

Nishtawaymiht

(Identity)

Have you ever asked yourself, “Who am I?” I have. In fact, all of my people went through the same thing. Let’s just say being of mixed-race isn’t the easiest thing to deal with. This is the story of how my people and I found our way, our purpose, and our identity.

Let me take you way back, to the 1800’s (1808 to be exact). It was a warm, spring evening. Everyone was heading to a prayer meeting with the Elders. My sister Dorothy and I were getting ready when she said, “Ugh, ANOTHER pointless meeting! Seriously, when are we gonna know what to do with life?” This made me even more nervous than I already was (Dorothy has a problem with being insensitive.)! The other Elders and I were working our tails off to guide our people, but this was a pretty sticky situation. I mean, we have to figure out a purpose for every single Metis person, so it’s not much of a walk in the park if you ask me.

“Wow, thanks a lot for that,” I replied, offended. “Well, I’m not trying to be rude or anything,” she responded, “but we’ve been going to these meetings since before you and I could even talk, yet we’re still, well, outsiders!” “Woah, Woah, Woah!” I exclaimed, “We are NOT outsiders. Anyway, quit complaining. We’re going to be late.” So we finished getting ready and headed out the door for another “pointless” meeting.

When Dorothy and I got to the meeting headquarters, I started to get a little nervous. I’ve obviously done this before, since I’m an Elder, but after all those meetings that failed to help us figure out

who we are, it has become quite stressful. “What’s the matter?” asked Dorothy, “You look a little scared.” “I’ll be fine,” I replied. “Alright,” she responded, unconvinced, “Well then, I’m going to go find a seat. Si boon la luck (Good luck)!” Ok, I love my sister and her encouragement, but I had a feeling that my luck wasn’t so good.

“Good evening everyone,” said our chief Elder, once the meeting started. “So before we start, I just want to say thanks to you all for showing up and pitching in. Now, let’s begin giving thanks to Kitchi-Manitou, our sacred one.” I tried to focus on our worship, but I just couldn’t stop thinking about the responsibility of figuring out how to save my people from feeling lost. We NEEDED an identity! “Prayzaan kiiyanaan avik nipwahkow (Gift us with wisdom), sacred one!” prayed the chief, “Show us the way!” “Help us, sacred one,” I whispered, “We can’t do this alone.”

After the meeting, I went home and flopped onto my bed dramatically. At that moment, my mom walked in. What’s wrong, aamoo-ziinzibaakwad (honey)? she asked. “Dorothy is right!” I exclaimed. We’re all outsiders, and we always will be!” “Don’t speak like that,” she replied, in her soft, ‘mom voice,’ “Think about it this way. There’s culture all around us, even inside us. We’ve got many years of ancestry in our veins. And besides, you’re not in this alone. You’ve got all the other gichi-anishinaabe (Elders) to help you, plus the rest of our people. Everything is going to be just fine.” “Maarsii, maamaa (Thank you, mother),” I said, relieved. I guess she’s right, there’s present day culture all around, but that still doesn’t explain to me how I’m supposed to come up with an nishtawaymiht (identity) for every single Metis person in existence. Oh, boy. This is going to be a bumpy ride.

I woke up bright and early the next morning because I couldn't sleep, and — most importantly — because I had a GREAT idea. I knew exactly how to start building our nishtawaymiht (identity)! I mean, I didn't know how to fix the WHOLE problem, but I found out a way to get started on bringing out our new culture. I jumped out of bed, ran downstairs as fast as I could, and started writing letters, to the other Elders and all of our people, to call a meeting to order, but this time it wasn't a prayer meeting. It was a chance for me to take a stand and lead my people, like a true Elder.

“Ok, said Dorothy, after I told her about my plan, “so explain to me again how in the world this plan is going to magically fix our problem.” “It's most likely not going to solve the whole problem at the snap of fingers,” I replied, “but at least it'll give us some hope, you know, instead of giving up, like some people.” (I was obviously talking about her.) “Ok, I guess I deserve that,” she said, “Anyway, what do you need any help with this plan of yours?” “I need you to mail these letters to every Metis people around.” “Got it,” she replied. She was just about to head out the door when I said, “Maarsii, ma seur (thank you, my sister).” She nodded and headed out the door.

Dorothy may be the bearer of negativity, but you got to love her.

The meeting took place early the next morning. I'm not going to lie, A LOT more people showed up than I thought. I was getting more nervous by the minute. I wasn't usually in the spotlight. I may be an Elder, but I was still a young lady (as my mother would say), so I didn't really get leadership of meetings at the time. Although I was scared, I knew it was my turn to lead my people, so when the meeting started, I took a deep breath, cleared my throat and said, “So, I bet you're all wondering why I sent you all here so early in the morning. Well, I planned this meeting because I think I figured out how to build up our culture. When I said this, everyone started chattering with confusion.

“I know, you’re probably really confused, but before you second guess this meeting, but hear me out first. All this time we’ve felt like outsiders because we couldn’t figure out who we are. But in reality, we were too blind to see that our culture was right in front of us all along. Our culture and ancestry is all around us. We’ve got tradition, religion, AND diversity inside us and all around us. We are half European! We are half First Nations! We are Metis! And Metis is infinity. We go on FOREVER!” When I was done everyone started clapping and cheering. It was the best feeling ever. I led my people to wisdom, like a mature Elder.

Since then our population has grown and spread, and now everyone knows our name. We are Metis, and Metis is infinity.

Works Cited

Christou, Theodore, et al. *Nelson*

History 7. W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2016.

