what it means to live with the language. To do so, Alayna made the decision, much like her father did with her when she was young, to bring her children with her to the many presentations she was now giving all across the country. Just in a year's time that stories were shared for this project, Kyyalyn and Waaruxti traveled with Alayna to presentations and family visits in Columbus, Ohio (visiting and staying with Timothy and Sarah San Pedro); Akwesasne First Nation Reserve, Quebec, Canada; Southampton, New York; Green Bay, Wisconsin; East Lansing, Michigan; Bloomington, Indiana; Marietta, Georgia; Omaha, Nebraska; Twin Cities, Minnesota; multiple cities in New Zealand; Spokane, Washington (visiting and staying with Tara Dowd's family); Seattle, Washington; Portland, Oregon; San Marcos, California; Bozeman, Montana; Tucson, Arizona; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Denver, Colorado; Pine Ridge, North Dakota; and Maskwacis, Alberta, Canada.

Alayna remembers that when she was young, her father often took her with him traveling to presentations. He instilled in her how important it was to visit family, to stop in, to stay in their homes, and to always make an effort to see them when traveling. The only time they stayed in a hotel and not with family and friends during their travels was their trip to Nebraska—and even then, her auntie had a voucher to pay for their hotel.

Alayna always said that it wasn't until Kyyalyn was born that she really felt that responsibility to teach and learn in public spaces. John would say to her when she got nervous and couldn't speak, "Remember, Kyyalyn's watching you." When she heard him say this, she knew that she had a different level of responsibility; she wasn't just doing this for herself, she was doing this for her children and for their future. Her courage to speak comes from her hope that they learn they have a responsibility to share their knowledge and that, someday, they will also be called upon to share it.

LANGUAGE POST-ITS

When Alayna first decided to reclaim her Lakȟóta language, she knew that she had so much to learn. She took steps to surround herself with language. At first, she would take pictures of Kyyalyn doing activities like brushing her teeth or brushing her hair. She would then print the pictures onto flashcards and put the Lakȟóta action phrases on the card as well. She added both the first- and third-person forms of the language. She taped colorful sheets of paper, each having a Lakȟóta letter on it, so that Kyyalyn could learn her Lakȟóta alphabet. Doing this made it easier for Alayna and Kyyalyn to learn the language and remember conjugations.

Printing pictures on the flashcards got very expensive, because she had to change the color ink cartridges often as they continued to expand their language practices. So she turned to post-it notes and posted the Lakȟóta language all around the house. On the desk [akáŋwowapi]. On the laptop

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

[šiyútakaŋ]. On a chair [oákaŋke]. Alayna even translated items hung on the wall. For instance, above her coffeepot, it says, "Tȟóéyaš . . . Wakȟáliyapi yatkáŋ pe!," which translates to "Before you do anything, drink coffee!" Soon after Alayna began this, Kyyalyn started creating the translation post-it notes and posting them all over the house. They are now surrounded by the language through these post-its. When Kyyalyn's neighborhood friends come over, they ask, "What are all these post-its? How do you say that word?" Kyyalyn spends the time to teach her friends what the post-its mean as well as why they placed the notes throughout their house. She's proud to share her language with others, and that's something Alayna is hoping is just a normal practice for Kyyalyn to do.

Alayna thought about others beyond just her home; she thought about her community and how she might be able to engage in this language learning with them. She turned to Facebook to create a number of videos that taught others the language.

She recorded Kyyalyn repeating verb phrases in Lakȟóta and overlaid print text to show the translation and the spelling of the words. Some question and response example phrases are:

Alayna: Táku eníčiyapi he? (What do you they call you?)
Kyyalyn: Kyyalyn emáčiyapi. (They call me Kyyalyn.)
Alayna: Nilákhota he? (Are you Lakȟóta?)
Kyyalyn: Malákhota! (I'm Lakȟóta!)
Alayna: Ništíma he? (Are you sleeping?)
Kyyalyn: Hán, miśtíma. (Yes, I'm sleeping.)
Alayna: Kíkta ye čhúnkši! (Wake up daughter!) Yékta he? (Are you up?)
Kyyalyn: Hán, wékta wékta! (Yes, I'm up, I'm up!)

During these call-and-response videos, Kyyalyn would act out the action phrases, such as getting out of bed, brushing her teeth, washing her hands, and putting on her jacket. This gave both Alayna and Kyyalyn a greater sense of purpose and was an activity they both enjoyed doing together. Although Alayna knew her language skills were at the very beginning stages of development, she thought that sharing and teaching others would also help her to retain her language. This was hard work for Alayna, and things didn't really start to click until she was teaching the language to others both online and in the community. Her Facebook page got some traction. She was even interviewed for a documentary titled "Rising Voices," which detailed the ways she was learning the language and passing that knowledge on to her children and to others in the community who are also wanting to reclaim their language (see 45:46–46:43 at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wr-jackHWCw&t=2755s).

Now that Alayna is teaching the language and understanding the nuances of language, she thinks back to her school experiences, particularly in her English class.

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

"I don't even remember how I passed English because I didn't remember what adjectives were, or pronouns, or anything until I started teaching the Lakȟóta language," she says.

All of this language learning in the home has pushed Kyyalyn's development beyond most of the other kids in the language nest. The teachers told Alayna that Kyyalyn is the most advanced language learner in the school. But this has posed a bit of a problem in Alayna's mind. She's worried that Kyyalyn isn't being pushed like she should be. She wonders what more they can do to continue her language development and even asked the teachers, "Is there more homework you guys have because I want to make sure we are staying on track?" She feels like there's even more pressure to aid in Kyyalyn's language development because she was moving faster than the learning pace in her school.

"I have so much going on," Alayna says, "that I feel like it [language learning] is a chore. But I know it's a good chore because now the language is back in our own house. It's just that, in my mind, I'll never be good enough or we won't be good enough unless we're speaking fluently in our home every single day. We just have to try to figure out ways to help them get better."

Throughout it all, Alayna reminds Kyyalyn, as she continues her schooling, that the whole point of knowing who they are, the whole point of knowing their traditions and being rooted in their culture, is that no one can take that away from them wherever they go.

It's something that is in them always already.

WHITE BUFFALO CALF WOMAN

Alayna tells her children that there is so much to learn from their people and from the land. To unlock their knowledges, though, she urges them to listen to the stories told to them whenever and wherever those stories are offered. And if they have questions about their histories, they should always feel free to ask, because those stories are waiting to be told; sometimes a question creates the space for stories to reveal themselves.

During a road trip with the entire family in the car, traveling to a presentation Alayna was to give, Waaruxti and Kyyalyn were curious about the story of White Buffalo Calf Woman, so they asked. This is a story Alayna has told a number of times to them; they know that the White Buffalo Calf Woman brought the pipe to their people. This time, though, Alayna began the story with a question: "You know this story, but do you know why she brought the pipe to us?"

"Because our people were hurting?" Kyyalyn said.

"Yes," Alayna said, then continued the story to dig deeper into the why, "but she didn't show up just that one time. She showed up a few times."

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

Alayna could tell that they were listening deeply, absorbing the knowledges held within the story, continuing to gain the pride and honor of who they are and the strong family lineage from which they come. It was important that she included an additional point to her telling of this story. She knew her kids were ready to hear it.

"Listen," Alayna began. "They don't teach this kind of stuff in school because they don't want to portray the United States as having ever done anything bad. These stories are important and you need to always know that, even though they may not be taught in school, it's a part of our lives. It's our story."

Alayna then connects to a resistance, an action that her children might enact when in school.

"So you know when the kids stand up and do the Pledge of Allegiance?" she asks, and both Waaruxti and Kyyalyn nod their heads. "Well, that's not something you have to do. We're from a completely different nation, and when they honor that flag, sometimes they don't really know what they're honoring. I'm not telling you not to do it; I'm just saying that you have a choice. A lot of our people were massacred at the hands of the United States government. You know the term 'R3DKIN'?"[2]

Again, they both nod their heads.

"The government would pay white people to murder us. They'd rip off our scalps and be left for dead with red, bloody skin and scalp. They did this to prove that they murdered a Native American so they could collect their earnings. That's why we don't like that word. So you don't have to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance because, for some, honoring that flag means erasing the hurt and damage done to our people. And if you get in any trouble for this, you tell us right away. We'll talk with the school."

WAARUXTI AND SCHOOL

Waaruxti is a tactile learner; he learns by touching things, manipulating objects, moving around to try and figure out what's going on. He's always been so curious, making sense of how he interacts with his surroundings. This type of learning has not meshed well with any schooling behavior norms. When Waaruxti came home from school, he would share with Alayna that his feelings were hurt in one way or another. Alayna talked with his teachers about what was going on in the classroom. They would mention that he's real antsy, constantly in motion, singing songs when he shouldn't be, not behaving the way a child should in schooling settings.

She remembers one instance where she was waiting to pick him up after school. Kyyalyn was first to exit the school. Under normal circumstances, Waaruxti would be walking side by side with his sister, but on this day, she came out without him. Alayna asked where Waaruxti was. Kyyalyn told Alayna that his teachers were making him walk in a line with other students

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

who were also in trouble, his hands behind his back. When Alayna came into the school and saw this, she was furious.

She said to the teacher, “Why the fuck is he walking in a line! This has nothing to do with what he has to do outside of school. This isn’t how we act in society. This is fucking stupid.”

She remembers how shocked the teacher was as she tried to explain to Alayna why he was walking in a single file line. Their reasoning was that he was causing a disturbance in class because he would stand up and fidget while doing his work, which they felt was inappropriate and disruptive behavior. Walking in line, obediently, they felt, would correct this behavior.

“He was getting blamed for being wild,” Alayna said. “And he wasn’t the only one.”

Alayna was too angry in that moment to teach this teacher about the many trails that Native people have had to walk when forcibly being removed from their lands and located to new ones. She felt that his teachers ought to know what this action meant to Native communities; in addition, she had hoped that schooling would be a place and space for Waaruxti to explore, to move, to learn through actions, and not a place of obedience training.

Alayna would try to tell him all the time that he needed to listen to his teachers. But what hurt Alayna were the stories that he would tell her, stories of his teachers restricting his movement or punishing him for not behaving in a quiet and still way as expected by Western norms of schooling. At home, when he’s getting “wild,” Alayna asks him to dance or sing a song or move around to release his energy, which he has so much of. She feels that motion and movement are important to his learning experience, but it’s not something that the school sees as appropriate behavior. Maybe he’s just not ready for school just yet, she thought. Or maybe, she continues her thought, the school isn’t ready for them.

“It’s a harmful space,” Alayna said. “I just wish we could think more about how we can create spaces for students to understand what it means to be themselves and find places that reactivate the best in who they are.”

At home and in the community, her children act very differently. Kyyalyn loves to be helpful, aiding where she’s needed. She can sit for long periods of time, deeply immersed in the imaginative world created in whatever book she’s reading at the time. This type of behavior more closely parallels behavioral norms in schools—quiet, still, engaged through listening. Waaruxti is a bit different in that way. He walks around, jokes with people, but if something catches his attention, he’ll pay close attention. In thinking about their difference in learning, Alayna asks, “How am I taking the things that are important to them and working around that? How do I help them achieve their own standards that they set for themselves?”

These are questions that have been forever ongoing for Alayna, questions that she pondered during the Standing Rock movement and her work with the school there: “When trying to figure out what Mní Wičhóni Nakíčižiŋ

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

Owáyawa, the school created in the movement space, should be, we had to work through our Western mindsets of what schooling was and we had to unlearn what a schooling structure should be when it's rooted in learning our culture and language."

Since then, she's been working with so many schools, learning about the hope and promise in schools that are working to center language and culture and values from tribal communities and from project based learning models, schools like the following that Alayna lists from memory:

- Keres Children's Learning Center (New Mexico)
- Akwesasne Freedom School (Canada)
- Indian Community School of Milwaukee
- Health Leadership Academy of Albuquerque
- Avalon (project-based school in Minnesota)
- Bdote Learning Center (Minnesota)
- Six Nations (New Mexico)
- Native American Community Academy (New Mexico)
- Lakholi'iyapi Wahohpi (Lakȟóta Language Nest, North Dakota)
- Santa Fe Indian Community School (New Mexico)
- Cuts Wood School (Browning, Montana)
- Te Wharekura O Te Kaokaoroa O Patetere (New Zealand)
- Iyapi Glukinipi Lakȟóta Immersion Childcare (South Dakota)

In learning about these schools—their missions, direction, vision, and pedagogy—Alayna wonders, "If we could share our knowledges with one another in all these amazing spaces, there wouldn't have to be just one model, or one way of doing things, but building relations where we could help inform and support each other so that no one is starting from square one. We could create multiple education systems that center the needs of the children. . . . How could we be supports to each other in the many different ventures happening in all our communities? How do we move forward and continue to support each other and these schools and making education work for us and force the country to look at all the Indigenous schools being built upon knowledge that has always been? We don't need one school; we need all kinds of schools that center local tribal and community ways of being, learning, knowing . . ."

STANDING UP

Kyyalyn came home from school one day and ran to her mother.

"Mom!" she said. "You remember what you said about the Pledge of Allegiance, that I don't have to say it?"

"I do," Alayna said.

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

"Today in school I didn't say it! I didn't put my hand on my heart. I just stood there," Kyyalyn said.

"Okay. That's a start," Alayna said. "Did it cause you any trouble?"

"No."

"You should not be forced to do something that goes against your beliefs."

"Okay."

SINGING PRAYER

Every day, in their household, they say a prayer. Alayna says this is an important part of their day because she doesn't want them to think that this is something only done in ceremonies. She wants them to share what they are thankful for to Creator every day so that it's natural to them. This is something she asked them to do because she knows the feeling of shame when she was younger and asked to pray with others. It felt weird and awkward to her. She'd tense up, thinking that her prayer needed to be really inspirational or it was not worth saying. It was definitely something outside her comfort zone, so exposing them to this daily, she hopes, will bring pride and confidence to them so that when they are asked to pray in public spaces they will do so confidently. She tells them often that it doesn't matter how small or big something is, Creator will always listen.

She says, "I love that my kids get to pray about whatever they want. They're comfortable with it. It's not just something that's a crisis situation where we're praying for Creator to take this pain away from us, for it to be better, but we're praying all the time so that we're grateful for the little things."

Prayer has helped Alayna to recenter herself every day. She wants her children to have that centeredness: "I want them to pray from a strength standpoint rather than just when we're in crisis and something bad is happening, because I want them to be grateful for what they do have. I think that's important to have at a young age."

Shifting to a strengths standpoint in her prayers has helped Alayna to build better relationships with the people around her. She refuses to focus on the negative. Although she knows that it is there—she's not ignoring or ignorant of those things—she's just not letting the negative be the center of all her prayers to Creator. She's hoping that by modeling this in her home, her children will feel and radiate this energy as well.

On one such occasion, they were about to give a prayer, but Waaruxti stopped them and asked, "Can I sing pray? Can I sing pray?"

"Go ahead!" Alayna said, hiding her proud smile.

Waaruxti stood up from his chair, and while nodding his head to the rhythm that began beating in his head, he sang a Lakȟóta prayer.

Alayna, recalling this moment, says, "That's exciting for me because they're so confident in the language, both of them. When I was younger,

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

only an elder would give the prayer in Lakȟóta. Or when I was younger, only someone who was able to speak the language did that."

SHARING LAKȞÓTA

Alayna was asked to conduct a two-day Lakȟóta language workshop in Rapid City, South Dakota. She's done this before, but this time was a little different. She was co-presenting with Kyyalyn. It was Kyyalyn's first presentation, so, of course, she was really nervous. They got to the event an hour and 15 minutes early to set up and practice what they were going to say; they'd say it out loud so they could feel what it sounded like. They had an accompanying Microsoft PowerPoint presentation that Alayna had used in previous demonstrations, with pronunciation guides to get people voicing the language early in the presentation.

As the start time approached, Kyyalyn was getting increasingly nervous. Alayna sat with her and told her a story: "Listen, Kyyalyn. I didn't start teaching the language until I was an adult. For you to be here so young, 9 years old, and teaching the language to adults, that takes courage and you have that courage within you. Your voice and your message will have so much more power than anything I can say. When they see and hear you speak Lakȟóta, they will be changed. The feelings that you're having are normal. It's not easy to speak in front of others, but it's necessary to share their language and knowledge that comes with their language. Do you understand?"

Kyyalyn nodded her head, took a deep breath, and was ready to share. The room filled with people, ready and eager to listen and learn. Alayna introduced herself and her daughter to the group; she talked a bit about what they were going to be doing over the next couple of days, and that they would start by having the group speak the language with them.

Alayna clicked to the next slide. This was Kyyalyn's cue to begin; she would pronounce a Lakȟóta word and have the audience repeat the sounds to emphasize language stresses in the Lakȟóta language. The translated words weren't as important as feeling how to pronounce them. With the slides behind her and a group of adult faces before her, she froze for a moment. Alayna noticed; she put her hand on Kyyalyn's shoulder. Kyyalyn took a deep breath and began:

> "égnake," Kyyalyn said in a strong voice.

The audience, in unison, repeated after her: "égnake."

> "híŋhaŋni," Kyyalyn said with the audience repeating, "híŋhaŋni."
> "ȟtayétu"—"ȟtayétu."
> "wazíyata"—"wazíyata."

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

Kyyalyn began to flow, teaching her language with others. As she did so, Alayna looked upon her with so much pride, realizing what an important moment this was in both their lives.

SPIRIT DISH

Kyyalyn sits with her grandmother. She remembers her mother's voice telling her that if she has a question, she should ask it of her elders, that asking might unlock stories waiting to be told.

"Uŋčí [Lakȟóta for grandmother], you know how, before we eat, we always create a dish and set it outside for the spirits?" Kyyalyn asks.

"Yes," Uŋčí says while nodding her head.

"Well, one time I went outside to see if they had eaten and the food was still there." Kyyalyn continues her question: "The spirits didn't take it? Why?"

"When you make a spirit dish, you offer prayers and you invite the spirits to come share a meal with you, and give thanks for their constant protection and acknowledging that they are still very close to us," Uŋčí explains. "When we do this, it symbolizes the true meaning of Mitákuye Owás'iŋ, which means 'all my relations.' When you put that spirit dish out, the spirits . . ." She pauses to find a different way into the story specific to Kyyalyn: "Have you ever been around somebody and you can feel their energy, like your mom or dad, when they're happy or sad, you can feel it, right?"

"Uh-huh," Kyyalyn says.

"Well, that's what everything around us has. I have energy. You have energy. And your food has energy. So when you place it out with those prayers, the prayers just make that energy stronger. When you place it for them, they eat by taking the energy from the food. You see, they are not from this world anymore, so they can't physically grab it, but they take from the energy. Whatever is left of the food is for the insects and the animals to eat," Uŋčí says.

Kyyalyn nods her head, showing that she understands. Alayna is with her, listening and learning with Uŋčí, too. Alayna gives thanks to both of them, saying, "Thanks for asking, Kyyalyn, and for sharing the story, Uŋčí. I didn't even know that!"

They are learning together.

LANGUAGE AND TRIBAL KNOWLEDGE INTERTWINED

In one particular conversation, Alayna shared with Timothy a lesson of interconnectedness between language and knowledge.

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

"So I wonder, with language, beyond just learning a language and understanding different parts of speech, has learning the language done anything else for you?" Timothy asked Alayna.

"Yes, definitely. I feel like it has helped me to be more sure of the path that I want to take and provides the 'Why?' of my reasoning for working in health and education. Why it is that I want to help my people? Because I've seen how much it has helped my dad come out of his shell of not speaking, not being around it for so many years. I think he's the only kid out of all of his siblings who knows the language. The rest of them forgot it. And partially because he was raised by his grandma so they would just know phrases here and there," Alayna said.

"You mentioned earlier the ways language influences culture and the ways English has crept into your belief and language systems. Can you talk about that a bit more?" Timothy asked.

"Yeah. An easy example is that in Lakȟóta, we don't have the word 'my' in the language but because of English and because of the language constantly evolving and changing, we now have a Lakȟóta word for 'mine.' People use it in possession of people too, and you're just not supposed to. The same is if I was talking about my dad, I would say atéwaye kiŋ. So até is 'my dad,' and até mitȟáwa is just that this person is a father to me, basically. But people say até mitȟáwa, which means they just kind of added that word mitȟáwa, which is 'he belongs to me,' or something. But these are influenced by English because there are no possessive words in Lakȟóta. We don't possess things that are living, family members, own air, water, land. I feel like so many Native communities are really similar in the teachings. And obviously our ceremonies are different, but the teachings and the way we look at things and how our languages are and that's something I've been learning, too," Alayna said.

"You mentioned that it wasn't until you were an adult that you began learning your language. What was that journey like?" he asked.

"Well, my dad never taught me the language, and I think when Kyyalyn got enrolled in the language nest program, I started attending an adult language program the same time that she started school. I just quit school, quit everything and just went and started that program. I was also pregnant with Waaruxti at this time. I remember my dad just being so proud to see his daughter and his granddaughter learning the language together," she said.

"Can you talk more about your dad's reaction to you learning the language together as a family?"

"Yeah. Well, I was starting to hear stories all the time. People would message me or see me and say things like, 'Oh, I saw your dad and your little girl, and he was just speaking the language to her.' I'd get a bunch of the same stories, but in different places, like, 'I saw them at the store . . .' or 'I saw them at the gas station . . .' I just remember thinking how crazy that

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

was. He definitely changed in a way that, I don't know if it would happen if it was just me learning the language. I can't imagine how that felt for him to hear Kyyalyn speaking the language. My brother also showed how important language was in his life. He taught the language to his son, my nephew. He encouraged me to think how 'cool' the language was. The same month of his passing was the same month I found out I was pregnant with Kyyalyn. Nine mothers later to the day of his passing, she was born. In our ways, there is always a balance of life and death."

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

Tara and Scyla

Re-storied by: Tara Ramos, Scyla Dowd, and Timothy San Pedro

Fishbowl Shelf
by Scyla Dowd

The world is a fishbowl,
inside the fishbowl is my Native identity
outside is white culture.
What if I am the fishbowl? —
I'm not inside
        or outside —
I'm just sitting on a shelf, asking:
                        "Where do I go?"

Scyla and Tara

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

SCYLA RAISED HER HAND

Scyla enters her freshman Advanced Placement English classroom wondering what corrections to history she'll have to teach her teacher and her peers this time. She's keenly aware that she's the only student of color in this classroom; she's learned early on that her school doesn't know what to do with students of color, especially students of color who excel in school. The class is in the middle of reading *To Kill a Mockingbird,* so her teacher begins to teach them about the Jim Crow laws so that they have a better understanding of the historical contexts of the book. He's teaching it matter-of-factly—this happened and then this—as if the events in the past don't still impact those of today.

"At the time, the government held that people from different races were separate but equal," the teacher begins, "meaning that it was legal for segregation based on race in public facilities."

Scyla's eyes begin to roll, as they do from time to time in her classes. Sometimes she corrects the course content being forced upon her; sometimes she remains silent, knowing that it's not worth her time and energy to do so. When she has this inner conflict, her mother Tara's voice pops into her head: "If you don't share the truth, it will remain hidden." She doesn't think it's right that she constantly has to make this decision, but here she is, 15 years old, listening to her inner voice, deciding that she has to say something so that her classmates understand the significance of their history.

She raises her hand.

The teacher calls on her.

"People were murdered for being Black. You need to take that into consideration," she says. "It just wasn't, 'Oh look, tragic Black people not being able to use a water fountain or sit in front of a bus,' and then just watch a documentary about it. No! Actual human beings were being killed purely because they had darker skin tones. You can't just skim over that . . ."

"Okay, thank you for your contribution, Scyla," the teacher says and then moves on with his lesson as usual.

Scyla isn't finished.

" . . . And it wasn't just black and white. This world isn't just Black and White people. There's Native Americans, there's Mexicans, there's brown of every shade. There's me that's a combination of all of that. You can't just make generalizations because these stories affect all these groups of people still today! People were fighting, *dying*, for their rights to be seen as human. We were the last group of people—" she pauses to specify, "Native American women—were the last group of people to be able to vote in this country. We keep forgetting that part of our history."

Scyla can see that students around her are getting uncomfortable, bowing their heads, doodling in the margins of their notebooks, waiting until the teacher speaks so that they can take notes on what might be on the test.

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

Scyla's contributions never make it to the test; they know this, and so does she. They may have stopped listening, but she knows she can't just let this slide. She had to say something.

The lesson continues.

Scyla sometimes worries about the power her teachers hold over her. She wants to succeed academically, but she knows that these corrections to history like the one she's making may impact her grade negatively. She knows that to students and maybe even to her teacher, these corrections are construed as disrespectful. She's learning to find her space, to create her space, within a schooling system that doesn't know what to do with her.

INTRODUCING SCYLA

Scyla says her thick, curly, brownish, blackish hair is unruly, not knowing which way to go. She thinks this is a pretty accurate metaphor for her identity, saying, "I'm a little of a lot, but not a lot of a little," which has left the understanding of her identity in a state of perpetual confusion that she's working to figure out. Having conversations about her identity and others' identities is something she always welcomes.

"Everybody says I talk like a valley girl," she says. She's been perceived as having this brown exterior, but a white interior.

Her mother Tara thinks the world of Scyla. She says that "from the moment 'go,' she was gifted with this spirit that is going to be the kind of leader that we need. She likes to think through things. She's very cerebral in her head, but also deeply connected and rooted in her heart. She's always thinking, 'How do things and events impact my community?' She just has that extra something in terms of leadership ability and thoughtfulness about her community and wanting the world to be a better place."

But there's also a weight that Scyla carries; she has very high expectations for herself in school, as Tara describes:

"My child is a high-achieving, straight-A student. She has a 3.90 grade point average with three Advanced Placement honors classes. She's taking seven classes right now!"

Scyla agrees with this assessment: "I've got to study to be perfect."

Tara understands Scyla's need to achieve, but she makes sure that she knows that achievement is also about having balance in her life. If she puts too much weight on one part, the academics, then she may be neglecting other important parts of what makes Scyla, Scyla.

Scyla says, "One of the few things that I've been able to control is my grades, my academics. It's really just about following a rubric, being able to show my teacher I'm capable of learning what they want me to. I've always tried my hardest in school and just thrived in a school environment because I'm so social. Admittedly, I can be kind of a teacher's pet."

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

Lately, Scyla has gone public with her navigations of identity. She's created a YouTube channel where, from time to time, she'll post videos about topics that are front and center to her. Her first video was her discussion of her emerging understandings of her identity and sexuality. She begins all her videos with "Hey, guys, gals, and nonbinary pals, how are you today?"

She then continues by going straight to the point of the video:

> Today I wanted to talk about being stuck in the middle. Now obviously, you're not gonna be stuck in the middle with everything you do, because I love softball, so I get along with those people. And I love horses, so I get along with those people. But at the same time, I'm stuck in the middle for a lot of other parts of my life, like race: I'm Mexican. I'm Black, White, and Inupiaq Alaska Native. I am so many different aspects. It's hard to acknowledge and preserve certain parts of my identity without feeling like others are suffering or like I don't care about others, even though I do.
> I care about myself
> and my identity
> and being who I am,
> and being true to who I am
> because I am Black,
> I am Native,
> I am Mexican,
> and White, even.
> And it's really hard not to feel like
> I'm hurting other parts of my identity
> while building one up.
>
> Another aspect of me being stuck in the middle is being bisexual, or pansexual, or demisexual. You are stuck again, and again, and again, in the middle between being straight, and gay, or even asexual, and you're not any of the above. It's really hard to be able to take a deep breath and still realize that you are still wholly you. So just know that no matter how many bits and pieces you think you are, that you are what? You are you. And nobody can change that. Nobody. Yeah.

She's not sure anyone is out there listening, but she feels comfort in knowing that someone else who may also be stuck in the middle will see her video, relate to it, and find some comfort in knowing they're not the only ones experiencing this multiracial reality.

Tara is proud that Scyla continues to question and make sense of her reality: "She's done a lot of work and learning to make sense of who she is. Standing up for those things is really important. Having the right to be in the world in whatever way that makes sense for her is important."

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

However, Scyla is not ignorant to the social ills that surround her. She's constantly worried about how men can't control themselves around her because, as Tara describes, "She's this young, beautiful thing. Rather than seeing her as a 15-year-old little girl who has self-expression and confidence, they sexualize her."

That worries them both.

Scyla loves softball. She plays second base and was placed on the junior varsity team as a freshman. She also loves her horse, Kharoline. In one competition, she was named the high reserve champion for the whole show, which means she got the second-highest score for the entire competition of everyone, no age restriction. She's also on the Teen Council for Planned Parenthood, and a member of the National Honor Society. She led tampon drives (events to collect tampons and pads for girls) in her middle school even at the objection of some teachers and students for the appropriateness of such an event. She does all of this because when she gets passionate about something, she's all in, which she attributes to her mother.

"We're very similar in a lot of ways," Scyla says. "When we're eating dinner at the dinner table, I'll share with her instances at school where I'm like, 'Excuse me, but that's not how this goes. The war on drugs is really a war on Black and Brown people, so just stop.' And she'll be like, 'That's my girl.'"

INTRODUCING TARA

Scyla is most definitely Tara's girl. She's proud of the type of human she's become and has worked hard to raise her in a way that teaches her self-confidence and critical awareness. Tara is a proud Inupiaq woman who lives in Spokane, Washington, far from her homelands. Her Inupiaq name is Qallaq (no translation). She considers her identity as a bit of a hybrid, too; she lives in what she calls the *Indigenous slash*:

"My knowledge of Indigenous ways of being is deeply rooted in being influenced by the Coeur d'Alenes, Spokanes, Kalispells, Colvilles, Chippewas, the tribes that have a great presence in this area. I have aunties and uncles amongst all those tribes who have influenced how I view Indigenous culture, not just from an Inupiaq worldview, but from a pan-Native perspective," she says.

It wasn't until much later in life that she first stepped foot in her Inupiaq village. Her connection to her home community has been mainly through social media, where she follows a number of Inupiaq women and activists. She's continued to relearn who she is, where she's from, and how she's embodied her Indigeneity because, for most of her life, that identity had been stripped from her. Growing up, she was in and out of foster care;

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

she remembers being forced to give hugs to her foster parents, who didn't love her and treated her cruelly. It's taken her the better part of 35 years to feel comfortable with her physical and spiritual being. She knows this has impacted, in some small or large part, her relationships, including the ways she shows Scyla affection and love, but she's always working to be better for everyone around her.

Tara is a fierce resistor against settler colonial systems. She is strong-willed, strong-minded, and very vocal in her community: "I'm known for being really aggressive and holding my ground and holding boundaries really strongly," she says.

Timothy has seen this in action almost daily during their time together in the journalism program at the University of Montana. He'd always make sure to sit next to her so that he could be close to her power and learn from her truth. Tara would correct truths from others, both students and professors. Timothy always admired the way she stood up for herself and her community, and despite the early emergence of his own critical awareness at that time, he supported her the only way he knew how—jotting notes of affirmation during class, having long conversations on their walks to other classes, including her truths into his course-assigned papers, showing her that her words had impact.

Apart from her years attending the University of Montana in Missoula, Tara has lived in Spokane, Washington, for all her life and has been very involved in her community, serving and working in a number of different capacities that are rooted in issues of equity and social justice. She grew up in the lower South Hill, a part of town known for poverty. She describes herself as being "very emotionally expressive and outgoing."

"I step into spaces that people don't generally step into unless it's so high-stakes that they have to. They avoid it if they can, and I don't, which I think is deeply rooted in my being Inupiaq, meaning being somebody who's super-aggressive and super strong-willed, and really powerful."

She knows her power; she's never been afraid to wield it. Others may see her as having a hard exterior shell; she's had to create that shell, that shield, in order to protect herself and the people she loves from harm. Underneath it all, however, she says she's "one of the most softhearted people in the world, hence why I need such a strong armor because I'm so soft underneath." This shell that much of the world sees is a result of her having to stand up and be the voice for so many:

"I can't lie to myself anymore about it; I'm just *not* this hard person. Really, the reason why I can't *not* say something when I see racism, or I see misogyny, or I see homophobia, or I see systems being oppressive to anybody, why I have to say something is because I care so deeply. Because I love so deeply that I can imagine somebody that I love being harmed by that system doing that to them."

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

This exterior everyone else sees comes at a price, and she's frustrated, at times, that others can't see that her fierceness is for the betterment of all the people around her.

"When you call out racism, you're actually looking out for everybody in the room, and I'm so tired, *so* tired of people proposing it as if I am the bad guy because I'm so, so not," she says.

It's even gotten to the point where folks, people who are allies to her, will use the phrase "Stay out of trouble, Tara," or "Don't get into trouble, Tara," or "You're such a troublemaker, Tara." This frustrates her because what they are really saying is, "You're challenging the status quo" and "You're making whiteness visible," and in doing so, it makes them feel uncomfortable.

"I just think it's really interesting the social norming that people try to do, and they don't even know they're doing it. They're unconscious about it. I usually play it off and say, 'You know me, I'm always going to push the envelope.' Then they laugh uncomfortably because they don't know how to handle it."

She can fully empathize with Scyla and the sometimes troubling and painful schooling experiences she is having because Tara has also been forced to deal with many of those same structural inequities. And like Scyla, Tara was perceived as being very intelligent, but it came at a price: "I'm perceived as super intelligent, but super white because of that intelligence," which is something that Scyla has recently been trying to understand and overcome. What Tara is learning, and what she hopes Scyla comes to understand, is that their intelligence is deeply rooted in their Inupiaq identities. She hopes that knowing that, even though they live far from their traditional homelands in Alaska, Scyla feels connected to the power of place and to their Inupiaq family and community.

Tara believes that if she can show Scyla that her power and strength are connected to her Inupiaq identity, then she has done something right as a mother.

TARA AND SCYLA'S RELATIONSHIP

By Western norms of family, Scyla is Tara's niece—her brother's daughter. When she was born, he was in prison because of gang-related activities, so he couldn't be there for her. Tara remembers receiving a call informing her that Scyla's biological mother was in labor with her. She was in college at the time; she dropped everything and drove to Spokane to be there for her birth. When Scyla came into this world, Tara said to herself, "It's probably gonna be me," meaning that she was probably going to be the guardian and mother to this baby. When Tara was asked when she took up the parental guardianship for Scyla, she says her role as a mother to Scyla began the night of September

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

25, 2002—when she was born. Tara was just beginning her senior year at the University of Montana's journalism program. She was there, watching Scyla come into this world, and she's been there for her ever since. She knows it sounds cliché, but it's true—Tara fell in love the moment she saw her face.

"I knew I would be the one responsible for her life," Tara explains. Scyla's biological mother was erratic and her biological father, Tara's brother, was in and out of prison. Knowing that there was little stability in Scyla's life, Tara took it upon herself to raise her as her own, and she is doing just that.

"She's my mom," Scyla said. "I call her Mom."

"I didn't give birth to Scyla, but I felt like a new life has been created and I'm going to be responsible for this child in an authentic way," Tara said. "I knew she was going to be mine. I just had that knowledge. I just knew."

Having been in and out of foster care throughout her childhood, Tara knew the importance of creating a nurturing home environment where love is mutual, dialogic, and unconditional. Tara recognizes that, living in Spokane, they are what she calls "City Indians"; they don't attend pow wows regularly; she doesn't cook traditional foods. She's come to terms with this but still continues to model and teach Scyla pan-Indigenous values such as considering and making decisions for "we" and not just "me."

"We think about how our actions as Indigenous people will impact the earth in a real way. I knew I was going to raise her to understand her role in the world and how she perceives the world. To me, that is the ultimate form of Indigeneity, that we think about the whole world in our decisionmaking. The idea that a decision that you make as a human being potentially has worldwide effects. I think raising our children as Indigenous requires us to be able to be really authentic with ourselves," Tara said.

As her mother, Tara sees Scyla's brilliance: "Scyla is going to be a leader. I see the power of her voice, the power of her brain, the power in her heart and spirit."

But Tara knew that for Scyla to feel that power and harness it, she needed to know more about where a portion of her identity came from. It wasn't until their first trip back to their homelands in Alaska, surrounded by their Inupiaq relatives, that both Tara and Scyla realized just how connected they were to this place and the people of this place.

GOING "HOME"

Tara has fought often with NANA (not an acronym), the Inupiaq Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act corporation that handles the disbursement of funds for those of Inupiaq descent. On one occasion, when she was attempting to sign up for automatic deposit for disbursement of money, Tara had a disturbing phone call with a woman who treated her like a second-class citizen because of the fact that Tara was not raised on her homelands. She told

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

them, "Just because I live in the Lower 48 does not make me any less Native. That doesn't make me any less Inupiaq. That's total BS. You can't treat me like that. That's not right."

Feeling as if her identity was being stripped from her, Tara decided to send a picture of Scyla, herself, and Yaya (Tara's mother) to put into the community newsletter in an attempt to connect with the family that they've been severed from. She knew it might be a long shot, but it was important that she try for her mother and for her daughter's sake. When the community newsletter came out, a complete stranger looked at the picture and, even before reading the names in the caption, she said to herself, "That's my family." The woman was, in fact, family; she's Tara's aunt, Auntie Verna, and she looks just like them. Verna, who travels a lot for her job, happened to be traveling to Spokane that next day and reached out to Tara, letting her know that she would be staying at the Red Lion Inn; she asked if they could meet with her.

It was nine o'clock at night and Tara dropped everything. She told Scyla and Yaya that they were going to meet a relative. Neither of them second-guessed it. They were off to the hotel to meet their Auntie Verna. When they saw her, it was like looking into a mirror; it was uncanny how much they looked alike. Immediately, they knew they were family and shared stories until the early morning. Tara knew that being there so late, talking into the wee hours, would impact their energy in the morning, but this was more important than anything Scyla would learn in school the next day.

Verna shared photos of their family, telling them who they were and how they were related to the faces and places in the pictures. Tara expressed to Verna that one of her greatest desires was to bring her mom home, but the cost of travel was a huge obstacle in making that desire a reality. Hearing her concern, Verna told Tara that they belong to a large family; they belong to a people; they belong to a village and a region and to land. Verna was sure that once others in their family knew about them and learned their story, they would wholeheartedly support bringing them home. Verna, knowing the importance of this moment, grabbed her phone and, with an outstretched arm, took a selfie with her newfound relatives and sent it to their great-uncle. As soon as she hit Send, he instantly messaged back to say how excited he was to know more family was out there.

The next day, Verna returned to Alaska, but she still kept in touch with Tara, and they continued to message each other. Soon, without any prompting, a fundraiser was started devoted entirely for travel funding for them to come home. Verna created a Facebook page titled "Bringing Family Home."

The Facebook group description read:

> Dear Family of Clara and John Attauraq (Atoruk),
>
> First, I apologize for the length of this note, but it is actually a short version of the story we want to share. Please read on:

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

I had heard from my late Auntie Pauline Schuerch about her and my Dad, the late Theodore Westlake, Jr.'s first cousin Mabel (Atoruk) Dowd leaving Kiana many years ago. We knew she had children, but we were not in contact with any of them, until a year ago in March of 2012.

I discovered that one of Mabel's daughters, AnnMarie (Billie), lived in Spokane, WA, with her daughter Tara, her son, and her granddaughter Scyla. I just happened to be headed to Spokane the next day. I searched the Internet for contact information and found a phone number for Tara Dowd.[1] I called Uncle Larry Westlake, Sr. and told him what I was about to do. He approved and was very happy about it.

I called the next day. Tara answered, "Hello, this is Tara." I said, "Hi Tara, my name is Verna Westlake; I'm from Kiana, Alaska." Mostly, what I remember about what followed next was her screaming with excitement! She said, "My mom told me we're related to the Westlakes . . ." and on and on. It was so much fun! That evening I met all four Dowds. It was one of the most memorable moments in my life. The connection between Billie (Yaya) and I was immediate. When I saw her, I felt I knew her all my life.

Billie expressed a strong desire to see her mother's birthplace and her Alaskan family. I offered to do what I can to help make that happen. The family members that we've shared with so far have been more than willing to support this event.

We've asked Tara to share something about their lives in this introduction. She is not comfortable asking for help, I reminded her that WE offered, she didn't have to ask. The following words are hers:

> After my grandparents, Mabel Atoruk and Walt Dowd married, they moved away from Northern Alaska and they had five children. My mother, Annmarie (Billie) Dowd, ended up in Spokane, where she had my brother and me.
>
> We lived a hard life, one riddled with poverty, loneliness and a feeling of never really belonging. My brother did not start out very well in life. He ended up in prison after surviving the streets and gang life. While I, Tara Dowd, fought hard to attend college on a full-ride academic scholarship.
>
> Before graduating, two huge life-changing events happened to my family. The first: My mother got a bilateral lung (double) transplant that saved her life. Second: My brother's girlfriend gave birth to my mom's first grandchild, Scyla Dowd, less than a month later. That same year, I graduated with my BA.
>
> My mom, my niece and I have since lived together and my brother is doing well. I got a job at a local nonprofit and worked hard on behalf of tribal people in Spokane and the state of Washington.

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

> In August, it will be 11 years since my mother's transplant. On my small salary, I have been able to purchase a small home so that, for the first time, my mom and Scyla knew the meaning of stability. Both my mom and Scyla have already lived such a rough and hard life with very little family support, as most of them live in Alaska.
>
> I know that most people with lung transplants have a pretty short lifespan. My greatest desire for my mother is that she be allowed to meet our family and visit our traditional homeland. She was not raised to know pride in being Inupiaq so that she could fit in with her white peers.
>
> No one deserves a chance at a homecoming more than my mother, even if only for a few weeks. I humbly ask for help in bringing her home. She cannot travel alone, and I cannot leave my niece (whom I am raising as my own), so it will be the cost of three people. I, of course, would love to bring my brother as well. But my mom and Scyla are the priority. We can be gone for two weeks. And it can happen any time in August. I should be able to help pay at least a thousand dollars, but that's all the extra cash I can afford. For which, I am ashamed of. I wish I could just do it, Verna. But the weight of all that I am responsible for is already so heavy. :(I am doing the best I can. Please share that it is taking me a lot to ask for this help as I ALWAYS do everything myself. I TAKE care of everyone. But this time, I just can't do it alone.
>
> Thank you for all of your love and support. I am so grateful for your welcoming my mother with such a warm heart. She deserves to know her family and know that kind of love. Tara

Soon after this message was posted, there were fundraising dances, different auctions, and raffles to pay for their journey home. They raised just enough to purchase plane tickets for their family to come home to Kiana. There was an outpouring of love, and they could all feel it.

With airplane tickets purchased, they were on their way home. Along their journey to Alaska, Scyla remembers simultaneously being amazed at the outpouring of love as well as scared for what was to come.

> I guess part of me was scared that it was going to feel like . . . you know when you go to a friend's house and their extended family is over and it's just kind of awkward because you have to meet, like, their aunt? And you're like, "Oh, hey," and it's just, like, really quick and really painful. I was kind of scared it was going to be like that, but I realized like, no, we're family.

Sometimes Scyla slows down and thinks about her time with her Inupiaq family: "It helps me center myself; I don't know how else to say it other than

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

that. I'll feel like, because I have these feelings of not belonging, I remind myself that,

> You belong somewhere,
> you have culture
> and that helps me
> not disappear.
> It's really powerful."

She expanded upon this feeling of *centering*:

> Every once in a while, I just stop everything, and I say things that I know are true, like, "I am Inupiaq. My name is Scyla Annmarie Dowd. I am sitting on the ground right now." Like, these types of things that I know are true help me center myself and, I guess, like, take a deep breath and say, "These things are constant. These things are happening right now." Living in the moment, I guess. Especially when I'm in situations where I feel like I'm questioning who I am and what I'm doing with my life, I'm like, "You are Inupiaq. This is you. Your Inupiaq name is Tununataq. You love to ride horses," and just like listing these things, and then that usually helps me feel, I guess, more grounded and that the world isn't about ready to explode or internally combust, which is helpful.

In her description of centering herself, she mentions twice that she's Inupiaq. She says this is crucial to her identity because, although her biological mother is Black and Mexican (which Scyla says she's also thankful for), learning about those cultures has been extremely limited. Having Tara as a mother, and having the opportunity to travel back home to Alaska, has helped her understand where she's from. Tara also models these affirmation statements, telling Scyla from time to time, "You're Alaska Native. You are Inupiaq. This is who you are." Scyla said that it took her a long time to come to this realization. It took a trip home:

"It wasn't until we went up there [to Alaska] that I actually experienced being connected to people and place. It's a central part of my identity because I haven't had a lot of opportunities to explore the other parts of me. I want to, and when I do, it won't take away from being Alaska Native, but right now, that's who I am."

For Tara, the trip helped her understand that her strong, assertive voice and demeanor originates from this place and these people. She saw a society that was led by women, a matriarchal society. She saw women in powerful positions, making decisions for the betterment of the community, leading gatherings, prayers, and events. This helped her realize that she is who she is because of where she's from. Even though this was her first time visiting,

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.

Tara knew that her roots have always been deeply connected to this place and to these people. Even though this was her first time to her village,
the village has always been within her.

THE DANGERS OF A MODEL MINORITY[2]

In elementary school, Scyla went to what they call a "highly capable program," which was pretty much all rich White people. When she had the chance to choose which high school she wanted to attend, she chose the one with a more diverse school setting but when she's in her classes, it doesn't feel diverse. In all of her honors classes, she's the only brown girl. There may be one or two others in other classes, but that's about it. That's always been hard for Scyla because she's definitely middle ground with . . . she's really good academically but socially . . . a lot of friends that she gets along with socially aren't necessarily the highest achievers academically. It's really weird for her to be in that position of wanting to be friends with people who look like her but also having to be like, "But I need to do homework!" Admittedly, she's somewhat of a perfectionist: "I want all A's always, and almost every day, I check our school's grading app on my phone to see the latest version of my grade."

During dinner, Tara sometimes tells her that she needs to find balance and that she's working so hard to be a good student that Scyla might be missing out on becoming a good person. She'll ask Scyla, "What's your social balance? How are you engaging in your community and building community and talking about and changing how your school experiences racism and all of those things, things that you do care about and you talk about all the time? How are you infiltrating that into your school community? Are you being a leader?"

Scyla tells her about feeling isolated and alone and how she's ashamed and feels guilty for having those feelings. Tara will say something like, "There is no guilt and shame with that other than when it stops you from doing what's right."

Scyla says, "I feel like classes with . . . I take honors classes; there should be more kids of color, there should be more poor kids because that's how our school demographic is and kind of like my mom mentions, the school-to-prison pipeline. It's real. A lot of my friends are getting sent to in-school suspension."

The majority of her friends in this school are from homes that are spread out across the city because she attended "this Highly Capable Program that bused us in during the 4 four years of school." She chose to go to this one localized neighborhood school, where everybody knows one another because they went to the same middle school together. They all have these great friendships that Scyla does not. She says,

Copyright © 2021. Teachers College Press. All rights reserved.

San, P. T. (2021). Protecting the promise : Indigenous education between mothers and their children. Teachers College Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-08-18 14:02:37.