

Surrender No. 40: draft 15

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By

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*[slide: green path in a forest until introduction]*

*[soundscape plays until introduction]*

*[slide: introduction text]*

Hello. Tansi. She:kon [*say-go*]*—*that’s “hello” in Mohawk. Thanks for coming.

I want to acknowledge that the land on which we gather today is Treaty 4 territory—the traditional territory of the Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine and the homeland of the Métis.

I need to say something about what you’re about to hear. It’s part of my MFA in theatre at the University of Regina, along with a play called *What You Carry* and a critical engagement paper where I think about the creative work I’ve done. The play will be read here, at Artesian, at eight o’clock tonight. Between now and then, there will be some food and a cash bar downstairs. I hope you’ll stay and eat something and then stay for the reading of the play.

*[slide: Haldimand Tract]*

We’re good people, right? And this is a good place, Canada. People risk their lives, crossing the border when it’s 30 below, because they know it’s a good place. Right?

That’s one of the stories we tell about ourselves. And those stories are important.

*[slide: Firewater]*

The Cree writer Harold Johnson says that everything is story: “I am story, you are story, the universe is story, and all these stories work together to create what we experience as reality” (104-05). The stories we tell about ourselves help define who we are. Like the

story that this is a good country, that we're good people. But those same stories can prevent us from seeing the things they leave out.

*[slide: the Haldimand Tract]*

I want to tell you a story about a walk I took last June, through the Haldimand Tract in southwestern Ontario. It was a longish walk, three hundred and thirty-five kilometres. It took two weeks. There are a lot of places I could begin this story, but I'm going to start with the day my sister Pam drove me up to Dundalk. That's the town closest to the source of the Grand River, the river that runs through Brantford, the city where we grew up. Pam still lives there. So does my mother.

*[slide: blue sky and puffy clouds]*

It's a beautiful day. We get to Dundalk and eat supper at a little restaurant there. Then we look for the motel where I'm supposed to be staying the night. I was sure it was in Dundalk. But we can't find it. We stop at a gas station on the edge of town. I ask for directions. "Oh, turn right, you can't miss it," the guy says. So we head down Highway Ten, thinking we'll see it right away. We don't. I'm starting to think we made a mistake, turned the wrong way, when there it is—halfway to the next town. My first day of walking just got eight kilometres longer.

*Pause. Water.*

I have to explain what the Haldimand Tract is. It's a history story. I know, I know: history, right?—all those dates to keep track of. But the story of my walk doesn't make any sense unless you know the story of the Haldimand Tract.

***[slide: timeline: 1784]***

That story begins in 1784. Well, actually before that. But in 1784 Sir Frederick Haldimand, the Governor-General of Quebec,

***[slide: Sir Frederick Haldimand]***

issued the Haldimand Proclamation. That document reserved six miles on either side of the Grand River, from its source in the hills near Dundalk to the place where it empties into Lake Erie, for the people of the Six Nations.

***[slide: the Six Nations]***

They call themselves the Haudenosaunee, the People of the Longhouse. Or the Onkwehonwe, the Original People. The Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora: those are the Six Nations. The Haldimand Proclamation says that they were supposed “to take Possession of, & Settle upon” the Haldimand Tract, and that they “& their Posterity” were to “enjoy” it “for ever” (Johnson 51).

***[slide: Haldimand Tract map]***

Haldimand bought that land from the Mississaugas for eleven hundred and eighty pounds (and seven shillings and sixpence) and reserved it for the people from the Six Nations who wanted to live there. Those nine hundred and fifty thousand acres—that’s the Haldimand Tract.

You see, the Six Nations had fought alongside the British during the American Revolution. In revenge, the Americans launched a scorched-earth campaign against them. They went through Six Nations territory, burning crops and villages, killing women and children. When the war was over, a lot of people from the Six Nations were living along the Niagara River as refugees. Now, the Six Nations were still powerful allies against the

Americans, and Haldimand wanted to keep them that way. So he negotiated with Joseph Brant,

***[slide: Joseph Brant]***

a Mohawk chief, and together they came up with the agreement expressed in the Haldimand Proclamation.

***[slide: Haldimand Tract/Six Nations map]***

Between 1784 and today, something happened to the Haldimand Tract. It got smaller—a lot smaller. The current Six Nations reserve, southeast of Brantford, is only forty-six thousand acres. That's just five per cent of the land described by the Haldimand Proclamation. The grey part on this map? That's the Haldimand Tract. The orange-red part? That's the reserve.

So what happened? I never asked that question, never thought much about it. Then I stumbled across a book called *Conflict in Caledonia*,

***[slide: Conflict in Caledonia]***

about the occupation of Douglas Creek Estates, back in 2006. Maybe you remember that—it made the national news. The author of *Conflict in Caledonia*, Laura DeVries? She grew up in the Haldimand Tract, like me. And what I learn when I read her book—

Well, I remember putting it down on my desk, feeling angry and ashamed, because I'm part of the story she tells, as a descendant of the settlers who came there.

*Pause. Water.*

***[slide: a road]***

That first morning, I walk up the shoulder of Highway Ten to Dundalk and get breakfast. Then I push on to my next stop: a B&B some twenty-five kilometres south. My hosts are curious about why I'm walking, and we have a good chat about it. I'm happy to talk to people about what I'm doing, because I spend the days alone, walking. Most of the people I see are in cars and trucks. Sometimes they wave. I do meet a few people, and I get together with old friends a couple of times, but this walk isn't like the Camino de Santiago, in Spain, where you meet people all the time. This is a solo walk. I have to get used to that.

Not that I don't enjoy myself:

*[slide: milkweed]*

the warm sun, the sweet smell of milkweed, the birds singing, and everything so green, despite the drought. Don't think this walk is some kind of hair-shirted penance—it isn't.

*Pause.*

So, how did the nine hundred and fifty thousand acres of the Haldimand Tract turn into forty-six thousand?

*[slide: timeline, 1793]*

In 1793, John Graves Simcoe, the first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada,

*[slide: John Graves Simcoe]*

took back the northern third of the Tract.

*[slide: the northern third]*

The original survey had been botched, you see, and the Crown hadn't bought that land from the Mississaugas after all. Simcoe went ahead and bought that land, but he didn't add it to the Tract. That decision is the basis of one of the Six Nations elected council's land claims.

Then there's the middle third, where the cities of Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge are.

***[slide: Joseph Brant]***

Brant convinced the Confederacy Chiefs to use part of the Tract to create a permanent income for the Six Nations. That's where the middle third went, blocks one through four on this map:

***[slide: the middle third]***

Brant sold that land in the 1790s. The Six Nations elected council says that Brant was only supposed to arrange to lease that land—that the Confederacy Chiefs wanted the Six Nations to retain ownership. But Simcoe was saying that the Six Nations couldn't sell the land at all because it wasn't really theirs (Johnson 74), and as far as I can figure out, Brant thought the best way to prove him wrong was to sell some. Because Brant exceeded his power of attorney, though, the middle third is the subject of another land claim.

The Six Nations set up a trust fund with the money from those sales. The government appointed trustees to manage that money and, along with stealing from the fund themselves, they let the government borrow from it to pay off debts, build roads and canals and bridges, to keep McGill University from going bankrupt—among other things.

***[slide: McGill University]***

Not one of those loans, not one, was ever repaid. Today, figuring six per cent compound interest over more than one hundred and fifty years, Canada owes the Six Nations seven billion dollars (*Land Rights: A Global Solution* 7-9).

By the way, here's a story about McGill, one I heard from a journalist who writes for the *Two Row Times*, a newspaper at Six Nations. Apparently a delegation of people from Six Nations went to talk to people at that university. I don't know who went—whether they were clan mothers and Confederacy Chiefs, or people from the elected council, or both. Anyway, the people from Six Nations said to the people from McGill, “You owe us money.” And the people from McGill said, “Yes, we know.” The people from Six Nations said, “We don't expect you to pay it back.” And the people from McGill were so happy! Then the people from Six Nations said, “Instead, we want free tuition for any student from Six Nations who wants to study here.” And the people from McGill, they said, “No.”

*Pause. Water.*

***[slide: map of villages along the Grand River]***

What about the southern third of the Tract? That's where people from Six Nations actually settled, in villages along the river—different nations in separate villages. A lot of that land was stolen by squatters—settlers who showed up and just took it, sometimes violently (DeVries 36). Some was flooded without compensation by the Welland Canal Company. Some was leased to settlers who turned around and sold it. The rest was taken by the government in a series of surrenders—some big, some small.

*[slide: timeline, 1841]*

The biggest was the General Surrender of 1841, which stripped the Six Nations of all their land outside the current reserve. The government found people at Six Nations to sign the papers, but they can't have represented the majority, because the Six Nations have been protesting the General Surrender since it happened. And guess what? It's the basis of another land claim.

*Pause.*

*[slide: a road]*

For the first couple of days, I walk on roads. I see a lot of roadkill and a lot of signs: "No Trespassing. Electronic Surveillance in Operation." People in that part of the country take private property seriously.

Anyway, I'm looking forward to the third day, when I reach the Grand Valley Trail,

*[slide: Grand Valley Trail]*

a series of marked footpaths on private land. I'll still have to walk on the road sometimes, but I figure the footpaths will be quieter, less dangerous, more pleasant. And they are. The problem is, they aren't always well marked, not like this one. Sometimes the path I'm walking on just vanishes. And then I'm lost. I have a trail guide, but the maps don't always make sense. So, on the morning of that third day, the path I'm on disappears. I can't find it. I decide it must follow a lane that leads to cottages on the river, and I walk that way.

Then, waddling around a corner, heading right towards me: disaster.

***[slide: a skunk]***

We look at each other.

*You raise your hands in a gesture of surrender.*

“Okay, buddy,” I say. “Okay.” And start backing away, slowly.

*You lower your hands.*

But the skunk is just as afraid of me as I am of him. If he could talk, I think he’d say,

*You raise your hands in a gesture of surrender.*

“okay, buddy, okay.”

*You lower your hands.*

because he turns around and scuttles back the way he came. I move forward, cautiously.

Maybe it’s an ambush. But he’s gone. The lane turns out to be a dead end, and I walk

back, thinking about that skunk lurking in the bushes. Then I find the path. I’m not lost. I

didn’t get sprayed.

*You take a deep breath.*

I take a deep breath—and keep walking.

***[slide: a highway]***

I get lost on the Grand Valley Trail a lot, and eventually I decide it’s better to walk along the highway. It’s noisy and dangerous and the gravel shoulder can be hard

going, but highways don’t just disappear without any warning. That’s not the way I

wanted to make this walk. So once in a while I try the trail again. And almost every time

I get lost.

*Pause. Water.*

Reading that book, *Conflict in Caledonia*? That was my red pill moment.

***[slide: The Matrix, the red and blue pills]***

You remember that movie, *The Matrix*? Neo, the main character, he was given a choice: he could take the blue pill and go back to sleep, or he could take the red pill and see how things really are. I ended up taking the red pill. I found out what's missing from the story I'd been told about the Haldimand Tract, about Canada itself, really. If you're a settler, like me, you might be surprised when you learn about the relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples, the way I was. Because we're good people, right? We don't act that way. But if you're Indigenous, you're probably just thinking, how come it took you so long to figure this out? How could you know so little about our shared history—and our shared present?

So I asked myself: what are you going to do now? I felt powerless. Obviously no one person can make the federal government settle those land claims, or recognize that the Haldimand Proclamation is a treaty. (It doesn't, even though at Six Nations it's considered a treaty—or a deed.) Maybe nobody can, not even our Prime Minister, who says all the right things while his government drags its feet. But I can walk, I thought. I've walked in Spain, in England. I can do it again, this time in the Haldimand Tract.

It's an instinctive decision, something I feel compelled to do, a journey I have to take: I want to feel, with the muscles in my legs and the bones in my feet, just how big the Tract is, or was. And, following the example of many artists before me—the sculptor Richard Long, for instance, or the performance artist Marina Abramovic—I decide to

consider my walk an art work. A site-specific performance. I call it *Muscle and Bone*. I decide to keep a blog about the walk.

***[slide: Muscle and Bone blog]***

If people read it, look at the photographs, they'll become the audience.

I want this walk to connect to the Six Nations community somehow, so I decide to use it to raise money for the Woodland Cultural Centre's "Save the Evidence" campaign.

***[slide: Save the Evidence web page]***

The Woodland Cultural Centre is an arts organization located in what used to be the Mohawk Institute, the residential school in Brantford—the first in Canada, it opened in the 1830s. When that school closed in 1970, the property was turned over to the Six Nations, and it became the Woodland Cultural Centre. Most of the Centre's in the classroom building, built in the 1950s. The dormitory building, built in 1903, is mostly empty. It's in bad shape, almost derelict.

Survivors call the Mohawk Institute "the Mush Hole," after the porridge that was served to the children there. The food was so bad, and the children so hungry, that they'd sneak out of the dormitories at night and go to the landfill—it's just down the road—and eat garbage. Or they'd steal bait from the rat traps in nearby factories. Like other residential schools, it was a terrible place.

A while ago, the Woodland Cultural Centre said to the people at Six Nations, let's renovate the dormitory building and create a museum about residential schools there. At first, some people didn't like that idea. They said, why not just tear it down, try to forget such an awful place ever existed? But others said it was important to save the evidence of what happened at the Mohawk Institute and places like it, and in the end, that's what they

decided to do. The Woodland Cultural Centre started raising money: a lot of money. It's a big project.

Because I want to use *Muscle and Bone* to encourage people to donate to "Save the Evidence," I end every blog post with a pitch for contributions, and I publicize the performance as much as I can. The people at the Woodland Cultural Centre say my walk brought in some fifteen hundred dollars for the campaign. Every little bit helps, right?

Oh, just before I start walking, the Province of Ontario commits one point four million dollars to "Save the Evidence." And while I'm walking, David Johnston, the Governor-General of Canada, tours the Mush Hole, along with the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario and other dignitaries. Does that mean that the feds will contribute to "Save the Evidence"? They created residential schools—shouldn't they take responsibility for telling people about them?

*Pause.*

Before I got too excited about this idea, though, I knew needed to talk to people at Six Nations and at the Woodland Cultural Centre, too. So, back in December 2015, I flew to Ontario and went to Brantford and to Six Nations. I got in touch with Bonnie Whitlow, who runs the Aboriginal Student Support Centre at Wilfred Laurier's Brantford campus, and arranged to trade deerskin for tobacco with her. You see, people at Six Nations have been growing tobacco for thousands of years. Bonnie told me it's bad form at Six Nations to give gifts of commercial tobacco—and because tobacco's a sacred medicine, it's really

not supposed to be bought and sold, she said. She was doing me a big favour, and I'm grateful.

I talked to people at the Woodland Cultural Centre. They were generous and encouraging. And I met with a faithkeeper at Six Nations. She's Seneca, a grandmother. She asked me not to use her name when I told this story. We had coffee at a diner on the edge of the reserve. We talked for a long time. I told her about the walk I was planning, and I asked, is there any reason I shouldn't do this? "No," she said, "you're passionate about it, so you should do it. But there are things you need to do, while you're walking and before you start." She said, "You need to look for joy while you're walking, and offer tobacco to the Creator every morning and every night, and pray for gratitude. And whenever you cross the river, you need to toss a pinch of tobacco into the water, to show your gratitude to it."

I was surprised to hear this. No. Not surprised. Shocked. I never expected anything like it. Quite the opposite. But a month later, I was reading John Ralston Saul's book, *A Fair Country?*

***[slide: A Fair Country]***

Saul argues that this kind of openness is characteristic of Indigenous civilizations, that their communities are inclusive circles that expand and adapt as new people join. So maybe I shouldn't have been so surprised.

Is there anything I absolutely should not do while I'm walking? I asked. "Yes," she said. "This is a spiritual journey. You must not drink alcohol." Well. I can tell you from experience that there's nothing better after walking 30 kilometres on a hot day than a cold beer.

*[slide: a mug of draft beer]*

But if she says I shouldn't drink during this walk, then I won't.

*[slide: Tom Hill]*

I talked to Tom Hill, too. He's a writer and curator and the former executive director of the Woodland Cultural Centre. That's Tom with the Mohawk artist Shelley Niro. We met in the office on the reserve that he shares with his sister-in-law, a land-claims lawyer. He made tea and I told him what I wanted to do. He didn't see a problem with it—that people at Six Nations would think the idea of site-specific performance was weird, but nobody would complain about me walking. I told Tom that I was supposed to offer tobacco to the Creator but didn't know how to do it. He explained: I have to burn it. The smoke will carry my words into Sky World, where the Creator will be able to hear them. Can I use commercial tobacco? I asked. (I didn't get that much, and I wanted to give it to elders instead of burning it.) "Oh yes," he said, "some of the old fellows, they just crumble a cigarette into a dust pan and set the whole works on the wood stove and burn it there."

*[slide: walking]*

So, while I'm walking, I offer tobacco to the Creator and pray for gratitude. I look for joy. I don't drink alcohol. And I offer tobacco to the water when I cross it.

*Pause.*

After that trip to Six Nations back in December 2015, I flew home to Regina. I bought maps, planned a route. Because there's usually just one place to stay in each

village, I made reservations. I'll be on schedule. If anything goes wrong—if I get sprayed by a skunk, for instance—I'll be in trouble.

*You chuckle.*

Sure, I could just pitch a tent at the side of the road, but the Ontario Provincial Police

***[slide: the OPP]***

wouldn't like that, and I don't want to get arrested. So I planned ahead.

***[slide: walking in Regina]***

Spring arrives. I start taking long training walks around Regina. I walk to Pense, to the Cowessess gas bar and back, around Wascana Lake a thousand times. I write my first blog post,

***[slide: first blog post]***

telling people what I'm doing and why. I design the only prop I'll need: a business card with the URL of my blog on one side, and the URL of the "Save the Evidence" donation page on the other.

***[slide: the business card]***

I go over and over what I'll be carrying in my backpack. How many shirts can I get away with? How many pairs of socks? And I keep walking. My feet finally stop blistering. I think I'm ready.

But being ready is a problem. You see, I've read a lot of memoirs about walking. And you know what makes them interesting? When the narrators make mistakes, when they're not prepared. That always makes for a better story. But thinking of this walk as a performance has made the stakes are higher than they would be if it were just a walk. I'm worried that something might go wrong, that I might not be able to finish. It happens. So

I try to make sure that I'm ready, that I know what I'm doing. So I'm not like, for instance, Bill Bryson, whose book *A Walk in the Woods*

***[slide: A Walk in the Woods]***

is a classic about walking. Bryson and his walking buddy, Katz, don't know what they're doing. They make all kinds of mistakes, and those mistakes are funny. They make that book worth reading. And they're the kind of thing I try to avoid.

So the story I'm telling you isn't as interesting as it could be. I mean, I could've stayed at the Satellite Motel in Cambridge. It would've made for a shorter walk that day. And since I was a little kid, I've been curious about that place,

***[slide: the Satellite Motel]***

with its goofy silver and red rocketship out front. But the online reviews are, well, terrible. "The Satellite Motel rents rooms by the hour," they say. "It's the best place in Cambridge to buy crystal meth." It's not hard to decide to stay in a better place up the road. Bryson might've made a different decision. Maybe I ought to've followed his example. Maybe the need for a good story outweighs everything else.

I do make mistakes, of course—lots of them.

***[slide: a path by the river]***

Like, the morning I leave Brantford for Six Nations? After walking for an hour I realize I need to find a toilet, and it's not something I can deal with by ducking behind a tree for thirty seconds. By the time I get to Lion's Park—that's an athletic complex on the river—it's all I can think about. I try the arena. There has to be a toilet in there, right? But it's locked. And I'm running out of time. I'm going to shit myself.

Then I see it:

***[slide: the portapotty]***

a blue and white portapotty beside a baseball diamond. A very full portapotty, dirty, smelly, disgusting, really. But I don't care. I'm just relieved—literally—and grateful to the person who put it there.

Also, the URL of my blog on my cards is wrong.

***[slide: the business card, corrected]***

It says "[muscleandbone.wordpress.com](http://muscleandbone.wordpress.com)" instead of "[muscleandboneblog.wordpress.com](http://muscleandboneblog.wordpress.com)." I've been directing people to somebody else's blog. I don't know how it happened: I proofread the text over and over again before it went to the printer, but I didn't catch the mistake. I'm mortified. Jesus Christ, I ask myself, how did you manage to fuck *that* up? I scribble the right URL on the cards, but whenever I give one away, I have to explain, so I relive the mistake for the rest of the walk.

*Pause. Water.*

***[slide: a hot day]***

The day I walk from Paris to Brantford, it's hot. And humid, the way summers in southwestern Ontario can be. The sun is a furnace. My pack feels like it's getting heavier with every step and sweat's running into my eyes. I'm only walking twenty kilometres today but in this heat it feels like fifty.

I finally get to the city and I walk past the neighbourhood where I grew up. I could've walked through it, past the house we lived in, but in this heat? I'm not taking

one extra step. I see the plaza where we used to buy popsicles when we were kids. The convenience store, the Farmer's Dell, is still there. I go in, buy a popsicle. It's cold and sweet and gives me the strength to keep walking.

*Pause.*

***[slide: the Mohawk Institute]***

The next part of this story is hard to tell. You see, I've arranged to tour the Mohawk Institute building. I borrow my mother's car and drive to the Woodland Cultural Centre. I meet Jessica Powless, the outreach coordinator, and she walks me through the old red-brick building. She's Mohawk, in her early twenties. I'm grateful she's taking time to do this, because the Governor-General is coming the next day and she's busy getting things ready. She starts by showing me a map of the school property. There was an orchard and a farm where the boys worked. The girls worked in the kitchen or learned to sew. The kids were supposed to spend half their time in the classroom and half working, but sometimes they just worked and didn't go to school at all.

We walk downstairs, into the basement, where the kitchen and dining rooms are. One dining room for the staff, the other for the children. The food the staff got was edible. The kids got mush. Jessica shows me the oatmeal cookers in the kitchen. They're huge, like tympani. "The dining room is where children were publicly shamed and punished," she tells me. "Like, if they wet their beds, they'd have to wear the soiled sheets tied around their necks." We look into the laundry room. Around the corner is the boiler room. It's not open to visitors—*asbestos*. "Most of the sexual abuse happened in

the laundry and boiler rooms,” Jessica says. “The noise of the machinery covered up the sound of the assaults.”

Boys and girls were always kept separate. One side of the building was for boys, the other for girls. We go upstairs, into the girls’ side. The sewing tables are still there. The kids were given numbers when they arrived at the school, and some of the girls scratched theirs under the tables. Some of the graffiti records their crushes. “47 + 102. 59 loves 17.”

From the outside, it’s an imposing building. Inside, it’s small, cramped. The dormitories are tiny. The older girls lived on the top floor, and we go upstairs to look at their rooms. Then we cross over to the boys’ side. Jessica tells me about the evidence of resistance they’ve found in the building. The kids opened up crawl spaces in the walls where they hid personal items: marbles, chewing gum, toys—things kids like, things these kids weren’t allowed to have. Everything they brought with them from home was confiscated when they got there, and sometimes they’d steal things back, like quilts, and hide them in the walls. One crawl space runs from the older boys’ dormitory to the older girls’. “That one makes me really happy,” Jessica says. “It gave brothers and sisters, or sweethearts, a way to be together.”

Jessica shows me a beam they uncovered after the roof leaked. It’s been burned, as if somebody tried to set the place on fire. This is the third building on the site. The first two did burn down. After the 1903 fire, eight boys were found guilty of arson and sentenced to terms at the Mimico Industrial School near Toronto (Miller 369).

It’s not a hot day, but the building is airless and stuffy. “It was cold in the winter and hot in the summer,” Jessica says. “The ventilation is very poor.” I think about the

stories I've heard about tuberculosis spreading in crowded, unventilated dormitories. I wonder how many children are buried outside.

In the basement . . . in the basement there's a closet under the stairs. Kids who tried to run away would be locked inside. Sometimes for days. It's more of a cupboard than a closet, really, it's too shallow to let a kid sit down. There would've been no light, no food, no water, no toilet. The staff thought that the sound of the kids crying would be heard through the door, that it would make other would-be runaways think twice.

We go over to the boys' side of the basement. I'd read about a room where the boys were encouraged to fight each other and I ask Jessica about that. "Right here," she says. "The staff would tie a rope around these four pillars to make a kind of boxing ring. The boys would be forced to fight each other until one was beaten unconscious." Sometimes the staff would bet on which kid would be left standing. "It was like a prison," Jessica tells me. "There were gangs. Kids preyed on other kids, the way they'd been preyed on by the staff. This was an ugly place."

The tour ends. I thank Jessica for her time, and walk outside into the sunshine. I know some people had positive experiences in residential schools—the playwright Tomson Highway says he learned to play piano at Guy Hill Residential School in The Pas, and that led to a career as a concert pianist (Terauds). But survivors like Highway, who have good things to say about residential schools, seem to be in the minority. Besides, the purpose of those places—making children ashamed of who they were, taking them away from their families, from their communities, trying to destroy their languages and cultures—frankly, it's genocidal. Even if the children had been treated well, and generally they weren't, residential schools would still have been monstrous.

And that's part of our story, too.

*Pause. Water.*

***[slide: a path through a forest]***

The next day is National Aboriginal Day—Solidarity Day, they call it at Six Nations. I walk to Ohsweken, the village on the reserve. It's my longest walk ever—thirty-eight kilometres. I walk beside the river, through a forest, along country roads. Eventually I end up on the shoulder of Highway Fifty-four. It's busy. Cars and trucks are speeding past just a few feet to my right. The narrow shoulder is covered in fine gravel, like sand, and it's hard to walk on. I run out of water but get more at a gas station on the reserve. I buy a braid of sweetgrass there, too. It's pinned up on a bulletin board next to the cashier.

I'm beat when I get to Chiefswood Park, where the Solidarity Day celebrations are happening. It's still some five or six kilometres to Ohsweken. I sit and rest and watch a band tear through a set of blues classics. It reminds me of something I heard Robbie Robertson say on the radio once: that every house party at Six Nations turns into a jam session, because there are so many great musicians there. My camera dies, but I'm too tired and self-conscious to ask for permission to take anybody's photograph. And I'm wearing this t-shirt I bought at the Woodland Cultural Centre with a picture of the Mohawk Institute on the front and the words "I helped Save the Evidence." I look around at the old people sitting near me, survivors of that place, more than likely. And I'm sorry I'm wearing that shirt, you know? Bringing memories of that place into the celebration.

The band finishes its set, and I hobble down the road into Ohsweken. I'm staying at the Bear's Inn. It's a nice place—I recommend it.

*[slide: the Bear's Inn sign]*

It's a kilometre or so on the other side of the village. They don't serve supper, but I'm too tired to care: too tired to eat, to write my blog, to do anything. I end up falling asleep in my sweaty walking clothes with the lights on.

*Pause.*

I spend the next day at Six Nations. I'd tried to set up meetings with people on the reserve but they all fall through. I call Jan Longboat, an elder my friend Ed Doolittle said I should get to know, partly because we're both gardeners. "Her garden's amazing," he told me. "It's like nothing else on the reserve." Jan's on her way to a funeral but says we can get together in Brantford when my walk is finished. "I'll call some people and we can have a potluck lunch," she says. Okay, I think. That'd be nice.

*Pause.*

When I went to Six Nations that December, back before the walk, I noticed a few dogs running loose. I almost hit one when it ran out in front of my rented car. And dogs that aren't tied up are bad news if you're walking. I carry a little baggie of Milk Bones in my pocket to bribe angry dogs when I'm walking in the country. It works, most of the time. Still, I'm worried about dogs the day I walk from Six Nations to Caledonia. But all

the dogs I see are tied up. I start to relax. Maybe, I think, maybe I'm going to get to Caledonia in one piece.

That's when I run into

*[slide: an angry pit bull]*

the pit bull. I'm looking down at my phone, not paying attention, when I get to the house with the junked cars and the four dogs out front. Three of those dogs are tied up. One isn't—the pit bull. He's big and angry and coming right at me. I cross the road, quickly but not too quickly—I don't want him to think I'm running, that I'm prey, even though we both know I am. I make soothing noises: "Okay, buddy, okay."

*You back away from the imaginary dog.*

He just growls, comes closer. If *he* could talk, I think he'd say, "I'm not your buddy, asshole." I'm terrified. How'm I going to find out if he's had his shots? I can't go up to the door to ask, I'll just get bitten again. Do they still treat rabies with injections to the stomach? Doesn't that hurt? Is there a doctor back in Ohsweken? How'm I going to get there? And if this dog bites me, if he bites me how will I finish this walk?

*You pull the bag of Milk Bones out of your pocket and take one out.*

I fumble for the Milk Bones in my pocket and throw one at him. I don't throw the whole bag—I'm worried that there'll be another dog just up the road. He stops. He eats it, growling while he chews. I've never seen a dog do that before. But I'm putting distance between us. Soon I'm far enough away that I'm no longer a threat to him. Or, let's be honest, that he's no longer a threat to me.

*Pause.*

***[slide: Haldimand Tract map]***

I find it hard to imagine that you could steal land. I mean, isn't everything registered and titled and legal?

Well, here's one way. In 1835,

***[slide: timeline, 1835]***

the Six Nations agreed to lease land to the Crown for a road from Hamilton to Port Dover. It was called the Plank Road because its surface was made of wood. That's what they did then. The Six Nations also agreed to lease land for a half mile on either side of that road for settlers. (DeVries 35). Today, the Plank Road is called Highway Six. It's the main street in the village of Caledonia.

Anyway, the Six Nations agreed to lease that land, but they retained ownership. But the government turned around and sold that leased land to settlers (*Land Rights: A Global Solution* n.p.). The last of those land sales happened in the 1950s, so this isn't ancient history. A lot of Caledonia sits on that land—the mustard-coloured area on this map.

***[slide: the Plank Road claim]***

So does that housing development, the Douglas Creek Estates. People at Six Nations call that piece of land Kanonhstaton, “the Protected Place.” The occupation's still going on, you know. Nothing's resolved, even though it's absolutely clear that the Crown sold land it had no right to sell.

When I get to Caledonia, I ask the woman at the B&B where the occupation happened. “Oh, it's just down Argyle Street,” she tells me, “on the edge of town, right

next to the Canadian Tire.” I walk out to see it. There’s fence and a sign that says “No Trespassing” and gates bearing the Two-Row Wampum

***[slide: the Two-Row Wampum gate]***

and the flag of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

***[slide: the Haudenosaunee Confederacy gate]***

Behind that, there are broken streetlights and one remaining house, where the occupiers stay. I can’t see any difference between this piece of land and the Canadian Tire next door, or the housing development behind that, or the lot across the road with the “For Sale” sign on it. That’s no surprise: it’s all part of the same Plank Road land claim.

Here’s another story about land. The house where I grew up is in what the Six Nations elected council calls Surrender Number Forty.

***[timeline: 1835]***

In 1835, the Six Nations surrendered that land to the Crown. In return, they were supposed to get two things.

*Hold up first one, then two fingers.*

One, the government was supposed to remove the squatters from the rest of the Six Nations’ land. Two, it was supposed to sell that land and turn the money over to the Six Nations, for their trust account. Surrender No. 40 is the mauvish area on this map.

***[slide: Surrender No. 40]***

The government didn’t hold up its end of the agreement. It didn’t do anything about the squatters, and it gave the land away instead of selling it (*Land Rights: A Global Solution* n.p.). So, was that agreement valid? The Six Nations elected council doesn’t think so.

The forty-eight thousand acres of Surrender Number Forty are the subject of yet another land claim.

*[slide: the map of the Haldimand Tract]*

There are twenty-nine land claims related to the Haldimand Tract. In thirty years, only one has been resolved. And we all know that the Haldimand Tract isn't the only place in Canada where there are disputes between First Nations and the government over land. Too often Canada broke the treaties it made with Indigenous peoples. Land reserved for First Nations was taken or sold without their consent, all over the place. And, to complicate things, in some places there are no treaties, or the treaties that exist don't cede land to settlers. The land claims process is slow. And First Nations say it violates the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Canada finally adopted in May 2016. That's because the government demands that Indigenous peoples extinguish their title to their land before anything can be settled. First Nations say that's not the way to do things, that it makes the land claims process just another land grab. Phil Monture—he's Mohawk, he ran the Six Nations elected council's land-claims office for more than 25 years—he says that Canada needs to enter into long-term treaty relationships with First Nations instead of demanding that they extinguish their rights to their lands and resources (Monture 3). And the Supreme Court says that reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous interests can happen by negotiating agreements that recognize, rather than extinguish, Aboriginal title (McIvor). But that's not the path we've decided to take.

Remember, just zero point three percent of the land in Canada is reserved for First Nations, Métis, or Inuit peoples (*Land Base Statistics*). Zero point three percent.

*Pause.*

***[slide: a road or path along the river]***

My next stop, after Caledonia? Cayuga. My hosts at the B&B there complain that construction of the new bridge over the Grand was delayed for a year because people from Six Nations occupied the land where the bridge was supposed to go. “I don’t understand why they would do that,” they say. “It doesn’t make any sense.” I try to explain what I’ve learned about land claims in the Haldimand Tract. Maybe, I say, maybe if the government would negotiate resolutions to them, these things wouldn’t happen. But they’re not convinced.

I tell them about my blog and say I’ll be linking to their web site. Then I go out for dinner. When I get back, my hosts are, well, freaked out. “We’re so sorry,” they tell me. “We didn’t know what you were doing. Those schools were terrible places. And they weren’t even necessary! Those people would’ve learned our ways eventually.” The question of the land the village is built on is completely forgotten. I mean, it’s called “Cayuga” because that’s who lived there before the General Surrender, it was the Cayuga village.

*Pause.*

***[slide: a road]***

Two days later, it's the grand finale of my performance. I walk the last thirteen kilometres from the town of Dunnville to the village of Port Maitland, where the Grand empties into Lake Erie. I wet my feet in the river,

*[slide: feet in the river]*

the way I did when I got to the ocean at Finisterre, on the Camino de Santiago in Spain. The river smells like shit and dead fish. Down the road there's a cottage development with a beach on Lake Erie,

*[slide: feet in the lake]*

and I wade into the lake there. The water's cold and a lot cleaner than the river. Then I sit on the breakwater and watch the waves crashing against the beach.

One of the cottagers comes over to say hello. I tell him about my walk and he complains about Americans. "Those fuckers tried to open a Walmart in Dunnville," he says. "My buddy was upset about that—it'd bankrupt all the independent businesses in town." But this guy, the cottager, he knew what to do. "I told him to call the Indians," he says. "And they came down and put up their flag and sent those Yankee cocksuckers back where they came from." I tell him this land did originally belong to the Six Nations. "Oh, yeah, they think they own everything," he says. "Skydome, the CN Tower, the whole works." I don't know what he's talking about but figure that the Mississaugas of the New Credit must have a land claim in Toronto. (They do.) "What're you gonna do?" he says. "You can't just give it all back."

*Pause.*

My sister Pam, my niece, and my grand-nephew drive down from Brantford to pick me up. We hurry back to meet the people Jan Longboat has brought together. I'd told Pam it was a potluck, and she's made a fruit salad. We're meeting at Kanata Village,

*[slide: Kanata Village sign]*

a bankrupt museum on the site of what used to be the Mohawk Village, back before Brantford existed, before the General Surrender. After the bankruptcy, the city tried to seize the property for back taxes, and a group called the Mohawk Workers occupied it. That dispute's been going on for almost ten years. The museum building's open and people are inside. One fellow gives me a thick envelope of information about the Haldimand Tract. He's one of the leaders of the Mohawk Workers, and he tells me that the land we're on still belongs to the Six Nations. "We never sold it," he says. "It's still ours." He's a little suspicious of me. He says, "I'm not going to shake your hand until I find out what this is all about."

We gather around a table to eat. First, there's a long blessing in Mohawk. The Thanksgiving Address, it's called. When the speaker finishes, he says, "And that's the short version!" Everybody laughs. Then he explains in English what he just said. It was a statement of love, respect, and gratitude for everything, he says, from the grasses beneath our feet to the skies above us (Alfred 237). For me, it's a glimpse into Longhouse spirituality. It's beautiful.

After we eat, we go around the table, introducing ourselves. One woman gives her Mohawk name, and then her name in English—or, as she says, her PoW name. Another's a survivor of the Mohawk Institute. She won't talk about what happened there. Not today. Instead she tells us how hard it is to tell those stories. Eventually it's my turn. I talk about

my journey: my discovery of the history of the Tract, my decisions to walk, to support the “Save the Evidence” campaign. And I tell stories, the ones you’ve just heard: the skunk, the pit bull, the portapotty. One woman says, “Thank you for caring about this history, for making this walk.” It’s only a gesture, I say, nothing more. And the fellow from the Mohawk Workers shakes my hand.

Then they give me gifts: a beaded zipper toggle bearing the flag of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, sweetgrass, books about the Mohawk Institute. We talk about people from Six Nations walking together through the Haldimand Tract. “We’re too old,” one woman says. “But our young people could make that walk.” I say I’d like to come along. “Well, you know the way,” somebody says. I try to get pictures of everybody, but it’s late and people are starting to leave, so I have to make do

*[slide: outside the replica longhouse]*

with a group photo Pam takes in front of the replica longhouse outside.

I still feel so honoured that my walk ended this way. I never expected anything like it. Had I finished by wading alone into Lake Erie, it would’ve felt incomplete. When I get home, I send Jan Longboat some ornamental tobacco seeds. The plants are supposed to be stunning—tall and aromatic. I hope they find a place in her garden.

*[slide: the Haldimand Tract map]*

So that’s the story of my walk through the Haldimand Tract, how it changed me, how it told me a different story about Canada. It doesn’t mean this isn’t a good place, or that we’re not good people. Just that there’s a lot more to our story.

Remember Bonnie Whitlow, the woman I traded with? She told me that there are two words in Mohawk that describe settlers.

***[slide: o'seron:ni]***

One, *o'seron:ni*, means “the axe-makers.” Bonnie says it means that all settlers do is chop down trees. It’s a pejorative word, she says, and she doesn’t like to use it. The other word, *tyorhenhsa:ka*,

***[slide: tyorhenhsa:ka]***

is different. It’s from the Mohawk word for morning (Whitlow 5 December 2016), and it means “the people who came from the east.” Isn’t that lovely? Maybe we’re *o'seron:ni* now, but maybe we could aspire to become *tyorhenhsa:ka*. Maybe, if we try hard, that’s a name we might live up to.

Nya:weh—thank you.

***[slide: blog URL/Save the Evidence URL]***

Questions?

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