup>60</sup> Leo who is 17 years old and graduating high school this year. And Elizabeth Grace (Lizzie) is 11, graduating grade 6.

vessel of a world before and after the falling and flying all at once. Worlds we can access in the here and now.

I've learned that beautiful things happen when questions are asked, keeping in mind *the ever good* is a shared experience, between people, generations, across spacetime, inside and through multi-dimensions. It's like you get to visit with all the parts of yourself, past-present-future, including ancestors, while collaborating with what is asking to become. Please consider this next excerpt from an article I read as a metaphor but also as a curious meaningful coincidence.

In quantum physics, the zero-point energy of the vacuum is more than an ongoing challenge, and it's more than the reason you can't ever truly empty a box. Instead of being something where there should be nothing, it is nothing infused with the potential to be anything.

(Musser)

All of this is medicine. All of this continues to expand into new possibilities.

### WORKS OF THE EVER GOOD

I created the model below as a means to understand how *the ever good* (with Anishnaabe Medicine Wheel teachings) might look like within a black hole, metaphorical framework. I'm still catching up to understand fully what this model wants to be and offer and there is more work

to be done for the future. But I can at least understand some parts for now. I imagine the circle as the event horizon. It's as far as we can see and know from our perspective on Earth. Within that circle, I call it *the everything* and outside the circle resides what I call *the everything other*. Outside the circle lies the realities we cannot yet fathom, but through the folding of spacetime onto itself, we sometimes get leaked information from the particles and dark matter that refuse to behave<sup>61</sup> (Irizawa 2025). The above can be seen as the Sky World, or as science calls a parent universe<sup>62</sup>. At the centre I merge Anishnaabe cosmology, of the seven directions as taught by Anishnaabe Elder, Lillian Pitawanakwat, whose teachings she made purposefully accessible on the internet<sup>63</sup>: Above; Centre; Below; East; South; West; North; and Below. At the centre is the self. It's the forever fire<sup>64</sup> - the soul and Spirit as depicted by the spiral<sup>65</sup> expanding outwards.

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<sup>61</sup> Relating to Hawking's Dark Matter Paradox.

<sup>62</sup> Larger cosmic host of our own universe inside a black hole.

<sup>63</sup> I know this because a dear friend and community Elder, Diane Sheridan, who knew Lillian Pittawanakwat personally, said that Lillian wanted everyone to have access to the teachings and that she would have been proud to see me learning from them.

<sup>64</sup> I've heard many Indigenous Elders refer to the soul as a fire.

<sup>65</sup> I had a dream once, where a guide (or helper) showed me a chart of ancient symbols that had profound teachings attached to them. I knew that I would never remember all the symbols upon waking so I focussed on one. The symbol for "I" was a spiral. I acknowledge that there is a whole lot more I could write and study about the spiral and what it means to ancient cultures all around the world.

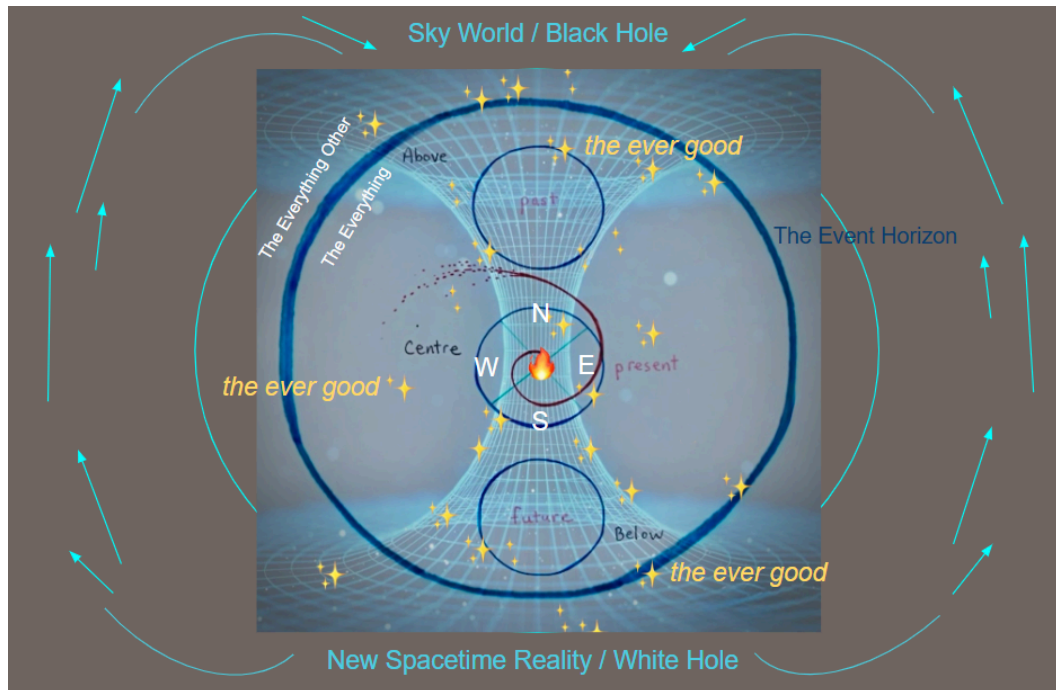


Figure 4: Sketch of Black Hole model Merging with Anishnaabe Cosmology  
(beginning stages of development and understanding) 2026

(Background image source: Getty)

I invite you to imagine the metaphorical and philosophical possibilities this model affords. Beyond the event horizon of our universe/black hole is the parent universe, the above or the 'source' we fell from - Sky Woman and her Sky World. While on her way down, because of her love, she grasps at what she can in order to take it with her and this is *the ever good*. The geese and the animals help her *fall into being* where they collaborate a new life, that becomes a new spacetime reality<sup>66</sup>, together. If our universe is falling inside and through a black hole, then the animals that came to help Sky Woman were falling too, along with the Earth and, this makes their acts of care, generosity, kindness and compassion all the more heartwarming. In this

<sup>66</sup> Or maybe a white hole where all matter and information is thrown out into a new spacetime reality.

speculative model, *the ever good* exists in the past-present-future all at once, in all directions. At the centre, the place of singularity, the place of expansion made possible from one single point, is where we have access to all of it. Everything.

For my final thesis exhibition I imagined the gallery space to be the, centre, the place of singularity as shown in my ‘Sketch of Black Hole model Merging with Anishnaabe Cosmology.’ Metaphorically, the centre is where the forever fire burns and where one returns to the memories, the place that holds us steady and with love. For me, it was when Granny would say, “Ever good!”



Figure 5: Detail of Chip Board Wall, 2026



Figures 6, 7: Ada Slaight Gallery Hallway, OCAD University, 2026

I liked the space I was assigned because there was movement, a passing through kind of like a ‘falling’ experience. I imagined building a world inside this space that could represent and *feel* like the “centre.”



Figure 8: Gallery Installation Detail (angle 1), 2026

The centre would have to represent Granny's kitchen with the woodstove close by for a sense of warmth and to set the stage of 'home.' I covered the far window with construction chipboard which helped provide another layer of warmth and brought back visceral memories of my grandparents' house growing up. I feel this was one of the most important elements of the exhibition. The chipboard holds a neon sign that reads, "ever good," serving as a beacon of light that announces the place and illuminates Granny's iconic phrase. Her portrait sits close by.



Figure 9: Gallery Installation Detail (angle 2), 2026

The kitchen table was another essential element. There has been profound scholarship written around the setting of the kitchen table. And rightly so, as it is a place where we gather to be nourished, to share, to offer and receive, discuss, tend to and to learn. We learn about each other at the kitchen table. We learn about ourselves, our families and communities. We come to plan and make lists and we unload heavy burdens on to it - burdens that show up in all the ways. With

their interactive exhibition, “Métis Kitchen Table Talk on Methodologies of Making” presented in Edmonton, Alberta (March 24, 2019) artists Cathy Mattes (Michif) and Sherry Farrell Racette (Algonquin/Metis/Irish) gallery goers were invited to gather at the kitchen table and for a discussion, “...about methodologies of making.” The artists led participants through talks about their Indigenous ways of being related to their practice of making (Mattes, Racette, 2019). They theorize and explain through a Métis worldview,

... the kitchen table is “where some of the best learning occurs. The kitchen table is where some of the best learning occurs. When we gather with friends and family around food and tea, we relax into easy conversation, lending to a safe space for dialogue and knowledge sharing.

(CKUA Edmonton, 2019)

I imagine that every Indigenous artist, maker, writer, student or scholar has early memories of working at the kitchen table, honing in on their practice, while the rest of the world buzzed around them. Time can feel like it stops at the kitchen table, or at least it’s slowed for just a while. I think of the American poet laureate, Joy Harjo’s (Muscogee Nation) and her poem, “Perhaps the World Ends Here,” that begins with the line,

“The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.” And then this breathtaking poem ends with the line,

“Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.” (Harjo 1994) I held this poem as I found just the right kitchen table for my exhibition.



Figure 10: Gallery Installation Detail (angle 4 with Wood Carving), 2026

The next piece entitled, “Honouring the Grandmothers,” leans on a wall and is installed directly across from the “ever good” chipboard wall. Here, I’ve painted 10 yellow roses that represent the 7 Grandfather teachings<sup>67</sup> (Banai pg. 64) with the 3 grandmother teachings I think should be added; Kindness, Compassion and Generosity. This larger work, painted on thick plywood, rests against the wall so that a viewer can stand *with* the piece, grounded with the grandmothers. I made sure to clean and wax the gallery floor to enhance the reflection (but also Granny always had shiny floors).

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<sup>67</sup> Banai shares the seven Grandfathers of Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty (or Honour), Humility, and Truth.



Figure 11: "Honouring the Grandmothers"  
42" x 80" Acrylic on plywood, 2026



Figure 12: "Honouring the Grandmothers"  
(Reflection Detail)

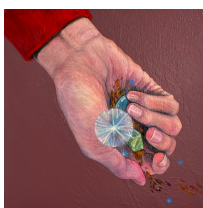


Figure 13: "Offerings"  
6" x 6" Acrylic on wood panel, 2026



Figure 14: “White Raven”  
20” x 20” Acrylic on wood panel, 2025

With this piece, *the ever good* is represented by the flower motif that sits close to the Raven and is always with the Raven, no matter the circumstances.

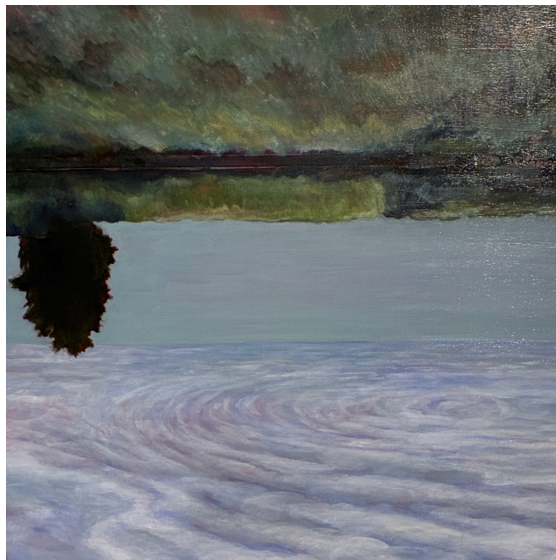


Figure 15: “Sky World”  
24” x 24” Acrylic on wood panel, 2026

This “Sky World” painting purposely disorients and suggests a portal through the clouds. Here, I experimented with what we feel and know to be ‘up and down’ and ‘falling or flying’.



Figure 16: “White Throated Sparrow & *the ever good*”  
12” 12” Acrylic on wood panel, 2026

After Granny passed, I felt she came to visit me as a White Throated Sparrow. The call of this sparrow is distinct and rings through the forest with a sweet song. This piece, of the sparrow flying away, was presented beside Granny’s portrait to tell the story of her Spirit being set free. In the painting, a glow is present between the wings, as if carried by the bird. This is *the ever good*.



Figure 17: Gallery Installation Detail (angle 3), 2026



Figure 18: Granny's Kitchen Soundscape Install, 2026

Cousin Bruanson McCraw sourced moments with Granny in the kitchen from hours and hours of family VHS footage. Although we could not catch clips of her saying, “Ever good!” I believe the message that did come through was more powerful and relevant to our current times. The resulting elements were assembled in collaboration with Mark Vogelsang, a long time friend and sound engineer for my documentary, *Muffins for Granny* (Mongrel Media, 2007).

This work explores memory through field recordings gathered across natural and domestic spaces. Using a handheld recorder, the listener returns to environments where these

memories were first lived: Water moving through a brook, the quiet rhythm of a kitchen, revisiting the voice of beloved Granny carried into the present. The act is both simple and deliberate: to stand within these spaces and press play. Pressing ‘play’ activates another dimension. A recorded voice of an ancestor is heard not in isolation, but placed back into the environments where it once existed. In doing so, the work reflects the tension between what can be held through sound and what remains beyond reach. Each moment becomes a meeting point between past and present. The recording offers a trace, is multi-dimensional, while the surrounding space reshapes meaning. Memory unfolds not as something fixed but as something re-experienced like fragments stitched together into a quilt of sound. This installation holds the listener in that unresolved space where presence and absence coexist. Where memory resists containment, and where the act of listening becomes less about retrieval, and more about acknowledging what cannot be fully returned.



Figure 19: “Candle and Copper Vessel”  
12” x 12” Acrylic on wood panel, 2025



Figure 20: “Starling and Birchbark Basket”  
14  $\frac{3}{4}$ ” x 21  $\frac{1}{2}$ ” Acrylic on wood, 2025

Both “Candle and Copper Vessel” and “Starling and Birchbark Basket” explore the idea of a vessel - of what is carried and held. This particular birchbark basket that I’ve painted sat on my Granny’s dresser, in her room for as long as I can remember. She explained that her cousin, from Fort Hope, Ontario had given it to her and that’s all I know about it. I inherited it from Granny and cherish it so much. The painting suggests that the entire universe is poured into the basket.



Figure 21: “Lionel McCraw’s Heron and Sand Pipers” Framed Photo: Theresa & Roger McCraw (Granny and Grampa) sourced from artist’s own collection

## Wood Carvings

My uncle Lionel McCraw has always amazed me with his talents and knowledge about the land and during our visits we spend hours talking about our practice of making. I'm proud to have his work exhibited with mine, celebrating multi-generational perspectives and collaborations for the *the ever good*.



Figure 22: (Detail of photo)

Theresa and Roger McCraw in Caramat, Ontario.



Figures 23, 24: "Vessels with Wood Walleye" & "Love Birds" Lionel McCraw, 2026



Figure 25: “Moonlight Quilt” Barb Taylor, 2026

### Moonlight Quilt

The quilt was made in collaboration for this exhibition by long time family friend Barb Taylor (Anishnaabe) of Caramat, Ontario. It honours the memory of Granny’s quilt practice and the only prompt I gave Barb was, “Think of the moonlight.” Granny and Barb loved to make quilts together and their styles were very similar as a result. Their quilts remain an immense gesture of love, generosity and warmth in the community.



Figures 26, 27: “Katie Rose” & “Katie Rose” (with black and white projection)  
36” x 48” Acrylic on salvaged wood, 2025

Katie Rose (Anishnaabe) is the name of the young dancer shown in a looping video, projected onto the painted panel of a snowy forest scape. In addition to being a wonderful dancer, Katie was also an exceptional artist from Eagle Lake FN. Our stories, hers and mine, collided in an unexpected way after I’d seen her dancing video, “Riptide shuffle flic flac remix” uploaded to YouTube May 28, 2015. I reached out to family in Eagle Lake with the intention of working with Katie only to learn, heartbreakingly, that she had taken her own life just months before. Her mother explained Katie had gone through a series of tremendous losses she could not recover from... Katie’s art works are truly breathtaking. I wanted to honour her by setting a stage for her dancing while bringing her along in an art gallery setting she was surely destined for. This piece activates *the ever good* as an act of care and my offering of love.

This next installation is also an act of care where I imagine and hope that somehow, across spacetime Neil Stonechild can feel the love behind its intention.



Figures 28, 29: Neil Stonechild, Starlight Install (1, 2), 2026

Neil Stonechild, a Saulteaux First Nations teenager was found frozen to death in a remote field on the outskirts of Saskatoon, November 1990. That was the same year my dear friend Catherine Gowan (15 years old) was murdered in our hometown. I was 14 years old in 1990. Two police officers Larry Hartwig and Brad Senger from the Saskatoon Police Service left Neil (17 years old at the time<sup>68</sup>) there alone to fend for himself in the middle of winter without his coat and only one shoe (Reber and Robert). I had heard about the infamous “Starlight Tours” stories as a child and carried Neil’s story my whole life. This painting is my offering to the memory of Neil as I

<sup>68</sup> My son Leo is currently 17 years old preparing for high school graduation and upcoming prom...

continue to grapple with questions of justice regarding Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The painting is presented with a smaller Raven piece and Bob Dylan's "Percy's Song" (1963) plays in headphones. Dylan was 22 years old when he wrote this song. I invite you to reflect on the juxtaposition of these. Neil Stonechild was born on August 24th, 1973 and died on November 25th, 1990. He was loved and had his whole life ahead of him.



Figure 30: "Neil Stonechild"  
18" x 24" Acrylic & Graphite on wood panel, 2026

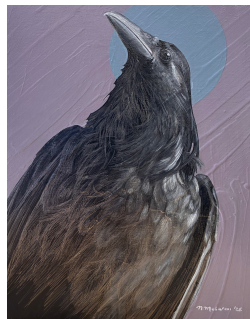


Figure 31: "Witness"  
8" x 10" Acrylic & Graphite on wood panel, 2026



Figure 32 “Sparrow at Ocean’s Edge”  
10” x 10” Acrylic on wood panel, 2024

Granny always wanted to see the ocean and she never did get the chance. In this painting, I lovingly place her at the ocean’s edge. I wonder if all this work I do around, with and for Granny has her looking back and I wonder if I can ever let her go.



Figure 33: “Kahlil Gibran & The Pic River”  
19” x 24” Acrylic on wood, 2025



Figure 34: "Presence"  
30" x 48" Acrylic on masonite, 2019



Figure 35: "The Landing Place"  
24" x 58" Acrylic on salvaged wood

## THE EVER GOOD & LOVE

I find immense comfort in knowing I'm not the only Anishnaabe calling back this knowledge in the same way that Creator's first thoughts were put out into the great void. At first, they didn't come back. Until they did - as a pathway of stars and planets that mark our way home (there are Indigenous teachings about that too<sup>69</sup>). There is one more story I'd like to share as masterfully retold<sup>70</sup> by beloved, Anishnaabe author, journalist and poet, Richard Wagamese<sup>71</sup>.

The story begins at almost the beginning, but long after *Debiinaawe Giizhigon, the sound at the centre of all Creation*<sup>72</sup> and long before time existed. Creator came to speak with the animal nations about a new creature that would be sent to live among them. They would be called the Anishnaabe/humans (in Wagamese's story he names humans, "Man") and they would become kin to the animal nations. Creator explains that the Anishnaabe would be born filled with questions and to help us humans find answers to these questions, Creator would give us the beautiful gifts of knowledge and truth. With these we'd be able to find our way to our own Spirit. But in order for humans to truly appreciate this offering, Creator would have to hide it somewhere we could search for and find it. But not easily because it would need to also be earned (Wagamese). In this story, which I've heard in person from Ralph Johnson, James Carpenter and Cindy White in slightly different versions, the animals offer their ideas about where Creator should hide this precious offering.

The salmon said that he would take the gift and put it at the deepest part of the deepest ocean. The Creator replied that it was destined

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<sup>69</sup> The Milky Way guides our way back to The Spirit World, I've heard many times, through many of the Elders I encountered.

<sup>70</sup> This story would have been told prior for many generations leading up to and going beyond when Wagamese retells it.

<sup>71</sup> His best known works include, *Keeper'n Me* (1994), *A Quality of Light* (1997), *The Next Sure Thing* (2011), *Indian Horse* (2012), which was later made into a feature film, *Medicine Walk* (2014) and *Starlight* (2018)...

<sup>72</sup> Like the Big Bang

that someday Man should visit there. The buffalo said that he would carry the gift to the very middle of the Great Plains. The Creator told buffalo that Man would someday cover the entire world and he would find it there too easily. The eagle said that with his powerful wings he would fly it to the moon, but the Creator turned down the suggestion as well because Man would someday travel there too. One by one the animal people made suggestions. No one seemed able to come up with a remote enough place to hide the gift of knowledge and truth. Finally, the little mole came forward. The mole lived within the earth and had lost the use of his eyes. But even though he couldn't see, the mole had learned the ability to see with the vision of his heart. He had developed true spiritual insight. The mole told the Creator that he knew the perfect place to hide the gift. "Put it inside them," he said, "because then only the wisest and purest of heart will have the courage to look there..."

(Wagamese)

That's the theory. I needed to make all this work, explore the many ways in search for the knowledge and truth that would bring me these words that communicate (finally) what I needed to know and understand from the beginning, but could only find here, at the end.

At the beginning (not of time but of this thesis work) I wanted to find out, "*How can I make the ever good my grandmother spoke about something that can be held, shown or described and practiced?*" *the ever good* is something I wanted to know how to honour, with

and through acts of care the way Granny did. By using autoethnography in search of *the ever good* I was able to bring it down from all the places I felt I could find it, and share it and ground it in theory - Granny's theory. But theories need words and I couldn't find them without taking the journey that first asked me to trust my intuition (Fisher pg. 11-29), to open myself up to new ideas through the exploration around the mechanics of the cosmos, scratching the surface of quantum theory knowledge. I needed to share and continue to hold in high regard teachings offered to me by beloved Elders. I needed to look at what other artists, writers, makers and thinkers were doing even if I could not quite understand it. I needed to collaborate and also be alone. I needed to tell the stories (again). I needed to dream and be grateful. I needed to navigate single parenthood through a full-time education journey. I needed my family and friends more than I could have known<sup>73</sup>. I needed all these things because I needed to search everywhere I could and for as long as I could. I needed to do this so that I could recognize *it* the instant it showed itself to me. And Sky Woman, the grandmother of all grandmothers, guided me like all loving ancestors do. Throughout my life when Granny said, "Ever good, my girl" something in me always reset. But reset to what exactly? Drawing the model (albeit not that well) helped me see and imagine this world I was building around *the ever good* and what I saw was a place where forever memories live. Memories not as fixed occurrences but as a place to visit and be reset by love and truth. The centre. The kitchen table, warmed by acts of care. A fire not only sustained by love, but a fire that *is* love. When Creator created the universe, s/he had to first imagine a place. And their thoughts were sent out in the Great Void as a longing and a great love. This great love, coupled with great intention (Elder Terry Dokis) created a vibration that scattered stars and planets and made the universe. Creator then found a way to hide an important

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<sup>73</sup> Sometimes being a single parent causes a person to be hyper-vigilant and asking for help is too difficult for fear of help not showing up. But, I am truly humbled by the ways my family and friends supported me through this MFA journey.

gift inside all of us - a gift that would lead back to Spirit, back to the centre of all things. Every time Granny said, "Ever good," she was marking the moment(s) where she recognized in us *the ever good*. When she did this, she stopped time and brought us right back to ourselves, back to a place before we ever needed healing. Her acts of care pointed us to the gifts Creator hid inside us, the place that linked us to the first ever particle that became and that continues to become. *the ever good* if described with terms borrowed from quantum physics, isn't necessarily the particles that are waiting to become, *the ever good* is the stir, the force, the thought, the intention that excites particles *into becoming*. *the ever good* is mapped in our hearts, memories, stories and is written on shorelines and horizons, found in all the places we look to in longing and a loving intention. The Elder's teachings I've shared and continued forward, when put beside the quantum physics theories that I could explore during this time, suggests to me that *the ever good* may even be mapped by the cosmos itself. And like the universe, my knowledge of it will continue to expand.

In times that feel like falling, like when we walk with a broken heart due to life's circumstances sometimes all we have left is *the ever good*. Sometimes all we have is what we carry though our hands be empty. And in times that feel like flying, *the ever good* is our offering of love and acts of care - in whatever form they take on.

Granny, Theresa McCraw (nee Desmoulins) had a lot of love to give to everybody. She famously said, "Ever good!" when she was proud, impressed and/or pleased with whatever was happening at the time. My cousin Charmaine explains earlier on, "Her words carried me to a place within myself that is steady, whole, and untouched by circumstance. To me, *the ever good* is a place, a knowing where we come from and what lives within us, regardless of what we face." In these closing thoughts, I'll emphasize that *the ever good*, can be elusive because it's a deeply

personal experience that connects us to the place in the centre that is “untouched by circumstance.” Yet, *the ever good* will show up as lights that look like knowledge and truth, meaningful coincidences (when there are no Grannys and kitchen tables to remind us), inherent gifts, a stirring and longing that happens when we look to the stars for answers or for company. Sometimes we have to fall to find *the ever good* because we will see it in what we reach for, what we bring, carry and protect in our falling. We can recognize it in what stays constant with love and what can never leave us or be taken away. I have learned that *the ever good* is very real. It is touchable, workable, writable, and memorable because loving acts of care make it so.

I often revisit that one day, when I was 4 or years old, and a stranger came to the door in need of Granny’s welcoming nature. That day when I watched her get straight to work. She knew exactly what she was doing. She knew *the ever good* she offered through and with her loving act of care, would remind the man (if nothing else) that he belonged there at her kitchen table. But thinking back about that stranger who transformed right before my eyes, I believe he left with a whole lot more than cleaned clothes and a paper bag full of Granny’s masterfully wrapped, sandwiches in hand.

*Miigwech for your time (and care).*



“Portrait of Granny” (detail)  
39” x 36” Acrylic on Wood panel, 2024

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