[Tape begins. Some conversation before formal questions start]

Heidi: I need to break away from academia. Actually, maternity leave coming up is a... a really- it's really good timing for me. Cause your mind can like spin out of control. With so many different um things and then there's always more questions and... yeah. So. I think it's gonna be a welcome break and I'm gonna grow some potatoes and some roses this summer.

Michelle: Nice!

Melissa : Mm mhm.

Heidi: I'm gonna practise not talking as much, maybe.

[Michelle laughs]

Heidi: I do have to start turning my attention to writing cause I'm a student, so.

Melissa: Well some people use talking to get into their writing, like recorders and...

Heidi: Yeah. Yeah. I guess I'm ready to-

Audience member: How're you doing, Heidi.

Heidi: I'm nervous um. I'm actually uh conducting my MA research right now. Which I feel underprepared for. I've never felt like a good academic. So um having the mic flipped on me as we've been calling it in these workshops is uh a little bit nerve-wracking. [Laughs]

Pat: Are you ready- shall we begin?

Heidi: Yeah. Yeah you can go ahead.

[00:01:24.21]

Pat: Do you want to tell us a bit about yourself, Heidi?

Heidi: Sure. Um. I'm a mom of three. Um, gestating my third currently. I am a graduate student at Trent University where I also did my undergrad. I moved to uh Lakefield, which is a little town just outside of Nogojiwanong um Peterborough, Michi Saagig territory, um about 7 years ago. And I've been studying and working here and living here and raising my family here. My son was 18 months old when we moved here. Uh so I think for him, this will always be home. It's where he's grown up. And my daughter was born here. And uh this little one will be born here too. So I feel very connected to this place because of my children, like through my children, even though I didn't grow up here myself. Mm. Yeah.

Pat: So roots here.

Heidi: Umm I dunno if- I'm still thinking about that. Because my own family history is largely unknown to me. Um- growing up I was told that I am uh of Scottish and Ojibwe ancestry. I know that I have some other ancestors from different places- mixed in their as well. I have a Grandmother from England, for example. Um but where uh... where on the land and in the world those places actually are I don't know. And I'm really fascinated and curious about reconnecting with those places and understanding um the lives of my ancestors better. Not just those who may have been Indigenous to Turtle Island but those who are Indigenous to other places like Scotland as well. So that's something that I'm, just in the last few years of my life, starting to explore.

[00:03:36.09]

And I think that motherhood is something that has led me to uh think a little bit more about that um. I also think that coming to Trent has led me to that as well. I've had many wonderful teachers uh knowledge holders here who have generously shared in a way that um I couldn't have imagined where I grew up in Mississauga and Toronto. Um, indigeneity in those places, at the time when I was growing up there, uh and going to school and working, was invisible. Very largely invisible. With the exception of the stereotypes um and so I um... I don't know how to explain it. I guess I grew up very low income. I moved around a lot. My mother struggled with alcoholism. And mental health issues. So I felt a lack of belonging um in those places in the city because of that. But I never knew or understood how that was connected to my culture or a lack of community. If that makes any sense.

Pat: Yeah it makes sense.

Heidi: And when I moved here, uh, that wasn't um... It wasn't something that I was cognisant or conscious of. Until after a couple of years here. Um, and uh... That's why I stayed. There's a really strong, vibrant Anishinaabe community here. There's also a very vibrant group of um, people here, diverse peoples who, uh have some understanding of that, and I think that um... this is where I need to be right now. To deepen my own understanding and learn about myself in these ways and learn about, you know, my own connection.

Pat: Sounds like you're talking about memory work.

[00:06:02.01]

Heidi: I guess a little bit, yeah. I'm still learning what this is for me. I feel very green and underprepared to do, to interview and to talk about some of the knowledges that I've been um learning and um... manifesting, maybe? [Laughs] Yeah.

Pat: So working with it.

Heidi: Yeah.

Pat: And it connects to activism, does it? Does it connect to resistance? Is that part of it or is that not yet part of it or maybe not ever part of it.

Heidi: Um, I think it's always been a part of it for me, although I wouldn't necessarily identify as being an activist. Although I'm starting to see how the small day-to-day things that I do, the small acts of resistance um... I'm trying to think of a good example. Maybe one will come to me but it's not right now. Um, but you know, we do these things I think just by um getting through our day sometimes can be an act of resistance. In all these small ways that we do that. There's mornings when, you know, I don't feel well and I'm tired but I'm a mom so I get up and I make sure that my children are taken care of and I see that as something that can be an act of resistance in a society that um... Punishes motherhood in so many ways. I was a single mother to my first two children til about two and a half, three years ago when I met my partner who came and joined our family. So as a single mother who has experienced a disconnection from my family, not just culturally but physically as well. Um, because of classism and mental health and addiction issues and lots of violence in the home because of those things and involvement from organizations like Children's Aid and the police who I view as being very oppressive organizations... Organizations that are, you know, expressed as being helpful but they're actually very harmful and they, they pull people apart, you know? People that should be nurtured to stay together. So, yeah. Thinking about some of those experiences over the course of my life, and these institutions that have impacted the way that I live and the way that I raise my children and some of the limitations to um... that go along with that in our society. Yeah I see these small acts of resistance and I admire them in others around me constantly. So maybe in that way? Yeah. I mean I go to rallies and I try to support my fellow community members, my peers, my friends and family who are champion, champions of specific causes.

Pat: I like the term you used "quiet acts of resistance."

[00:09:43.01]

Heidi: Yeah.

Pat: That's also very important and you've talked about relationships. Relationships with people that have been important to organizations.

Heidi: Mhm. Yeah. I think that answers- I think that's my answer [laughs].

Pat: And- has your idea- your ideas about your own activism, your own being in the world, has that changed over time for you?

[00:10:13.05]

Heidi: Oh, for sure. I was very shy when I was younger, so shy in fact that people thought I wasn't friendly. Um I've heard that a little bit throughout my life. And that's changed a great deal as I've gotten older and I think what um, what actually has helped my self esteem and my confidence is, in a lot of ways, accessing education. It's a real privilege for me because of that, um. Ten, fifteen years ago, I'm in my mid-thirties now, ten or fifteen years ago, there's no way I could have sat here and had a conversation um, that I'm largely unprepared to have [laughs] and still feel-

Pat: -doesn't sound like it-

Heidi: -uh [laughs] I have so much learning to do. Um without crying. Without choking on my words, or not being able to find a way to express myself um maybe through storytelling or just drawing on memories and these fragmented pieces of my life.

[00:11:23.06]

Pat: And what about, what we call intergenerationality, what about the olders and the youngers.

Heidi: What do you mean.

Pat: Well relationships that you've had that have been important that you've shared, that you've given, you've gotten. Both-

Heidi: -Oh. I thought that's what you might have meant. I was very close to my grandmothers when I was young. My Nana, my Mom's mom, I was very close to her and I know she walks with me every day. She passed away when I was only eleven years old but the relationship, the friendship, the nurturing. Um, you know she used to rub my back. I would bug her, "Nana, rub my back." So I could fall asleep. I still uh feel that sometimes. And the influence she had on my life was so strong and so nurturing. I miss her every day of course. And I wish you know, sometimes when you're going through difficulties, just to talk to my Nana and hear what she would have to say. It would be wonderful. But because my Mom was unwell and our lifestyle was very unstable, my, my Nana for me- even if this is inaccurate, I was just a little girl- I viewed her as a source of stability for me. You know, and I was in a very safe, nurturing environment when I was with her. My Nanny, my Dad's mom, she probably would disagree with me but uh I see her as a very contemporary feminist woman. She's very outspoken. And strong and brave. She raised four children on her own as a widow in her early, in her late twenties, in the sixties. Which I understand was very difficult to do.

[00:13:22.03]

Um, even when her husband was alive, they didn't have a lot of money and uh. She told me a story once about the birth of my father. She gave birth to him in a Toronto hospital and because they, it was a Catholic hospital, because they didn't have money to pay, the nurses wouldn't actually let them take my Dad home. So they sent my Grandmother home without her newborn baby and my Great-Grandmother apparently went back and [laughs] somehow got him out. My Grandmother actually couldn't remember, wasn't clear whether or not she just paid the fee, the hospital fee, or if she just like gave them hell, and was like, "You're not keeping the baby."

[00:14:09.08]

You know, um, and I've heard Anishinaabekwe in this area, Anishinaabe women, talk about uh, not just uh the colonization and the infiltration and the like, perversion towards their communities, but also how white settlers have treated their own. And I learned about that before my Grandmother told me this story. About my Dad's birth. So I've held onto that and I've thought a lot about that and wondered in the last, more recently in the last couple of years... What knowledge is lost when people are dislocated from their land for one reason or another and something that I'm thinking more about that was uh shared or taught to me um from, by being here at Trent as a student in a course with Anishinaabe-Algonquin Paula Sherman- she's a supervisor on my MA project- she talked about some teachings around the importance of knowing your own ancestral roots so that you can understand and maybe communicate better when you're living on the land, that you're not originally from. So that you could at least speak in a way, or understand the connection and the gratitude and the relationship between human and land. If you know where you, where your family comes from. I don't know if I'm explaining that clearly or well enough. But a reference that she offered around those teachings was, came from Grandfather William Commanda, who I still admittedly need to do a little more learning around. Um, his work. But yeah, so that's something that I'm exploring a little bit more and I think about my Grandmothers a lot when, um, when I'm, you know, researching that or looking it up.

[00:16:29.25]

Pat: So, does your MA project reflect, do you think, memory work? In any way?

Heidi: My MA project asks... How... I'm forgetting my own MA research. I've been doing this for a year and a half. [Laughs]

Pat: Take your time.

Heidi: I've heard that. I've heard that this happens.

Melissa: Mhm.

Heidi: You get so involved in what you're doing, you actually forget what you're doing. Um. My MA research looks at intergenerational relationships that happen at Manómin harvesting time. Manómin is the Anishinaabe word for wild rice. When I moved to this territory, wild rice was something that I... I didn't learn about it right away. I don't want to say I was here for a week and then, you know- and I had- I happened to move here during harvest season. Which happens to be around the end of August, beginning to middle of September roughly, although it can change, and climate change has affected that greatly. We had a lot of rain this season so that affected it. But um, yeah it didn't happen immediately but that was one of the first things that I did learn about when I came here and just sort of serendipitously landed and made friends with people who are ricers and uh... yeah. And I'm trying to think back to exactly how this happened but I honestly can't pinpoint a moment. But I started learning about Manómin very early into my life here. On this territory. And uh... I don't know where I was going with this, but. I felt in love with it. Not in a romantic way. I view Manómin as... a living being that shows us how to survive. And I think that I have spent a lot of my, my own life trying to survive. And maybe that's not my only connection or appreciation to it. But I do feel that my life circumstances, the things that brought me to this territory um, maybe there was a reason there. You know, maybe that connection was meant to be made.

[00:19:24.08]

Not to get too... You know, woo woo about it [laughs]. Yeah. And we go out, you know, every harvest season now and I've built I think really great relationships with a community of harvesters in Curve Lake and Alderville. And Alderville has a really, um, there's actually a really nice relationship between the um communities here and Ardoch First Nation, that I'm slowly learning about the history of that. Excuse me. Um, and uh, my children like to come out in the canoe and it's just something that I really would have liked to have grown up with and I'm so glad that my children get to have this experience and that it will be um... Yeah. I dunno. I guess I'm hoping to do some of the work and some of the questions that I've had growing up and teach my children how to place value on the land, not as a commodity, but as something that they have a reciprocal, loving relationship with. Um... Because that's something that really needs to change. Cause we won't survive if it doesn't.

Pat: Wonderful. Thank you very, very much.

[00:21:02.24]

Heidi: [Laughs]

Pat: And is there anything else that you'd like to say or any questions that...

Heidi: Um. I don't think so. Yeah.

Melissa: Thank you, Heidi.

Pat: That was really wonderful.

Heidi: Thanks.

Pat: The image of the canoe and the children and the ricing.

Heidi: Yeah. When I'm talking about it, it feels very fragmented still. And I also just feel like it's important to say that I have been here for seven years which is a long time especially in a world where everybody moves around so much and technology allows us to communicate to the farest reaches of the world um but I'm still a newcomer here, even if somewhere in my family tree I do have connections and roots to the land, to Turtle Island. But I also share these experiences in some ways as second-hand knowledge because I'm still learning and I will forever be learning. And I think it's the, like... Yeah. I'm gonna leave it at that. I don't need to blubber on about it. But yeah it's such a privilege and I'm so grateful that after the way that I grew up I have had the luck, the serendipity to end up here. I didn't end up here in the best circumstances. It was a choice I made for economic and personal reasons to leave the city. Which I never thought that I would leave. To raise my family here. So, sometimes things happen in life, and you get pushed in directions that you ought to have chosen for yourself. I heard that somewhere once. And I didn't care for it much when I heard it, but when this life transformation change, this move happened for me, and I landed here, I understood very much what that meant. So.

[00:23:14.03]

Pat: Thank you.

Heidi: Thanks.

Audience member: Awesome.

Melissa: Yeah.

Heidi: Thank you. I didn't talk very much about my research but that's okay. [Laughs]

Audience member: Do you want to add something about it?

Heidi: No it's okay. No it's fine. Thanks. I'm in the heat of the- like in the middle of it. So I'm not even...

Pat: Well you spoke about it very well. Beautifully.

Michelle: I loved it. Cause I think it's really nice it was, you know, like the past, right? And then your education and where the future's going.

Heidi: Yeah.

Michelle: For your kids and for everybody. Beautiful.

Heidi: It's remarkable because the institution, like, the academy, or you know whatever. It's so colonial, it's so oppressive and there's so many limitations and it's very frustrating. And I've cried a lot and I've had a lot of sleepless nights trying to force myself through work that I really didn't feel like doing. And couldn't understand why this is being, like, impressed upon us to like train our brains this way. Um, but by the same token, there are people at Trent, I don't know if this happens at all universities... that also try to um break that down and going out and doing land-based courses and listening to the stories and personal experiences of my teachers and knowledge holders and peers and people who are from here or other places, um, and learning about the land in the way that I have, has been really liberating too. I didn't understand before why education was a privilege. Because I never really liked going to school [laughs]. But that's a young, immature, you know. But uh, but now I understand why it's so, yeah. And I wouldn't have known these things and I wouldn't have known how to ask these questions about myself in the way that I am now or where to look for answers or who to ask. If I didn't have access. To the university.

[00:25:22.08]

Heidi: There's that. It's an interesting nuance.

Melissa: I just kept thinking about how your little one got to be part of that.

Heidi: Yeah. My daughter and this one have, I was pregnant now twice during my education. Which a lot of people say, "I don't know how you do it! I don't know how you do it!" But uh you know we do what we have to do. We weather these storms and we do what we have to do and um like the Manómin, maybe some of you are familiar with what's happened in the waterways here. Some people, some of the settlers here have developed and polluted the water and polluted the ecological relationship. That is so needed here. Not just for the people, not just for the water itself, for the health of the water, but also for the waterfall and for the fish and you know for everyone. This is a relationship that needs to be sustained. I can't remember where I was going with that. I lost it. But, yeah.

Michelle: Still got it.

Heidi: [Laughs] It's somewhere.

Michelle: Can I get a quick photo of you and Pat together? As a concluding shot.

Pat: Sitting down or just-

Michelle: Standing up. Nice. Yay. Thank you. Great.

Monica: I think this struggle, academic struggle is probably in every university, no?

[Other chatter happening simultaneously]

Monica: Academics trying to impose these very rigid rules and human beings trying to change it.

Audience member: Yeah. [Laughs]

[00:27:19.22]

Michelle: Yeah and hopefully it changes bit by bit, and, right?

Monica: And then there will be someone else to change-

Michelle: That's right, yeah. Next generation will tell us...

[Chatter]

Michelle: Are we doing one more or that's it?

Monica: What's our schedule?

Michelle: How are we doing for timing?

[Chatter going on, many people talking simultaneously]

[00:28:01.02]

[End of tape]