













Sharon: Sharing my story always gives me a new faith in myself, as I am able to look at what I wrote. Sometimes I never cease to amaze myself because I feel so silly for what I put me through. Trust me, there are days when I can jump on the pity train and my ass rides for a long time. But when I read what I wrote... then I become revived once again.

Valerie: I verbally shared my story so many times in the past 20 years, but never actually sat down to write it. I asked myself 'How do I write this?'... As I wrote my story, I realized it was similar yet different than verbally telling my story. Well, words are words that come out of your mouth and people can misinterpret what you're saying, and some even forget the message you're leaving. Whereas, with writing, you can leave a message of hope and can provide courage to someone who is really searching to understand one's life. Someone may be reading my story 50 years from now, when I have passed this physical life and moved to the spiritual realm.

### **Sharing our experiences is a part of our healing journeys**

Each of the women communicated how sharing her story with the project was an important part of her own healing journey. Once again, they acknowledged that while it is difficult to reflect on their pasts, it is important for them to do so to progress in their healing.

Jane: Putting my experiences on paper was extremely difficult yet exhilarating... I must continue to vocalize the challenges I have faced and those that are ongoing. That is how I survive; by sharing and loving, contributing to my community and thereby growing.

Sharon: Sharing my story is what I do. It is where my continued healing journey brings me new appreciation for other women who are in need... The ghosts of the past surface at different times when I am sharing and the memories are painful. But at the end of the day I know that I will be okay because it is all part of my continuous healing journey... Writing this is self-discovery of my inner Medicine Wheel that I carry in my heart, mind, body, and soul.

### **Our stories offer hope to women in need**

The idea of offering hope to the participants in our study through the gift of an oyster/pearl was discussed

as an illustration of First Nations women's experiential voices contributing to the project. Hope was relayed in Sharon, Valerie and Jane's motivation for sharing their life experiences. Their collective desire is to provide hope to women in need, with whom they have experiences in common.

Sharon: It meant that sharing my life without alcohol/drugs might benefit the lives of others that are new in recovery and need to hear the possibilities. When I was out on the street or in prison or in treatment there was never anyone there for me. When I am asked to do something today that may save a soul, I have no hesitation. It is important to be able to reach out and touch the heart of a woman that has no idea how to love and to show her the way. It is important to give her hope for a renewal of life that she thought would never be and to give her peace of mind... Through sharing my life, perhaps one day another woman will benefit... I hope it will give one woman one small chance at full recovery.

Valerie: I realize people will make use of the only resources that they have within reach and if its alcohol and drugs, then that's the only resource they have. This is one of the main reasons I agreed to write my story. I hope this written document can become a resource for inspiration and hope rather than turning to addictions.

### **Documenting our lived experiences increases our self-esteem**

The women spoke of an increased sense of self-esteem and a general feeling of well-being as a result of sharing their experiential stories with the project and with the women who will participate in interviews. It has been documented in the literature that this benefit occurs when individuals tell their stories in their own voices and perspectives. (Ristock & Pennell, 1996; Stanley & Wise, 1991). Once again, the women noted that the necessity of reflecting on their experiences didn't make it easy.

Jane: Although frightening at times, I am committed to breaking the stigma... An improved self-identity has emerged and I am learning more about myself as I continue on my lifelong healing journey. With the love and support of my family, friends and community I am stronger... Through my experiences in this project with my story I now feel more worthy of holding my Spirit name.









