

Older Adults and Storytelling – a Lifelong Learning Exploration

by

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Abstract

We make use of stories every day to express our feelings, to share experiences and traditions, and to help teach others. Across the world, there is a long and diverse history of storytelling, but its power has diminished in the modern and Westernized world. This research focuses on the stories that older adults tell people in their community, within the Halifax Regional Municipality in Nova Scotia. It focuses on people between the ages of 65 and 85. This study highlights the stories that older adults tell and explores what these stories entail, the intention of sharing these stories, where they are told and to whom. This research makes use of storytelling methodology. People are storytelling beings who, individually and socially, live storied lives. Storytelling methodology allows for research to be conducted in more inclusive and diverse ways. Additionally, stories can give us access to complex feelings, behavior, and traditions. The main research question is, what stories do older adults tell to convey their culture to others? Resonant themes include stories as learning opportunities, stories as social connectedness, stories as sharing lived experiences, stories as entertainment, and stories about meaningful things. This research highlights the importance of storytelling as informal learning and the role of older adults in communities.

Dedication

This research is dedicated to my father, Dion van Dyk, who is my favourite storyteller.

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Chapter One: Introduction

*All of these lines across my face
Tell you the story of who I am
So many stories of where I've been
And how I got to where I am*

*But these stories don't mean anything
When you've got no one to tell them to, it's true
I was made for you*

(Carlile, B. 2007)

Our lives are made up of stories. In most cultures, as far back as we know, stories have been a means of transmitting knowledge (Lawrence et al., 2006). We make use of stories to share feelings, experiences, values, traditions, increase understanding, and build our communities. We use stories to entertain as well as to teach others how to better humans (Lawrence & Paige, 2016).

The purpose of this study is to explore the stories that older adults, between the ages of 65 and 85, tell about their culture to members of their community. I focus on everyday storytelling as a means of education. For my research I explore older adults and the use of storytelling as informal teaching and learning, what stories are told about experiences of culture, what themes are focused on, where storytelling happens, and challenges in the process. While there is a long and diverse history of storytelling across a wide range of cultures, the power of these oral narrative traditions has been lost to the modern and Western world (Tappan & Brown, 1991). Stories can play a critical role in proclaiming ourselves as cultural beings (Dyson & Genishi, 1994) and further explain:

In narratives, our voices echo those of others in the sociocultural world – what those others think is worth commenting on and how they judge the effectiveness of stories told. That is, we evidence cultural membership both through our ways of crafting stories and in the very content of our tales. (p. 4)

Within gerontological research of social issues, there is a tendency to overrepresent the negative and declining face of ageing, such as frailty and dependency (Russell, 2007), yet there are “two kinds of stories in the sociology of ageing: stories told by other people about ‘the aged’ and their needs, and stories older people tell about themselves” (p. 173). This study aims to focus on the latter, on the narratives of contribution of older adults in informal lifelong learning about culture.

To position myself as the researcher and story listener, allow me to share my own story before I continue exploring the stories of my research participants.

My Story

What is my story? I come from a South African, Afrikaans family. I grew up in Zimbabwe, away from our family’s cultural home. Learning about culture was dependent on stories, church, music, and food shared. This was influenced by being outside of the country where I was born. We learned cultural aspects from family and those in our small Afrikaans communities. I grew up in small towns in Zimbabwe, before moving back to South Africa to study psychology.

Stories fascinate me. I enjoy looking at who is involved, what they mean and when they are told. My mother was a traditional Afrikaans homemaker with traditional Afrikaans views. She was a classically trained pianist, with a graduate degree in music. She loved art and encouraged creative expression in us as children. My mother’s story of meaning was found in rhythm and tune. On the other hand, my father used his voice. From an early age, my father would tell us bedtime stories. He reads often, with a wide subject matter. He grew up with limited financial resources. His grandparents had no money for books and so they would tell stories to one another. My father always privileged the stories of other people, and he shared this value with me. My father held more liberal views than many of his peers when he grew up. He focused his Christian ministry work on helping those who had been marginalized, from working with people of colour in a segregated, apartheid South Africa in the 1970s to helping people in rural Zimbabwe find water sources by drilling boreholes. He encouraged the rights of women in a time where this was not the norm. Bible stories also became a way to share culture; stories of David and Goliath, or Jonah and the whale illustrated values and beliefs important in our culture. Proverbs were also commonly used to illustrate life lessons. Storytelling is my father’s favourite pastime. He can talk to anyone about almost any topic and find a story to

connect to the conversation. It is no surprise that I focused on narrative therapy when I became a counselling psychologist.

My stepmother is a ballet instructor and has managed her own ballet school for many years. She is my idea of a go-getter and can do anything she puts her mind to. Where my father can talk to anyone, my stepmom can make things happen. Movement is the theme of her stories. She has a true talent for aesthetics and design and makes spaces beautiful. Whether in telling stories while making specific recipes or finding old children's books and sharing these with grandchildren, she shares what she knows through everyday activities. With our blended family, many Sundays and special occasions were spent together around the parental dinner table, inside or outside, with good food and wine, and many great stories told.

Southern Africa is rich in cultural diversity. One common aspect is storytelling and sitting around the fire, sharing stories and songs. While the intent is to entertain, often it is also educational. Thinking back on the Afrikaans history, the 'Voortrekkers,' a group of pioneer white people who left the Cape Colony from the southern part of the country, used stories to help keep them entertained but also motivated.

Moving to Canada as an international student made me reflect on my culture and what I had learnt about it to enact and share here. People have asked me how much of a culture shock landing in a new country was and so many things come to mind, from holidays and celebrations to ways in which people greet you and always have a comment on the weather. In my studies, I completed a course on older adults and lifelong learning. In my class there were people from different areas of the world, and we often shared our own values and beliefs. The combination of the immigration journey and learning about the contributions of older adults to teaching and learning made me wonder about cultural knowledge, both my own and that of other people. I reflected on older adults as our knowledge keepers and opportunities to learn from them. I thought about how cultural knowledge is passed down, how it is preserved and how it is learnt by others.

As a newcomer, I have also had to learn about the culture of the community where I live. This shared knowledge connection with others is tacit, often not thought about, but just done. There is a critical connectedness, and relationships are intrinsic to promoting how we learn about our own culture and that of others. This impact ripples outward. Through social

connections, we feel belonging. We experience value and worthiness. We engage in activities. We can teach others and learn from them. Through social engagement, we become more motivated to learn more, connect more, and do more. This experience led me to ask more questions about how this process of cultural transmission works. What meaning is made in this educational process that we encounter daily, what do we focus on, and from whom do we learn?

Situating This Research

This study is situated in a storytelling methodology. The main reason for using stories in educational research is that people are storytelling beings who, individually and socially, live storied lives. As such, the study of stories is the study of how people experience the world. Storytelling enables individual voices to be heard and for the patterns and trends to translate into the everyday (Russell, 2007). In this light, education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and collective stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

I have intentionally chosen to direct this inquiry towards ageing and lifelong learning to add to the body of knowledge on experiences of older adults that focuses on their experiences and contributions. Randall (2013) describes the research landscape on older adults in this way:

As in the old joke about the chap seen puttering beneath the streetlamp searching for his keys, when he suspects all along that they're lying in the ditch nearby, the focus of gerontology has been kept on things that can be quantified ... 'because that's where the light is'. (p. 166)

Central to this research of stories is illuminating the voices of older adults, aged 65 and older, in Nova Scotia, in this lifelong learning educational process. At its core, lifelong learning can be viewed as “the development and enactment of knowledges and practices that make a difference to individuals, social groups, communities, and/or society at large” (Brigham et al., 2021, p. x). Lifelong learning can have a range of purposes, including social, cultural, political, and economic ones. It can be used to inform, to instruct, to train, to inspire or even to mobilize (Willis, 2002). Learning continues into and throughout our lives and needs to be supported by a variety of educational activities that are context specific (Nesbit, 2006). There are many sites and sources of learning, including what we learn in our daily lives. Lifelong learning has a multidimensional quality, with an “everydayness and everywhere-ness” element to it, where every moment can offer opportunities for learning (Brigham et al., 2021, p. xvi). Part of this

every day and everywhere aspect is learning that happens when we share stories. Storytelling can be viewed as an organic part of lifelong learning (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). Stories lived and told function to educate others, and as such stories in a lifelong learning context are positioned to explore the complexities and subtleties of human experience in teaching and learning (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

This research is situated in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia's story is a complex one. Situated in the southeastern part of Canada on the Atlantic Ocean, Nova Scotia is known as one of the maritime provinces and is the second smallest province in the country. Translated from Latin, Nova Scotia means 'New Scotland' and reflects the origins of the early settlers (Beck, 2024). The rich fisheries of the coast provided a major drive for European interest in the region. It is one of the four original provinces that made up the Dominion of Canada in 1867. Before that, it became the site of the first European settlement in North America in 1605. In 1621, the area was granted to a Scottish noble person, leading to a very brief and unsuccessful Scottish settlement. The region served as a focal point of English-French rivalry in their mission to take control of North America, passing back and forth between them until 1713 where the British took control of the colony (Moody & O'Grady, 2024).

The Mi'kmaq people are among the original inhabitants in the Atlantic provinces of Canada. This traditional territory is called Mi'gma'gi. Archaeological evidence and oral history place the Mi'kmaq in Mi'gma'gi for over 10 000 years (Gallant, 2024). People of African descent have been part of province's cultural mosaic since 1750, a year after the founding of the capital in 1749. There were three migrations of people of African descent to Nova Scotia, including the Black Loyalists who were promised freedom and land for supporting the British, Black Jamaicans named the Maroons who had been deported from Jamaica, and Black refugees from the slave states in the United States, and enslaved people who were emancipated as a result of the Abolition Act of 1834 from Bermuda (Sehatazadeh, 2008). The early history of Nova Scotia predominantly focuses on European settlers and their battles for taking ownership of the land and ignores the cultural genocide of the Indigenous people and the brutal treatment of people of African descent (Green et al., 2022). I can attest to this in my experience of searching for information about the history of the province.

Halifax is the province's capital and the largest urban centre in Nova Scotia, home to almost half of the province's population. This includes immigrants. With its harbor being large, deep, and free of ice in the winter, it serves as a port for many who arrived by sea (Schwinghamer, 2021). In the last few years, immigrants represent 9.4% of the population of Halifax. One in four immigrants in Halifax have moved here since 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2020). Many immigrants and refugees have settled in Nova Scotia over the years, adding to the province's culture and community (Eichler et al., 2022).

Statistics tell a specific story about the context of older adults in Nova Scotia. Globally, the proportion of older people in populations is increasing (WHO, 2015). Older adults are defined as 65 years and older, according to Statistics Canada (2023). Older adults above the age of 65 are of the fastest growing age group in Canada, with a record number of 18.5% of the population being 65 years and older (Statistics Canada, 2022). More specifically, 21.8% of Nova Scotians are 65 years or older, with the province having a greater proportion of people aged 65 and older exceeding that of children aged 0 to 14 (Statistics Canada, 2021). These demographics demonstrate that we have more old people than any other time in history (Gendron et al., 2015). This necessitates a continued increase in research on aspects of ageing as well as on this growing age group (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Participating in learning activities can be beneficial to socially vulnerable groups, including older adults. These benefits include a positive impact on mental and physical health, better family relations, more positive attitudes, healthier behaviors, enhanced civic participation, and expanded social networks. Given accumulating evidence from research on the benefits of lifelong learning, it is important to continue to look at the involvement of older adults in learning activities, particularly in the context of global ageing and widening gaps in social inequities (Narushima et al., 2018a).

Stories have the potential to empower unheard or quiet voices, such as those of older adults in our communities. Listening to these voices is more than just hearing what people say. As Britzman (1990, as cited in Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) wrote:

Voice is meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community... The struggle for voices begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself, and

feeling heard by others are all a part of this process... Voice suggests relationships: the individual relationship to the meaning of his/her experience and hence, to language, and the individual's relationship to the other, since understanding is a social process. (p. 4)

This research focuses on understanding informal teaching and learning by older adults through stories that are told. This study aims to use storytelling methodology to understand the experience of stories of culture as told by older adults, and how these stories are used to teach others. This study will address the following research questions:

- What stories do older adults tell to convey their culture to others?
 - For older adults, how important is storytelling?
 - What is the importance of storytelling in social connectedness?
 - Where does storytelling happen and who listens?
 - What is the intent in storytelling?

In this thesis, the outline is as follows. In Chapter 2, I explore literature as it pertains to older adults, the role of stories, culture, and lifelong learning. Chapter 3 looks at storytelling methodology and how this methodology informed the collection and analysis of the stories of the storytellers. In Chapter 4, I share the conversations I had with the storytellers, which I explore in a thematic way in Chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 6 provides a discussion and reflection about the stories and a conclusion.

Following on from this introductory chapter where I have described and given some insight into the focus of this research and my own story, the next chapter looks at the context that literature provides.

Chapter Two: Literature

In reviewing stories that literature and research tell about older adults and storytelling, I explore concepts related to being an older adult, such as healthy ageing, successful ageing, ageism, generativity, social connectedness, and then the intersection of storytelling, culture, older adults, and lifelong learning.

There have been key stages in how approaches to ageing have evolved. Following the second World War, ageing was viewed as a social problem arising from dependency and disengagement in old age. The 1970s and 1980s saw ageing emerge as an economic and employment issue. Since the 1990s, ageing has been viewed as a global phenomenon that requires concerted efforts of learning from different practices around the world (Zaidi & Howse, 2017). There has been more recent emphasis on active and healthy ageing following the World Health Organization's strategy on ageing and health (WHO, 2015).

Successful Ageing

Successful ageing can be seen as goal oriented and as an “active striving towards the specific goal of being successful in health” (Hansen-Kyle, 2005, p.52). Successful ageing can be viewed as a result or consequence of healthy ageing, where goals are achieved through the process of healthy ageing (Hansen-Kyle, 2005).

Pace and Grenier (2015) note that the traditional model of successful ageing includes three fundamental areas: low probability of disease and disability, high physical and cognitive functional capacity, and active engagement with life. This traditional model of successful ageing is based on a deficit model. It focuses on western ideals of function, individualism, and control and neglects the importance of a holistic approach to life. They suggest including four dimensions namely health and wellness, empowerment and resilience, engagement and behavior, and connectedness (Pace & Grenier, 2015).

Successful ageing has made important contributions to how we understand individual ageing as a socially mediated phenomenon. It challenges the narrative of dependency, undermining the idea that ageing is a biologically driven process of decline (Zaidi & Howse, 2017).

Healthy Ageing

Given individual differences in ageing rates and increasing lifespans, the concept of health ageing as an optimal physiological, biological, and sociological development throughout life became a research focus area (Behr et al., 2023). The concept of healthy ageing can be defined on two dominant approaches, either through health outcomes, mainly with the absence of disease and disability of individuals and lower morbidity and mortality rates of the population, alternatively through developmental adaptation processes of lifelong and dynamic interactions of people and their environment (Menassa et al., 2023). From a medical perspective, healthy ageing is the lack of chronic illness and the ability to overcome illness, while psychosocial definitions include personal accommodations, support, and attitude (Hansen-Kyle, 2005).

Western and non-Western research provide different perspectives on health ageing. The Western definition of healthy ageing focuses on the lack of serious illness, the maintenance of cognitive and physical functioning, and adapting to changes physically and mentally (Peel et al., 2004). Research on healthy ageing has highlighted the importance of mental health, physical health, and social functioning as aspects of health ageing. Compared to these academic views, older people across cultures hold more comprehensive views on healthy ageing than just functioning independently, and include aspects such as “family, adaptation to age-related changes, financial security, personal growth, positive spirituality, and positive outlook” (Hung et al., 2010, p.1385). For example, in Asia, older adults emphasized the importance of family, financial security and spirituality as integral to health ageing (Thanakwang et al., 2012).

The WHO (2015) considers healthy ageing in more holistic terms and has defined healthy ageing as maintaining a functional ability that enables individuals to meet their needs and contribute to society within their environment. This focuses healthy ageing on the life course and functional perspectives of ageing. Functional ability includes “health related attributes that enable people to be and to do what they have reason to value” (WHO, 2015, p.28). The World Health Organization conducted extensive research into how we can harness opportunities and address the challenges of population ageing (WHO, 2015). The report highlights five key domains of functional ability that are essential to older adults. These include the ability to meet

basic needs; to learn, grow, and make decisions; to be mobile; to build and maintain relationships; and to contribute (WHO, 2015).

To foster healthy ageing and improve the lives of older adults and their communities, significant changes are needed both in the actions we take and in how we think about age and ageing. To this end, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed a Decade of Healthy Ageing from 2021 to 2030 (WHO, 2023). Statistics used in creating this initiative (WHO, 2020) show that by 2030, one in six people will be over the age of 60 and these statistics represent

older people whose love, talent, wisdom and care mark each person, shape who we are and represent who we can aspire to become. These are people whom societies should value and ensure that they enjoy their human rights, live with dignity, and live long and healthy lives (p. 2).

The focus is on a human rights approach, and highlights the importance of four main areas, namely how we think, feel and act toward ageing, how communities can best foster the abilities of older adults, how we develop person-centred and integrative health care to older adults, and lastly how access is provided for long-term care of older adults (WHO, 2023).

Ageism

While research has shown that there is a need to include and support older adults towards a goal of healthy and successful ageing, ageism is pervasive in our communities. Over fifty years ago, Butler (1969) introduced the concept of ageism, describing it as a form of bigotry that people tend to overlook. Butler (1969) states that ageism is a “deep seated uneasiness on the part of the young and the middle-aged – a personal revulsion to and distaste for growing old, disease, disability; and fear of powerlessness, ‘uselessness’, and death” (p.243). Ageing is seen as a stage of loss and decline (Romaioli & Contarello, 2021). Being young is seen as key in “our consumer-driven, materialistic society and older people are frequently marginalized and regarded as burdens rather than valued assets and repositories of knowledge and wisdom” (Zimmerman, 2016, p. 8). The dominant discourse takes away the authority and autonomy of older adults (Calasanti et al., 2006). This social construction of ageing supports a narrative that ageing means an inevitable mental decline (Romaioli & Contarello, 2021). Moreover, Gendron et al. (2016) who explain that how we construct our identity, specifically the construction of age identity, is formed in part socially through language we use. This externalized ageism then becomes

internalized. Some older adults internalize the negative stereotype that most old people are weak, sick, or even senile (Palmore, 2015). Research shows that when older adults internalize these stereotypes, it can negatively affect their health and functioning, with lower life expectancy, reduced self-esteem, high blood pressure, and reduced motivation (Gendron, 2016; Nelson, 2016; Palmore, 2015). Ageism takes away potential. When society categorizes them as vulnerable, that is what they become, as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Having a perspective on ageing from the perspective of older adults can provide a different understanding of the human journey from research that focuses on the outside, and often dominant, research metaphor of decline (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011). Levy and Macdonald (2016) note an unintentional underemphasis on positive ageing, which has led to insufficient understanding of perspectives and how to improve older adults' lives and cross-age engagement. Older adults play a significant role in being active in their communities, as well as in nurturing, guiding, and ensuring the wellbeing of future generations, to leave a lasting legacy (Baskin & Davey, 2015).

Generativity

Erik Erikson coined the term generativity as part of his theory on psychosocial development (Erikson, 1997). Part of the seventh of eight life stages, generativity refers to a specific concern for younger people and the need to contribute to the next generation. The conflict between generativity versus stagnation takes centre stage and is described as the major conflict of adulthood (Ackerman et al., 2000; Erikson, 1997; Slater, 2003). While this can include being parents, the need to leave a legacy for younger generations is not exclusive, or equivalent, to parenthood (Ackerman et al., 2000). According to this part of Erikson's theory, contributing to future generations and the feeling of leaving a legacy can help to promote a sense of well-being in older adults and includes a sense of productivity and creativity (Newton et al., 2020). Individuals who do not achieve a sense of generativity become stagnant and can leave people feeling empty and unfulfilled (Ackerman et al., 2000).

Generativity can manifest itself in various ways, including family, relationships, work, and society in general (Slater, 2003). The main tenet of this stage is care. This could include raising children and grandchildren, intergenerational care, involvement in communities, political involvement, or caring for the environment (Newton et al., 2020). However, as Ren et al. (2022)

note, “older people can only take part in the lives of the younger if they are given the opportunity to do so, which requires attention and respect from the young” (p. 3072).

Intergenerational Learning

Our learning and development are culturally and socially bound, and an important aspect of these processes is found in the interaction between people from different generations (Stephan, 2021). In daily life, the concept of generation divides younger and older people into distinct groups (Franz & Scheunpflug, 2016). Generations could be genealogical, with generations being related to family members. Generations can be pedagogical, where one generation teaches another. Lastly, generations can be historical-sociological, whereby different groups live together in a community (Franz & Scheunpflug, 2016).

Intergenerational learning can involve different combinations of these types of generation and learning, resulting in learning with, from, or about another generation. In this sense, intergenerational learning is more than just an aspect of intergenerational relationships. Firstly, it enables the intergenerational transmission of skills, habits, attitudes, and competencies in both directions. Secondly, it creates the possibility for generations to learn more about one another and to understand the perspectives of other generations (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017). It can be bi-directional, whereby knowledge, skill, tradition, or habit transmission can be reciprocal in nature (Stephan, 2021). Intergenerational learning is related to intergenerational relationships as these relationships create learning environments and interactions, but the interactions can be changed through learning processes (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017).

Intergenerational learning can support family learning where people learn implicitly. It can serve as a link between generations where it would involve working with a topic that addresses all age groups and generations. This is often more useful when embedded in a local context. Intergenerational learning can also serve as a guided exploration of differences and can help with reflective learning experiences. These learning opportunities can result in reciprocal learning, increased social cohesion, and an appreciation of the plurality of perspective and experience (Franz & Scheunpflug, 2016).

Social Connectedness

Social engagement and connection with others are vital to successful ageing. The World Health Organization report (WHO, 2015) states that maintaining relationships is strongly interconnected with, and can impact, all other abilities. Social isolation has been linked with increased negative health risks as well as increased likelihood of illness, injuries, or even hospitalization and death (Cole, 2019). The social benefits of being involved in learning programs has been shown in literature (Gutheil & Heyman, 2016; Narushima et al., 2018a; Romaioli & Contarello, 2021; Sabeti, 2015; Zacharakis, 2019). The social aspect of learning is an important part of enjoyment and motivation. One of the roles of education is to help people develop social and cultural resources that will improve their quality of life and the communities in which they live (Thornton & Harold, 1991). One aspect that older adults can be involved in in this aspect of education is through contribution and involvement in education, for example as a mentor to peers and younger people or as volunteers (WHO, 2015). The ability to contribute is intricately linked to maintaining relationships and to growing and learning. As the WHO (2015) state, “working within groups and with peers, and being able to share experiences, are important parts of learning for adults” (p. 176).

Social engagement provides the opportunity for reciprocal relationships. These reciprocal relationships are important for a sense of self-worth and can act as a motivator for continued engagement (WHO, 2015). People look for learning and challenges that keep them socially connected and engaged (Zacharakis, 2019). Social connectedness and meaningful engagement have positive health benefits (Gutheil & Heyman, 2016).

Interestingly, social engagement is the one area of overlap between traditional and Indigenous models of ageing. The Indigenous approach, according to Pace and Grenier (2015) and Baskin and Davey (2015), promotes connectedness. Knowledge is viewed as something people develop as they have experiences with one other and the world around them. Inherently, “this knowledge is rooted in a relational epistemology—a foundation for knowing based on the formulation of relationships among the members of the community of knowers or knowledge holders” (Healey, 2019, p. 37).

Stories and The Role of Storytelling

The word *story* comes from the Latin word *historia*, which means an account of events or a narrative that intends to entertain. The word *historia* comes from the Greek, meaning to inquire. *Narrative* comes from the Latin *gnarus*, which means to know or have knowledge of (Lee, 2016).

Our lives are composed of stories, and we gather stories as we age (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). Storytelling is fundamentally a human activity (Huber et al., 2013; Shishko, 2022). We have a natural tendency to tell stories and share information, informing others about occurrences (Shishko, 2022). By telling stories, we are doing more than just recounting a series of incidents or events. By placing the events in a particular narrative context, we give them a particular meaning. As we tell the story, this transforms what we know into structures of meaning (Tappan & Brown, 1991). Stories are the means through which humans make meaning of experience. When we tell someone about our day, we connect separate events into whole sequences so that events can be understood in a meaning frame or context (Rossiter, 1991).

Stories may be fun and entertaining, but they are more than that. They serve various functions, including as ways of connecting people (relational), ways of knowing (explanatory), ways of creating reality (creative), ways of remembering (historical), as well as ways of envisioning the future (forecasting) (Sunwolf & Frey, 2001). Storytelling can also hold a transformative role, as Stone (1996) relates, whereby through storytelling we can come to know who we are in new ways and reveal to others what is deep in our hearts.

Stories give people a sense of meaning and belonging in their lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Lawrence & Paige, 2016; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). We make meaning of our lives by composing and communicating stories about our lives. In this way, the stories we tell, both to ourselves and others, become those stories that we are (Randall, 2014). By listening to stories, we can facilitate the expression of each other's every day, ordinary wisdom. This wisdom is described as ordinary as contained in our stories. It becomes accessible through telling and listening (Kenyon, 2003). Storytelling embraces the essence of person to person, weaving together personal and collective welfare with that of the community (Lawrence & Paige, 2016).

Storytelling is a learning tool and has been used as a critical educational resource since the beginning of language (Shishko, 2022). It is a way for people to understand and cope with their lives.

Stories and Lifelong Learning

If you think about the thousands of generations that have used stories, our understanding and use of stories may be so internalized that we may not realize how much we rely on them in our everyday lives and how valuable they can be in a teaching and learning context (Landrum et al., 2019). Stories have always been a traditional way of teaching, where we shape our experiences into stories. In this way, “experience is the stories people live” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi). Since we find meaning through stories, stories become critical to the learning experience.

Storytelling can be a powerful pedagogical tool, as Lawrence and Paige (2016) describe

Storytelling preserves the best in adult education. We are all born with the innate ability to tell stories. Each of our lives is filled with a rich treasure of life experiences and life stories. We each carry like seeds a great many untold stories of who we are, where we came from, and what we are capable of enduring through our personal journeys. Through nurturing the art of storytelling, this seed of life can germinate and mature into an awakening of the heart, mind, and wiser emotional self. Storytelling is a gift that opens a path toward a greater good for all to share. (p. 71)

Stories can be used in many ways to support teaching and learning in various contexts (Landrum et al., 2019). Learners weave new meanings into what they know. Storytelling can be seen as an organic aspect of lifelong learning, as it taps into the experience of the learners (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). It helps to link new learning with prior experience, and can be a collaborative, nonhierarchical process where learners are active agents in the learning process. Telling stories helps learners to make sense of theory and serves as a means of dialogue with others. Telling stories can then elicit stories from others, leading to a more social and collaborative learning environment (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). There are plenty of reasons to focus on stories of older adults, with compassionate listening and deep respect for the power that stories hold (Lee, 2016).

Stories and Culture

Stories have been used as a means of constructing, transmitting knowledge, and transformation in most cultures since the beginning of time (Lawrence et al., 2006; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). It is estimated that storytelling has been a means of communication for over 27 000 years, when cave paintings were created. Stories recount a sequence of events and have provided a means for cultural transmission of knowledge, which has allowed us to build on the wisdom of our ancestors (Landrum et al., 2019).

I agree with Landrum et al. (2019) that “storytelling is culturally universal – it is likely the oldest form of teaching, allowing generations of humans to share cultural knowledge to be remembered over time” (p. 247). When we consider culture as being a set of stories that we come into (Bruner, 1990), we realize the importance of storytelling in a research process such as this one. Stories impose structure to our experiences and, as such, are essential tools of cultural teaching, learning and reflection (Landrum et al., 2019).

Culture can be viewed as a shared way of interpreting the world. In working to make sense of cultural studies, Barker (2002) refers to culture as a cluster of ideas, images, and practices, which provide ways of talking about forms of knowledge and behavior that are associated with a particular topic or activity in society. Culture is not limited to groups of similar ethnicity or heritage. Goodenough (1999) defines culture as consisting of the guidelines for “speaking, doing, interpreting, and evaluating that people who live and work together have acquired in the course of interacting with one another in the conduct of recurring activities and that they have thus learned to attribute to one another” (p. 85). These guidelines, or criteria, include categorizing phenomena as meaningful, deciding what can be, deciding how one feels as regards preferences and values, deciding what to do and how to go about doing something, and the skills needed to perform (Goodenough, 2003). In this definition, Goodenough (2003) argues that no two people will have the same understanding or criteria of the expectations. It is formulated through dialogue, as people enter into, and negotiate, structures of meaning (Dyson & Genishi, 1994). In this sense, culture is not a static concept, rather a dynamic one. The images and rhythms of our stories are rooted in our cultural experience. In telling and sharing stories, we build on culture. Through the language we use, we transmit meaning and through the structure of

language, we impose some order of events that influences meaning. Thus, narratives become an instrument of cultural meaning making as well (Rossiter, 1991).

The collective activities and practices within culture are collaborative in nature. Making tools together, preparing a meal, building a shelter, playing a game, are all examples of these shared practices that facilitate the transmission of culture across generations. Humans have a shared intentionality involving shared goals and socially coordinated plans. This understanding of shared intentions creates forms of cultural learning and engagement. Over time, these shared practices become more complex over time, as we refine and evolve some practices. Tomasello et al. (2005) refer to these modifications over generations as ratcheting up.

Our stories are contextual. As Rossiter (1991) explains, “individual life narratives are situated within a myriad of overlapping familial, religious, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts. The narrative of any individual life is an expression of an embodiment of these contexts and systems of meaning within which it is lived” (p. 65). Moreover, individuals’ understandings of their culture change over time. With each new generation, these are different understandings, making changes to the culture pool, as Goodenough (2003) describes it. People learn and form their understandings from family, older adults, and peers. Stories in cultural teaching focus can focus on rituals, routines, practices, and socializing agents that support cultural learning (Maynard & Greenfield, 2006). However, social changes have been viewed as transforming culture and it is being commodified to an unprecedented level, changing its form from a discursive one to a form that is more figural. This transforms its social role (Plumb, 1995). As Berger and Quinney (2022) describe, changing social conditions can create cultural openings for the telling of alternative stories, which in turn make way for new ways of engaging with the world.

From an Indigenous perspective, knowledge is subjective and produced collaboratively through sharing and relationship (Christensen, 2012). This culturally significant way of sharing includes a strong oral history that is premised on the telling and sharing of stories (Christensen, 2012; Corntassel et al., 2009; Cunsolo Willox et al., 2013). Sharing what one has learned with others is an important Indigenous tradition. This type of sharing can be in the form of a story of personal life experience and is done “with a compassionate mind and love for others” (Archibald, 2008b, p. 2). As a way of passing on

knowledge and sharing experiences, storytelling is widely used by Indigenous peoples around the world (Baskin & Davey, 2015). Indigenous storytelling is also crucial to the cultural and political resurgence of Indigenous nations and is deeply connected to their homelands (Corntassel et al., 2009). As Cunsolo Willox et al. (2013) note, “these stories form the cultural, mythological, and historical fabric to daily life” (p. 133). There is diversity among Indigenous cultures, and it is important to recognize that there are different genres of story, as well as different intentions, protocols, and ways to make story meaning. Each Indigenous nation has certain protocols and rules for stories that are intended for teaching and learning (Archibald, 2008b). Indigenous storywork comprises of seven principles, namely respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, wholism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald, 2008a).

From an Africentric perspective, interconnectedness is valued, with knowledge of oneself, the past, one’s roots and situating oneself with a focus on ancestral greatness (Parris & Brigham, 2010). Africentrism values balance, oneness and interconnectedness, emphasizing unity among all of these (Jarvis, 2012). Africentricity calls African people to centre themselves and their heritage, history, and culture in their own learning experiences (Thomas, 2012). African people are rooted in oral traditions, as there was no written language (Ngũgĩ, 1982). Stories form part of African Indigenous education, where every event and experience are an opportunity for a story to help educate others (Mosha, 2000). In many parts of Africa, storytelling happens around a central fire, where villagers would come together to listen to stories told. Storytelling holds a central place in African cultures, from serving as inspiration, giving insight, evoking thinking, or molding moral values, where “for indigenous Africans, and indeed for all peoples, it is as basic as being human” (Mosha, 2000, p.55).

Older Adults and Culture

The way in which we live our lives today is markedly different from a century ago (WHO, 2015). Older adults have co-created some of these changed narratives and carry with them stories of knowledge and understanding through their experiences. By sharing these experiences, and telling us what they know, it enables older adults to put together qualities of creativity and ageing “to become keepers of the culture, the long recognized role of elders passing on values, wisdom, and a way of life, whether in the culture of a family, a geographic

community, or a people bound by ideology” (Cohen, 2001, p. 233-234). In the context of older adults, storytelling provides a dynamic, personal means of conveying cultural knowledge and values, contributing to the preservation and evolution of culture (Lawrence & Paige, 2016).

Artefacts

As part of the conversation with storytellers, I asked them to share an artefact with me and its story. This artefact could be any object. Firstly, this was to serve as a conversation starter. It may be easier and more comfortable to talk about an object initially. That said, artefacts can be much more than something to talk about. Artefacts, or objects, can provide a sense of security and comfort (Bell & Spikins, 2018; Sherman, 1991). Specific things that hold significance can serve as symbols of memories, or as metaphors for a theme and hold a place in that person’s story (Randall, 2024a). Objects can become material manifestations of the life we have lived and can be a tangible reminder of encounters and connections. They can capture, or even reveal, our stories of identity and of experience (Ingersoll, 2024).

Cherished objects that were chosen are not just a conversation starter or a way to break the ice. They are a tangible connection to our storytellers' stories and hold a space in their production. Artefacts become a connection to our own stories and can be a point of continuity with our history, a bond or connection between our past and present (Tobin, 1996).

This chapter focused on situating literature on aspects of ageing, stories and their role in culture and lifelong learning. In the next chapter, the focus is on the research methodology and the process that I followed in this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

For this study, I made use of storytelling methodology. Because this study focuses on exploring stories of informal learning experiences with older adults and the stories they tell about culture, using storytelling methodology is a suitable approach. In this chapter I describe the research methodology and details of the research process.

Storytelling Methodology

People respond to stories, and stories can make research more accessible than traditional academic approaches do (Lawrence et al., 2006). In Western culture, storytelling is an important but undervalued way of conducting qualitative research. As Cole and Flemming note (2021), research conducted in more alternate and inclusive ways can bring deeper meaning and moral purpose. By drawing on multiple ways of knowing, we create respectful spaces for engagement that “honor diversity in the fullest sense of the work and open hearts and minds to see, listen, feel, re-think, and re-imagine a more just society” (Cole & Flemming, 2021, p. 285). When people’s stories are valued, they feel valued. Sharing stories through research with communities “goes a step further to instill a deeper sense of value in these stories and reawaken the collective knowledge of the past by bringing it to the present. Stories connect across time: past to present, and present to future” (Pedemonti, 2017, p. 11).

Stories can be seen as a universal language, exploring constructed meanings of experiencing the present, and how these relate to the past (Rooney, Lawlor & Rohan, 2016). People use stories to shape and reshape their lives, considering what could have happened, should have happened and what did happen (Dyson & Genishi, 1994). Storytelling is a vital practice that people use to understand, accept, and go on with their lives (Shishko, 2022). In this way, stories are sense-making tools through which we can make meaningful connections and organize and convey our experiences to others (Dyson & Genishi, 1994; McDrury & Alterio, 2003; Rooney et al., 2016). It is an approach that allows for the purposeful introduction of complexity (Landrum et al., 2019). Stories present a framework for exploring the complexity of human behavior and storytelling becomes a means of accessing the complexity of human behavior (Rooney et al., 2016).

As a methodology, storytelling can “act as a methodological ‘release point’ to invite the unsaid, the masked, the contested, the contradictory” (Gallagher, 2012, p. 51). Storytelling is seen as much more than anecdotes and as essential for researchers in understanding the human condition (Rooney et al., 2016). As a process, phenomenon, and relationship, storytelling methodology serves to illuminate the experiences of people. It helps to make transparent how values, assumptions and beliefs inform our worldviews through reflection and reconstructing experience (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). Storytelling can be a powerful and influential way to challenge the mind, to document history and experiences, and to help transform our understanding by surprising our minds into new ways of thinking (Healey, 2019). It can serve to facilitate emancipatory knowing, whereby injustices can be noticed, and solutions can be found in creative ways (Banks, 2012). The telling of stories can be a means to “avoid collective forgetfulness” (Gallagher, 2012, p.53) and can help those who have been marginalized to reclaim and amplify their voices (Banks, 2012). By listening intently to the stories of others, we undertake to “elevate research from an extractive exercise serving the fragmentation of knowledge to a holistic endeavour that situates research firmly within the nest of relationship” (Kovach, 2021, p. 159).

Fundamentally, research is about creating and exploring knowledge and sharing that knowledge within communities. Stories provide us with an authentic way of honouring the voices of our research participants and presenting their voices in a way that connects with our audience, which in turn invites further dialogue and exploration (Lawrence et al., 2006). In research, storytelling does not follow the method but rather is the method (Brigham, 2012). Gallagher (2012, p.59) positions storytelling “as a place to begin inquiry, not a place on which to settle meanings”. As de Carteret (2008) points out, research conventions are narratives that privilege specific benchmarks. The role of storytelling in research holds value in that

research is always an interpretive process that involves conversations and storytelling, though the research framework traditionally applies other names such as aims, methods and conclusions. Research conventions are a particular form of storytelling that allows sociologists and historians to ‘tell stories as if they weren’t storytellers’ (Game & Metcalfe 1996, p. 65 as cited in de Carteret, 2008, p. 246).

Given this methodology, I made use of conventions and terminology that suits storytelling. Participants in this context are storytellers. Discussions with storytellers are conversations where stories are told and heard. The data in this context is the story and will be referred to as such. Analysis is my interpretation of the conversations and stories.

The role of the researcher in the storytelling process is that of intermediary in knowledge co-construction, in the collection, interpretation and revelation of the meaning held in stories (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Effective use of storytelling within research requires a willingness for researchers to share power and diligence, where tellers and listeners share a partnership in the storytelling process (Banks, 2012). When we engage in the inquiry process with participants, we also become co-participants. Alongside participants, we observe, listen and live, allowing for deeper insight into the research phenomenon, or experience. We co-construct the emerging knowledge, as the stories are told in relationship with the storytellers (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). The stories shared create opportunities for reflexivity and can point to some of the less obvious connections that have shaped our thinking (de Carteret, 2008). The researcher is then a story listener as well as a storyteller.

Stories were gathered through one-on-one conversations with older adult storytellers. For this study, where the voices of older adults and their stories are being privileged, having conversations enabled me to “discover what is significant from the viewpoints and actions of people who experience it” (Charmaz, 2004, p. 981).

The Storytellers

Hearing voices from Nova Scotian storytellers with different identities adds richness of experience for the listener. Knowledge is constructed socially in ways that factors intertwine with each other to produce meaning (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Different voices can bring to the fore different intersections that can be explored. Co-composed stories across time and place provide a space to share knowledge embedded in the lives of these storytellers. It is critical to hear the stories of different Nova Scotians, including those who have been marginalized which provides opportunities for a community to understand the meaning of these experiences more deeply (Williams et al., 2005).

All four of the storytellers involved in this study live in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) in Nova Scotia. Evie¹ is 80 years old and is a retired teacher. She is an immigrant to Canada and is of Anglo-Irish descent. She grew up in England and immigrated to Canada. Aila is 78 and is a retired teacher. She identifies as a Canadian settler and grew up in Nova Scotia. Matt is a 68 years old African Nova Scotian man who grew up in rural Nova Scotia. He is retired, having worked in the area of equity, diversity, and inclusion. David is a Canadian settler and is 76. He is retired, having worked in education, in curriculum development, teaching and administration. He grew up in Nova Scotia.

The storytellers were recruited through the community, such as local organizations, churches, and community groups. These community groups have a nuanced understanding of their respective community populations, including the protocols, culture, and social dynamics (Hanza et al., 2016). From the potential storytellers identified by community groups, I contacted each and invited them to take part in my study. I gave each of them a written invitation to participate and discussed it with each potential storyteller individually, either telephonically or by email.

The Conversation Process

I met with the four storytellers in their homes or at a local branch of the public library in the Halifax Regional Municipality to have conversations about their stories and their views on the role of storytelling. I met with the storytellers. We sat around coffee tables, dining tables, and a library table to have our conversations. Sitting in these spaces reminded me where informal learning happens, where our ways of knowing have been shaped, and where wisdom is shared. We took time to get to know one another, sometimes over a cup of coffee or water, before exploring the conversation guide. This gave me the opportunity to explain the study's purpose and give more context to my interest in the role of older adults and informal learning.

¹ Storytellers were given the choice to use a pseudonym rather than their real name in the thesis. In this way, they could exercise control over how their personal information is shared. Of the four storytellers, two chose to use a pseudonym and two chose to use their real names. Any people mentioned in their interview were also assigned pseudonyms.

The storytellers gave oral consent as informed consent, based on a consent script. I gave a copy of the consent script to the storyteller before we discussed it. The consent script included what stories I would collect, who would have access to them, how they would be protected, and how they would be used. Storytellers could ask questions about their understanding and agreement of all research areas, as given in the consent script. Copies of the consent script were made available for storytellers to keep and their oral consent was documented in the audio recording and my field notes.

This inquiry is at the intersection of storytelling methodology, using culturally appropriate research methods, and engaging with older adults. Therefore, the use of oral informed consent was most appropriate. Storytelling is an interactive process based on sharing stories that highlight human experiences and their contexts (Charise et al., 2022) and its strength lies in its integral nature as an element of day-to-day communication between people (Lekoko, 2007). Hence, obtaining oral informed consent rather than written consent aligns with this methodology, where the conversation about consent forms part of the conversations held between storyteller and story listener. Additionally, oral informed consent demonstrates a sense of understanding and sensitivity to cultural contexts of different participants, while written consent involves the expectations of a specifically Western model and can be seen as furthering previous colonizing practices due to colonizing experiences (Creed-Kanashiro et al., 2005). Furthermore, oral consent allows for flexibility in working with participants from different cultural backgrounds and experiences, as is the case in this research, where the informed consent process is adequately demonstrated in a culturally appropriate manner (WHO, 2020). I asked each storyteller to share an artefact with me to begin our conversation and with their consent took photographs of each artefact that was shared with me. Sharing an artefact was not a requirement of the conversation and not all storytellers shared one.

I shared the conversation guide with the storytellers. This helped to guide our conversation, but it was not a structured interview. Rather, it allowed for more natural and intuitive conversations (Austin & Sutton, 2014). The conversations were audio recorded. I chose not to take notes during the conversations but to be fully present and engaged. I made notes directly after each conversation. At times, it felt like I was visiting and listening to stories over a cup of coffee, rather than for research.

Analyzing the Conversations

The goal of data analysis is to find meaning and understanding in the stories, to return to the research questions and examine the data in the context that was set at the start of the inquiry (Healey, 2019). It is a multi-stage process and begins with thinking about, meaning making and analyzing conversations. As Healey (2019) notes, this process starts in the moment of the conversation. I started thinking about and interpreting the dialogue as soon as the conversation started and continued while transcribing the conversations.

I kept a journal of my thoughts, experiences, and reflections. I had some strong emotional responses to hearing the stories and lived experiences of the storytellers. It does stand to reason that “our emotional resonance with someone’s story engages us in a personal way instigating reflection to determine deeper meaning and to examine relationships with other people’s experiences” (Brigham, 2012, p. 3).

I transcribed the audio recordings and then listened to the recordings again to ensure I had accurately captured the conversations and filled in any missing or unclear words as needed. Each transcript was then shared with the storyteller to review. If they wished, they could make edits or changes to the transcript. I shared the transcriptions either by printing it and taking it to the storyteller or emailing it to them in a password protected file. Once confirming that they wanted any changes and making those, I read through each transcript several times. As Castleberry and Nolan (2018) consider, it is important to become familiar with the entirety of the conversation and allow for an understanding of phrases or meanings in context.

I made use of thematic analysis. The intention of thematic analysis is to move from data that is seemingly disconnected to finding themes and repeated patterns that begin to tell a story of meaning across different conversations (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolan, 2018). I gradually began to code the transcripts. I highlighted phrases and paragraphs and made notes in the margins of the transcripts. This helped me to identify concepts and ideas, from the words and paragraphs, that have some connection with each other (Austin & Sutton, 2014). The concepts began to form categories, and these formed potential themes. Once I had coded the conversation transcripts, I began to view these in relation to the other conversations and organized them together. In this way, I started to find thematic patterns across the conversations, focusing on interpreting what was going on within and across the lived experiences and stories shared

(Castleberry & Nolan, 2018). Part of my process was to take a break, walk away and do something else. This helped me to take a physical break, but my mind could continue to think about the stories and to think about different possibilities and different meanings (Healey, 2019).

The analysis was not a once off process, but rather an iterative one of reading, coding, integrating, and reflecting. Through this process, I explored how these themes helped answer my research questions, namely what stories older adults tell to convey their culture to others, the importance of storytelling, the role of social connectedness, where stories are told and who is listening, and the intent in storytelling.

In this chapter, I explored storytelling methodology, why I chose it, and the research process I followed. The following chapter focuses on the conversations with each of the storytellers.

Chapter 4: The Conversations

Stories are not to be treated lightly as they carry, and inspire, responsibilities. Stories need to be cared for as they are at the heart of how we make meaning of our experiences.

(Huber et al., 2013, p. 214)

In this chapter, I share the conversations with each of the storytellers. In exploring their stories, we can hear what stories are shared and the importance of those. This also includes sharing of an artefact by three of the storytellers.

As I noted in the methodology, I have used pseudonyms for people mentioned in the stories. In transcribing the conversations, I removed filler words, such as *uh* and *um*. I believe this does not reduce the storyteller's voice; it enhances the story's readability. I have shared the storytellers' stories as closely as they were received. Honouring the storytellers' dialogue is important so that we can fully hear their voices. It is their voices that we are trying to hear, so that they can be interpreted and reported on for others to read and learn from (Sutton & Austin, 2015). To this end, I have used block quotes of their stories, with direct quotes that are italicized and indented so that their voices are clearly articulated. In some instances, these quotes are long, as I have intentionally tried to share these stories in their entirety. I have added my voice in reflecting and commenting on my own thoughts, and you will note my own voice woven into the dialogue.

After sharing each storyteller's conversation, in the following chapter I share themes that emerged. As you read the stories, I invite you, the reader, to consider your own insights and interpretations. What do you hear in them? What stories provoke thoughts for you?

Evie

I met with Evie at her home, and we had our conversation around her dining table.

The Nutcracker

Evie shared a cast iron nutcracker in the shape of a dog. She began with an introduction to the artefact.

Figure 1: Evie artefact



She shares the story about the artefact she shows me.

I think I'll do a little preamble. Anybody in Britain is intensely aware of the class their parents came from and of the class of the person they're talking to. And one of the great things about coming to Canada is that is so, so, so less important. It's really how much money you make period here. But my father, my grandfather was a molder in an iron foundry, and this was in Elland, Yorkshire. And what he did, he would be given a design or sometimes he would help with design, and he would make it in sand. And one of the objects that he molded is this nutcracker which you can see... This must be at least a hundred years old... I've always thought this is so cute and up to about ten years ago the dog had a job of employment at Christmas where he would crack nuts.

She tells me about her grandfather.

And working in the foundry eventually killed him. As did grief. He lost two sons from what my father called poverty induced TB and he died about a year after the last

one died. They were about 22 and 24 when they died, just before penicillin became widely available.

She speaks of how she came to have this nutcracker.

And my grandmother of course had it and used it. And so it went from my grandmother to me!

With its place in family tradition, I asked her whether her children and grandchildren knew the story of the nutcracker?

This is the kind of storytelling I would have told them, leaving out the bit about the TB, when they were four or five and they would play with it for hours you know. Put their fingers in and try to get their sibling's finger in, but I don't know if they would remember it. Good point. You know what I'm going to tell this story to my daughters, who are now in their fifties, the next time I talk to them.

What stands out here is how our conversation prompted her to share a story with her children, in a new way and with new details, bringing different aspects of the story through and keeping it going.

Like Father, Like Son

Sharing the story about the nutcracker had encouraged another story to be shared.

This is how I tell a story. Something will come up, like a teachable moment and that will trigger a story.

She goes on to share a story about her son and grandson.

Now that I've got a grandson, a local grandson, my son's son, sometimes I tell [him] stories about his father. Sometimes in front of Liam and sometimes not in front of Liam, the father.

And here's a story I told three weeks ago. When my son was 18, he was very introverted in a sense, well fifty-fifty. And he was also a bit lazy. And he didn't want to go to the school prom. As you know the prom in Canada is extremely important. It's a real

rite of passage. So we gave up, we didn't try to persuade him. We just gave up. And two days before the prom, he said to me, and he called me mum. "Mum, I'm going to go to prom. I need to get a suit, coat, you know, dress shirt." So I gave him my credit card. And this was like 35 years ago. And even in those days, he spent \$500!

He's tall but it was on a suit, new shoes, new shirt, new tie. And ordered a corsage and a boutonniere. And his father and I went okay [sigh] it's a rite of passage. Because that was a lot of money!

[Laughs] It's a lot of money today! So, at the beginning of May my grandson, Sean, who is the son of Liam, said "not going to the prom. Not going to the prom." So his mother, unlike Darren and I, his mother said "yes you are. You've got to go to the prom. You'll regret it all your life. You've got to go to the prom." And we all said, "give it a rest. If he misses the prom, whose fault is it?" That's my northern Yorkshire side coming out. Rather than my Irish heart. And four days before the prom, he said to his mother, "I'm going to the prom. You need to come with me."

I was laughing the loudest.

And this brings me to mind of a great Canadian idiom what goes around, comes around.

I commented that it reminded me that the apple does not fall far from the tree, as that is what her story made me think of. I checked with her if she had told the story about Liam to Sean, and she replied emphatically:

Oh yes, I told them all, in front of him. I even said before he went out and bought that outfit, that I was saying to his mother... "ah well serves him right! Liam did this"... blow me, four days before prom! And I said to my daughter-in-law, "well you had four days and I only had two!"

As she was telling me this, I was reminded of my husband and I going shopping with our nephew for his first suit. This makes me think that what we hear in the story has an impact on how we can relate to it. Evie mentioned that she tells stories about her family members and about

her late husband, who died twenty years ago, often because they refer to her children. Through stories, she shares experiences and memories with her family.

Voices In the Fog

She shared a ghost story with me from when she was in Ireland.

So, my mother and my husband were both Irish and Ireland is very important to me. And every summer when I was a child, and actually until I was thirty, just because I married straight after college. I went to Dublin. As a child I went to County Sligo for maybe a month every year, because that's where my mother came from. So I was about 10 or 12 and I had a great friend called Maeve and where my grandmother's farm was, there was a hedge, a boreen, which is like an agricultural road, and the Ox mountains. And it was a beautiful day. You know my aunt or my mother would open the door and say go. And this day we decided to go up the Ox mountains which we'd never done before. And whether we'd been discouraged or something but we'd never done it. So we got to the top because in Ireland a mountain is like a thousand feet. Not Kilimanjaro, you know! So we went up the mountain and this is where the story gets very serious. A kind of mist descended, and I could hear voices of young men. And they were frightened and they were in peril. And it was very, very scary. And my friend Maeve grabbed my hand and we ran down the mountain, across the boreen, through the sloe hedge, which had thorns about the length of your finger. And we arrived in my grandmother's kitchen and we were bleeding. Because we were so terrified by what had happened up on the mountain. And my aunt and my mother reassured us and said "you're fine it was just fog coming down. Don't worry about it." And it was about five years later... I was about twenty when I found out that at the top of that mountain there had been a massacre of young French and young Irish soldiers by the British soldiers. In the year of the French, which was 1782. And I don't care how logical or scientific you are, I want you to know I felt their fear.

Yeah that's a ghost story I've often told. I've told to every single child.

In retrospect, I was interested... that my mother and my aunts knew what I was referring to. It's actually called the Teeling rebellion, I think. T E E L I N G. They knew! They knew because they were Irish and they knew all the stories. But nobody every told

us that story. It was reading that story. I believe I saw a Teeling monument when I was about 18 or 20.

Sharing stories as lived experiences connects both us and others with the past. It is also entertaining as it was told. Evie drew me in to travelling up and down the mountain along with her. Moreover, it made me think about stories that are not shared by our family, as her mother and aunt had not spoken of what had happened on the mountain and the link to history.

The Book Club

For Evie, book clubs with other women are a welcoming and tolerant space where stories are shared. She explains,

I think in my case, my 40 years of book clubs, I think it's one of the safest places to exchange stories. You don't get laughed at. You don't get jeered at. Hopefully sometimes you get laughed with. But I was thinking about this. I think certainly in my sort of bourgeois world the book clubs are a very safe place to exchange views and stories.

When I asked her why these were safe for her, she replied:

Well this is interesting because the 8 people in my book club, I see two of them all the time. The other 6 I don't see. I only see them at book club. You know, sometimes we may see each other at a birthday party. They all came to my birthday party. But I guess it might be something about social standing. Not everybody in the book club has the same income. But everybody in the book club is educated. Six of them are Canadian. And then there is my friend, who is from China, and me. We're the only two immigrants. But we have had immigrants who maybe died or moved. So, there's a name for it when you all belong to a group and you all share the same views. We don't all share the same views. Most of us are centre or left of centre. But some of us have got kind of hard-core morals. This line you do not cross. Whereas some of us say, oh that's a bit grey.

In this context, having different views and coming from different backgrounds, this is a space that is safe and valued. It is a space where peers can share their experiences with one another. The group talk about anything.

Whatever the story, the book is. And often they are women's issues like if there's been a rape or infidelity or somebody's... and in my group I've got people who are divorced and quite a few of us are widowed and two are still married. Three or four are still married actually, which is surprising at our age actually. But yeah, so we... definitely I would say they are not just women's issues. They're issues. Familial issues.

Evie had started a book club in her building as she had been lonely. In this way, the book club allows for not only sharing an interest in books, but it also serves as a social space for women. Evie's comment on being surprised that people of her age are still married also stood out. It is an aspect of the reality of ageing that I had not fully thought about.

The Family Gathering

Another space where stories are heard and shared is at family gatherings. These gatherings happen in different homes.

I don't know many cultures. I know Canadian culture. I know English culture. I know Irish culture. In my daughter in law's extended family, there's often 16 of us around a table, two tables put together, you know. The kids are there. The kids are always in it. It's generational. And that's a very Irish thing to have a generational family gathering. Everybody's listening. Some of the family might be rolling their eyes. Some of the children might be playing and sending text messages about like, urgh Evie is at it again. Poppy Patrick, you know seriously! Everybody is listening, you know there might be covert commentary going on. And you know if the children make a point which completely escapes us 'cause we're so out of touch, we listen. We listen. This weekend there's a birthday for one of the extended family. Certainly if my granddaughter comes up with a comment then the other two, there's four, six, five altogether, the others will comment and we will listen.

This story reminds me of family gatherings back home. What stands out for me here is the deliberate intergenerational engagement. There is intentional telling and listening, and there is space made for everybody who is present. Evie repeats the phrase 'we listen,' and this emphasizes the importance of this intentionality. The acts of texting and eye-rolling made me smile as this felt like 'typical' behaviour of younger family members. Another element of her story is the comment on how the older family members are 'out of touch' and how listening is a

means to stay up to date. There is an acknowledgement of not knowing and an intergenerational teaching moment to understand what is being said. This does not seem to be an uncommon occurrence at gatherings.

Evie talks about the role of speaking in her family, both past and present.

In fact [...] I don't see my brother very often. I haven't seen him since 2011. He lives in Manchester and we only write about 4 or 5 times a year. You know around birthdays and death dates and stuff. But the last time we met, we talked about our parents who are deceased of course, and he said one of the things I appreciate about my parents, our parents, is sitting around the table, talking. They gave us the gift of rhetoric. And I thought, wow! And how many families shut that down. But that I think is actually very important. And I think I didn't write this down as what I wanted to do with my children. But I think my husband and I and my children's in-laws, this is where we're alike. We allow children the gift of rhetoric and we try to encourage it.

As I reflected on her words, I think about how this reciprocal engagement enables a sense of critical thinking and consideration. Again, the intentionality of engagement is encouraged and valued.

She goes on to talk about the importance of being able to share and justify an opinion.

You can make a statement but are you prepared to back it up? Tell us why...Yes, you need to defend you know not in a hostile way, but you better be prepared...

I wonder what learning moments this creates for the people in her family, and not only for those who are speaking but those listening to how a statement is justified.

I know how lucky I am and how lucky my grandchildren are [to have that]. And my husband's people were the same. And my father was very encouraging. And my mother was too. But my father, considering his generation, was determined his daughter would get an education, determined his children would have the qualities that he did not get from home, just because of money.

Wet Hair Lessons

Evie talks about what people could learn by listening to stories.

Well as a grade 8 teacher I certainly used stories in a way... not to compare myself to Jesus Christ [laughs] you know I told stories that have, shall we say a point or a moral. And I certainly as a child listened to stories, you know my Irish relatives often had very pessimistic stories. Like, one I remember, I had very long hair and I had washed it and not dried it. And my cousin Pauline said, oh wasn't there a beautiful young bride down the street and didn't she do just what you did? She had wet hair and she didn't dry it and she was dead two weeks later. [Laughs] I was shocked, horrified and trying not to laugh all at the same time. My cousin Pauline telling me this story! It's the sort of story that made me think no don't go out with wet hair! [Laughs] So yes, I am a great believer that we all learn through stories. Which is what parables are. They are all stories with a moral.

There is both a lesson and entertainment in this story. This links to what stories Evie would most like to share with others. She noted:

Ones that are either funny or make a point.

Storytelling has a self-development function for Evie. She explains:

I think when you successfully tell a story it increases your confidence and you're more at ease with people. And I think telling a story does lay you open to criticism because people might not like your story or they might not agree with your story. Or they hate the way you're telling the story or they've heard a better version. So I think every time you tell a story you take a risk. But every time you tell a successful story, like with you laughing, that increases your confidence to tell more.

The impact of storytelling is not only with the listener. It has aspects of vulnerability, confidence, and self-reflection for the storyteller.

Aila

I met Aila at her home and we had conversations around her coffee table. We began with her sharing an artefact with me.

Swamp Transformations and Assumptions

Aila's artefact is a display of photographs, each on a clip within a single white wooden frame.

Figure 2: Aila's artefact



I can look at it whenever I want. And the reason this is so important to me, I bought a house, it was my third house. I had been running houses on my own since probably I was 30. I think at that point, I was probably retired, so I was in my mid-50s, maybe 60. And what I learned very quickly, when you're older, and you're dealing with these young coordinators who have come up and into their positions because of their family connections, you are simply an older person who knows nothing. They don't take into consideration where have you lived before, have you run houses before? So they just put you at zero, like you know nothing, we can get away with whatever we want, especially single, female, senior. So, I bought the house in the winter, and I remember

being in the back, and it was one of those things, like moving into this apartment, I had already made up my mind I was buying this house.

So I'm in the backyard, and my agent is there, my agent who was also a friend, or would be, and the agent for the developer, the new developer. So I look in the back, and I knew the answer to this question, but I thought, okay, I wonder what they will answer. So I said, how far back does this property go? Does it also include the slope? No, no, it goes to the end of the lawn, that is it. And I knew right away, the two of them lied. So I thought, I'm still buying the house, but I know what I'm dealing with. So, I bought the house in February, so as the spring goes on, I realize it's a swamp in the backyard. It's literally a swamp. And, of course, you can imagine the fear of the water getting in the basement.

So they sent these two young guys, and they would come, and of course, with the thinking that I had no idea what I'm talking about. So they would make comments, which would be ridiculous, and I would repeat it back. Oh, this is what you're saying. Yup, yup, yup, that's right. Unbeknownst to them, I would go in, write the comment down, date it. So I was basically collecting evidence. And one of my favourite things they said to me, I called on sort of early spring, and I said, you know, it's like a swamp back here. Well, your problem is you need to wait for the dry season. I said, oh yeah, I have no problem doing that. I said, I just don't know. When's the dry season in Nova Scotia? So that was the kind of crazy answers I was getting because they were going on the assumption I didn't know. And given that I wasn't raising my voice, I wasn't fighting, it was, oh, we got away with this again. So, this went on, this foolishness went on, and I think they might have done a makeshift kind of thing. So, I called one day, and I said, I want you to send me somebody with authority, somebody with a title. I said, don't send these coordinators to me again. So, they sent one of the VPs. So, so say, for example, he's here. I answer the door in red rubber boots. And of course, he's probably wearing \$400 shoes. So, he stands here, and I'm here in the swamp, and I'm like, oh, yeah, the worst is here. Oh, yeah, I can see that. I said, no, no, you can't. I said, you really have to come to experience it. What choice does he have? He refuses to come, it's admitting it's too bad for his \$400 shoes. So, he finally comes. He has no choice. When it was all resolved, he said to me, you know I ruined my shoes that day. And I said, yeah, I was kind of thinking that might happen.

She goes on to talk about how she kept going and did not give up her fight with the developers.

I got the decision. It took a backhoe seven days to correct the problem. Seven days, now could you imagine how much that would cost me? And so, the thing that shocked me about buying a house on my own as a woman, and I think they do this to men as well, but I think more so with women, how people are willing to lie. They actually had the builder next door offer to fix it for me for \$1,000. And I said, boy, I said, you're generous, why would you do that for me? If I had agreed, it would have made the warranty null and void.

She still had to deal with the slope behind the house and goes on to explain her solution.

So a friend of mine said, well, why don't you have friends come, bring a plant from their garden. They don't have to buy anything and just bring a plant. So that's what I did. So people came at nine o'clock. I had 35 people. All age groups, male, female, young, old. And they worked, I think the last person left at nine o'clock in the evening. And this is the result.

What stands out for me in this story is Aila's perseverance and determination, and the importance of her visual reminder of her success in this experience. She is proud that she never raised her voice and kept her dignity. She experienced being underestimated because of the assumptions people made about her because she is a woman and an older adult; the intersection of ageism and sexism. She spoke about the experience of ageism in her daily life.

So, but the world that people, seniors navigate in, like I'm 78, I'm not exactly shy. But still, I was just a senior to them. They didn't see the signs that she's not reacting the way we think she should, whatever. But it didn't stop them.

So yeah, it's pretty shocking how we do not value seniors in this culture. And we're invisible. You know, I said to somebody one time, there's no point in me wearing makeup. I do wear makeup. But I said, you know, nobody looks at us anyhow. But it was very interesting. One day I was at a restaurant, and I was leaving. That's when we were wearing masks. And I knew the servers well. So, while I'm waiting to pay, I'm chatting to the servers and we're laughing and bantering back and forth. So, when I went to pay, the girl at the cash said to me, the cutoff for senior's day was 50, I think. And she said, "Are you a senior?" And I said, if I take this mask off, you'll give me 50% off. I said, I'm very

definitely a senior. And, but I'm curious, what made you think I may not be? Yes. And it was very interesting what she said. Your voice is strong. Oh. And you're laughing. So you think of how many seniors are tired, they're not healthy, and they don't feel they have much reason to laugh. And maybe they're just kind of coping. So, if I can get to the cash and pay, and get out to the car, that's my limit, right?

As I reflected on her experience, I am taken aback by the ageism and the assumptions of how older adults behave and are perceived, without laughter or with softer voices. Some may think they are paying a compliment to an older adult to 'check' if they are a senior.

I told her that I was hearing in her stories how she would help other people advocate for themselves.

Yes, because I do it all the time. Simply because of people making assumptions. Whether they're making assumptions on your money, or why you're single, or whatever. But people, I just can't believe how people make assumptions.

But yeah, there's a lot of work to be done. And you know, I think, and a lot of times I take on battles and I did at work as well because I, I think to myself, what advantages that I have as compared to somebody else who bought a house like that. I had no trouble being assertive. I'm educated. I'm tough. All these things that not everybody has and they shouldn't need to have them if life treats them fairly.

So I take on these battles, especially at work, you know, when I would see bosses really doing a number on young people coming in, you know, and I'm, you know, and sometimes I'd actually meet with them and say, you're going to this meeting, this, this, this, you know, but, and again, seniors have a lot to share. It's an opportunity for them to share.

You know, all the things they, you know, when you think of this buying a house, you know, like all that takes and is involved that you've learned so much from.

That the next generation or the one after that has no clue about. And it's for me, it's finding ways to share that. Like you said, there's no platform to share that currently.

When you think of buying a house, you don't think of going to a senior.

And you should. And you should. And they could walk you through so many things.

This part of the conversation made me pause and think about who I go to for advice about something. The wealth of knowledge and experience that can be shared is vast, if only people would consult an older adult. Experiences can be shared and passed on to be helpful. While some aspects of processes may change with time, lessons learned by those who have done this before are valuable.

Sport is Everything

I think in terms of one story I used to love telling kids, and it was a true story. I taught in Cole Harbor and if you know anything about Cole Harbor, sports is everything.

And so I have no interest in sports. I know nothing about sports. So what I started doing was telling kids, telling my students stories about my involvement in a sport. So one day it would be golf. They'd want me to tell another story. No, no, I'll tell you another one tomorrow. So this went on for a while that I would tell them stories. And so one day they said, well, Ms Aila, well, what about hockey? Did you ever play hockey? I said, no, no, that's one I'm not trying, you know? So anyhow, these are all true stories because I've tried all the sports. Oh, but I was terrible at every one of them. And so I would have a story about every one of them and how I failed. And I thought they knew that these were true stories. So I met a parent shopping one day. She, oh, the kids just love your stories that you make up about sports. I said, oh, no, those are not made up. Those are true stories. So I think it's those kind of stories to tell kids about your experiences in something that they can relate to or helps you relate to them, I guess, as well. And so certainly that community, you had to somehow make a connection with sports.

What stands out for me here is the awareness of building a common connection with people and sharing experiences in a way that is relatable and contextual. This makes an impact.

Furthermore, I am struck by Aila sharing experiences of trying and failing. Not every story needs to be about successful experiences. And we learn alongside the storyteller.

Adventure At Different Ages Looks Different

Aila tells another story about taking a vacation trip in March break that was unplanned and turned out incredibly well. She had two hours to get ready for a Caribbean vacation, where she

was staying in a new hotel for its opening, along with journalists and reviewers. She was treated like royalty and had an unforgettable experience.

I like to tell that story because I think sometimes we forget how to do things spontaneously. Just go, you know, where is there an opening and I'm going, yeah, we can plan our lives to the last minute. And you think in terms of the planning we put into trips, I mean, we've put a lot of planning, you know, and especially as women.

So I've done a lot of crazy things like that because it's like, you almost have to go through life fearless sometimes.

You know, cause if you don't, I would have missed out if I wasn't willing to go by myself. And I think that is probably the first trip that I took by myself. And so, yeah, I would have missed out. And it was interesting.

And so that's one of my stories.

I commented that her experience had been such an adventure. She responded:

Yeah. Adventure, and adventure at different ages looks different.

As her story shows, there are advantages to acting without fear holding us back. The comment about adventure looking different at different ages prompts me to consider what assumptions I have about going on adventures, and what assumptions I have about older adults going on adventures. The dominant discourse of expectation can be loud.

If You're Listening, You Will Learn

For Aila, the importance of telling stories was summarized by her in the following way:

Yeah, make people laugh and also to see a different side of things, you know? But we spoke about it last week as well, how important it is to think about something from someone else's perspective. And it's not necessarily just empathy, like being in their shoes, but just considering an alternative.

I think rather than just disagreeing with somebody, to ask questions to explore why they have that view. You know, so, yeah, so, you know, yeah. Because so often, I think, and we all have to watch it, somebody expresses a view and you don't like it, and you kind of close off, well, why do they have that view? And, you know, what led them to

believe, you know? And, yeah, so exploring their opinion, I guess, would be, yeah. Yeah, and that's, I think that's so important, but it also takes time.

Instead of just hearing something, Aila speaks of thinking more critically about what you hear and your reactions to that, as well as consideration of alternative perspectives.

She went on to talk about the impact of listening to stories and what we can learn when we listen.

Oh, gosh. So much. So much. I don't even know how one would answer that. I think people can certainly learn about different cultures, religion, politics, life experiences, different perspectives, general information, keeping up to date. And I think, too, that's very important as you age, because it just focuses attention on your age when you're not up to date.

What stands out for me here is not only the learning opportunities that come with listening to stories, but also the opportunity and importance of keeping up to date. By staying up to date, you may not be perceived as being older. She goes on to say:

Yeah. You have to keep learning. And I mean, I think everybody has something to teach you. Everybody does. If you're listening, you will learn something from everyone.

Her explanation highlights the importance of valuing other people and their potential contribution. Storytelling needs a space for listening so that learning can happen. Another aspect of storytelling that stands out for me here is the active reciprocal nature of storytelling, of teaching and learning.

The Attic

We spoke more about the impact of storytelling, and she shared this.

Yeah, I think probably the most important reason is to laugh. You know, to tell stories that put you in a ridiculous situation. You know what I mean? And that you laugh at yourself.

I love telling the story that as a kid, I was always in trouble. Always in trouble. And I was visiting one time, and we were never allowed to go up in the attic in our house, but we had to go in the attic of this friend's house and get flowerpots for the grandmother. So off we go. And before my friend had a chance to say, watch where you're walking, I walked on the ceiling, which was knocked down. I came through the ceiling, and go past the grandmother, end up in the coal shovel, and get up, and I was

like, oh my God, I'm in trouble again. Because you look up, and there's a hole in the ceiling.

I asked her if she was okay and had not hurt herself and she continued:

Well, I didn't have time to think about that, but I did wear long-sleeved blouses all summer because I was bruised right up. And so I look up at the hole in the ceiling, and I'm like, oh my God, my parents are going to have to pay for that. They're going to have to get somebody to do it. So what do you do in a situation like that? You run. So, I'm running. I live like five miles away, and the family happened to be coming home, and they see me running, and it's like, Aila, where are you going? And I told them what I had done, and I said, I'm going to be killed. And so, they said, well, will you come back if we don't tell your mother? So, I went back with that understanding.

A theme that is strongly apparent in Aila's stories is being able to laugh at herself and to find the humour in situations. The story both entertains and holds a lesson about perspective.

She carries on talking about the story.

Many, many years later, I'm an adult, so I'm living in Halifax, and I'm at this funeral or wake, and this kid, probably in his 20s or whatever, said, is that the lady that went through the ceiling? So it was obviously a story. A story told. But imagine looking up and seeing this hole in the ceiling and the poor grandmother, and she was covered in, I didn't know, she was white from the shock. From all the ceiling. All the gyprock. So that's one of my favourites.

But it shows that it's okay to laugh at yourself.

What struck me here is that stories we like to tell can also be stories that are told about us by others. Our experiences can become other peoples' stories too.

Hitting the Mark

In response to where she tells stories, Aila said

I think, well, I used to tell a lot of stories when I taught. Just as they kind of came up and whatever. I think, definitely would not be on the phone. Never on the phone, I would think. Because I think you get, I get enjoyment out of a story when you're watching people's reactions. So you kind of do the build up. And then, you know when you hit that mark, you just watch the build up. And I also love, I love to talk in all occasions, but I also did a fair amount of public speaking. And I started to find it, like, really challenging.

And the reason is that you can see people. You can see their faces. So you know whether they're bored or whether they're engaged. So that's what I found was the challenge. You need to see, I need to see the facial expressions.

Telling stories in person is preferable to Aila. This makes me think of the active feedback and the immediacy of the reactions of those listening that helps us to navigate how we continue speaking. Telling stories in person has a positive aspect in that you can immediately see how your story lands with the audience. But this is also what could make it challenging.

If You Have Stories To Tell

Apart from her school students, she also shared stories with others:

I used to tell a lot to my grandnephew and niece. And they're older now, so I don't tend to so much, but certainly when they were growing up, you know? And I used to, they used to come and stay overnight and that, and we would tell stories, yeah.

Aila talks about how a story needs a listener.

Because you want to tell that story it's something and I think that that's a very lonely feeling to have a story and you have nobody to tell it to. And everybody's busy so you know you can see if people stop their feet are moving because they need to go, you know and yeah so I think that would really increase the loneliness if you have stories to tell and nobody to listen to.

As I listened to this, my mind immediately went to the song by Brandi Carlile (Carlile, 2007), that speaks of stories not being any good if you have no one to tell them to. There is a sense of sadness for me considering a life not shared. We spoke about the importance of people and social connections in relation to the documentary about Olive Bryanton (<https://www.cbc.ca/cbcdocs/pov/episodes/never-too-old>). The documentary explores Olive's journey in researching women who age in place and the importance of social support in ageing.

And the community was helping. And also, and I think we touched on this before, is that people know you exist. So, you know, people are driving by and, oh, you know, there's Emma out. I wonder how she's doing. Or if she's not out, they're wondering why she's not out.

So I think, and I, you know, as we talked about, you know, when you get older, you become invisible. And so I think at a certain age, you know, that's, you become aware of that. And I think, and you know more about this than I do, but I think 80 is a turning

point... That, you know, if you're going to have serious health problems, it's going to hit you at 80. And I think if you're losing friends, that's probably going to happen around 80... I think people can get very lonely. You know, their partner's gone and their friends are starting to go. Yeah. So, I'm not there yet. I will be 78 this month. So I've got two years to go.

This part of our conversation highlighted the importance of social support, not only in listening to stories but also having someone know you exist and do not feel invisible. Having someone look in on you and take notice of your life plays an important role. Through sharing stories, we leave a legacy, and we can remain visible to others. There is also a reality in the awareness of our mortality. The older we get, the lonelier or more isolated we may become. This makes me wonder about different aspects of social support and connection in healthy ageing.

Keeping your privacy

Storytelling can enable social interaction, but you can control how much you choose to share. Sharing experiences can be as deep and personal as you choose.

This was pointed out to me years ago and when the person said this I kind of was shocked but I realized it was true. Storytelling, also if you're in a group, it allows you to keep your distance. I like people and I love to socialize but this friend of mine said "Aila, everybody thinks they know you but in fact nobody does" and it's a way when you're talking about stories or tell stories it's also a way to keep kind of a distance does that make sense?

I commented that I had not really thought about storytelling from this perspective. As her explanation shows, you can share stories but choose how vulnerable to be or how much to share. Telling stories does not mean that you are sharing something that is personal.

Yeah because you're not talking [about you]. People think they know you because in a way you're telling a personal story like if I tell the traveling story that's personal or the falling through the ceiling but what do people come out knowing about you? Yes. I've been in situations where I've known people for a number of years, and I remember this lady said to me one time "Aila, I never really knew have you been married or are you divorced?" They knew nothing about me and I don't give that impression. And that's the point they were making. So I think distancing in storytelling gives you a chance to give a warm atmosphere, a friendly atmosphere. So, they might come away and you know we've

had a good social interaction and all this but that doesn't mean they know your marital status or your history, they don't know if you have children. Like I remember one time, I come from a family of 13 and somebody said to me after knowing me for years "oh yeah I always had the impression you were an only child". And I came from a family of 13. So yeah so, I think distancing and maintaining your privacy while still being engaged I guess that that makes sense.

Aila's perspective on storytelling has made me think about the different ways in which we use storytelling. It can be to entertain or to teach or to bring out in social situations. However, the storyteller chooses and controlled what is shared in that specific context.

Matt

We met in a local branch of the Halifax Public Library on a summer's morning and sat around a table in a study room, that was wonderfully cool on a very hot day. Matt chose not to share an object. Given the central thread weaving through his stories that he shares with me, I connect a picture of a cherry tree with him.

The Cherry Tree

His favourite story centres on the role of natural medicine with his father.

My dad, when I was growing up, I come from a large family, a family of nine. I know, a lot of us. And, of course, being not of means a lot of times, you know, trying to feed, you know, times were tough at times. But even in saying that, we always had food on the table. We always had clothes on our backs. So, we were very blessed in that respect. But my dad and my mom, when I was growing up, we didn't have an opportunity. We never even had a vehicle at times to go to a doctor or to what we call town because we lived in the country. So, because of living in the country and living all the way up in the country, it was kind of hard to get into the city of' times. So, my dad, when he grew up, and he grew up in the country as well, in another part of Nova Scotia. And when he grew up there, his father and mother were the same thing. Where he got his natural remedies from was from his grandfather and his father. They both, they all practised that. And apparently within the community, a lot of people knew of these and never wrote them

down. But they had to because it was the only thing that they could do to cure things. So, I remember one time, my dad, for example, I got sick. And very often when some of the kids got sick, dad, my father would go downstairs, and he'd make this thing called bitter tea.

He goes on to explain how bitter tea is made.

Okay. Now, this bitter tea was a combination of tree barks. I don't know what they were at that time. At that, when I was growing up, I didn't know. All I know is that when I went downstairs, you know, or when he brought it up to me, whatever, because we lived in a two-story house, you know, he would have these herbs steeping on the stove, in hot water on the stove. And then he'd pour it off, let it cool down a bit, and he'd have us drink it. And that would be our remedy for whatever it was at that time that was ailing us. So, he would do that very often whenever any members of the family got sick. He would also make another one called, oh my God, what was this called? Goose grease and molasses.

I could not help but wonder if this was a local saying that my newcomer vocabulary had not yet learned. I asked him to clarify what that was.

Just what it is. Like, a lot of people would take like the things called, oh, what were they called now? Other types of remedies that you get from the doctor or from the pharmacist or whatever. But goose grease and molasses basically was just what it is, goose grease and molasses. And you put it in a bottle and you put it in, leave it on top of your shelf for a while. And basically, when you went to take it, you'd shake it up. You'd have to shake it up because when you put the goose grease and the molasses, the grease would sit on the top, molasses would sit at the bottom. And so, and then you'd shake it up and then you spooned it out.

So, my dad was almost his own pharmacist in a way because of all these old-time remedies and I've recorded some of those myself, you know, off recording my dad. And some of the things that he was telling us about family history and stuff like that. And but those two are very, very forefront of my mind very often because all of us, all of the family members all went through the same thing. We all had to take those same remedies. So there's one day I'm sitting in my office at work and my dad calls me up and he says,

can I get some bark off of one of your cherry trees? So I'm sort of saying, okay, sure. Not thinking I'm giving him permission to do this, but I'm at work. So I'm sort of saying okay.

I have no idea why he wants this. I have no idea. Anyway. So, I give him permission. He goes and he does it, I guess. I get home. And the funny part of the story is that I have all these cherry trees in my yard, and I've got some that's in the closest part to the house and then there's some back further. And so you would think that he would take some of the bark from the tree in the furthest, but he takes the bark off the tree that's closest to the house. So of course, then I'm scrambling around to try and find some tar, some paint, something to put over the scab on the tree so that the tree doesn't die. And I thought, okay, this is just wonderful. So I go over to see him and of course, I come to find out later is that he wasn't feeling well and that he was making some bitter tea. So I know at least of one of the barks that he uses in this bitter tea is a cherry tree bark. And so many days later he was feeling fine again and running and he was good to go. And I thought, wow. And we're talking between when we were little kids and this, and the part that I tell you about my house and ...And then 40 years later, here he is, in my backyard, cutting bark off a tree to make it bitter tea. So, I thought that that's a pretty good story.

As I reflect on Matt's story, I think about the role of passing down knowledge and the oral traditions. There is a deep connection to family roots, to community, and to carrying on doing what has been passed down. What also stands out is the resourcefulness of finding and making remedies. Matt makes the link between the natural remedy ingredients with his context.

But, you know, but that could be where he has got it from too, or from a neighbor. I don't know where he got it. Molasses was a pretty readily available thing because back in the day molasses was everything to our people in our, in our culture.

Everybody had molasses, you know, and it was cheap, and it was a sweetener with no such thing as going to a store and buying a bottle of jam or something like that to put on bread or toast or whatever. Molasses was cheap and it was, it went on everything.

I commented that molasses is good to bake with.

That's right. It's good to bake with... but it was handed down. I know he didn't get those things off his own.

Like they were handed down from his grandfather to his father to him.

And he's always, you know, he's 98 years old now, but can't make it anymore. But he, you know, he carried that all the time. And in terms of the other barks that are in there, I don't know what the other ones are in there. I must ask him.

Talking about this story has prompted Matt to learn more. This made me reflect on how telling stories can also remind us of something we still want to know about, and not only the impact on the listener.

I asked him what he liked most about the cherry tree story.

What I like most about it, I think, because I think it illustrates the resilience of our people at that time. And I think also what it does, it, it, it lets me know that there was a, a communication between the native people of this country, the aboriginal people, you know, whatever you want to call it, whatever they want to call it, first nation people and my people. Because I'm almost certain that because they're using elements that are here, you know, as opposed to let's say Africa, because of using those elements, somebody had to let them know that those elements were, were good to use. And my speculation, I know I'm speculating, but it's, I'm pretty sure it's probably closer to true than not, is that, that was the communication that they had between the first nation people, the aboriginal people and the blacks that came to Nova Scotia. So, so I enjoy telling that story because it shows that communication there... So to me, that story is a connection.

Connections and history

We continue to talk about how stories connect us to our history.

It's a connection there. And to me, it's an important connection and it's a historic connection. It's a connection that I think that in terms of my children and my grandchildren, they've got to know that and understand that, you know, because I truly do believe that, that especially kids today, the newest generation, I don't know what is it, X generation or whatever it is, you know, they have got to know more of their history because it's sad, but the history is not being taught in schools because it's even right to this day, they're still learning European history. For the most part. They learn some Canadian history, but Canadian history is steeped in European history. So they don't really learn any of their own history, you know, so they learn somebody else's history, but

they don't really learn of their own history. And so that's another reason why, you know, it's important and I feel good about telling the story because, you know, it's part to me, it's part of our, and I believe, and this is what I know, I do not believe I know, that there are other people in my community that have similar stories about homing remedies because, because back in those days, they were very poor, you know, they could, you know, some could barely feed their families and needless to say, they couldn't go down to the drugstore in town and be able to afford whatever medication was available at the time. So, oftentimes they had to make their own remedies.

So then to me, it's like, where did they learn this from? You know, where did they get this from? They must have got it from someplace. You just don't go in the woods and take a leaf or a bark off a tree or somewhere and say, okay, I'm going to drink this. I'm going to do something with this. You have to know which ones are which because some without a doubt, as you may well expect, could probably kill you.

We laugh about how the wrong combination could do more harm than good.

It could actually kill you instead of cure you. Maybe they experimented [laughs]. That one didn't work! [laughs]

Matt explains how important it is to learn about history and stories outside of western history.

And when you look at all the different cultures in the world, it's like looking at a rainbow. A rainbow wouldn't be so pretty if it was just one colour. But because it has all those colours in it, that's what makes it beautiful. Well, guess what? That's what makes our world so beautiful because we have all these different cultures in it. But if we don't, if we're not willing to learn about other cultures, then we fall into so many traps. We fall into traps of hatred, bigotry, discrimination, racism. We fall into all these because we don't know.

It's like if somebody said to you tomorrow, oh, we're going to send you off to space. Well, guess what? You've never been to space before. You probably know little or nothing about space. And now they want to go there? Well, the fear would just be overwhelming. Well, it's the same with cultures and people. If you don't know that culture, if you don't know that people, you're going to automatically fear them. And unfortunately, our societal or global history is full of stories of people that have gone and

have done cruel things to Native people. I guess to put it in a nutshell. And it's mostly because they didn't know and because they were afraid.

We continued to speak about why storytelling is important. Matt highlights a critical point

And like I said, and again, in my culture, it was the only means we had because back in the day, a lot of our parents couldn't really read and write.

Telling stories was a form of communication, learning and sharing. He speaks about his appreciation for his mother, who he remembers was very smart and had beautiful penmanship, and she would get books given to her by people who she used to clean houses for. Through bringing back books and encouraging him to read, she inspired interests in him that he still holds today.

And then when I was like very young, and right to this day, even right now, I still have an affinity for ships, like nobody's business. Now, isn't that odd?

Having had that experience as a child, he realized the importance of nurturing children and he has shared this lived experience with his own children.

That's why I tell my kids all the time, you have to really nurture children when they're younger, because whatever it is they see, whatever it is they hear, whatever their life experience is, when they're between the ages... a lot of that stuff will stay with them for the rest of their life. You might not think it, but it will stay with them for the rest of their life. So, so be careful what you say, be careful what you do, and be careful how you nurture them.

Going To Work

Matt shares a story about an experience on his way to work. He used to take the bus and the bus stop was close to an elementary school.

So, this one day, I'm standing there with my briefcase, dressed, ready for work, and these two little girls came walking down the street, and they both, one stopped, and the other one stopped. They both stopped, and one stopped, and looked up at me, and said "hi you ugly black thing." It's no lie, it's the truth. And of course, my mouth just dropped, okay. And I didn't even know what to say, because we're talking elementary school, so they have to be five, six years old, okay. What do you say to a five, six year old that says that to you, okay. So anyway, I didn't say anything, because I wasn't sure, didn't

know how to respond to this, but before I could say anything even, here's what her friend's doctor said to her. She says, "that's not nice." That's what her friend said to her. "That is not nice," she said. "You should say you're sorry, because that's not nice." And I'm, and so I'm, I'm sort of like watching this, as I'm watching like a TV show or something, because I'm just watching this whole thing play on, because I haven't said a thing, right. So I'm watching this play on, and I'm sort of saying to myself, wow, what just happened, kind of deal, right. But you know, there was a lesson in that story for me, for anybody that knows that story, is that, that story talked about the homes that those two little girls were brought up into, although they were friends, it was quite obvious they were brought up in different homes. One was brought up in a home with no respect and was taught not to respect anybody other than their culture, who they were, okay, and disrespect anybody else. The other one was brought up in a home, obviously, where they were taught good morals, to respect people, to respect people of other cultures, and other colours, and whatever, okay. So, and I was very happy in a way, because I thought to myself, you know what, I didn't have to do a thing. Because her friend corrected her. And that's her friend that she goes to school with every day. So, so a few things will probably happen after that in their lives. Either she'll be her friend always, and she, her friend will be a little bit more caring about other people, a little bit more aware of other cultures, and whatever. Or she won't be her friend anymore, because she'll probably say, well, you know what, I can't have her as a friend, because I didn't grow up in that home. I wasn't taught those things, and if I take those values and morals home to my parents, I know they're going to correct me as well. So, so that was, that was pretty neat. I thought that was really neat.

As I listened to this story, I immediately found myself reacting to the content. I told Matt I had no words to express my shock at what had happened to him. His reflection on the story helped to guide my own thinking and I wonder about content of stories and the intended impact and message in it. He shared his purpose in telling this story.

And I tell that story quite often to people, because it's, it speaks to, to me, it speaks to how sometimes things can correct themselves, rather than us all time thinking, well, we've got to correct them there, because these are two little white girls, okay. But at the same time I didn't have to do that correction, because there was, because for

everyone that's negative, there's one that's positive. And, and all it really speaks to is speaking up.

He speaks about how Dr. Wesling influenced his thinking in this.

Anyways, she often said, she said, the only thing that racism needs to prosper is for us to do and say nothing, okay. And that, and to me, right there and then, that little girl exemplified.

As adults have got to do, speak up. If your friend is doing something, they're saying something that morally you know is wrong, speak up and say something, okay? Because that's the only way we're going to stop it, otherwise it'll continue to flourish.

I am struck by his wisdom and reflection in the focus on correction and hope in his story.

I'd share those stories with anybody, and why is because, like I said, especially the one about the little girls. You know, that to me is a good story that speaks to, you know, when people think that racism is running wild, and that there is no correction out there. It speaks to the fact that, yeah, there is correction out there, and also that there's hope out there, because those little girls were in grade, you know, one or grade one, probably grade one, maybe grade two, but, you know, they were, they were very, very young. You know, today, those little girls would be in their 20s.

Those girls would be in their 20s right to this day, and it gives me hope, because at least I know that for every little girl that's out there that has those racist tendencies and discriminative tendencies, there's a little girl out there that has good morals and good values, and they don't look like me.

Perspectives

In reading through our conversation now, I find myself considering Matt's perspective and thinking about how this could be different from my own. In sharing his reflections, I can reconsider my own. What stands out for me in this part of our conversation is the impact of his perspective on mine. And this point was illustrated in me asking the impact that storytelling can have on others. Matt noted:

That's a hard question for me. Because when you think about the impact on other people's lives, how stories are, it's kind of speculative because how do you say what the impact is? Because it can be different for different people. What kind of impact would I

hope that would have on them? That they'd be able to see the same things I've seen in it, okay? From my point of view, my lens, okay? The value, again, the human resilience. Those types of things, those are the things I see on my lens. I hope that they would be able to see the same things out of them that I see in my lens. Now mind you, they'll probably put their own spin on it, whatever which way. But at the same time, I would like they, I would like, I would, I would hope that that, that's what they would get out of it. That's what would impact them the most. Those types of things. Like, moral values, for example, the one about the little girls. That's a moral value thing. You know, values, these values in this home, these values in that home, because that's what it really speaks to. It's not about the little girls themselves so much. So, it's about where did they come from. What was their home like from? Because at that age, they're only going to be reflective of what they see and hear and do. Because that's what little kids do. They mimic.

In saying this, Matt highlights one impact of storytelling, mimicking what you hear and values that are shared.

In speaking about the value of listening to stories, Matt commented:

I believe, first of all, that stories are an educational opportunity. Okay? So, if it's an educational opportunity, it's obviously there's something to learn from it. So, in that, I, in most stories, there's an opportunity to learn something.

What you get out of it is going to vary. Again, it's going to be one of those kind of things where, you know, some people might get one thing out of it. Like, I've been in enough group settings to know that you sit around a group of ten people, you know, and you ask each, every one of them what they get out of the story. You know, the majority of them are going to be different from one another. So, when you tell them stories or even when you tell, like, for example, my stories, I'm hoping that they get out of it that understanding that a couple of things. Number one is that nature holds a lot of keys to our health.

And, and we know that, we know that professionally if you're a science student or if you're a scholar in any kind of way into, I think it's botany, it's called. You know, if you're into that stuff, then you'll know that nature holds a lot of the stuff that we need. The other thing is that we have to have an appreciation for our seniors, our older people,

our older folks, because it's not just wisdom that they're handing down, they're handing down also a lot of their techniques and a lot of the things that they knew, even though we don't use those things anymore, to know that they were smart enough and wise enough to, to develop these things that, that brought us to where we are today.

I mean, they're just there. I would hope that, you know, for example, somebody would say, well, that's the reason why we have to protect our environment, for example, you know, because if we lose all our cherry trees, if we lose all of our, you know, whatever, then, you know, we have, we have no remedies, period. Because even though you might be going to the drugstore and getting your pill or your, whatever you're drinking or taking, you know, the basis of that was way back here. And if we lose those, you know, because I mean, ecology is, is another big thing with me. I really believe that we should really take care of the environment big, big time. That's why I really do have appreciation for the First Nation people big time, because they often speak about the land and about the earth and, and, and they make no bones about it. You know, they say we're protectors of it because we're on, because they always say, you know, we're only borrowing the land from us. We don't own it. They're only borrowing it. We're just, we're just inhabitants of it. And we should learn to take care of it. And that's something that man is, is still, I mean, still got a ways to go about it.

Common Ground

We spoke about where storytelling takes place. Matt enjoys talking in person.

Most times it takes place, actually, it can take place at a social gathering sometimes, because sometimes when I run into some of my friends at various social, especially ones that are from the place where my, for example, where my father's from, I run into, they're not so much my cousins, but they grew up, you know, in the same area as my dad did, and then that story will come out, because they share the same affinity, especially when it comes to telling stories about the natural remedies and stuff like that, okay, because some of them even have more stories on natural remedies than I do, because some of them just remember all this stuff. I only remember bits and pieces. So, it's usually at social gatherings, maybe a one-on-one, someplace.

Believe it or not, I don't really like talking on the phone much [laughs]. You know, I'm sort of like, "hi, goodbye, I'll meet you soon." Yeah. I'll do it with my brothers. I've

got brothers that live out west. So, I have no choice but to sit down and have a long conversation with them, but if it's somebody locally, I'd rather meet them for coffee, or go by their house, or wait until I see them, and then I'll have a conversation with them.

Apart from friends and community members, Matt also shares stories with his own family.

My grandchildren. My kids. Yeah, mostly my grandchildren. All my kids, they know everything. They don't want to hear nothing I got to say, you know, because all my kids are grown up now.

[My grandson] likes to hear what Grandpa has to say, and my granddaughter, the one I was telling you about yesterday, for example, well, me and her are just like that. Yeah, and with her, I love it, because, you know, we've come so far in our relationship now, her and I, that whenever we meet up, and she just starts, she tells me everything. When I say everything, I mean everything. Even things that I'm sort of saying, I don't know if I really want to know that, you know, but she tells me everything. And so, I'm sort of saying myself, that's good, though.

The connection to his grandchildren comes through strongly in our conversation. There is a positive intergenerational relationship and engagement. He spends time telling stories but also listening to what they have to say.

He talks about the impact and value of sharing stories with one another.

Oh, it brings us closer. It brings you closer, because I think that when, when you share a story with somebody, you feel safe with that person, right? Because if you don't feel safe with a person, you're not going to share the story.

This made me think of how his granddaughter must feel safe with him in sharing all of her stories so easily. And this made me smile. He goes on to comment on how storytelling can help relationships to develop.

It brings you closer to that person in that relationship. It nurtures that relationship. And also, it opens them up because you are showing vulnerability when you start telling the stories. So therefore, because you're showing the vulnerability, maybe they'll show vulnerability back to you again, you know, because sometimes when I tell a person a story, I'm almost always in anticipation of them telling me another story, either

one that's similar or related to, or something or a story period. And you're almost in anticipation of that. Once you finish telling your story, then you're sitting, you're waiting. So can you tell me yours?

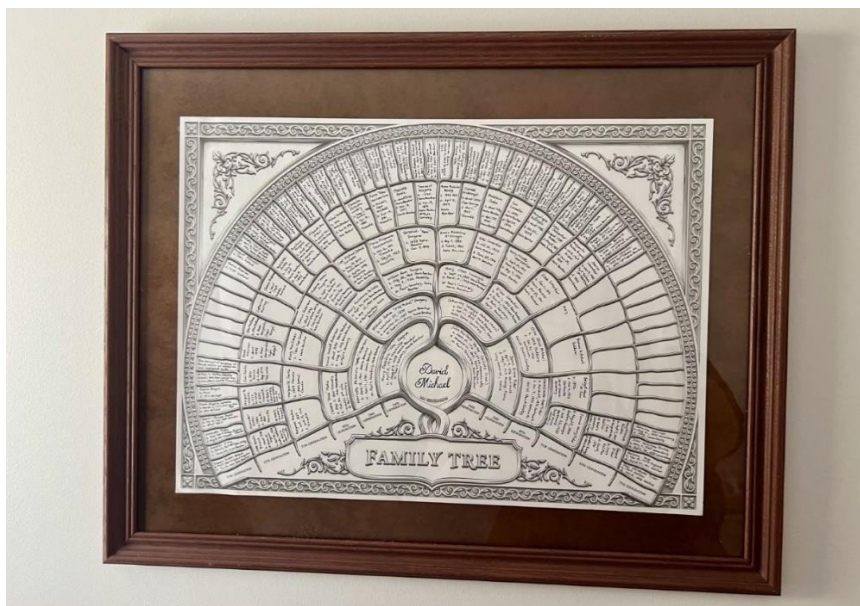
[It] becomes a sharing and engaging thing. So then it just keeps rolling, which is good. And very often when I'm being with my friends, you're right. It's like that. We run out of time because we're either having this conversation on a break when we're in a meeting or something. And then that 15-minute break is out. It goes too quickly. Yeah, it goes too quickly. So now we can't share no more, kind of deal. So you'd like to be in an atmosphere or a situation whereby you have lots of time, you know, or you're walking down the street or just coming over a mall somewhere, and you run into somebody, you know, you don't have all day to stand there and just reminisce and stuff. So, you know, it's sort of a, you know, little quick here and quick here, a little quick, quickie stories.

Matt raises an important point on the context when telling stories. We may not have the time for reminiscing or connecting for a long time. There is a time and place for longer stories and for the “little quick, quickie stories.”

David

David and I talked around his coffee table in his home. For his artefact, he shared a representation of his family tree that hangs in his home.

Figure 3: David's artefact



The Family Tree

David's older sister and his niece worked on building the family tree. This cherished object hangs in the guest room. David shares how looking into family history resulted in more stories about his ancestors. He shares about his grandfather:

And he died in World War I. And through the archives, the war archives, she was able to determine that he was a nurse in World War I. And then when many soldiers were falling, he stood up and became a fighter. And he's buried at Vimy. So I'm hoping to get there this fall to see his site. But it's very interesting, because since then, I did ancestry. And I was getting all these relatives called Trent. And I said, why am I getting relatives called Trent? And then that's when Carey did the connection. And the connection came from Veteran Affairs. Because when Peter went off to World War I, he had to leave a will, like every soldier did. And he left all of his possessions to my grandmother, Anne. And we never knew that he had, obviously, had a love affair with her. And she probably, you know, she probably had a rough time because she was pregnant, young, very young. And when my father was born, his birth certificate in the state of Massachusetts claims to be John Smith. Because her sister, Anne's sister, was married to a Smith. And she, the sister, obviously convinced Anne to use her brother-in-law's name as the father. Later, when my father was baptized in the Catholic Church, the name John Peter Trent is down as the father. So she couldn't, the sister and Anne, didn't feel they could lie in the church, but they could lie to the state.

So it is a nice piece of [history], and she's coming actually in two weeks to fill in the rest of this. She's figured it out. So nice to go back seven generations and know your roots.

He goes on to talk about how he and his siblings have different perspectives on these familial stories.

My older sister likes to hear of it with a bit of hesitation. I am very hyper and excited to know that Peter was a hero in World War I. My youngest sister, who's five years younger than me, doesn't want to hear it. And the reason why I think she doesn't want to hear it is she was 15 when Mom died. And she had stepped up and stayed. We were all in university or off. And so, she became Mom's replacement. And she's very

protective of Dad. Now she's very protective of me to the point that she drives me nuts. So she doesn't want to hear anything about the Trents.

It is interesting how different family members have different experiences from the same story. People value stories in different ways and relate differently. David comments on this.

Yeah, isn't it, it's funny how our stories, our stories within a family always seem to be different from person to person. And sometimes I wonder, I used to be a volunteer with Cubs when DJ, my son, was small, six, seven, eight-year-olds. And you know playing that game Pass the Secret? And [laughs] you'd pass it around to 18 little boys. I used to be. And by the time it got to number four, the story had changed. And I'd ask, what did you say? And he said this, no, I didn't. And they'd get into quite a rousing argument. And I wonder if adults are any better... No, we can't pass the truth along. Yeah, because my stories are very different than their stories. Isn't that just fascinating?

Each sibling has a different response to the family stories. This stood out for me as highlighting how we have our own perspective and our own lens when listening or even re-telling stories, even as relatives. David also points out something about the nature of telling stories. They are told differently as they get passed on and shared.

He goes on to tell a funny story related to his grandfather.

On my mother's side, what's interesting is that she goes back to Scotland because my grandmother, if you go back, has all her relatives [there]. And her, perhaps the most interesting story about my mother's side is that her grandfather was Sebastian Irving Sampson, who was the captain of a ship that went from Halifax to the Caribbean, taking fish and stuff down to the Caribbean and coming back with rum. My father says that he had anecdotal reports on Sebastian. Sebastian was married three times. Oh. Four times, I'm sorry. Four times. My nanny, or Millie, her name was, she was the fourth one. And I said, what did the others die of, Dad? And he said, when he got tired of his wife, he'd toss them overboard. He said he'd kill them. My mother would say, "don't you tell him that" [laughs]. So that story has endured in our family.

As he told this I thought about how the humour in the story and its shock value has helped the story to 'endure' and be told. It has an urban legend element to it for me.

Know Your Roots

The framed family tree sparked interest in David and his children.

And the kids want to know about all the family. They often, when they come here visit, they'll go quietly by themselves to look at that artefact. And then they'll come back and ask me about this person or that person. Do I have any story about those people? They want to know their roots, even at a young age. I don't think I did that. And that's a change. I don't think I did, but I can't remember. And they want to see where their great-grandfather [is], all the stories about him, right?

He comments that stories about family include sharing stories about his children with his grandchildren.

The grandchildren want stories also. The stories the grandchildren want, even the 20-year-old and the 17-year-old, they want to know about what mom was like. And I tell them stories about how Stacy thought she was a movie star from the time she was born. And we had a stage for her and she'd sit on it and sing. And what songs did she sing? And of course, we'd all have to applaud because if we didn't applaud, she'd get, and she would demand attention.

Yeah. And then the boys, the two boys would ask, what was dad like? And I'd say, your father is very much like Peter. He has a little temper. I said, when I played tennis with your father, he was a very poor sport because I couldn't beat him. I was a poor sport because I'd really beat him. I was bigger. And then one day, he got so mad, he bounced his racket on the court. And I said, "if you do that again, DJ, I'm never playing tennis with you again." "I'm sorry, dad." But he will sit and listen and laugh at them. But the boys take it quite seriously. They'll laugh, but they're internalizing what they're hearing.

And so Lizzy, the one who's now only seven, she'll say to me, "Papa, tell me a story of daddy." And I tell her only good stories because I don't want to tell her anything bad because she adores her dad. So I tell her all kinds of stories. And then they want to know stories about me when I was a young kid. My seventeen-year-old would say, who

taught you to drive? And I'll tell the story of when I was flying over a railroad track because I didn't know how to shift because it was a manual. Once I got it going, I just kept it going. And learning to drive. And memories of our trips. And the boys find it very funny that DJ was not one to travel in a vehicle. And my ex-wife was from Hamilton. And we'd be down here and have to travel up there all the time to see her family. A couple of trips, I'd get a smile from his mom, and I'd say, I can't take it anymore. We're going back home. And we'd try to go back home because he'd be screaming in the backseat when he was young. So it is interesting. And a lot of funny stories.

These stories share history and reminisce about the past, connecting past experiences and people to the present. He is helping his grandchildren to learn about their own parents. This context is important to both the children and the grandchildren, who want to learn more about who they come from.

Learning Stories

David worked in education and professional development and these stories hold great meaning for him.

And then there are stories, and they are informal in a way, but they can be learning stories that you tell either teachers or pre-service teachers. And that has been probably my most important stories I've been telling. Because in teaching in the Faculty of Education, I felt it's so important for the students not just to learn how to teach mathematics, which is what my job was, or theories of learning about mathematics, but to understand how as humans we have to understand where we're all coming from.

He shares a story about teaching in a class that had several international students.

There was one, a young lady, extremely bright, named Ming, who sat in the very front. And I would say to her, she became almost like my guide, I'd say, Ming, do you think anyone has any problems with this in class? And she'd say, I think you need to go over that again. And I would go over it again. And then I'd say to the class, would someone else like me to go over this? Oh yeah, I'd like that. Because Ming was open and honest, right? And I'd say to teachers, find a student that you know is going to be upfront and honest. Because if you say to the class, does anyone have any questions? They shut up. They'll all say no.

So anyway, one day I went into class, and it was the first class of the morning at 8 o'clock... And I noticed that they were particularly quiet. And there was a feeling in the class that it was very different. And so I went over to Ming. Oh, my goodness. It's like having a second set of ears, right? I said, Ming, what's up? It doesn't feel right. Oh, she said, did you not hear? I said, no, I didn't hear. It was the day after Tiananmen Square shooting. And two of the students that were in my class had a cousin that was killed in Tiananmen Square. And they were all wondering, how do they go back to China now? So I just said to them, "let's just close our labs, materials, and let's just talk about Tiananmen Square. Why did it happen? What can we learn from it?" And they were sobbing in the classroom. And a couple of kids said, "I'm sorry. I'm so emotional." And I said, "don't be sorry." So the lesson was, it's all right to cry. And I said, I'm weeping on one side, and I don't even know these people. But I said, "for you, those of you who knew these people that were killed, you deserve to cry." And we had quiet moments. And then I'd ask them, "please help me somewhere. What should we talk about?" And they would talk about the restrictions of the Beijing government and how it was so different in Canada. And I would talk about having pride in one's country, regardless, and how they could be leaders in China when they go back. It was such a great learning experience for me. So at the end of the class, I said to them, "ask me a question". And Ming said, what did you learn, sir?" Isn't that a great question? And I said, "Ming, I love your question." And I said, "I have to sit down, because I'm going to get a little emotional." And I told them what I learned and didn't understand. And they should not expect that I truly could understand, because I've never lived under a repressive regime. And I think for teachers, they have to come to the realization that their journeys are so privileged compared to many of the students, even the very bright students, especially where they're coming from many countries.

As he told me this, I was thinking that it is good to pause the formal learning sometimes and to close the books and have a conversation about what is happening in the class. I commented this to David, saying because then you do get that great moment of someone asking you, well, what do you think about this? And he continued.

And Ming was brave enough to speak out. But the question I would ask is, how do we make more Mings?

This story really made an impact on me. His reflection about privilege makes me think about being aware of our positionality in relation to others.

He goes on to share a story about being a new principal and the challenges he faced going into that role.

And then I thought about, I used to tell that story to new teachers to say that you're going to have a lot of fences to climb. And then I thought, stop doing that, David. Tell the new teachers and maybe even the old teachers stories of success. Tell them stories that are really celebratory about education. And they will grow more from that.

One of these success stories included how he worked with teachers to make learning mathematics more interesting and worked on an integrated art project about Inuit art. He goes on to talk about how he workshopped this concept with teachers in professional development sessions.

It's very challenging to do. But it's very possible to do that. So I tell pre-service teachers, don't believe a textbook is the best resource that you have. Your best piece is between your ears. And so I often share that.

He remembers and privileges these stories of value and his contribution to the learning and development of others. He reflected on what kinds of stories would have more impact or be more helpful.

Death and Velcro

David states that he shares many stories with his sisters.

My sisters live in Antigonish. I live here. I'm constantly being invited. "Come, come, come, come." So I go usually every two to three months and spend the weekend or whatever, three days generally. And we're all retired, and they're both teachers. So we talk about stories from school. Usually, when I talk to my sisters, we talk about funny stories. Funny, but maybe tragic in a way, too. We talk about people who have died that we've known for a long time, and how funny they might be, or have been. And then I tell them stories of people who have died. And they're sad, but they laugh. We do remember the good things of them too. That's important. And we always seem to remember how good the people were. Even if they were sometimes real assholes, I hate to

use that word. Remember how kind they might have been or how they helped you or did this or remember that or remember this, right?

The role of reminiscing together comes through strongly here. One of these stories is about his Uncle Thomas. His uncle and aunt, Lynn, had been on a cruise when his uncle became ill and needed to be transported to hospital in Seattle. He tells the story of how he needed to coordinate the repatriation of his uncle's body so that the burial could be held in Toronto and how this took weeks to arrange. Just before the public viewing of the body, he meets with his aunt and his daughter in the funeral home.

So we go to him and Thomas is lying on the thing like this. Obviously, he's now getting up to about four weeks. He's stiff as a board and she's fondling his collar and said, oh, Thomas. She gave his best suit that she had taken of the group. Oh, Tommy, oh, you look so good, Tommy. I mean, he looked terrible. And then she turns to me and said, oh, David, I have his rosary. Do you know what a rosary is? I have his rosary and he has to be like this. And I put his rosary in his hands. I said to Stacy, you go find, with a lady, you go find the lady who's in charge of him because it was a big funeral home. Go find the lady in charge. And so the lady comes with a guy and she says, what's wrong? And I said, my aunt wants his hands folded with the rosary. Here's the rosary. She said, he's completely in rigor mortis. We're going to have to break his arms to get them together. And I said, do whatever you have to do. I'll take them in the back. So I'm down there and my daughter's looking at me and thinking, what the heck is going on? And I'm thinking, it just sounds like, you know, this is going to really drive them nuts. So they get his arms together and she calls me up and I go up and I said, just stay here, Lynn, because I didn't want her to see in case it looked awful. And I go up and he's like this, with his arms folded. And I said, oh, I said, did you have to break their arms? Yes, she said. But she said, I couldn't really break one of them. So I'm a little bit nervous. I said, why are you nervous? Tell people not to touch him because I velcroed him [laughs. What do you mean you velcroed him? [laughs] She said, he said there's velcro on both wrists and the velcro is holding his hands in place and it is possible, she said, that if they disturb it, it's going to snap back to where they were. So I say, "she told me, Lynn, people shouldn't touch him, his arms because they're just set in place, very sensitive". And she was a nurse, right? So she said, "okay, I won't touch". And she was just touching his face and his

shoulders, but not his arms. [laughs] So I take my daughter to the back of the room because showing started at two o'clock. I said, Stacy, this is going to be a shit show. Some of Lynn and Thomas's friends are very touchy feely. When they come in and they start, you're going to see a rosary flying in the air and it's going to be a resurrection [laughs]. So I have told that story many times, including to my sisters and we all laugh, but it's kind of sad, but it is funny.

The story is poignant and funny and makes a tragic situation more bearable with humour. He speaks candidly about how we deal with our own sense of mortality as we get older.

And I think as we get older, we're trying to deal with our own pending death. And when I was maybe younger, I would avoid the topic of death. Now, because we have so many who've dropped dead around and are our friends and things. Now, every, my sister calls every week, both of them call. Well, do you know who's in the nursing home? We have a talk about what happened, how many people got this surgery, how many people have knee surgery, how many people have hip surgery. It's just continuous. And I do call my older sister, my sister of death. So when she calls me, I'll say, "how are you my sister of death? I have no one to report today." It's almost like weekly, someone dying. Remember, she's 81 and I'm 76. So it's to be expected. It makes sense.

Sharing stories is part of his interaction with his sisters, but as he shares it is not about the story itself.

For me, with my sisters, as we've grown older and share and share and share, I know they have an expectation that when we meet, I'm going to entertain them with a story. My goodness. And I know that they're going to refute. And Anne will say, you're embellishing that. And I am. I'm sure I am. Because sometimes the story changes a little. But what it does, it's not so much about the story. It's about the time that we spend together and laugh with each other. It's that making connections and seeing their reaction. And my brother-in-law, who's kind of quiet and doesn't say much, will say, oh my God, I remember that. And he'll start roaring his head off. And we'll all say, what the hell's wrong with you? You're acting funny. But I think it's because he's recalling.

The stories are important, but it is more about what they represent and the engagement that they enable. The social connectedness experienced in telling stories is greater than the different stories shared.

It's About Life

The impact of storytelling is one that David hopes to be a lasting one.

And I hope that my grandchildren, when I'm gone, they will remember my stories. Because I can remember my father's stories. And I can remember my mother saying, don't tell them that, if they were a little bit off... And so stories really bring us together. And after we're gone, it's that that we have the memory of.

I commented that that was the legacy we leave behind.

Yeah. That's the legacy. All that other crap. They're not going to remember that I gave them \$20,000. Well, maybe on occasion, but they'll remember that story.

I added that they will remember the story of his uncle's funeral.

Uncle Thomas's Velcro! [laughs] Yeah. And I would bet that many of those teachers and pre-service teachers in the course that I taught them on math will remember the stories of that art project. And how they integrate it.

When we spoke about the purpose of this study, David remarked that

It's really about life, isn't it? What is life all about?

He later commented again:

You're really exploring what it means to be human.

And this resonated deeply with me. Our stories are what make us human and are what our lives are about. They are what we leave behind.

Listening to these four storytellers was as enriching and interesting as what I had hoped for. They shared their humour, history, vulnerability, and insight. Their stories ranged in diversity and perspective, but my experience was a similar one. With each storyteller, I felt as though I was visiting with them, instead of acting as a researcher. I believe that this gave authenticity to the process. I am left feeling privileged to have listened to their voices and become familiar with their lives, even for a short time.

This chapter focused on the conversations held with each of the storytellers. In the next chapter, I explore the themes in the conversations and consider some common threads between these unique and diverse stories.

Chapter 5: Themes in the Conversations

In this chapter, I discuss themes that resonated through the conversations with the storytellers. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of storytelling for older adults, what stories are told, who is listening, where storytelling happens, and to explore challenges in the process. This study has been conducted using storytelling methodology. Considering this methodology, it stands to reason that “at its heart, research is storytelling” and as the researcher and listener, “I reflect upon those stories and interpret them, and then I too become a storyteller as I share these stories, along with my own experiences and ideas, with different audiences” (Christensen, 2012, p. 232). The main research question asks what stories older adults tell to convey their culture to others. For older adults, how important is storytelling? What is the importance of storytelling in social connectedness? Where does storytelling happen and who listens? What is the intent in storytelling? To explore these questions, I have looked at the following themes – stories as learning opportunities; stories as social connectedness; stories as sharing lived experiences; stories as entertainment; and stories about meaningful things.

Stories As Learning Opportunities

Stories have served as a traditional teaching device and encourage personal reflection (Schutz & Richards, 1997). Storytelling can help people to learn a value or moral. Evie notes that apart from funny stories, she shares stories that “*make a point.*” Aila spoke of how “*life is about learning. It’s when you stop learning, that’s when you die, I think... we all have a purpose. And to the day we die, you know, there’s a reason we’re still here. Either we need to learn or we need to teach.*” Evie talks about stories as inviting teachable moments, where “*the stories only come when an incident prompts them.*” She continues to say that “*I am a great believer that we all learn through stories.*” Similarly, Matt believes that “*stories are an educational opportunity. So, if it’s an educational opportunity, there’s something to learn from it... in most stories, there is an opportunity to learn something.*” He also notes that “*we need to have an appreciation for our older folks, because it’s not just wisdom they’re handing down. They’re handing down a lot of their techniques and a lot of the things that they knew. Even though we don’t use those things anymore, to know they were smart enough and wise enough to develop these things that brought us to where we are today.*”

In this way, sharing stories can be a learning opportunity to discover and explore where we come from and what brought us to this point. By sharing stories, we can ask questions as Matt does - *“where did they learn that from? Where did they get that from?”* Telling stories can be a form of bottom-up history, sharing the history of events from the perspective of those who have lived them, rather than top-down history from the perspective of leaders and those in power (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011). Matt noted that stories can provide a “historic connection” because schools only teach history from a European perspective. *“So they learn someone else’s history, but they don’t really learn of their own history”*.

By telling stories, we can help others learn about different cultures. As Matt states, *“if we’re not willing to learn about other cultures, then we fall into so many traps. We fall into traps of hatred, bigotry, discrimination, racism. We fall into all these because we don’t know”*. It can also help with bridging a gap between people. In this way, it can clarify assumptions or make the unknown known and help to overcome fear. As Matt points out when you know little or nothing about something, fear can be overwhelming. *“If you don’t know that culture, if you don’t know that people, you’re going to automatically fear them. And unfortunately, our societal or global history is full of stories of people that have gone and done cruel things to Native people... And it’s mostly because they didn’t know and they were afraid”*. Telling stories between people of different cultures can help to broaden our knowledge. Storytelling has the power to disrupt stereotypes that have been created. Once you have heard a person’s story, it is difficult to judge a person by his or her cultural membership, as Lawrence and Paige (2016) argue. Stories can help us to appreciate difference (Dyson & Genishi, 1994). Matt describes how we appreciate a rainbow for all its different colours. *“A rainbow wouldn’t be so pretty if it was just one colour. But because it has all those colours in it, that’s what makes it beautiful. Well, guess what? That’s what makes our world so beautiful because we have all these different cultures in it”*.

Through sharing perspectives, people can hear another’s point of view and see through their lens. This offers a learning opportunity to expand our own thinking. Aila speaks of *“trying to get people to see things from a different angle”* and *“exploring their opinions”*. She states that *“you have to keep learning. And I mean, I think everybody has something to teach you. Everybody does”*. For Aila, it is important to *“hear another side. Maybe they won’t agree with*

you at that moment, but they'll walk away and rethink, or they'll pay attention to something that's on the news".

Sometimes the impact of the story is not immediately clear. Evie considers that the impact of a story may take some time. *"I don't think it has a great impact on people at the time. I think it has an incremental impact. Little by little they know what to expect... and not even know where it's coming from but it's there"*. David noted that sometimes we need to repeat stories. *"We take for granted that what we tell people, they've decoded and put in memory. And that's kind of unrealistic"*. Matt points out that the impact of storytelling will differ from person to person. *"What you get out of it is going to vary... some people might get one thing out of it... the majority of them are going to be different from one another"*. He adds that he hopes that people are *"able to see the same things I've seen in it... from my point of view, my lens... they'll probably put their own spin on it... but at the same time, I would hope that that's what they would get out of it, that's what would impact them the most"*.

Storytelling is also used in formal teaching and learning situations at work to share experiences and lessons learnt. Matt refers to the story about the racism incident that he shared with the little girls through his work *"because I do a lot of things with employment, equity and diversity"*. David shares, *"and then there are stories, and they are informal in a way, but they can be stories that you either tell teachers or pre-service teachers. And that has probably been my most important stories I've been telling"*. He goes on to explain that it is not only about imparting content knowledge, *"but to understand how we as humans have to understand where we're all coming from"*. Understanding the narrative and contextual dimensions of people can lead to new and different insights, more compassionate judgement, and the creation of shared knowledge and shared meanings, all of which can inform professional practice (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

The learning opportunities presented with stories are reciprocal in the context of the storytellers. An intergenerational gap exists and becomes more apparent when engaging with younger people. Aila notes that listening to stories helps keep up to date. *"And I think too, that's very important as you age, because it just focuses attention on your age when you're not up to date"*. Evie comments that *"you know if the children make a point which completely escapes us*

because we're so out of touch, we listen". Through telling and listening to stories and engaging, it can help fill that intergenerational gap.

Older adults have a great deal of knowledge, wisdom, and skills to share, from their experience and what they have learnt through their lives. They can share lessons from a place of life experience and reflection. As an example, Aila points out that "*when you think of buying a house, you don't think of going to a senior. And you should. You should*". Her experience with property management could help someone navigate the process and look out for pitfalls.

Stories As Social Connectedness

In all the stories shared, there is a listener's mention or implied presence. Stories are told *to* someone. For our storytellers, these include family members, friends, people at work including colleagues and students, and community members. This can be viewed as storytelling as a means of social connectedness. Social connectedness can be defined as the positive perception of the extent to which one has feeling of interpersonal connection and close, meaningful, and constructive relationships (Ottoni et al., 2022).

David speaks to his sisters on the phone every week as a way of staying in touch and keeping up to date about people they know. However, using the phone as a means of connecting and social contact does not appeal to most of the storytellers. Matt emphasized "*Never over the phone, no*" and this aligned with Aila's response *that* sharing stories "*definitely would not be on the phone. Never on the phone, I would think*". Connecting with others on the phone was seen as a necessity when someone is far away. As Matt mentioned, "*So, I have no choice but to sit down and have a long conversation with them*". Evie mentions writing letters to her brother who is in another country "*four or five times a year. You know around birthdays and death dates and stuff*". Although speaking on the phone and writing letters can be used to storytelling, a strong preference was expressed by all storytellers for telling stories and sharing experiences in person. In-person interactions allowed them to be in the other person's presence, see their expressions, and experience more engaging interaction (Yuan et al., 2016). Aila notes that she likes to see how people react to her stories. "*I get enjoyment out of a story when you're watching people's reactions*".

All the storytellers mentioned an intergenerational connection where stories are told to younger people. Whether younger family members or younger people in a work situation, such as the pre-service teachers that David referenced, connectedness with younger people came through in each conversation. Evie states that *“the kids are there. The kids are always in it. It’s generational. And that’s a very Irish thing to have a generational family gathering”*. Intergenerational stories get passed down from one generation to the next and can serve as education about personal and historical events, the transmission of values, building relationships, and expression of generativity (Estey, 2024).

Family is not the only social connection discussed. For example, Evie noted that the book club plays a big role in her social life. She had started it to not feel lonely when she moved to Halifax. In this space, she feels safe to share her experiences and stories with other older women, even though they are a diverse group. They differ in marital status and ethnicity. The discussion of the book enables the group to talk about other issues and how these relate to them.

Storytelling is not just about the story but is also about the connection and relationship. David highlights that *“it’s not so much about the story. It’s about the time that we spend together and laugh with each other”*. There is space for sharing opinions and building social skills, such as gauging feedback and building confidence.

Stories of connectedness can be about people who have died. As an older adult, there seems to be a greater awareness of one’s mortality. Aila says that *“if you’re going to have health problems, it’s going to hit you at 80. And I think if you’re losing friends, that’s probably going to happen around 80”*. There is a sense of reality about being an older adult. Evie points out that in her book club there are still women who are married *“which is surprising for our age actually”*. David mentioned how he would talk to his sisters about who had died. *“We would talk about all the people we know who’ve gone away, right? And I think as we get older, we’re trying to deal with our own pending death... It’s almost weekly, someone dying. Remember, she’s 81 and I’m 76. So, it’s to be expected. It makes sense”*. Along with the noted awareness of mortality, sharing stories about those who have died helps us to remember them. As I reflect on this, it is also about keeping the connections alive, even though the person has passed away. I wonder about how that form of reminiscence plays a role in our sense of social connectedness and belonging.

Working through the conversations, I have reflected on the importance of connectedness and relationships. This impact ripples outward. Through social connections, we feel belonging. We experience value and worthiness, within ourselves, others and in a spiritual sense. We engage in activities such as book club, in Evie's case, or meeting friends for coffee, as Matt noted. We can teach others and learn from them. Through social engagement, we become more motivated to learn more, connect more, do more. The World Health Organization report (2015) states that the maintenance of relationships is strongly interconnected with, and can have an impact on, all other abilities related to healthy ageing.

Loneliness lives on the other side of the social connectedness spectrum. Aila raised a crucial point when she spoke about how we all need someone to listen to our stories. Without a listener, loneliness can grow. *"I think people can get very lonely. You know, their partner's gone, and their friends are starting to go"*. She remarks later in our conversation that *"I think that that's a very lonely feeling to have a story and you have nobody to tell it to. And everybody's so busy so you know... I think that would really increase the loneliness if you have stories to tell and nobody to listen to"*. The role of social contact and connection is invaluable. In considering the role of social connectedness in storytelling, it is necessary to reflect on the impact of the absence of social support and connections. Who do we then voice our stories to? Who do we reminisce about and with?

Stories As Sharing Lived Experiences

As Pasupathi (2001, p. 651) states, "we live our lives immersed in talk, providing others with stories of what happens to us and ideas about what we think our experiences mean". Telling others a story about your lived experience offers understanding and insight to what we have gone through. Aila explains that *"I think stories are good for giving examples. So if you're trying to get a point across, you can tell a story as an example of that... And I think it makes it more meaningful if you can say, you know, well, I did this, and when I did this, this happened"*. Stories first arise in the context of relationships with others, and we share how we interpret our experiences with them (Dyson & Genishi, 1994).

Sharing lived experiences is a way to help family members to get to know one another. Storytelling is a tool for constructing shared identities (Sunwolf & Frey, 2001). Family members are an example of this. Evie shares *"I certainly tell stories about my family members, and I tell*

stories about my late husband who died twenty years ago". It must be noted that in sharing our experiences, we tell stories based on our memories of an experience, selectively choosing what parts to tell and what parts to leave out (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). This could depend on the context of who is listening, as David remarks when sharing stories with his granddaughter about his son - "*And I tell her only the good stories because I don't want to tell her anything bad because she adores her dad*". Stories provide not only meaning but belonging in our lives. They attach us to others and to our own history by providing a rich tapestry with threads of time and place and characters. The story fabric of our lives contributes to "both our knowing and our being known" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1).

There is a sense of vulnerability in sharing lived experiences and sharing stories 'from the inside' as they have been experienced (Clark & Rossiter, 2008). That vulnerability creates a certain level of intimacy (Estey & Resmi, 2024). These may include sharing emotions and thoughts that are personal. Sharing individual truths and opinions through stories makes those aspects of ourselves open to criticism and interpretation.

Stories can be told about experiences that were achievements or failures and what came from that experience. David shared his professional experiences with new teachers and chose to focus his stories on successes and celebratory events in his own career. Aila shared stories of how she tried and failed at sports and about how she could laugh at herself. This links to the theme of stories as learning opportunities as the stories come with a point to learn or reflect on. Through sharing experiences, lessons are also shared.

Storytelling as sharing lived experience can lead to reflecting on what happened. It can also lead to prompting new action, such as sharing stories again, or asking questions to help learn more. When sharing lived experiences, people tell events to their listeners in ways they hope will engage and interest them, and listeners contribute their own reactions and insights to the retelling (Pasupathi, 2001). Sometimes this can result in us realizing something about the story or from the reaction of the listener. In some of the conversations this happened, such as when I asked Evie about sharing the story of the nutcracker with her children. It also happened with Matt when I asked him about learning from his father about the ingredients in the natural remedies that he makes use of. We spoke about how natural remedies could help the current health care system challenges in Nova Scotia. He commented that "*I never even thought of that because... it gives*

people an opportunity to be healthy or to continue being healthy in spite of the fact that they don't have proper medical care”.

By sharing our experiences, we can leave a legacy. Telling our stories to and of ourselves and others is part of the legacy we leave behind. From our reality, we can craft our legacy (Ingersoll, 2024). As David remarked, *“And I hope that my grandchildren, when I'm gone, they will remember my stories. Because I can remember my father's stories. And I can remember my mother saying, don't tell them that, if they were a little bit off”*. For Matt, sharing experiences about using natural remedies could encourage people to look after the environment and protect the land that we inhabit *“because if we lose all our cherry trees... then we have no remedies period”*. By passing down stories and knowledge from generation to generation, there is a sense of hope that the next generation will gain the value from those (Ingersoll, 2024).

Stories As Entertainment

Stories can make people laugh. The process of telling stories with humour can also give the storyteller a sense of enjoyment and pleasure (Rooney et al., 2016). Humour came through as an important aspect of storytelling. Evie likes sharing jokes. She calls them *“groaners”*. She shares her groaners with family and told me her groaner of the week - *“I played frisbee with my dog yesterday. What a waste of time! I need a flatter dog!”*. Aila noted that the stories she would most like to share with others are funny ones. *“I think probably the most important reason is to laugh. You know, to tell stories that put you in a ridiculous situation”*. These stories are light-hearted and sometimes self-deprecating. The intention can be to elicit a reaction or empathy from listeners by retelling stories in an amusing way (Rooney et al., 2016).

Humour is also found in how the stories are told. When people tell stories for the purpose of entertainment, they may make it more interesting by omitting certain details, embellishing them, or exaggerating events (Dudukovic et al., 2004; Rooney et al., 2016). The goal of accuracy is not as relevant in this context. David mentions how he does this with his sisters. *“I am going to entertain them with a story. My goodness. And I know that they're going to refute. And Catherine will say, “you're embellishing that”. And I am. I'm sure I am”*. This lends a socially and culturally elastic, ever-changing form to stories (Rooney et al., 2016).

Stories can be used in social situations to help facilitate conversation. In this context, stories can be a surface level activity for the purposes of entertainment and sharing information

(Estey & Resmi, 2024). Aila talks about how being a good host is a skill where *“you’ve got to get people interacting and find a way to involve everybody”*. She uses storytelling to help redirect conversation in social situations, especially if someone *“dominates the conversation... I think that’s another way storytelling comes in handy”*. Keeping stories more lighthearted in this context is important to her *“because people need to find a way to relax”* as *“everybody has their own problems”*. When Aila spoke about this, I had not thought about using storytelling in this context. This point brings in both a social awareness and a social strategy to how and when to use stories, as well as what kind of stories to tell.

The experience of listening to some of the stories in these conversations had a lasting impact on me. Laughter and humour had a strong presence in our conversations, either in the telling, or reflecting on the stories told. The storytellers found humour in sharing their stories, and retelling funny moments, or in our engagement and dialogue at the time. Among the serious moments and sad moments, the laughter gave us shared moments of connection and joy.

Stories About Meaningful Things

The artefacts shared with me were cherished objects. These objects hold value to the storyteller. Moreover, the objects provide a story of how that object came to be, or where it came from. It is not merely a thing. Everyone has things they want to keep, things they cannot forget, and things that hold meaning. The storying of things helps us to gain insight into experiences, history and context. Objects help to gain insight into the dynamics of people's lives, and in so doing act as lenses to help *“reflect from multiple angles upon the incredible complexity of personal narrative, especially later in life”* (Randall & Robinson, 2024, p.x).

These objects are on display for both the storyteller and others to see and speak about. The meaningful object is an entry point into stories (Randall, 2024a). David commented that *“many, many stories in our family come from this artefact”*. Evie’s nutcracker holds stories of where it came from, *“my grandmother of course had it and used it. And so it went from my grandmother to me!”*. The nutcracker also holds stories of how it played a role in Christmas traditions, serving as a source of entertainment for her children - *“he had the job of employment at Christmas where he would crack nuts... they would play with it for hours you know, and put their fingers in and try to get their sibling’s finger in”*. Aila has her display of photos where *“I can look at it whenever I want”* because she explains that *“that event was so important to me”*.

The storytellers engage with these meaningful things regularly. In this way, they are cherished. These are objects held with care and have an emotional attachment. Similarly, these are objects kept in the minds of those with them (Baldwin, 2024).

There is a connection because of the story and experience that it represents. Cherished objects are material representations, or manifestations, of our lives and give a tangibility to our experiences and connections (Ingersoll, 2024). This representation can be of what had been achieved, such as Aila's fight with property developers and the garden on the slope, or of family history such as the nutcracker and the family tree. In this way, these meaningful things serve as symbols for memories or as a metaphor for themes central to the person's story (Randall, 2024a).

The resonant themes discussed in this chapter explore what stories are told and offer some insight into importance of storytelling, the role of social connectedness, listening and context in storytelling. In the next chapter, I reflect on the aspects of these themes in more depth. I consider limitations and recommendations and give concluding comments for this thesis.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

There is a future because the stories are not locked up within our individual lives. Instead, they are held as precious elements of communal wisdom. Our stories do not need opportunities for neat resolution; they just need to be told over and over again... heard and pondered before the dancing begins. (Holmes, 2021, p. 111)

Through the storytelling methodology lens, research is not intended to explain in an objective way. It can draw insights but not give an objective, definitive answer. This is an intentional exploration of hearing stories and gaining understanding of the experiences of others so that we can hear and learn things we may not have otherwise known. Narratives and stories are uniquely positioned to provide an inside look into ageing through the ways that older adults make sense of, and communicate, their experiences to themselves and others (de Medeiros & Etter-Lewis, 2019). This includes what stories older adults share, in what context, and with whom.

For me, the value in this research process has been in having storytellers share their wisdom, experience and ways of navigating the world. It has been to understand where intentional space is created in the lives of the storytellers to have their voices heard, and to consider the impact of this. Through this process, stories have been shown to mean sharing experiences, listening, learning, and a contribution to someone else's sense of understanding. And a great deal of laughter.

In the previous chapter, I have explored resonant themes of stories as learning opportunities, social connectedness, sharing lived experiences, entertainment, and stories about meaningful things. In this chapter, I delve deeper into exploring these themes and how they intersect with discourses of ageing and the contribution of older adults in informal learning about culture.

Our Stories Need a Listener

We are hard-wired for storytelling as an activity for organizing experiences, understanding those and exchanging them in the social world (Bruner, 1990). Storytelling comes naturally to us and is one of the most important ways in which we communicate. Through

stories, we communicate with others about “who we are and what we believe; about what we are doing and have done; about our hopes and fears; about what we value and what we don’t” (Edlmann et al., 2019, p. 1). There is an assumption that telling a story implies the existence of a listener or audience, to whom the storyteller is attuned and responsive. Through the stories shared in the conversations with the storytellers, it is evident that social connectedness plays an important role. Different stories are shared with family members, friends, community members, and those in work contexts. All the storytellers spoke about ways in which they were engaged in social activities where stories are shared, from family dinners, spending time with grandchildren, dates with friends, and time with members of a book club. Being involved in informal social activities has been noted as particularly important for older adults and helps with improving feelings of well-being (Huxhold et al., 2013).

Qualitative studies have shown that social relations play a critical role for older adults (Hill et al., 2023; Huxhold et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2022; Zacharakis, 2019). Social engagement and connection with others are vital to successful ageing. Social connectedness and meaningful engagement have positive health benefits (Gutheil & Heyman, 2016). Social contact and social support lead to increased feelings of purpose and value, or usefulness as Lewis (2014) describes. A sense of purpose is the degree to which a person feels that they have goals or direction guiding their actions (Lewis et al., 2022). Having a greater sense of purpose promotes greater life engagement. In turn, feelings of engagement and purpose can positively affect both psychological and physical outcomes for older adults (Hill et al., 2023; Huxhold et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2022). People look for opportunities and challenges that keep them socially connected and engaged (Zacharakis, 2019). Evie looked to start a book club, for example.

Stories as social connectedness can broaden and deepen relationships. Stories can entertain us but can also introduce us to the person telling them. People resonate with experiences or themes shared, such as adventure, resilience, illness, failure, and relationships. These are our shared human experiences and remind us of our fallibility. Aila and David shared experiences of trying and failing. This shared a vulnerability in reflecting on our shortcomings and an ability to reflect on and learn from what we have not done well. This links our lived experiences to learning opportunities, and often to humour, in how the story is relayed.

There are several barriers to participation and involvement. Being isolated and experiencing loneliness was noted in the conversation. As Aila mentioned, having stories to tell and wanting to contribute to community wellbeing, but no one to listen, would seriously increase feelings of loneliness. Although older adults may experience a decrease in the availability of meaningful and socially valued roles, this does not mean that there is a reduction in the need and desire to be valued and useful in their communities. Older adults want to feel as though they are appreciated and have a meaningful role in their community. We all have a need to feel heard and validated. This need may be unmet in some or all relationships and community contexts. When Aila raised this point, I reflected on the need for social contact. Having a support system is not only necessary for managing tasks and being taken care of physically. Social contact plays a much-needed psychological role as well. We need to feel as though someone acknowledges us and our existence. Part of this includes listening to us when we speak. The thought of not being heard, of being disempowered and isolated, is heartbreaking, and yet it is the experience of countless people.

It is important to consider other barriers, such as physical abilities, poor health, poverty, and changing lifestyles, that can all contribute to being isolated and not being heard (Pace & Grenier, 2015). Digital exclusion is another factor to think about. Older adults are less likely to use technology-enabled opportunities than younger people (Seifert et al., 2018; Yuan et al., 2016). Communication is not as multimodal in nature for older adults and is a necessary consideration when thinking about ways of social contact. Internet use for communication can assist with maintaining contact, but it can also jeopardize communication preferences (Yuan et al., 2016). As much as connecting digitally can help feeling connected to people far away, the digital divide can lead to diminished feelings of inclusion, purpose and value.

Social isolation has been linked with increased negative health risks as well as increased likelihood of illness, injuries, or even hospitalization and death (Cole, 2019; Lewis, 2014). Interestingly, social connectedness is the one area of overlap between traditional and indigenous models of ageing. Moving away from individualism and a focus on physical health, the indigenous approach promotes connectedness; empowerment and resilience, including humour; health and holistic wellness; and ongoing teaching and learning (Baskin & Davey, 2015; Pace & Grenier, 2015). By focusing not only on the physical and psychological aspects of older adults, encouraging

and valuing social engagement and connectedness can promote successful ageing. Connectedness also extends the focus of wellbeing and health from the individual to the community (Pace & Grenier, 2015).

Under the influence of the culture in which we are immersed, we live our lives in ways that try to create the stories we want to be able to tell (Edlmann et al., 2019). Our cultural stories are informed by place and belonging. Our context and history are interwoven into, and through, what we share every day. Similarly, by listening to others, we learn about them through the stories they tell. “The most cherished places in a culture are often not visible to the eye but are rather brought into view the drama of narrative, song, and performance” (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 279). Some of these invisible places are made visible through our stories.

The Value of Laughter

In my time spent with the storytellers, there were many moments of laughter and joking. Some stories shared in our conversations were funny. They were told with intentional humour and with the expectation that I, the listener, would laugh. While this did entertain, and as I continue to engage with the stories they continue to entertain, humour serves a purpose other than to make us laugh.

Humour can help us redirect our focus when we do not want to, or are not ready to, think about something serious. It brings in levity and can moderate the pathos. Research on humour in older adults is extensive and demonstrates its positive impact in successful ageing. Findings show having a sense of humour can have a positive psychological effect (Berk, 2015; Martin, 2006). Humour has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety, help in correcting negative cognitive processes, help in reducing trauma responses and generally improves stress reactions, psychological well-being, and overall health (Lurie & Monahan, 2015). Humour can also help physiologically, such as assisting the central nervous system, cardiovascular and respiratory systems, and muscles (Berk, 2015).

In terms of mental health, humour helps us to reframe situations in ageing in a funny way to deal with it in a more constructive manner (Wanzer et al., 2009). In this way, humour and resilience can go together. If you think about the adage, “if I don’t laugh, I’ll cry”, humour can help with coping. Humour helps with dealing with adversities faced (Baskin & Davey, 2015).

I think back to Evie's groaner jokes and Aila's stories where she laughs at herself and shares stories to make others laugh. I cannot help but think about what we can do in our community that brings about joy and humour. What space do we make for hearing what is funny and appreciating the humour in what we go through? And how much do we appreciate the humour of older adults? Instead of laughing at them, we need to consider laughing with them.

Between The Generations

The role of young people as listeners, as audience, came through strongly through the conversations. The power of social connectedness, particularly intergenerational connectedness, is to enable the sharing of stories. The distinct connection between learning opportunities, social connectedness, and sharing lived experience was emphasized when each storyteller spoke about sharing stories with young people and children. This connection speaks to concepts of learning about one another and learning from each other (Schmidt-Hertha, 2014).

Younger people were mentioned in relation to sharing memories, sharing lessons, and sharing history. In their research, Pace and Grenier (2015) and Baskin and Davey (2015) highlight the importance of passing on traditions and wisdom to younger generations. An intergenerational community comes into existence through sharing the stories of ancestors and ancestors' stories. Stories "connect us, allowing us to be present to and with one another and all things, continuing through generations" (Huber et al., 2013, p. 214). Telling stories gives opportunities to both pass on and preserve culture, language, history, values and community (Lewis, 2014).

Intergenerational relationships were further noted by some of the storytellers as a necessity to keep up to date and avoid seeming older or being confused with what is being spoken about. This highlighted the reciprocal nature of intergenerational engagement. It requires mutual participation, respect, care and reflection (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017). There needs to be an opportunity to share about your own generation and learn about others. Through this reciprocity, there is an equal opportunity to contribute to one another's learning. In addition, through learning about one another, understanding of another generation develops and this increases social cohesion. This can be seen as a form of transformational learning, which is a form of informal learning (Hake, 2014). Moreover, reciprocity also manifests through providing

opportunities to share and be involved in their communities, along with older adults' desire to be involved (Lewis, 2014).

The storytellers share stories not only with one generation but several, including children, teenagers, and adults. The term 'multigenerational' as noted by Watts (2017) may be more relevant in this study. Multigenerational engagement and learning reflect the reality of the storytellers' contexts more accurately. From the point of view of younger people, having these social connections and learning opportunities with older adults can provide them with role models, supportive figures, and sounding boards for decision-making (Hill et al., 2023).

The fast-paced changes in our social and technological world do put into question the value of multigenerational engagement. Rather than teaching younger people what to think, we need to teach them how to think (Lewis, 2014). This implies there must be consideration both of what is shared between generations and the listener's reflexivity to discern how to apply what is heard to their lives today. Teaching people how to think relates to the point raised in some of the conversations about critical thinking and being able to defend an opinion. This extends to what we read and hear on social media. David mentions the need to become more careful about what we read because of misinformation online. He asks how we teach children and ourselves to know what is true and what is not. Aila notes how people accept what they read on social media as fact. *"If I read it and found it interesting, I would source it. I would find out... but know what you're talking about"*. This helps teach others how to think about what they encounter daily.

I wonder about those who do not have multigenerational engagement, for either the older or younger in our community. What gap does this leave? What knowledge, skills and values go unlearnt? More than that, what about those who do not look for the value in this engagement?

Leaving a Legacy

Some of the conversations from how we share our lived experiences centred on the concept of legacy. Sharing stories can be considered an act of leaving a legacy, so that others, including family members and others, may learn through their life experiences (Hausknecht et al., 2019). Moreover, through sharing stories of experience and history, older adults play a significant role in nurturing, guiding, and ensuring the wellbeing of future generations, to leave a legacy (Baskin & Davey, 2015). I agree with Ingersoll (2024) that legacy stories are both about things that matter to us and are the things that matter.

Legacy can mean leaving an impact on future generations. This relates to the theory of generativity, as coined by Erikson (1997). Generativity, defined by Erikson (1997) as the concern of establishing and guiding the next generation, has evolved over time. Redefining the concept, Kim et al. (2017, p. 4) describe this stage of development as “the human experience of contributing to and promoting lives of others and oneself”. Generative actions can be small or grand in scale. This contribution can be in the form of sharing stories, teaching values and knowledge, as well as maintaining and cherishing traditions, whether in families, neighborhoods or communities (Estey, 2024).

The primary motivation for generativity arises out of an awareness of our mortality. There is a definite sense of awareness of mortality that came through in some of the conversations. Evie mentions that some of her book club friends are still married “*which is surprising at our age actually*”. David humorously calls his sister “*my sister of death*” when they catch up on who they know who has died recently. Aila talks about “*losing friends*” around the age of 80.

Being in this life stage can prompt us to want to leave behind a legacy. The storytellers show some of this in continuing family gathering traditions of listening to one another and rhetoric, telling stories to be remembered, or passing along values of the environment and natural remedies. Our cherished objects can also be part of our legacy. Passing down artefacts or sharing objects that hold meaning, holds the promise to be enduring. Generativity in objects elevates them from being just an object to a representation of caring and shared experience (Estey, 2024).

Silencing Barriers

It must be noted that being a role model and a source of support is only possible without barriers preventing voices from being spoken or heard. As highlighted in the conversations in this study, voices and stories of older adults, and of women, and of African Nova Scotians have been silenced or made invisible. By purposefully telling these stories and creating space to share them, from inside their experience, they can be heard and re-told repeatedly. We continue to experience the impact of stifled voices, of fixed authorities who spoke for others, of standards that others have set (Greene, 1994). There is still much to be explored in making the voices at these intersections louder, and at telling them as they have been experienced, rather than how someone decided for them.

Ageism is a barrier mentioned by Aila in her conversation. Ageing has been noted as being something negative. As Randall (2024b, p.16) explains,

the narrative of decline eclipses the portrayals of ageing as a potentially creative endeavour, as an adventure of development and discovery, and, despite the decline that it certainly entails – perhaps in some ways *because* of them – as a pathway to greater insight and wisdom.

The Revera Report (2012) conducted a survey with Canadians from the ages of 18 to 75+ about their attitudes towards ageing and their experience with ageism. The report notes that ageism is the most tolerated form of social prejudice in the country. In the survey, 79% indicated that older generations are less valued by society than younger generations. Further, it highlighted that age discrimination comes primarily from younger people. Ageist attitudes create a gap between the older and younger and that could present challenges in sharing experiences, insight and wisdom. Having a valid understanding of ageing requires relating directly to older adults. This means speaking to them, and more importantly, listening to them (Scheidt, 2015). What is more, stories can be silenced if listeners do not appreciate the diversity of how stories have been crafted and the range of experiences they describe (Dyson & Genishi, 1994).

Another barrier to consider is that of the value and purpose of lifelong learning. For many, lifelong learning is predominantly an ideology of vocationalism. Learning is meant for working harder and faster, and has an individualistic discourse (Merriam & Kim, 2011). Johnston (2003) argues that the move towards individualism in society raises barriers for lifelong learning and calls into question the views of the common good. The emergence of social movements challenges established notions of community and the role of educators in promoting this in society. Focusing on individualist differences may further encourage cultural fragmentation and can risk more xenophobia, racism, and fundamentalism. Non-Western approaches to lifelong learning focus on the communal and informal. Its purpose is to empower a person to be an active member of the community. Merriam and Kim (2011) point out that most Western people neither recognize nor value learning that is part of our daily lives. This can silence or undermine culturally embedded knowledge and the sharing of that in the everyday.

Limitations and Recommendations

The stories offered by the storytellers provided many insights, but these insights cannot speak for those from diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds, or other differences. There is much more to be learnt and heard from others. The storytellers are based in Halifax, and their experiences may be different from those in other areas of the province. Three of the storytellers are retired teachers. This was a surprising coincidence, and it could present a particular lens on how they see the teaching and learning impact of storytelling. Three of the storytellers fit the English/Irish/Scottish culture of Nova Scotia, although one of those storytellers identifies as an immigrant. Their cultural backgrounds and education opportunities could influence their attitudes, beliefs, and engagement (Maulod & Lu, 2020). It was challenging to find immigrants who were fluent in English and who were willing to participate in a study of this nature, and this may need to be a consideration for future research. The stories focused mainly on what I had looked at through the conversation guide. This could have limited what the storytellers focused on and shared.

There were a variety of artefacts shared with me in the study and not all storytellers shared something. This could be seen as a limitation, but I do not view it that way. Sharing artefacts started a conversation between me and the storyteller and stimulated a story. The diversity in the artefacts shared a commonality, in how our things matter to us and are more than just objects. There is meaning found in what we share, both materially and orally. There is more to research into the role that cherished objects play in the stories of older adults and in their lives and legacies.

I would like to share several recommendations following this research. Storytelling in lifelong learning plays a vital role. It creates space for people to share their experiences and to reflect on these. Future research on diverse storytelling practices and learning opportunities can shed light on ways to enhance and encourage this oral tradition further. We can consider the role of storytelling in a generative context. The role of connectedness in storytelling is also important to explore further. The benefits of feeling heard and appreciated add to a sense of belonging and being in a community. The impact of loneliness and social isolation in older adults is essential to understand further, with the growing number of older adults in our community. It could be of

value to consider the role of storytelling in helping those who experience loneliness and isolation, or feelings of invisibility.

Applying storytelling methodology to future research is recommended. Storytelling, as a methodology and a way of knowledge sharing, creates space for taking back ways of knowing in Indigenous and African Nova Scotian culturally embedded knowledge and can create new space for ways of knowing in Eurocentric academy. As a methodology, storytelling is relational and “centres on relationship, reciprocity, and approaching people and places with open ears rather than an open mouth” (Christensen et al., 2018, p. 173). Through sharing stories, there is a way to understand power imbalances in academia, but also in narrative, discursive and material spaces which can activate healing. It is important to examine stories for oppressive ideologies as they are told through specific lenses. It is critical to continue to look for ways to “re-educate mainstream settler colonial audiences by promoting alternative stories to those that have dominated colonial pasts and presents” (Christensen et al., 2018, p. 175).

What is more, we need to continue to explore the role of storytelling on lifelong learning praxis. As Chapman (2011) says, “we need to get out more, invite more novel theories home for dinner, bring them into our classes and, yes, challenge ourselves and our students out of the comfort of the known and the easily understood” (p. 399). Lifelong learning educators can encourage learners to build their own knowledge by observing and contemplating their own experiences in their lives through stories instead of only focusing on hypothesis testing or question formulation (Merriam & Kim, 2011).

Intentionality in informal learning is largely absent, and we are only conscious of having learnt at all through reflection (Findsen & Formosa, 2011). Lifelong learning educators can encourage and focus on intentional informal learning by looking further into what is shared and learnt, in what contexts, and by whom. The role of older adults in this process needs to be explored further. Lifelong learning in older adults deserves more attention in active ageing policies (Narushima et al., 2018b). Nonformal and informal learning matter more to older adults (Findsen & Formosa, 2011), and there are plenty of learning opportunities for older adults through connectedness with other people and organizations that can be looked at. There is a need for policies to include learning opportunities for older adults that are not only formal. Government focus has largely been on schooling and formal education, and they rely on non-

governmental organizations to provide learning services for older adults (Findsen & Formosa, 2011). Older adults are excluded from statistics in adult learning, as they are assumed to be post-work generation (Narushima et al., 2018b) This must be reconsidered to prioritize and fund lifelong learning opportunities connected with schooling and career development.

Conclusion

By synthesizing research and storytelling, Christensen et al. (2018) posit that it commits us to the belief that people's stories can direct listeners to transformative knowledge. Storytelling methodology challenges more conventional approaches to research and does not ask of a researcher to choose a side. It is an approach to research that is relational, reciprocal, and respectful. I hope that this exploration adds to the conversation on the acknowledging and valuing the role that older adults play in how we learn informally, how their stories advance our knowledge and understanding of the world in which we live, and how their shared experiences help to advance our relationships and sense of citizenship.

Understanding the process of ageing and role of older adults in our community can only be acquired through uncovering their experiences, and the meaning they give these, from them directly. When these stories are told, we get to know where they are at. We can also learn more about ourselves in the process, as they help us understand and learn more about our own experiences and how those connect. Storytelling is education in its most holistic form, honouring the knowledge of previous generations (Huber et al., 2013).

It can be argued, however, that if those listening to the stories of older adults do so with an ageist or racist or sexist filter, the impact and value of the stories will be diminished and the transformative direction lost. When biased filters are removed, stories, and myths, and diaries, and histories, give shape and expression to what would otherwise be untold about lives. Explicitly considering inequality and the impact of historical and structural factors on a range of marginalized older adults is non-negotiable and creates space for real listening. Voices set free to speak to others and among others, resonating with the sense of seeking, struggling to name, striving to find language for what was suppressed and repressed over the years (Greene, 1994). But if no one is listening, then stories are silenced, and people become invisible, along with their voices. The invisibility dissipates when there is someone to listen. However, as Greene (1994) states, it is not just a matter of seeing now, or of breaking through the conditions that impose

invisibility. It is a matter of helping change practices and doing something to mend the ragged edges. What practices do we need to change to mend the ragged edges of valuing and honouring the stories of older adults in our community?

Once a story is told it cannot be taken back. It is never-ending although it changes (Huber et al., 2013). “Sentences end with full stops. Stories do not.” (Rosen, 1985, p. 20). We story ourselves into being, as we are unwilling to dissolve into darkness. “It is in these ways that we plant our stories in the lives of future generations: we remind them through our stories and the visible remains of the traces our lives leave behind” (Huber et al., 2013. p. 214). It is our stories that connect us and make us human.

I leave this study with a renewed appreciation for the power of story. I also hold a deep appreciation for the storytellers, for their voices and their contributions to our own insights. Their sense of humour and openness to share and engage with me has made a lasting impression and I will carry their stories with me. Their stories have made me reflect on stories planted in my life and the traces that have been left in my journey. I would like to leave you with this statement from King (2008) about the conversations and stories shared in this research:

But help yourself to one if you like. It's yours. Do with it what you will. Cry over it. Get angry. Forget it. But don't say in years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now. (p. 29)

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Appendix A

Older Adults and Storytelling – a lifelong learning exploration

Older adults needed for a research study!

I, Xandie Thompson, am a graduate student in the Master of Education program at Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. I am conducting research on stories that older adults tell as part of our community's informal learning. I would like to have conversations with four to six older adults about the stories they tell, who they tell them to and where, and why they tell stories.

Who can participate?

- Older adults who are between 65 and 85 years old
- Currently living within Halifax Regional Municipality.
- Be, or self-identify as being, of African Nova Scotian descent, or Indigenous descent, or a Canadian settler, or be from an immigrant family and have lived in Canada for five years or more.

What would taking part involve?

- Taking part will involve face to face conversations with me about experiences of telling stories that are told by older adults.
- We will likely need at least two conversations to explore the role of storytelling, lasting between 45 minutes to 1½ hours.
- The conversation will take place at the storyteller's home residence or at a local branch of the Halifax Public Library.

If you would be interested in taking part in this study, please contact me directly.

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Appendix B

Research for a Master in Arts in Education Thesis

Older Adults and Storytelling: a lifelong learning exploration

Contact information for researcher:

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INFORMATION ON THE STUDY

What is the study about?

Older Adults and Storytelling: a lifelong learning exploration focuses on the stories that older adults tell and to explore what these stories entail, the intention of sharing these stories, where they are told and to whom. By exploring these stories, the purpose is to get a better understanding of how knowledge is shared and passed down to others in our community.

Who can take part in this study?

To take part you must be between 65 and 85 years old, and you must be, or self-identify as being, of African Nova Scotian descent, or Indigenous descent or a Canadian settler, or be from an immigrant family and you have lived in Canada for five years or more.

What will you be asked to do?

You will have individual conversations with me about storytelling. I will meet with you to introduce the study and discuss questions and any concerns with you. Following that introductory meeting, we will meet between two and three times to talk about stories and storytelling. I will share a conversation guide with you so that you can think about what we will speak about, and you can even note down some thoughts if you choose to. Each conversation will be between 45 minutes and an hour and a half. The conversation will be in English. The purpose of these conversations is to hear about your stories and views about what it means to tell stories as an older adult. I will ask you some questions related to the topic. In our conversation, I will ask you to share an object with me that has a story you would like to share. This could be any object that you choose. With your consent, I will take a photograph of this object as part of the study.

The conversations will be held at your home or in a local branch of the Halifax Public Library.

The conversations will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. All transcribed conversations will be verified with you for accuracy, and you can make any amendments. If you wish, I will remain in contact with you throughout the process and address any questions or concerns.

How will I protect your confidentiality?

I will ensure that your name and other identifying information will not be used in my thesis made publicly available based on this research, unless you choose to make this information known. I take the responsibility of protecting the privacy of all storytellers in my research seriously, which is why you will be asked to give consent to take part in this study. The audio recordings and any written documents from this study will be kept strictly confidential. Hard copies will be kept in a locked file in my place of residence, and all electronic information will be coded to remove any potential identifiers and secured using a password protected file on my computer.

What if you would like to review your transcript?

I will verify the transcript of our conversations with you. The transcript will be sent electronically, or by hard copy if you choose, and you will have one week to review it. I will remind you after 3 days to check the transcript. If I do not hear back from you, I will assume that you are fine with the transcript as it is.

What if you would like to withdraw from the study?

Participation in this research is voluntary. We may need to have several conversations to explore your thoughts on storytelling as an older adult. We will talk about your thoughts and experiences on storytelling. You may pass on any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. You are not required to answer all of the questions. At any time, you may let me know that you would like to stop the interview and take a break, reschedule or you may choose to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to withdraw completely from the study, you can email, phone or verbally state to me that you withdraw. Any of your stories and information that has been gathered will be deleted. There is no penalty for stopping participation. You can withdraw from this study up

until September 1, 2024, when I expect to be submitting my thesis.

What are the risks of participating?

The risks involved in this research are minimal. The conversations may become physically tiring. If you feel uncomfortable or tired from the conversation, you can say that you would like to stop the conversation. You might feel some discomfort or become upset sharing stories about your life, but you will decide what information or stories you provide in the conversation.

What are the benefits of participating?

There are no direct benefits to taking part in this study, however, taking part in the conversations will give an opportunity for you to express and discuss your thoughts and experiences that will contribute to our understanding and knowledge of the role of storytelling for older adults in our community.

How will this research be used? The research findings may be used in community presentations, academic papers and conferences. The results of my research, of which the conversation is one part, will be published in a thesis and available through the Mount Saint Vincent University library.

Where can you get more information? If you have any questions or would like further information with respect to this study, you may contact me, Xandie Thompson, at 902-xxx-xxxx or by email at xandie.thompson@msvu.ca. You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Susan Brigham who can be reached at 902-457-6733 or by email at susan.brigham@msvu.ca

or the Mount Saint Vincent University's Research Office at 902-457- 6350 or by email at ethics@msvu.ca.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research.

Please find the consent script that I will go through with you on the next page.

Appendix C

Consent script for Storytellers taking part in the Study: Older Adults and Storytelling: a lifelong learning exploration.

I have discussed the study's information with the researcher and understand what it is about and the risks and benefits to taking part. I understand that by giving oral consent, I agree to take part in this research study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw my involvement during the study up until October 1, 2024. I have had enough time to think about the research study and have asked questions about it. I agree to be audio recorded. I understand that my oral consent will be audio recorded and noted by the researcher.

I understand that the transcription of the conversations will be made available to me to review upon request, and I have provided my email address for this. I understand that I can amend the transcription within the week that it is sent to me by the researcher.

I agree to have the artefact that I have shared photographed.

Appendix D

Conversation guide

- Tell me about this (name of artefact) – what is its story?
- Tell me about a favourite story of yours that you like to tell, perhaps to your grandchild or your family
 - What do you like most about it?
- Tell me what your stories are about – what kind of stories do you tell?
- What stories would you most like to share with others, and why?
- Where are you when you tell stories – for example, at home, at a social gathering, on the phone?
- When you tell stories to others, who are you telling these to? Who is listening to your stories?
- When you tell a story, what impact do you think your story could have on the people who are listening to it?
- What do you think can people learn by listening to stories?
- What impact does storytelling and sharing stories have on our relationships with others?