STORYTELLING IN PLAY: UPISASIK THEATRE REVISITED

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A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This is the story of Upisasik Theatre, a small high school theatre troupe in northern Saskatchewan that created, performed and toured its plays from 1978 to 1985. It is a story told by the teacher-director, and it weaves together the meanings and memories of the actors of Upisasik.

The author of this narrative returned to the Cree-Metis community of Ile-à-la-Crosse in the spring of 1992 to visit and interview past students, many of whom are now community actors in a revived Upisasik Theatre Collective. Through these interviews he explored the significance of the Upisasik experience for its participants and for the local community. Field notes were used to document the work of the new Collective.

The story that emerges is one of personal and social meanings both for the actors and for the teacher who writes this narrative. It is a story of collective creation, of cultural expression, of storytelling in play.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all those who once were students in Upisasik Theatre and who now continue the story. A special thank you to the Upisasik actors who have contributed directly or indirectly to this narrative:

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I wish to dedicate this story to Val Drummond, my wife and closest friend, who has been the unofficial co-author of all of my work with Upisasik Theatre. This is her story too.

Lon Borgerson
May, 1993
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study has been conducted according to guidelines laid down by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Human Experimentation. In addition, I have complied with requests by all participants that their anonymity be waived. (Appendix C) Personal and place names are therefore authentic.

In drawing material from my interviews, I have attempted, in Lincoln and Guba's words "to portray the world of the site in terms of the constructions that respondents use, seeing the world 'through their eyes,' as it were, and expressing their constructions in their own natural language."

My participants are therefore quoted verbatim. Ellipses (...) indicate omissions. Shortened breaks (...) indicate pauses or hesitations. Brackets [] are used for Cree-English translations. It is important to note that although I refer to Cree as the first language of Ile-à-la-Crosse, there is a growing awareness that the language of that community is unique and distinct and that "Michif" or "Cree Michif" is a more accurate term.
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INTRODUCTION

In January, 1976, I found myself driving across the winter road to the community of Ile-à-la-Crosse, whiteness everywhere as I followed the curve of cleared ice through the islands of Rosser Bay. In the distance, the gray spire of St. Joseph's Church marked a destination that I assumed at the time to be short-term, a few months at most. It became instead more of a home than any since my birth-place, partly because of the people, partly because of the landscape, partly because of the dramas that came from both.

At Big Dock, I drove up off the ice, past a laneway of small houses and outbuildings to the main street of the town. Rossignol School was easy to find: three large circular pods with windowed walls all around. This was a new school, named after a priest and built after a fire in 1972 gutted the old one. My students later told the story of how Brother Guy saved the gymnasium and one classroom wing by driving the mission cat through one corner of the burning building.

At one of my first staff meetings, the school's Metis architect, Douglas Cardinal, spoke to us about the cultural significance of the new school's design -- the use of circles, the vaulted ceilings and skylights, the windows of each and every classroom facing in to the community within and out to the community without.

Ile-à-la-Crosse is a Cree-Metis community, first established as a fur-trading post more than two hundred years
ago. Its name then was "Sakitawak," or meeting place, because it is situated on a peninsula that marks the meeting of the Canoe and Beaver Rivers with the Churchill.

As the second oldest community in Saskatchewan, and as a hotbed of Metis politics, Ile-à-la-Crosse has created for itself a rich and vibrant history, and this blend of history and politics led to the proposal that a historical play be written to celebrate the community's bicentenary in 1976. Funds were procured for a production and tour, and an attempt was made to contract a well-known playwright from the south. The writer in question agreed, on condition that he be given copyright, but his terms were rejected by the Ile-à-la-Crosse School Board. This was a pivotal decision because it signified that this historical play should come from the community and belong to the community.

After a long delay, a researcher (Val Drummond) was hired, and, as the new English teacher, I was asked if I would work with a group of high-school students to create a play that would tell the story of Ile-à-la-Crosse, of Sakitawak. I was presumptuous enough to agree.

Presumptuous because I had no theatre training to speak of. In fact, my perception of drama had changed little since my days as a junior-high student in rural Saskatchewan. Drama then was the stuff of lines and memorization, of songs and recitations, of lips in synch with everyone else's dialogue. There was the repulsive taste of lipstick and the
wickedly strange scents of rouge and facial powder and there was tall, tough Cameron, high-kicking beside me, a fellow elf in red top and leotards.

Later on, in high school, I stood at the edge of the same school stage in an undersized suit, the cuffs tight on my farm-boy's arms, which I flapped wildly, crowing, "Cock-a-doodle-do, Cock-a-doodle-do, Cock-a-doodle-do!" I have no idea why. I only know that, as a rookie teacher in my first two schools, I directed plays that resembled very much the dramas of my own school years. Some came from the Samuel French catalogue of plays from New York, New York. Farces and whodunits, chosen more often than not for size and gender of cast than for content and relevance:

IT'S COLD IN THEM THAR HILLS
A Hillbilly Comedy in One Act
by LeRoma Greth

Here is a hillbilly comedy guaranteed to delight any audience and be a lot of fun for any cast! It's the story of a family - Paw, Maw, and their six teenage daughters. One of the girls has unfortunately reached the ripe old age of nineteen and is still unmarried. Paw and Maw decide something must be done! They've got to get a husband for daughter Snoddy...

Red elves, hillbillies and whodunits all seemed somewhat trivial and irrelevant in the context of the Ile-à-la-Crosse drama project. Unarmed and unprepared, I took a crash course, a single summer session drama course, and there took inspiration from Brian Way's Development Through Drama (1967)
and the creative drama movement of that time.

Creative drama is rooted in a repertoire of games, exercises and activities meant to develop the perceptive and expressive abilities of the individual student:

Education is concerned with individuals; drama is concerned with the individuality of individuals, with the uniqueness of each human essence. Indeed this is one of the reasons for its intangibility and immeasurability.

(Way, 1967, p.3)

And so, once or twice weekly, a few teachers, here and there, have pushed back the desks or taken the kids down to the gym for a session of creative drama, even though it has never been formally integrated into any level of our provincial curriculum.

To facilitate the process of creating a play with the students of Ile-à-la-Crosse, it was decided that I should devise a locally-developed course in drama and have it accredited by the provincial Department of Education. However, when we searched for curriculum models, none could be found. Although some larger comprehensive schools were offering credit courses in drama, none seemed to have a curriculum on paper. We were on our own.

A locally-developed Drama 10 course of study was therefore written and was eventually given provincial approval, with Drama 20 and 30 credits introduced in subsequent years. These new curricula blended creative drama
with a community focus:

In the initial part of the course, students will individually experience exercises that involve their physical selves, emotions, speech, concentration, senses and imagination....Students will be asked to research into newspapers and, more importantly, into their own community and social background for improvisational material....They will have the opportunity to study and act in scripted works, but most of their performing will be of their own original material.

(Saskatchewan Education, 1977)

Eight high-school students registered in that first drama class. We started with games, warm-ups, exercises, and moved gradually into improvisational work. From the very start, the drama program took on a collective nature, with improvisations based not only on the work of the researcher and me, but on the personal and community stories that the students brought to class. It was in the making of this first play that I began to see the incredible power of narrative, of the well-told story, in the making of meaning.

And so began the story of the Ile-à-la-Crosse drama group, Upisasik ("Little") Theatre.
CHAPTER I

UPISASIK THEATRE KAYAS

SAKITAWAK KAYAS (1978)

[The three Speculators converge on the Metis Man]
First Speculator: You've got scrip, sir?
I'll give you a dollar an acre.
Second Speculator: A dollar an acre!
I'll give you a dollar fifty.
Third Speculator: I see you're a very smart man so I'll give you two dollars.
First: Two twenty-five.
Second: Two fifty. Two fifty.
Third: I see you're stubborn... Three dollars!
First: Three fifty. I'll give you three fifty.
Second: Three seventy-five. Three seventy-five.
First: They're talking peanuts. I'll give you four bucks.
Second: Four seventy-five.
First: Ok, so I'll say five dollars for your scrip.
Second: Five dollars! Five dollars?
(Lowers voice.) Hey, what's going on here?
(Three speculators move toward back of stage, huddle, speak secretively, make a deal, shake hands and return.)
First: OK sir, one dollar. We're going to give you one dollar an acre for your scrip. That's all we can offer.
Second: One dollar.
Third: Yes. One dollar.

Kayas: the past. Stories of contact between the Cree and the first white explorers. Stories of rivalry between the Hudson Bay and Northwest Company and an honest-to-goodness duel the year that they merged, 1821. Stories of Sarah Riel, Louis Riel's sister, a nun whose life was saved by a miracle a year after she came to work in the Ile-à-la-Crosse Mission. People say that after being given the last sacrament, she sat
up in her bed and asked someone to bring her shoes. She lived for eleven more years and was buried in the local cemetery.

Stories of the granting of land scrip by Commissioner McKenna and the hasty appropriation of this land title by the Church, by the Bay, and by three speculators from the south who conveniently accompanied Mr. McKenna.

Stories of the 1902 flood, when families paddled right up to the church step for Mass. Stories of boarding school life and the mystique of the clergy ("They have to go to the bathroom!..."No they don't, cause they're holy.") Stories of the last voyageurs, of pampered Hudson Bay factors, of strict boarding school teachers, of the flu epidemics of 1919 and 1937 and the red light in the sky that gave the people warning.

These were the stories of Sakitawak Kayas.

Throughout the making of the play, we struggled with content. On the one hand, we wanted historical accuracy; on the other, we wanted the material to entertain. Walking the fine line between fact and fiction resulted in endless discussion and debate, particularly between me and the researcher. In retrospect, this was a debate over validity. Our research was, in fact, an ethnographic enterprise, with the play as our form of representation. The validity, or authenticity, of our play therefore lay not in its factual base, but in its "rightness," in its "fit" with those from whom the stories came -- our informants and audience-to-be
To make sure that we "got it right," an early version of the play was performed at the Old Folks' Home, with actors and audience interacting both during and after the show.

In the spring of 1978, *Sakitawak Kayas* was performed in Ile-à-la-Crosse and toured to other northern communities. After the hard work, the frustrations, the many times when we felt like giving it all up, we experienced the magic of transforming gyms and band halls into little ("upisasik") theatres where people could hear their own stories, performed by their own people, in Cree as well as in English. For many, our performance was the first live theatre that they had ever seen. It was also "the beginning of Native theatre in Saskatchewan" (Bouvier, 1983, p.16).

NAPEW (1979)

Just before break-up, the ice would melt away from the shore of Lac Ile-à-la-Crosse, leaving a fringe of water that widened with the warmth of spring. Late on Friday afternoons I would watch skidoos arrive from across the lake to take kids home for the weekend. Each skidoo towed a sled, and in each sled was a canoe, which was used to shuttle kids and groceries out to the ice sheet for the journey home. On Monday mornings, they returned for another week of school.

At one time there were homes all around the lake, with family settlements at places like Sandy Point and Fort Black.
The people made their living from a traditional economy of hunting, trapping and fishing, and many kept gardens and livestock. The decision of most families to leave all this and to move into town resulted in an abrupt shift in lifestyle, and this change was the topic of our second play, Napew.

The story emerged from a series of improvisations set in locations around the community -- the cafe, the show hall, the classroom, the hospital, the bootlegger’s -- locations that presented a whole new set of problems for our family, the LaRivieres, as they adjusted to urban life in Ile-à-la-Crosse. Power-outs, horror movies at the show hall, Mrs. LaRiviere taking off her apron before she answered the telephone; these were scenes of familiarity and hilarity for our audiences. For Napew, the son, the contact with "southern" institutions like the school, the mining companies, the R.C.M.P., all led to conflicts that were both comic and self-destructive. Napew was the only play that my students allowed to end in tragedy. After the play was videotaped in Stanley Mission, a narration was added, with this as the final entry:

Sister: Dear Diary..Today was the saddest day of my life. I cannot put it into words. I feel that Napew is our people, the Metis. And we are all lost...

THE PIN (1980)

In The Pin, old Angeline carefully inspects a small pin that her granddaughter has brought to her.
Angeline: What is this?
Girl: A Celebrate Saskatchewan pin.
Angeline: And what's the X for?
Angeline: Did you say "Celebrate Saskatchewan"?
Girl: Yeah.
Angeline: Why wheat?
Girl: Well there's wheat in Saskatchewan.
Angeline: You mean southern Saskatchewan.
Girl: Yes.
Angeline: You know, they could have put a fish here. I mean, there's fish all over the place.

The Pin was part of a Celebrate Saskatchewan project which twinned the drama groups of two historic communities: Ile-à-la-Crosse and Arcola.

For this one year, my role as a school principal led us to recruit a teacher-director who would carry on the collective approach of the school's drama program. Under Allan Lake's guidance, stories of the distant, and not-so-distant past were once again brought to class as source material for improvisations. Wringer washers, chain saws, outboards, Bay manager marriages and the Ile-à-la-Crosse school dispute -- all became rich material for the historical collage that became The Pin.
In early May, 1980, after a six hundred mile drive and two bus breakdowns, the students of Upisasilk Theatre arrived in Arcola, Saskatchewan. Some of our hosts were certainly apprehensive about billeting "Indian" students from the North, and our students were certainly apprehensive about performing for a totally non-Aboriginal audience. But friendships grew quickly, and on a warm May evening, on the second floor of the old Arcola Town Hall, the students of Upisasilk Theatre enacted their stories, in Cree and English, for a large, appreciative prairie audience.

SCRIP VAN WINKLE (1981)

Rip: (in Cree) I don't believe it! People have left their homes across the lake? They all live here?

Lisa: Yes.

Rip: (in Cree) It's crazy. Look at all those new houses. There was nothing here before. Everything has changed. (Turning to the lake) No, not everything has changed. The lake is still the same. The lake will always be there. And there's Big Island! That'll never change. It will always be the same.

What if someone fell asleep years ago and woke up in 1981? Better yet, what if someone received land scrip in 1906, fell asleep, and woke up in 1981, with the scrip still in his pocket? And better yet, what if this scrip was for title to prime real estate in the south; say, for example, Kiwanis Park in downtown Saskatoon and the grounds of the Bessborough Hotel?
This was the idea behind *Scrip Van Winkle*. The hero, Rip, is found asleep in a deserted shack at the edge of town. His only means of identification is the land scrip that he received just before his seventy-five year nap. He presents it to the local DNS (Department of Northern Saskatchewan) officer, the grid-references are checked, and Rip is soon on his way to Saskatoon to claim his land.

As he sets up camp in "Kitsiwanis" Park, he gets an amusing look at what Saskatoon is all about: joggers, photographers, flower-children, hookers and poodle-lovers. When it becomes public knowledge that Rip has land title to the center of the city, he finds himself pursued and harassed by the same speculators that snapped up scrip in 1906.

*Scrip Van Winkle* was performed in a number of northern schools and communities and was part of a cultural exchange involving LaLoche, Ile-à-la-Crosse, and Saskatoon's Shoestring Gallery. On May 30, 1981, the Mendel Auditorium in Saskatoon was transformed into a northern-style theatre, and a large audience came out for what was billed as "An Evening of Improvisation and Short Plays, presented by Upisasik Theatre of Ile-à-la-Crosse." One audience member, Susan Ringwood, was there to see the outcome of a certain summer session drama course that she had taught three years before.

**COME TOMORROW COME** (1983)

When Douglas Cardinal designed Rossignol School, he
included a large semi-circular "Music Room," with carpeted
tiers dropping down to a small trapezoidal stage area. The
Music Room was never used as intended, but it could seat more
than one hundred students and was therefore a good space for
films, workshops, assemblies, and for performances by Upisasik
Theatre.

Our work area, however, was an L-shaped classroom in the
old wing, which the students and I transformed into a workable
space with the help of a few gallons of flat black paint and a
set of wall cupboards that were just the right size for a
small stage.

Early in January, 1983, I sat in the center of this
newly-renovated space, a jiffy marker in hand, jotting notes
on a long sheet of paper while the students carried on an
intense discussion about the lives and choices of young women
in Ile-à-la-Crosse. They were responding to an invitation to
perform at a Social Services conference, with its theme
"Adolescents in Crisis."

From these discussions, a storyline emerged, and scenes
were charted for improvisational work, a reversal of the
process used for previous plays. Come Tomorrow Come told the
story of three young women who have just graduated from high
school. Penny chooses to get a job in the community; Rachel
leaves to go to university; Margaret moves between both worlds
as a northern reporter for the Star Phoenix. The play
portrayed the racism that some women experience when they move
to the city and the sexism that others endure at home.

In the end, Rachel returns to Ile-à-la-Crosse, two guys tossing for her in the local cafe; Penny packs her suitcase and her newborn child for their move to Saskatoon; Margaret gives a speech at a particular Social Services conference.

Margaret: A lot of us graduate from Grade 12 now. But then there's nothing. Well, almost nothing. With the traditional skills being lost, there is little meaningful work for us to do or aim for. We need more training programs like NORTEP in the north and we need local industries. We women need more ways to prove we're persons than by having babies...

ME NO INDIAN (1984)

The basic storyline of Me No Indian was contributed by Maureen, a long-time drama student who had acted in every one of our plays. A young woman chooses to become a teacher, but, in the process, rejects her cultural roots, as represented by her kohkom (grandmother). When she finally realizes her mistake, it is too late to learn from kohkom; she is on her own.

Because Me No Indian was scheduled for performance at a national education conference (CITEP 1984), it was structured to demonstrate the many expressive forms that could be incorporated into a collective creation. The play included not only improvisational dialogue, but puppetry, mime, music, masks, visual slides, readers' theatre, a speech, and the
poetry of Louis Riel:

Though the Metis are not many in number
Great is the destiny which they command
Proud of the hate that the world heaps upon them
Yet they have played a great role in this land.

_Me No Indian_ and _Come Tomorrow Come_ were the only plays ever entered by Upisasik Theatre in the Provincial Drama Festival, which is sponsored by the Saskatchewan Drama Association (SDA). Usually, we prioritized northern audiences for those precious few days every year when we could take our plays on the road.

I also disliked the competitive nature of the festival. Landy (1982) suggests that "the school play" encourages "a hierarchy of players and a team spirit based upon a common enemy" (p.78). There are close parallels with sports: the rehearsals are practices; the regional festivals are playoffs; the provincial festival, a tournament.

At the regional festivals, Upisasik Theatre was out-staged and out-produced by Big River High School. (The costuming and props for our plays were kept simple, symbolic, and portable enough for touring.) Although Upisasik Theatre won its share of acting awards, it lost in the overall adjudication. The SDA awarded 40 marks for acting, 35 for production, 10 for presentation, and only 15 for "endeavor, originality and attainment" (Saskatchewan Drama Association, p.6).
Gabrielle: Look, I know what you're trying to do! You want me to go back to Ile-à-la-Crosse, don't you? Well, I won't. Damn it, it isn't the same now! This is Saskatoon - not Montana. This is 1985 - not 1885. And I am only Gabrielle.

Riel: (To Gabrielle.) In 1870, the frontier was Manitoba. In 1885, the frontier was the farmlands of Saskatchewan. In 1985, the frontier is Northern Saskatchewan. The North, too, will be lost.

In 1985 we set to work on a play that would commemorate the Batoche Centenary. We imagined what might happen if the 1885 "rebellion" were to occur in 1985; were to be staged in Ile-à-la-Crosse instead of Batoche; were to be led by a woman, Gabrielle, who is visited by visions of Riel, just as he had been visited by visions of God.

Riel: (To Gabrielle) My ideas are right; they are well-balanced. They are level and clear; there is no mourning in my thoughts. My ideas are like the sights on my rifle. My rifle is upright. It is the invisible presence of God which holds my rifle straight and steady.

Gabrielle: Are you trying to say we should take up arms and fight back? Look, this 1985! We can't just run out and get our guns and raise an army. It didn't work for you, and it sure as hell won't work for us. If I went back to Ile-à-la-Crosse and told everyone to get their guns and prepare to fight, I'd be laughed out of town...And if I told them I'd been talking to you, they'd lock me up in an asylum. We can't fight a war in 1985. What do we do? Tell me!
The text of the vision scenes was developed around Riel's own words, excerpted from his diaries; the storyline came both from the events of 1885 and from the community itself. There was no question that the land issue was as real in 1985 as it had been a century before. But what specific issue might set off a modern resistance? And what form would the "rebellion" take? For answers, students interviewed community members and even hosted a noon-hour, phone-in show on the local radio station:

Dear Parents, TUNE IN TO CILX ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25 FROM 12:00-1:00.

It is now 100 years since the 1885 Rebellion under Louis Riel.

The drama group at Rossignol School is making a play for BATOCHÉ 85 and WE NEED YOUR HELP.

Our play will give the story of the 1885 Rebellion as it might happen in 1985: Surveyors will arrive in Ile-à-la-Crosse and plans will be made for an oil well or mine of some sort (uranium? gold?) IN THIS AREA.

What guarantees should this community have (if any) before the mine or oil well can go ahead?
If we can't get any guarantees, what then?...TUNE IN TO CILX RADIO ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25 AT NOON HOUR FOR A SPECIAL PHONE-IN SHOW, "BATOCHÉ AGAIN".

From the responses, the students drafted a new version of the 1885 Bill of Rights and, in so doing, found that they were able to transfer many of the same demands of one hundred years ago into a modern context.
In the play, a government minister (appropriately named Scott) arrives in the community to officially open an oil field. After a standard northern speech, he is presented the Metis Bill of Rights. When he rejects it, Gabrielle announces the beginning of the "rebellion," in words borrowed from the 1885 Proclamation:

Gabrielle: We do declare and proclaim in the name of the people of Ile-à-la-Crosse and its fur block territory that we have, on this 19th day of March, 1985, established a provisional government and hold it to be the only lawful authority now in existence in this area. In support of this declaration we pledge ourselves an oath, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour to each other.

Although the events of 1885 led to tragedy, the students wanted Gabrielle to end with a statement of hope for their people, the Metis. And yet, for the students and me, the play was more than this: It was the story of Native protest, of people once again defending their land against speculators. It was the story of the Haida in British Columbia, of the Lubicon in Alberta, of the Mohawks in Quebec.

After a successful northern tour, Gabrielle was performed where its story really began -- at Batoche, during the Centenary celebrations, with an Upisask graduate, Duane Favel, directing the performance. It was hoped that this all-Native production of Gabrielle would mark a new phase for drama in Ile-à-la-Crosse, for it was that summer that I left the school and community of Ile-à-la-Crosse.
Unfortunately, as Vye Bouvier puts it, Upisasik "bit the dust" (Bouvier, 1992, p.10).
Duane: I guess for me it would have to be a stage with our backdrop... the one with the river on it... Yellow, red, blue backdrop, with an eagle, or man, with wings. With lighting flashed on him. And maybe a rocking chair with... with a shawl wrapped around. And.. possibly... a table or something with... my fur hat I used to wear all the time. And that would sum up Upisask Theatre. Because it was the rocking chair and the fur hat. And maybe a leather jacket and moccasins somewhere.
CHAPTER II

UPISASIK AS POPULAR THEATRE

Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world. (Freire, 1970, p.75)

In the eight years that passed after leaving Ile-à-la-Crosse, I often reflected on the Upisasik Theatre experience, and in order to discuss its significance I have had to impose my own set of meanings. For workshops on collective creation, for articles, for the classes that I teach and take, for my own peace of mind, I have had to go beyond the chronology as presented here.

The search for conceptual frameworks or models that might "fit" the Ile-à-la-Crosse experience has led me first to the popular theatre movement and then back to the tradition and culture of the students themselves.

Penny: Jim..Jim..Jim!

Jim: Just a minute. (Shouts offstage) Basketball? What time?..Okay, six o'clock! Pick me up, OK?..Ha Ha Ha..Stuff ya!

Penny: Jim, I need to talk to you!

Jim: (Angrily) Just wait!..(Smiling, calls offstage) Right on! Yeah man, I'll be there!

Penny: Jim, Please. Can I talk to you?

Jim: Listen, can't we talk later on?

Penny: No Jim, I have to talk to you now. Can we go for coffee?

Jim: I'm gonna go for coffee with the guys.
Penny: Well, what about tonight? I need to talk to you.

Jim: Well, tonight I've got a basketball game. And after that we're gonna go for a coupla beer. Tomorrow maybe we'll..

Penny: Jim, I'm pregnant.

Jim: You're...(Long, long pause. Then...) You..stupid..bitch!

Theatre as a language to speak of oppression. What made this scene electric in performance was the fact that the actors were portraying a moment from their own lives. This is the essence of popular theatre: to use theatre as a language of and for the oppressed and as a rehearsal for liberation.

In *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Augusto Boal (1979) describes the Operacion Alfabetizacion Integral (ALFIN), a literary campaign launched by the Peruvian government in 1973, with its goal to eradicate illiteracy within four years. In a country with a vast number of languages and dialects (45 languages in one province alone), the ALFIN adopted a stance that "there are many languages besides those that are written or spoken," and that people should therefore be taught literacy not only in Spanish, and not only in their first language, but in all possible languages, including photography, journalism, film, puppetry - and theatre (p.121).

Students were therefore taught the vocabulary of theatre, the use of body and voice to express the reality of their lives and thereby to know themselves better. They identified images and incidents of oppression in their lives and
reproduced these in the classroom, in the form of sculptures (using the bodies of other participants) or scenes (using improvisation). They then used drama to explore and enact solutions to their oppression. It is from this notion of theatre as a language and as a rehearsal for change and liberation that popular theatre has emerged.

The term "popular" is used in its broad context, meaning "of the people," and it is used as well to define a broad area of methodology known as "popular education." Grounded in the work and writing of Paulo Freire, popular education serves as an alternate approach to education, using as its curriculum the learner's own environment and needs. In the third world, with the majority of people living under economic and social injustice and oppression, popular education is seen by many as a process for change, for liberation, with popular theatre as one of its tools.

Popular theatre is, therefore, "poor theatre." For people who do not have access to radio, television and print, and for those whose media are "one-way channels between the government and people," popular theatre "offers a down-top channel of communication which can expand (people's) participation in development" (Chambulikazi, 1989, p.32). It is a "people's media" and a form of literacy to which peasants already have access.

Because it builds on people's own forms of expression, education and organization, it immediately affirms and helps to revitalize people's autonomous forms of
expression, education, and organization.

(Kidd, 1984a, p.266)

It also makes it possible for communities to examine and reflect upon issues or problems, to develop a collective understanding of them, and to rehearse strategies for change.

And so, popular theatre is used in mass education programs in many developing countries: in struggles for national independence; in awareness campaigns against venereal disease in Botswana and for preventative health in Sierra Leone; in political struggles against land invasion in Bolivia, corrupt landlords in Bangladesh, and poor working conditions in Nicaragua (Kidd, 1984a).

But what of the "developed" countries? What role does popular theatre play in societies of comparative privilege? To a great extent, while popular theatre has been a theatre of the oppressed in many developing countries, it has been a theatre for the oppressed in our part of the world. Its roots go back to the Chatauqua Festivals of the 1920's and to the agit-prop theatre of the 1930's when workers used drama to protest the hardships bestowed upon them by the Depression. In Sudbury, for example, skits were performed to worker audiences that spoke of long working hours, lay-offs and poor relations with the boss (McGauley, 1987, p.38). Drama was used to communicate experiences that were shared by actors and audiences, thereby developing a sense of solidarity.

In the 1960's and 1970's we saw the emergence of
"alternative theatre" companies across Canada. In Saskatchewan, theatres such as Globe Theatre in Regina and 25th Street Theatre in Saskatoon, and plays such as Paper Wheat and Generation and a Half dealt with the stories and heritage of prairie people. The actors engaged in a process of "collective creation," with community research followed by community performance and discussion. This process usually involved a sharing of political philosophy on the part of the actors and a desire to stimulate change and action.

The nationalistic flavor of theatre eventually dwindled, for a number of reasons -- commercialization and private sponsorship of some theatres, aging directors and static staff, larger theatres needing larger and more mainstream audiences. Filewood (1982) suggests that as "alternatives to the mainstream establishment," collective companies were considered to be "less respectable, or at least less important," and were, therefore, last in line when it came to public funding (p.54). The choice was, and still is, clear: "rich means Shakespeare, poor means collective creation" (Filewood, 1982, p.56). Collective companies had to conform or concede. Hunt's (1989) unequivocal explanation is that "the politicians took the nationalistic rhetoric and made it their own" (p.20).

In the last decade, alternative theatre has mushroomed in Canada, with many of the new troupes closely affiliated to the popular theatre movement (more than 100 in Ontario alone).
They share an assumption that "it is not people who have to go to the theatre; rather it is the theatre which is obliged to go to the people" and that "ideally, the evening out at the theatre is not the total experience, but rather the initial catalyst for an ongoing program of education and action."

Theatre is not an end, but "a medium of transformation." (Kidd & Selman, 1979, p.16)

With the widening gap between rich and poor; with growing poverty, hunger and unemployment; with a thicker-skinned and less sensitive attitude from both government and its middle class clients, it seems likely that popular theatre will become more "popular" in every sense of the word.

In the meantime, there has been a tendency for alternate theatre to develop within marginalized populations, particularly in larger urban centers. Toronto's Native Earth Performing Company is a prime example, given the recent success of its leading playwright, Tomson Highway. With close parallels and connections to popular theatre, there is today evidence of an Aboriginal theatre movement. Kidd (1984b) describes it as "theatre of identity," Aboriginal people using theatre as a tool for asserting their own voice and identity, and for "strengthening the spirit as a precondition for survival and self-defense...against the inroads being made into the consciousness of the people by the schools, the media, the Church and other institutions" (1984b, p.113).
Rod: (Erases the board and makes a large X. Throws the brush and chalk at the board.) What the hell is X?

Student: X is a hidden number. You have to find it.

Rod: So what's X going to do for you? Is it going to clothe you? Will it feed you and your kids?..It's not going to do anything for you. (Erases the board and draws a large dollar sign in place of the X). This is what I'm after!

*(It's My Life, 1983)*

Native theatre is a theatre of people "who have had an experience of colonial invasion, occupation, exploitation and cultural oppression" (Kidd, 1984b, p.110): it is a theatre of and for the oppressed. In our third world it, like popular theatre, contributes to a broader movement of "indigenous people fighting back to defend their culture, to resist economic exploitation, and to regain control over their land, their economy, and all aspects of their lives" (Kidd, 1984b, p.110).

Amok: I have come to visit. Do you want to work in our uranium mine?

Rod: Well, is it safe? I've heard...

Amok: Of course. It's as safe as possible. The latest in technology. Alpha, beta, gamma, bla bla bla bla bla (Aside) Humans have never handled anything this hot before. We're experimenting.

*(It's My Life, 1983)*

Kidd suggests that such theatre cannot make revolution,
but it "can be a form of support for revolution" (1984b, p.116). Indeed, drama can play this liberatory role for all who are "already marginalized by race, class, gender and sexual preference" (Hunt, 1989, p.21).

In Pond Inlet, the student-actors of Tunooniq Theatre have used popular theatre to "raise awareness of their social condition and of important issues" such as family violence (Hamilton, 1987, p.44). In Frobisher Bay, popular theatre has been used "to raise issues and concerns about the legal system" and to demonstrate its incompatibility with the Inuit system of law (Hummelen and Wildcat, 1984, p.82). In Saskatoon, the students of Joe Duquette High School have used theatre to deal with urban Aboriginal issues such as alcoholism, drug abuse, racism, sexism and homelessness:

It is music, light, choreography and culture dramatized in public performance. It can capture authentic humour and tragedy, dreams and fantasies of Native youth whose voices have been silenced by poverty, racism and indifference and have not been represented in the popular media nor the school curriculum.

(Regnier, 1988, p.27)

A significant aspect of popular theatre is that it draws on traditional forms of cultural expression and blends these with contemporary and westernized forms. Ritualistic song, dance and drama are integrated into modern performances, and for many indigenous cultures, this gives voice to the "narrative art", or oral traditions, of the people (Epskamp,
For Aboriginal people, there seems to be a natural affinity between the art of storytelling and the language of theatre. Aboriginal American author N. Scott Momoday (1991) speaks of this influence on his writing:

The Native American has always had a very highly developed dramatic sense. His ceremonies and his oral tradition are full of dramatic force. So a play is a very natural kind of vehicle for telling a story in the Native American Way.

(p.33)

At Joe Duquette High School, a "story circle" approach is used in which drama students "construct a liberating community with one another," and where they "tell their stories and improvise their views of social reality within the safety of the circle" (Regnier, 1988, p.26).

The oral literature of story, song and ceremony is familiar to our students who have experienced traditional winter storytelling sessions on the reserve. We had only to use that structure to elicit the students' contemporary stories.

(Murphy & Smillie, 1986, p.13)

For these students and for the students of Upisasik Theatre the stories that were told in class and in performance were both vibrant and authentic. They emerged from a rich literary heritage, with theatre as a new language, or new discourse. People's theatre. Popular theatre.
One afternoon, in the Spring of 1991, I was visited at my workplace by two ex-actors of Upisasik Theatre -- by Maureen (Penny) and Nora (Gabrielle). They had been asked to perform at a "Heritage North" Conference in La Ronge, and were interested in developing a short collective creation.

We met in a dingy cluttered storage area downstairs and, after some discussion, eased our way into some dramatic improvisation. But to no avail. Nothing clicked. And then, for some reason, Maureen told a story in Cree.

It was a story about a miracle, about a little statuette of the Virgin Mary that her mother kept on a windowsill in their house. One winter, when Maureen was very young, she sat by that statuette and pressed her finger against the frost that had formed on the window. The warmth of her skin melted a tiny circular spot in the frost, and this spot just happened to be directly in line with the mouth of the Virgin Mary...

Story led to story, Maureen then Nora, in an improvisational dialogue. Personal stories. Community stories. Historical stories. The short play that emerged was called LaPlush à Lavée; it was a tribute to the stories that are evoked by even the most common of artifacts, by a washboard. It was a story about stories.

Daughter: (To audience.) You know, there's so many stories that we can tell and one of them is just about this washboard, which is a "plush à lavée" in my language.. And there's so many things that are important, but not as important as the people, the grandparents, our
elders. Not as important as the stories they can tell us. And certainly not as important as the language they speak. People, stories and language. That's what culture is all about. This is our heritage, our real heritage.
Maureen: We came to town by horse. Christmas Mass. Oh, and every Christmas I think about that when it's so bright out anyways, it always seems, every Christmas? I remember going home in the back... Like those big wagons they used to have, the back part would always be for us kids. Well, there was only me and Dale actually then, eh? And I remember looking out one day.. Isn't that strange? My mother made sure we were all covered. I remember peeking. It was just beautiful. The ice was like water and the moon was bouncing off it... Then we got into boats and skidoos. I was still out there when we switched... It was really nice.. what I remember.. going back and forth.
Laplush à Lavée was part of a resurgent interest in theatre in Ile-à-la-Crosse, and much of this came from adults such as Nora and Maureen who were once student-actors in Upisasik Theatre. Dramatic work seemed to accelerate in the fall of 1991, and just before Christmas of that year Maureen called me with some exciting news.

First, Another Home had been revived. This was originally a television soap series created by Upisasik Theatre in the fall of 1983. It ran for two seasons on CILX-TV, scheduled conveniently on Friday nights just before the weekly television bingo. The new series was titled, appropriately, The Return of Another Home, and it continued the story of the Whitefish family who have only recently moved into town from across the lake:

However, the Whitefish family carry on as families once did before television and bingo replaced this outdated social activity. The Whitefish family visit. Constantly. And, as in real life, they are related to EVERYONE in the village. The dialogue is in the Metis Cree dialect. There is a kind of humor in this language, which could not be understood in any other language. Through community drama it continues to be heard.

(Bouvier, 1992, p.10)

The new soap revived old characters, introduced new ones, and set in motion ideas, issues, and projects for the
new year.

One such project was to create a play to raise AIDS awareness in the north. Funding was already in place and two alumni of Upisasik Theatre had been hired to write and direct a play that could be performed in schools and communities in the spring of 1992.

In her position with the Sakitawak Health Development Board, Maureen had "revived live drama as a tool in community development," with a focus on public health issues such as birth control, impaired driving and AIDS (Bouvier, 1992, p.10). It was Maureen who served as the catalyst for the formation of a community theatre troupe: the Upisasik Theatre Collective.

I was as excited as Maureen with these developments and with the implications that this might have for my academic work at the University of Saskatchewan. Seven years after leaving Ile-à-la-Crosse, the creation of this new theatre collective provided me with a fitting context in which to continue the story of Upisasik Theatre, to add the stories of the student-actors to my own narrative and to discover the significance of Upisasik Theatre in their lives, past and present:

The past shapes the future through the medium of a situation, and the future shapes the past through the stories we tell to account for and explain our situation.

(Clandinin and Connelly, 1988, p.9)
I have suggested that in its focus on issues and story, the drama group functioned as a form of popular theatre, but this is primarily my story, my retrospective look at Upisasik. What was the meaning of the Upisasik Theatre experience for the students involved? What value did it have then? And what value now? To answer these questions I decided to revisit Upisasik Theatre in the spring of 1992.

When I met with my thesis committee in April of that year, I introduced my research proposal with a story. A story about another statuette of the Virgin Mary.

It was a concrete statuette, about two feet high, weighing perhaps 120 or 130 pounds, and it made its way to Ile-à-la-Crosse because of Upisasik Theatre. I first saw it in late March in the space that we rent for my drama classes in Prince Albert. A Catholic blue and white statuette trolleyed into a United Church auditorium for a spring rummage sale. When I spoke to the minister about it he told me that it had been hand-painted by a woman from the community and given as a gift to the church and the previous minister for counselling support that she had received. When this minister moved away it was decided that a new home might be found for the statuette, and so it was up for sale for only five dollars. I could not help but think that someone in Ile-à-la-Crosse might be interested.
A few days later, when four members of Upisask Theatre showed up for a women's healing conference in Prince Albert, I met with them to discuss my research proposal and then took them over to see the statuette. They were very interested and took me up on my offer to transport the statuette to Ile-à-la-Crosse during the Easter break. There was a lot of discussion about the home that the statuette might find in the community, but there were also jokes about the double-take that I would create by driving into Ile-à-la-Crosse with the Virgin Mary in the passenger seat.

The journey of the statuette to my home and then on to Ile-à-la-Crosse is a story in itself, but suffice it to say that the statuette made its way to Maureen's home and from there to her mother's room in St. Joseph's Hospital and from there to the room of an elder in the "new" Old Folks Home.

I told the story of the statuette to my thesis committee because it analogized what I hoped to achieve through my research. The statuette embodied many meanings, many stories. The woman who hand-painted it as a gift of gratitude, the church members who put it up for sale, the Upisask actors who visited it before the rummage sale, the drama instructor who transported it north to Ile-à-la-Crosse, the devout woman at St. Joseph's Hospital -- each endowed it with another meaning, another story. And the
statuette embodied all of this.

These are the kinds of meanings that I hoped to discover as I revisited Upisask Theatre. Jamake Highwater paraphrases from Hannah Arendt's *Life of the Mind*:

...that the impulse behind the use of reason is not the discovery of truth but the discovery of meaning -- and that truth and meaning are not the same things.... It is possible that there is not one truth, but many; not one real experience, but many realities; not one history, but many different and valid ways of looking at events.

(Highwater, 1981, p.6)

I was to find that those who participated in my research certainly did have "many different and varied ways" of looking at the Upisask experience. Many meanings were to coincide, others were to collide, and yet others were to connect so unexpectedly that coincidence seemed far too facile an explanation.

The story is always out there but the important step has still to be taken. The unrelenting flow of events must first be selectively attended to, interpreted as holding relationships, causes, motives, feelings, consequences -- in a word, meanings.

(Rosen, 1985, p.13)

To discover and triangulate these storied meanings, I decided to use a process of data collection that would include a group interview, individual interviews, field
notes, document analysis and participant observation. And it seemed only appropriate to express my findings in the form of a narrative:

When we tell a story as descriptively as we can, we are recovering an important event in our experience. It is when we ask ourselves the meaning of a story and tell it in a narrative, that we reconstruct the meaning recovered in the story.

(Clandinin and Connelly, 1988, p.81)

At the heart of the narrative lies an oral tradition that has been diminished and repressed within our mainstream culture. In its place, we have propped up a paradigm that makes sacrosanct the language of logic and technique, of conventional academic discourse. The problem with this, according to Eisner (1985), is that "in de-emotionalizing expression and proscribing suggestive language, the opportunity to understand empathetically and to communicate the quality of human behaviour diminishes" (p.90).

Eisner (1985) argues that "language must not be restricted to a didactic expository mode alone, for to do so is not only to limit what can be conveyed; it is to distort the character of the situation we are trying to understand" (p.154). He calls for "the expansion of our expressive repertoire" (1985, p.10) because "the ways language can be used are multiple" (1991, p.29).
It is only in recent years that we have seen a shift away from the prevailing view and towards acceptance of other forms of representation. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Clandinin and Connelly, 1988, 1990; Eisner, 1991)

Within this new paradigm and in the spirit of the oral tradition, I pursued my research through the use of narrative, or story. Clandinin and Connelly (1988) state that "because of its focus on experience and the qualities of life and education, narrative is situated in a matrix of qualitative research" (p.3).

Narrative is a form for inquiry that can contain both the world and the relations within which it becomes the focus for our attention, a locus of concern, a system of meanings, in short, our world. The narrative encodes time and space. Like our bodies, it literally takes place. Its storyline takes up time, as do we, from beginning to end.

(Grumet, 1990, p.107)

On the evening of May 14, 1992 I sat among delegates at a northern health conference in Prince Albert, enjoying the evening entertainment. As the Cumberland Dancers high-stepped their patterns in the light of the electric chandeliers, I watched the actors of the Upisasik Theatre Collective preparing to perform: Maureen asking the manager to close the door to the bar so that they might have an entrance area. Beckie, hand in hand with her
daughter, crossing the carpeted risers that would serve as a stage. Jerry and Kenneth quickly erecting curtains and light stands with help from Kenneth's brother, Gerald. Cindy, Sandra and Henry drifting offstage. Everyone in smart black outfits.

An hour earlier I had met with the Upisasik cast in the lobby of the Marlboro Inn. Although I had already discussed my research project with Maureen, Beckie and Jerry, it was time to receive formal consent from all members of the group. I squatted down against a corridor wall, Jerry beside me, ruffling my hair and joking about my impending baldness: "Are you going to take long?"

Across from us, four of the women sat on a red couch. Cindy searching for a folder that she needed for the play. Beckie admitting her nervousness about performing: "You know, this is the time I'm gonna freeze."

When we were all settled, I discussed the research process and the rights and responsibilities that they held as research subjects (Appendix A). I outlined my plans to interview past and present members of Upisasik Theatre and to participate in the present work in whatever way seemed appropriate. In particular, I highlighted my own concerns about my role as a participant-observer. Now that Upisasik had finally been revived, with very little involvement from me, it was crucial that it continue to grow and develop as an independent and autonomous collective. It must not
become dependent, as it once was, on my role as a teacher-director.

Among my interview questions would be questions that probed the relationship between teacher and student, between director and actor, in Upisask Theatre. I wished to explore the nagging doubts that I had about my role in the high-school collective. Why did Upisask Theatre collapse when I left? What might have been done to provide continuity? Why does the theatre exist today?

In informal discussions with Maureen, I had already discussed these questions and concerns, and we had agreed that my role as participant-observer should not be allowed to become one of "teacher-director." Otherwise it would be ended. Maureen, however, assured me that my concerns were unwarranted and that she was looking forward to employing my services as a "stage hand."

In the lobby of the Marlboro Inn, Beckie's smiling response to my concerns was that it was presumptuous of me to think that my presence would make any difference at all. After the laughter I explained that I would be "the best damned stage hand they'd ever had," and they would end up relying on me so much that they would be unable to function without me. This provoked more laughter. Sandra ended the session: "Okay Lon, let's just sign them now and get on with it." With that, consent forms (Appendix B) were signed, and I formally began my research in a darkened
ballroom as Upisasik Theatre performed its latest play,

Sarah:

Doctor: Good afternoon, Sarah.

Sarah: Hi. I understand I have to come in for pre-natal visits until my baby's born?

Doctor: That's right. But we've also found something else in your blood tests.

Sarah: Um, what's that?

Doctor: Well it's a virus. Well it's been around for a while, but it eventually. It's HIV virus and you're positive.

Sarah: You mean I have AIDS?

Doctor: Well, not yet. Eventually it will turn into AIDS, but not right now. You'll have quite a while before that happens, actually.

Sarah: You mean I'm gonna die! How about my baby?

The performance had a familiar feel to it: a lot of laughter, a serious issue, Cree dialogue, a message. At the end, there was a standing ovation and I shared hugs, handshakes and coffee with the cast. And then we said our farewells and I drove home thinking about the journey I would soon make "home" to Ile-à-la-Crosse, "home" to Upisasik Theatre.
Rod: Number one is Naps getting up off the floor when we performed and like you know. Just getting up off the floor and the lights coming on. Nothing major. Nothing to anybody else but to me it was something else. I don't know how to explain it. That's what I always think about. Naps getting up off the floor. I don't know. It's nothing. I don't think he said very much when he woke up. I think the scene ended when he got up.
CHAPTER IV
UPISASIK THEATRE REVISITED

To take a stranger's vantage point on everyday reality is to look inquiringly and wonderingly on the world in which one lives. It is like returning home from a long stay in some other place. The homecomer notices details and patterns in his environment he never saw before.... Now, looking through new eyes, he cannot take the cultural ground for granted.... To make it meaningful again, he must interpret and reorder what he sees in the light of his changed experiences. He must consciously engage in inquiry.

(Greene, 1991, p.267-268)

Keewatin Kountry on CBC Radio. Monday, May 25. As distance faded each frequency away, I flipped from channel to channel on the FM band. Green Lake, Beauval, Ile-à-la-Crosse.... And then, after the noon hour, Cree language broadcasting on the Missinipe Broadcasting Corporation. Talk of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal people, of the Hughes Inquiry, of a Rossignol School canoe trip to Besnard Lake and Pine House. The song, "It's a Long Way Back Home."

The two o'clock news featured a protest by American Indians against their lack of representation at the United Nations: "The white, black and yellow races are all represented at the U.N... But not the red."

The Ile-à-la-Crosse Forks. Billboards: "Northern
Sunset Motel," "Rainbow Ridge Bed and Breakfast," "Air Charter." An old weathered CILX sign. At Rosser Bay I checked to see if the water was open and it was. A red half-ton parked by the shrine pulled in behind me and passed me near the turn-off to Wobbie Bay, and I followed it in.

Ile-à-la-Crosse. On the causeway between town and Snob a blue car flashed its lights so I pulled over and found myself greeted by Maureen, who was just giving Cindy and her baby a ride home. We agreed to meet in five minutes at her office in the LCA (Local Community Authority) building, and I went on ahead to wait for her. There, on the front steps of the LCA building, visiting began -- parents of ex-students, ex-students who are now parents....

Patton (1990) describes the role of participant-observer as one in which "the researcher shares as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the setting under study" (p.207). He proposes a stance of empathic neutrality:

Empathy communicates interest in and caring about people, while neutrality means being non-judgmental about what people say and do during data collection. (p.58)

It was not without trepidation that I initiated this research project. I was aware that my eight years of work
in the community and my frequent visits since then had resulted in a close identification and rapport with the community and with the participants in my study, and I knew that this might bias my findings. On the other hand, I knew that I must avoid the traps and pitfalls of ethnocentrism. Balancing between these two extremes would require a self-reflective and vigilant approach to my research:

Either underidentification or overidentification with the contextual values leads to errors; the key seems to be...that the investigator examine his or her own values as well as the values of the context or situation.

(Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.177)

When Maureen arrived at the LCA building, we discussed her position with the Sakitawak Health Development Board and how it had evolved from a community concern with alcohol abuse and impaired driving. Its original focus was to use newsletters and local radio and television media to raise community awareness, with support from the Four Worlds Development Project and funding from the Department of Health and Welfare. With her interest and expertise in acting, it seemed only natural that Maureen use drama as part of her work.

The AIDS drama project was funded separately by Health and Welfare, but Maureen worked closely with Beckie and Jerry in creating Sarah and she ended up in the lead role.
She eventually had to book time off from her own job so that she could perform on tour with the play. Maureen's plans were to set Upisasik up as a nonprofit organization that could be directly funded as a community development program: Upisasik Theatre Collective Incorporated.

We ended our discussion by finalizing arrangements for a group interview that evening, to be held in the new home of Upisasik Theatre in the basement of the community hospital.

I had visualized this group interview as a storytelling session that would "kick off" my research in the community and set the tone and agenda for individual interviews:

Narrative inquiry is a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds.

(Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, p.4)

My hope was that the participants would share their memories of the old Upisasik Theatre and that my questions would encourage discussion of the significance it had for them and for the community.

The group interview (Appendix D) is a useful qualitative tool for eliciting "high quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of others" (Patton, 1990, p.335). I wished to use it to begin a "mutually-constructed story out of the
lives of both researcher and participants" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, p.12).

Jerry and I were the first to arrive at Upisasik's new space, a large basement room below the east wing of St. Joseph's Hospital. The floor was concrete and cold, and the walls had been painted black for theatre purposes by Fine Option workers. Along the far wall was a low stage with three very familiar black rostrum blocks, and behind the stage was the canvas backdrop from Upisasik's last play, Gabrielle.

As with all of our plays it was a symbolic painting, with colorful images of St. Joseph's church, the 1870 Metis flag, the 1885 Bill of Rights, a man lifting fishing nets from the bow of a red skiff.... It had originally been laced with leather onto a long peeled spruce pole, which we placed across two sets of tripods -- spruce poles arranged in tepee-like fashion. There had been two smaller backdrops for Gabrielle, one covered with small black oil derricks, the other depicting powerful dark images of Riel's death -- a portrait, trial scene, coffin, tombstone.

It was the Riel backdrop that Jerry pulled from a back room, and as we unrolled it and tacked it to the wall, I told him how the painter had been spooked by it. Harold Flett, a teacher in the school, had worked meticulously on this backdrop and finished it at three o'clock one morning. Alone in the school, with images of death freshly painted
before him, he felt the strongest urge to get out of the school and away from the painting. And he did.

With the story told and the backdrop hung, Jerry and I settled down at an old wooden table and were soon joined by Elaine and Maureen: Elaine, tired after a twelve hour shift at the hospital, and Maureen lugging a shopping bag with cartons of apple and orange juice and a supply of doughnuts and chips. We formed a small circle in the large room and the interview began. It was indeed an evening of stories and shared memories and laughter.

Jerry: I remember once we were going to Saskatoon too, on the bus. And that semi-truck passed us. (Laughs) I was making the sign of the cross. (Laughing) The first thing I knew there was just snow flying over the bus... You know why I started making the sign of the cross? Cause I seen that semi coming around the corner, right behind us, and I went, "Oh my God!" (Everyone laughs) And I looked around, and there was that semi-truck coming right beside us. (Laughs) And then I looked back. There was just snow flying over the bus. (Laughs) If that semi-truck had never bothered to stop, we probably could have sat there until the spring. (Everyone laughs.)

As the driver of the bus that hit the ditch, I have told this story a number of times over the years, but this time it was being told from the perspective of one of the students. There were many more memories.
Elaine: I remember coming up with the name... that thing we did for the TV.

Maureen: Another Home?

Elaine: Yeah.

Jerry: The Whitefish family.

Elaine: I always remember everybody used to watch Another World and I thought "another home" across the lake. You know how some people have houses over there and then came into town because the kids are going to school? And I don't know... I was thinking that... "Another house"... "Another Home!"

But there were surprises, too, for Maureen, Jerry and Elaine spoke candidly of Upisasik Theatre, and unexpected meanings emerged that I knew I must pursue in the individual interviews.

Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit.

(Patton, 1980, p.278)

I had originally planned to interview at least six participants. These would be selected through purposive sampling, with all six as graduates of the old Upisasik Theatre and at least three as current members of the Collective. Each participant would be asked questions about Upisasik Theatre "kayas," the ups and downs, and the influence on his or her personal life since then.

(Appendix E). These interviews would be semi-structured
and would become part of the "ongoing narrative record" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, p.5).

In the end there were ten individual interviews, nine of them with adults who had been in Upisasik Theatre during their high school years. At the time of the interviews, five were actively involved in the new Collective, but this number was to rise to seven by mid-summer. Filewood (1982) suggests that this is the nature of a collective; it is "an organism in a constant state of change, as it grows and reacts, as its membership changes, and as it redefines itself in new projects" (p.54).

Each Upisasik interview provided a context for visiting and, although most of this occurred before and after the recorded interview, it seemed to add a sense of informality and spontaneity to each session. Most interviews therefore ran from forty to sixty minutes, with three of them running considerably longer than that. The group interview was a full hour and a half. In all of the interviews there were jokes, jibes, laughter... and candor.

Rod: See, they used to have a drama thing... when I was there, and I used to watch them do their plays. Everything was scripted.. Those people were so outgoing. White people.. you know how white people are. So fake sometimes.. I don't know how to explain it... It was their drama group, and you know how they don't want outsiders in there.. Especially a Native guy. You didn't see Native guys get involved in that. I come over here
and ninety percent of the people are Native. I really felt like I belonged and everything took off from there!

Of the ten interviews, nine were held during my first stay in the community, from May 25 to June 8. They were usually held in the evenings in the Upisask Theatre space, which I discovered was once the girls' residence in the old mission boarding school. The girls came from across the lake and from other communities until the mission school was finally closed and Rossignol school took over. It seemed appropriate that I should conduct Upisask interviews there, for many of our plays had touched on life across the lake and the difficult transition to village life.

These were the participants in the individual interviews:

**WANDA**

Wanda acted in the first scene of the first episode of Another Home, sweeping the floor, dancing with the broom, and smoking with her Kohkom in their home across the lake. On Tuesday evening when she arrived for her interview, she brought with her a coffee maker and cups which she loaned me for the rest of the interviews. Family responsibilities prevented Wanda from participating in the new collective. One of her two boys turned four on the day of her interview.
and Wanda was only one month away from giving birth to a baby boy.

**ANNA**

Anna completed Drama 10, 20 and 30 by the end of grade 11, and the Batoche performance of Gabrielle was her last involvement in theatre. Her twin girls kept her busy at home, and when I interviewed her she was pregnant with her third child. Before her interview we spoke quietly of the Upisassik Theatre space where girls like her own might once have been schooled away from home. Later, when I listened to her interview, I heard church bells behind our words announcing the afternoon mass.

**MAUREEN**

When it came time for Maureen to register in the Kindergarten class at the mission school, her mother held her back. Rather than send her daughter to the residence, she kept her at home at Poplar Point and moved into town in time for Maureen to attend Grade One. Maureen's interview was rich with stories of her childhood years and she spoke of the lure of life across:

Well see, now I'm at that age where I realize how important everything is, your language and all that, Lon. That's why I just want to move across the lake! I just want to move back home! I was just walking to the store this evening when you were supposed to have come and I seen... [He] stood out
there on the steps, looking. And then I.. You know, I knew he was in there drinking next door and I thought. I was pulling my wagon with my girl and I thought if only we could all move back across the lake, we wouldn't have these problems. And I don't even know what he was thinking, and he looked so.. depressed? You know he had nothing out here. I mean here. So I'm gonna move home! (Laughs)

Maureen was an Upisasik Theatre stalwart for six years and acted in nearly every production. She was the driving force behind the Collective and even included her son in the winter tapings of The Return of Another Home.

ELAINE

Like Maureen, Elaine was with Upisasik Theatre for six years. Although she enjoyed drama and had mostly positive memories ("mostly, when I think of drama"), she used her interview as an opportunity to vent some of her frustrations from that time. She added a critical twist to my research findings that has helped me to re-examine my role as a teacher-director then and now.

Lon: I mean, like you said, we did a lot of individual things and then group things. So before it came to making a play, before we got to that part. Same feelings there?

Elaine: No, because it was a group. Everybody worked together. But there was always that little part when everybody knew who was going to get the leading role no matter what it was.
Elaine's position as a nurse at the hospital left little time for involvement in the new collective, but she participated whenever her shift permitted it.

Jerry

I interviewed Jerry in the LCA building where he was finishing off the latest edition of their community newsletter, Sakitawak Atchimoowin: Dwayne Desjarlais and his lottery win of $187,112.80 ("That's the way to go Dwayne! May you manage your money wisely."); a letter from the Archbishop announcing pastoral changes; a Cree language survey from the school with this warning: "The community of Ile-à-la-Crosse has witnessed its Aboriginal language deteriorate to a critical point..."

Jerry's interview was warm, relaxed, with a lot of laughter and story about Upisasik past and present, and I was amazed at how vividly he remembered his three years of high-school drama. Recording his interview was far more enjoyable than transcribing it, for the CILX Radio transmitter somehow created a mess of electrical interference on my audio tape: sound distortions, tin music, "This is CILX Radio..."

Rod

When I transcribed Rod's interview I found that a whiskeyjack had added its voice to ours from outside his
kitchen window. Rod sat across the table from me, relaxed and articulate, and spoke of his four years in Upisasik Theatre:

I took it and I enjoyed it. I really got my self-confidence up to tell you the truth. I felt I belonged somewhere. Because I just moved back from Battleford just the year before or something like that. And I felt like I belonged in that group. Like you know, I thought I was pretty good. I knew I wasn't going to be no Tom Cruise or anything like that. No big time actor. But I'd have a chance to travel, meet different people, go to different places. All expenses paid. (Laughs)
And we... God, I remember we used to eat. Remember that?

After Rod's interview we went down to Lisa's Cafe for coffee, hamburgers and fresh apple pie. Little did we know that less than two months after this interview, Rod would once again be on the road with Upisasik Theatre.

RAN

D

Y

Randy is better known as "Yogi." Soon after his family moved back to Ile-à-la-Crosse from North Battleford, he started attending my drama classes. He performed a small part in Me No Indian and played the comical, spaced-out character of Cheech Lambert in the second season of Another Home. When the soap was revived in the fall of 1991, Yogi acted his old role for five or six episodes and then lost interest. His main focus was, and still is, his
job as disc jockey at CILX Radio.

On the day before his interview, I gave Randy a ride to the station. As he hopped out of my truck he told me to keep my radio on because he would be dedicating a song to me in the next few minutes. "You mean, you've got a song called 'That Old Son of a Bitch'?" I asked. He laughed, and I drove on to the school. I walked into the staffroom in time to hear his choice: "I'm Too Sexy" by Right Said Fred.

**BECKIE**

After leaving high school, Beckie took a hairdressing course in Buffalo Narrows and then opened a small salon in her home, and this is where we held our interview. As I asked her questions, she gave me a much-needed haircut. The interview was peppered with jests and interrupted by Beckie's two daughters, but it provided an opportunity to discuss the writing of Sarah, the future of the Collective, and Beckie's new role in Upisasik:

> And for myself, I don't know. It's just a feeling that I... I was interested in it in high school, but I'm a person who doesn't like to be told what to do. So I wasn't really. But now I'm doing the telling so that's a different story. (Laughs)
SANDRA

When I told Sandra the story of the statuette of the Virgin Mary, she added another layer of meaning:

See, my grandma's got two about this high and they weigh a ton, eh, cause I tried to lift them. And I asked her, "Where'd you get this?". She said, "Spuddy brought them.". "From where?" I said. "Where he works," she said. Well that's where he works is at the Penn.

The Penn is, of course, the Saskatchewan Penitentiary in Prince Albert, where Sandra's uncle worked as a Native Liaison worker. There, as it turns out, concrete molds of the Virgin Mary are created by the inmates and sold for a nominal sum. Sandra's grandmother hoped to get a local artist to paint her statuettes. I was more than surprised at this news, for less than a week before Sandra's interview her uncle had escorted me and the SUNTEP Theatre troupe through the Penn's green iron grates to perform for Aboriginal inmates.

When I asked Sandra why she hadn't been more involved in high-school drama, her response was, "Probably because you wanted me to." "Stubborn" or not, Sandra never involved herself in Upisak Theatre until its latest creation, Sarah.

They just asked me, and I said okay. Since it's for AIDS, cause that's how it started, eh? Cause they told me it's through Health and Welfare and
it's to educate the kids about AIDS. I said, "Oh, if that's what it's for, then I'll do it." And then I got sort of carried away. (Laughs) We started doing different things.

DUANE

Duane's interview was the only one not held in the community. We met instead at Wanuskewin Heritage Park on the eve of its official opening on June 27. There we settled ourselves on the patio of the interpretive center, its white plastic chairs and plexiglass windows contrasting with the lush green of the valley below. As we spoke, people drifted back and forth in preparation for the evening rehearsal of Living in Harmony, a complex outdoor production involving some seventy actors. Music played intermittently over the massive sound system, and walkie-talkies clicked back and forth. As the Cree trickster, Wesakechak, Duane would play the main performing role in the production, but for now we spoke of his early work in Upisasik and the leading roles that he once held in plays like Napew and Scrip Van Winkle.

Duane's love of acting led to two summer sessions at the Canadian Native Theatre School near Toronto and then, after a stint in the RCMP, he turned to teaching as a career. We therefore crossed paths in the SUNTEP program (Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program) and in SUNTEP Theatre before Duane moved on to a teaching position at Joe Duquette High School in Saskatoon. There,
as a teacher-director, he has found himself looking back at my role in Upisasik with as much interest as I looked back on his:

However, it's quite quite different from being a director, or a teacher of drama, and a student. (Laughs) It's been night and day, and it's been a real learning experience. And a lot of ups and downs and a lot of frustrating experiences. And it forces me to look back at your role in over five years in Upisasik Theatre. Now I can think back and try and visualize what you went through.

These then were the Upisasik interviews. There could have been many more, and this was never more apparent than at the Kindergarten graduation on Thursday night, May 28. There I watched twenty-four little people in blue caps and gowns honored by their community, and it struck me that nearly all of them were children of old students. Some were "Upisasik children," and as I visited with their parents after the banquet I met potential candidates for even more interviews. It was with some misgivings that I drew the line at ten.

In the months to come, the interviews were transcribed into a 280 page tome, which I later condensed into a 120 page set of excerpts. With the help of my field notes, I then tried to find commonalities or conceptual hubs that I might use in order to make sense out of the chaos (Eisner, 1991).
Eisner compares the whole process of data collection and analysis to the gathering of evidence for a court of law. The goal is not to provide certainty, which is impossible, but to "prove beyond a reasonable doubt." The educational critic therefore works much as a lawyer does to draw on multiple data sources (triangulation) and to present a tight argument, a coherent case.

I preferred to view the research process as being much more like the collective creation of a play. It involves the bringing together of stories and the discovery of themes and threads that might be used to weave these stories together into a new narrative.

Upisasik's plays were created, not for adjudication, but for an audience, for community. They were designed to both inform and engage, but the most significant learnings, or meanings, probably came from the process -- not the performance.

In the same way, I approached my research project, not primarily as the gathering of evidence for academic adjudication, but as a process of storytelling, with the most significant learning to come from the process -- not the performance.
Randy: It would be of the drama room. Full up with all the students that were inside there. Meldon with the camera and the lights flashing down on all us sitting there. And you worrying in the background. Now that would be the picture! (Laughs)
CHAPTER V

COLLECTIVE CREATION: TALE, TOLD, TO BE TOLD

Duane: If I was inviting somebody to come to our class, I would just say in Cree... I would say "[Ahstum, Come and have some fun with us.]" And to me, that's what drama is. Lots of fun.

The students enjoyed drama class because it was a break from regular classroom routine. Elaine enjoyed it "because I was in a class where I didn't have to work, work, work." Rod liked it because it "wasn't like school where you had to go and do your Math class and English class and stay until the bitter end." For Jerry it was one class he wouldn't skip because he might "miss something." And Wanda looked forward to always doing "something different."

Wanda: Going down to the drama room it was... a good feeling because you weren't sitting with a paper and pen. I don't know. We brought energy. It gave us the energy we didn't have in the last class. (Laughs) To me it was nice to go to drama class.

When I asked my ex-students why they took drama in the first place, I was surprised at how strongly they had been influenced by each other. Duane remembered watching our first play, Sakitawak Kayas.

Duane: I think the thing that got me hooked was seeing the creativity and the humor that the people around me had, and were able to bring out on stage. And these are my friends, my
fellow students, who were doing this... And I think the first image I have is Buckley, walking into the Music Room with snowshoes on, and Felix and Bobby greeting him. It was amazing what that did to me. It inspired me in a way that I wanted to become part of it. and that's what sort of inspired me to become a part of Upisasik Theatre.

Duane, in turn, inspired younger students like Jerry who decided, after seeing Napew, "I want to do this." And, when he did "do this," Jerry too had an impact, especially in his soap role as "Utin."

Randy: Jerry. Jerry would always make us laugh. That's one of the best things. The best thing I liked about drama was Jerry Daigneault. He made me go. Because the comedy in him made me want to go there.

A common thread through all the interviews was this mutual respect that Upisasik students had for each other's acting ability. Before Tantoo Cardinal, before Graham Greene and Tom Jackson, the actors of Upisasik Theatre served as role models for each other. Maureen, though, was also influenced by actors from outside the community.

Maureen: First it was always white people on stage. Right? These little touring groups that come. And I thought, "Oh my God, I'd love to do that. I want to do that!" I didn't even know what the heck the word was or what it was they were doing, okay? Then one year the play came.. Boom.. No, You and the North Wind In My Hair, and I thought, "Oh my God, they have Native people!" You know? Finally I begin to see myself on stage.
Dontcha Know, You and the North Wind in my Hair had only one Native actor, and the manufactured accents of its non-Native actors continue to be a source of amusement for those like Maureen who saw it. Nevertheless, its characters were mainly Native and three of them were even based on people that the actors interviewed in Ile-à-la-Crosse. Maureen remembers the play well because it was the closest thing to Native theatre that she had seen.

Students therefore came to drama classes because they wanted to act, but they also came because they wanted to "play." In the group interview, Maureen and Jerry talked about how much they loved the "games." Elaine saw them as "warm-ups," as a preparation for theatre work.

Elaine: You knew you had to work because there was something major at the end that you had to work for, so this was the way you had to learn to relax and then think clearly and then go into your working...

My lesson plans from early in the year were peppered with these warm-ups: mirrors and machines, tangles and tag games, statues, twizzles, and tableaus. Many of these were trust exercises for it was important to me that the students become comfortable and confident, not only with speech and movement, but with each other.

Anna: Mmhmm. That was fun. It's hard to get somebody to trust like that though. You never know, they would have made you fall in the pit or something... or took you in the boy's
bathroom. (Laughs)

Wanda: It was something you had to 
try, cause if you didn't trust them and 
you weren't going to try, you'd never 
know. You know what I mean? You have 
to try no matter what.

As the year went on, less and less of each class was 
devoted to these activities, and more and more time was 
given to improvisational work. Bingos, corpses, rababoo 
(rabbit stew). Chain saws, flashers, and diarrhoea. These 
were sources for early improv and they were often 
performed later for student audiences. For children's 
shows, we drew on nursery rhymes, fairy tales and Aesop 
fables. It was easy material to work with; it connected my 
students to those in the early grades, and it offered 
plenty of opportunity for interpretation and improvisation. 
And for laughter.

Anna: The exciting parts I liked about 
drama was doing little plays... or the 
big ones... They get you all excited 
and ready to go out and perform. 
That's what I liked. Performing... in 
front of kids. Especially for kids. 
...I remember when I was taking it when 
Elaine was in our class... her last 
year, I think it was. And I don't 
remember which guy it was. She was 
doing that... that crow? And the fox? 
Trying to steal that crow's cheese? 
And (Laughs) I remember she got mad 
when someone told her, "What beautiful 
breasts you have!" (Laughs) She got 
really mad! It was part of the play, 
the person's lines. I don't remember 
which guy it was. "What beautiful 
breasts you have!" he said. She got 
really mad.
I was amazed at how often and how vividly this early work was remembered in the course of the interviews. For the students it seemed to epitomize the fun of drama. In my mind this work was blurred and eclipsed by each year's collective creation, but many of these early improvisations did make their way into the annual play.

Duane: (Laughs) I was doing an improv with Jerry, and we were doing a morgue scene, and I was dressing him up. He was supposed to be a dead body laying there... And he's been laying in this cold freezer for a long time, so it was pretty easy. I'd stick his arm up and keep it there, and I'd put his legs up, straight up, and put his pants on. But I was standing in front of him and he had his hands up like this, eh, up above his head? (Laughing) So when I pushed his legs down, his whole body came up eh? And it was just like... So that was neat, like it was a good scene, and I remember we put it into my first play, Napew.

For a play like Napew we would devise a storyline that would weave our more successful improvisations together, but for later plays the storyline came first and would generate the ideas for improvisation. Either way, the collective creation usually evolved from an idea, theme or issue.

Duane: It comes from a single idea, and you give all the individuals within that improv, who are going to be doing the improv, the same idea. And then you just turn them loose. And if something comes out of it, then you take it and you use it. And if not,
then you rework it, or you leave it. And once you have enough improvs that you like, then you string them together somehow with a common theme, or... So I think it's difficult to explain to people because they have a difficult time understanding. Like, no writer? No director? Whose idea was it? It's hard to say even whose idea it was because it gets lost in the shuffle.

Whose idea was it? This is a question that I asked in nearly every interview. It was certainly important to me that our plays deal with things that "mattered," but when it came time to choose a topic or issue for a play, was the decision-making process indeed collective or had I somehow imposed my beliefs upon the students? If I had, then this was not popular theatre, not theatre of the people but theatre for the people. Whose idea was it?

**Duane:** I think your role in Upisask Theatre, I don't think was a decision-making role. I think it was a supportive role in terms of... We would create something and you would support it by giving us ideas to further develop whatever we were doing. And from there I think basically you left the decision to us on whether or not we wanted to continue with that idea or not... I think it was important for you to make certain kinds of decisions that would put the whole play together. But in terms of coming up with amusing ideas, I think you gave us a lot of respect in that regard, in terms of what we would use and what we wouldn't.

According to Rod, I was "the central force" and "things wouldn't have happened without you there," but the
process itself was a collective one.

Rod: Well, forgive me if I'm wrong here, but a lot of times, like I said, we'd be doing some skits and would work out from there. Sometimes we'd sit around as a group. Everybody would have their say in what they thought was the issue of the day. Sometimes the play would evolve around that. Those are two of the things. Nobody had all.. Not just one person had all the ideas. Everybody had their input in it, whether it was a stupid idea or not. Even those people that were kind of shy and all that stuff, like you know, they'd have their say. We'd write it down, put it on the blackboard, then a play would evolve from that.

There was no specific process involved in our choice of topic or theme. For example, the "issue of the day" for Oops was determined by a recent series of radioactive spills at a northern uranium mine.

Wanda: Environmentally speaking we were ahead of it. (Laughs) It was just.. It was dangerous. The dangers of spills and the toxics and.. Some people might not have known of the dangers and all that.

For other plays, the theme or issue was determined by an occasion or celebration: the Ile-à-la-Crosse Bicentennial (Sakitawak Kayas), Celebrate Saskatchewan (The Pin), the Batoche Centenary (Gabrielle).

Sometimes the issue was sparked by a specific invitation to perform. For the CITEP (Canadian Indian
Teacher Education Program) conference, the students chose to tell the story of an Aboriginal teacher who abandons her culture.

Maureen: Ma No Indian is about turning against your own kind.

Elaine: How we shouldn't. How we always come back.

And in Come Tomorrow Come the group responded to an "Adolescents in Crisis" conference by speaking of issues in their own personal lives.

Maureen: It was probably the first play done on women and women's issues. Maybe that's what was so good about it too. Women finally had a chance to speak out something.

Although the choice of theme or issue was determined in various ways, it usually involved a brainstorming session of some sort and from this the stories would begin.

Maureen: "What is a problem in our community?" You'd roll out the big paper.. "Right! What is our biggest problem?".. Teenage pregnancy, alcohol, this and that.. "Okay, how can we connect these?".. Then from there somebody would tell a story. And somebody else would tell a story. Then all of a sudden all these different stories would make one story.. Make sense?

"All of a sudden" was not so sudden, for this was the hard work of collective creation. Stories became sources
for improvisation and the improvisations became scenes, but there were many steps in between, and these steps merged and blurred and often ran in unison for the life of the play.

There was certainly a research phase in which we gathered the information that we needed to tell our story. This was especially true for plays with a historical perspective, like Sakitawak Kayas and Gabrielle. For these plays we consulted historical documents, archival material, newspapers, and Riel's diaries. We also conducted interviews and held an open-line radio show, for our richest resource for all our plays was the community itself. From the community came an oral history, told through an oral tradition -- the telling of story.

All of these sources were explored dramatically and then discussed as a group; there was a constant process of shifting back and forth from improvisation to reflection in order to develop the dramatic potential of every scene-to-be. It was like an alternating current, now moving forward, now looking back so that we might move forward again. The cycle was irregular, with some work moving rapidly along while other work was agonizingly slow. This oscillating process continued throughout the life of the play and is documented in the notes that I have kept from that time.

After nearly every rehearsal or performance of 
Upisasik Theatre, the students and I would group together to critique the work. Afterwards, I would write a detailed set of "Drama Notes" or "Upisasik Notes" for the students to consider for our next session (Appendix F). The inevitability and illegibility of these notes were often a source of humor, usually at my expense. Many of these notes were kept, as well as lesson plans, memos, letters, newspaper articles and production notes, and I have used these to contextualize the story of Upisasik.

The story that emerges is of a process of change and revision that lasted for the life of each play:

NAPEW

READ THE FOLLOWING CAREFULLY. This play will be a success only if everyone of you keep adding to it and improving every small part of it. The moment we stick to what we've got is when the play will become BORING for us. IMPROVE it with each show. Most improvements will be made by you - But I have enclosed comments on every scene. Read it all carefully and make the changes I've suggested: They are important so that the audience understands the play better. FOLLOW THEM, STARTING THIS AFTERNOON. They are only a START, though. You must add more improvements yourself as well as the four pages that follow.

My comments are critical. I had little room for praise. That would have taken eight more pages...

In a sense, our plays were never "finished." They evolved and changed from performance to performance and
reached their final form in the last performance. It was only then that some of these scenes were transcribed from audio and video tapes so that we might have a written record of them. These handwritten scene scripts have served as a valuable source for the telling of Upisasik's story.

The collective process was therefore an oral process, and this usually puzzled teachers who inquired about our plays. Perhaps we are influenced too much by the power of the written word to trust our own oral traditions. Whatever the reason, I have often explained the collective work of Upisasik Theatre as being much like the process approach to writing. In the prewriting stage the students chose a topic or issue and researched it. In the writing and revision stages, they improvised and reflected on their work in order to better engage their audience. And after every draft, scenes were workshopped in a group context, with my notes as a guide. The final version, the final draft, was the final performance of the play; the play was always a "work-in-progress."

Tale, told, to be told...
In this context, a work in progress... is not a work whose step precedes other steps in a trajectory that leads to the final work. It is not a work awaiting a better, more perfect stage of realization. Inevitably, a work is always a form of tangible closure. But closures need not close off; they can be doors opening onto other closures and functioning as ongoing passages to
an elsewhere (-within-here)... The
closure here is a way of letting the
work go rather than sealing it off.
Thus every work materialized can be
said to be a work in progress.

(Minh-ha, 1991, p.15-16)

Norris (1989) documents the process of collective
creation in Joanne Reinbold's classroom in St. Albert,
Alberta. Previous to this study, Reinbold and colleague
Glenys Berry had co-authored a paper, which outlined eight
steps in the collective process: topic choice, synthesis,
research, exploration, refining, scripting, rehearsal and
performance. This was a process similar to that used by
Upisasik Theatre, with one notable exception.

For the students of St. Albert, the final stages of
the process involved the development of a written script
for rehearsal and performance. For the students of
Upisasik Theatre, the script was oral.

Lon: But what did we do? Write it?
Wanda: No. We didn't write it. It
was all in our minds. We knew what to
say. It was just.. It was fun.

Because it was oral, the "script" changed easily from
performance to performance, making it both exciting and
nerve-wracking for me. Anything might happen. When it
came time to perform, it was all in the hands of the
students.
Maureen: You'd add things. You knew what things would work on stage and what wouldn't. That's where you came in. The only time we needed you. (Laughs)

Well, I was also needed as a bus driver. After performing for students and for the community, Upisasik inevitably hit the road, and rehearsals continued even then. On one of our tours we were accompanied by a friend and local writer, Vye Bouvier, and as the bus rumbled down the highway to Beauval, Bouvier's field notes captured the hectic nature of a northern tour:

The students and Lon rehearse on the bus. Even before they've turned off at the Ile-a-la-Cross forks they remember they've forgotten the scaffold for the last scene of the play. Can they do without it? No. Who has a truck? Who will bring it to Beauval? They will phone Bill Gibbs... They arrive and now the props are hauled in and set up... No dinner? The students groan... They manage to sneak in a quick meal of fish cakes at the student residence. They hurry back to get dressed... The gym is dark, with lights focused on the backdrop - of a church and lake with a boat on it and a fisherman pulling up his net. The students are sitting on the wide carpeted steps to the gym... Bill drives like hell to get scaffold to Beauval. Scaffold arrives. Play goes well...

(Bouvier, 1985)

The next morning, as we drove through the dust of the Pine House road, Vye Bouvier recorded what she heard as the
students and I critiqued the Beauval performance of Gabrielle:

"Let's go with Claude, and don't be right across the backdrop."
"Be there ready cause those lights come up pretty fast."
"Wake up! Good morning! Earth calling Upisasik!"
"What was the problem with the Riel Scene?"
"After we say, 'We'll simply arrest him', what comes after that?"
"I think we know it."
"One thing you should watch out for. Don't build everything around this bill of rights. It isn't this magical piece of paper."

(Bouvier, 1985)

Because Gabrielle was better suited to older students and adult audiences, we created a children's show for this particular tour. It consisted of four legends about the Cree trickster, Wesakechak, who had magical powers but who also taught the Aboriginal people lessons, often through his own hilarious mistakes. It was Wesakechak who lost his eyes by abusing the kildeer's sacred ritual, who burnt the fox and made its fur red, who made the eagles bald when they dropped him onto the ice, who led the ducks in the shut-eye dance.

There was a lot of audience involvement in our Wesakechak play and, depending on the audience, it could be performed in Cree or English. Bouvier's notes (1985) captured both the spirit of Wesakechak and of the
collective process that extended into our tours:

"That was great last night. Wesakechak came running in like hell..."
"Leave the music off. Just for a second. Let's finish this up..."
"That fox definitely must give Wesakechak a kick in the ass. Not hard, and use the side of your foot please... While Wesakechak is chasing the fox into the audience and getting kids... Who's first to die? Lee Anne. No. 2 will be a kid. No. 3?... I want blood-curdling screams. Will you try them now?... That's not too bad. It's a little quiet."

(A small school bus shakes and rattles on a gravel road to a small village. Inside high school kids are practising bloodcurdling screams.)

"I haven't heard Carlos scream. Scream Carlos."
S: Aaaaag -

(It could only be Upisask Theatre on tour.)

For many of the Upisask actors, touring was a highlight of the school year. For Anna, there was nothing she didn't like about it, "except maybe sometimes travelling, sleeping on the floor, things like that... travelling in a bus, hot summer days." Of all the tours, she remembered Gabrielle and Wesakechak best and the reception that we got when we completed our dusty drive to Pine House.

Anna: Pine House. I had fun because the biggest turnout we had was Pine House. That was the biggest turnout
and everybody got involved. That's the one I liked. Pine House. People talked to you and they came up after we did our plays. They came up and asked us questions and that's what I liked.

The drama trips gave students a holiday from "real school," but they also gave them exposure to other communities in the north and in the south.

Elaine: Well, there is learning, because you don't only go to do this play. You're also learning of this new place you're going to, these different people. Seeing.. Well, when we first went to Saskatoon, seeing how this is Saskatoon. This is how people live. This is a city.

There was something magical about those tours, about squeezing in among the props and backdrops on a bus or single otter, about the ghettoblaster laughter of the road, about the hectic thrill of transforming some small school gym or band hall into an "upisasik" theatre. For me and for the students it was something "to look forward to."

Rod: Like in Ile-à-la-Crosse, it's a small town. There's hardly anything to do. Drama got us going. We got out of town. We had things to do. You'd have a trip coming up to tour the North and you'd have that to look forward to. It got you through a lot of things. Like I said I would have quit if I wouldn't have had some of the things that I had here.... Drama was a good thing in high school. That's all we lived for, that thing, when you think about it.
Anna: My favorite scene was the ending where they played that song... It'd get so quiet, when Nora was going up that scaffold, put the rope around her neck. It was so quiet. Not a single sound. Like during the other parts, like when we spoke, the townspeople? Like there'd be people chattering in the audience, eh? And as soon as we got to the ending... Quiet... Then we'd turn on the lights. In Batoche we did such a good job that people would come up to us in tears and shake our hands and everything... It was nice.
CHAPTER VI

UPISASIK THEATRE ON TOUR

Duane: But I also knew that we would travel and perform, and I think that was the biggest motivator for me was to go out and perform for different communities and... and the more we did I sort of got hooked because people from different communities recognized you. You know, I'd go to Beauval and people would be talking about the plays... And to this day, like, I meet people on the street and they talk about the plays that we did!

To this day, the actors of Upisasik are remembered for their performances. In Buffalo Narrows, LaLoche, Patuanak, and even on the streets of Saskatoon they have been approached by people who recognize them from those plays. After Another Home was shown in other communities there was even more of this.

In Ile-à-la-Crosse, people often called Jerry by his soap name, "Utin", which means "wind" in Cree.

Maureen: That one day we were standing at the Bay. It was really windy. Remember? Somebody opened the door. Whew!

Jerry: And I came walking in. (Everyone laughs.)

Maureen: There was an old lady. [Look. The wind blew in], she said. I looked, and I mean it was windy? And here Jerry walked in. (Everyone laughs.)

After moving to Beauval, Jerry's brother was continually mistaken for Jerry. On the streets of Beauval
people would call, "Hey Utin!"

On the morning of June 1, 1992, Jerry and I drove around picking up Upisasik actors for a short drama trip to LaRonge. Sarah was scheduled to be performed in Churchill High School that afternoon. Everyone piled into Beckie's truck and mine and, with the new portable lighting system and ghettoblaster carefully tucked away, we hit the road.

For me, this was an opportunity to contextualize my research interviews in the present work of Upisasik Theatre. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that phenomena of study "take their meaning as much from the contexts as they do from themselves," and that "no phenomenon can be understood out of relationship to the time and context that spawned, harbored, and supported it" (p.189).

Throughout the research period I used field notes to record incidents and events, and to explore my thoughts and reflections on the research process itself. My purpose was to provide a context for the narrative that would emerge from the data collection and analysis. Owens (1982) writes: "Human behaviour must be studied in situ if it is to be understood" (p.6).

As we sped over the bumps and pot-holes of the Pine House road, I thought of the Gabrielle tour and of the field notes that Vye Bouvier had written along this same
road, seven years and seven days before. This time, things were much quieter. Jerry, Henry and Kenneth flipped through magazines and slept a bit, and I followed Beckie's dust trail past the Pine House and Besnard Lake turn-offs to the highway into LaRonge.

At the Harbour View Hotel we joined the women -- Beckie, Sandra, Cindy and Maureen -- who laughed about the three hours of "unloading" they had just gone through: "Yeah, we got it all out of our systems." Rooms were booked, luggage was unloaded, and Beckie headed off to phone the school. The performance was scheduled to begin in half an hour's time.

Beckie had written Sarah in collaboration with Maureen and Jerry and as part of the AIDS awareness project through the Department of Health and Welfare. The guidelines for this project specified a time frame for the writing, performing and touring of the play, but they also made it more difficult, in Maureen's view, to "really have much fun with it." It was a play that "has to be done," and it dealt with a difficult and controversial issue. Nevertheless, the cast believed that its message was important for young people everywhere.

Sandra: Yeah, especially in the North cause kids are very naive when it comes to that. They think it's funny. They think it's a joke. Like we say in the play, "You don't get AIDS in a small town." That's what a lot of these kids think.
In the gymnasium of Churchill High, teenagers spread themselves out on the tiled floor, with a few of them squatting or leaning against the side walls. I sat in the middle, watching the cast set up. A jumping mat turned on its side served as a wing for the actors, and there they huddled, watching Beckie as she scribbled something onto a piece of paper. Only later did I realize that this was a strategy session for last-minute changes to the play, and that Beckie was providing the same form of feedback that I had given in my "Upisasik Notes."

The collective process for Sarah had been different from earlier Upisasik work, largely because of Beckie's role as playwright. Much of it had originally been scripted by Beckie, but she eventually decided that the actors "should just make their own lines" and she would transcribe these lines later, when it came time to submit a script.

In the interviews, Maureen and Elaine remembered being interested in working with scripts when they were in high school, while at the same time taking pride in the fact that their drama was "different."

Maureen: And then the people who do those scripted plays were amazed that we could improvise, because they're trained. Everyone's lines are written down? They don't know how to think on their feet?
To demonstrate the shortcomings of scripted plays, examples were given of performances that they had seen while in high school. They even laughed about their own experience with script.

In the summer of 1980, the community had received funding for a Young Canada Works project that would employ students to create and tour a play. A director was hired from outside the community, and he wrote the students' ideas into a script, *The Girl Across the Lake*. Those who were in it remembered the problems they had with the dialogue.

Maureen: Yeah, that's what I mean. Even the jokes weren't funny because they were white jokes. People in Turner sat there and.. "Come on, laugh!" Nobody was laughing!

Jerry: That's what I mean about improv. You can do a joke in your own way and you feel that it'll be funny.

When we entered this play in a regional drama festival, Rod remembers to this day how he was tripped up by one line. For Rod, the improvisational nature of our plays made them better.

Rod: It was better I thought because you could act yourself and if you missed a line, so what!... It wasn't rigid the way we did it. If there was a good line you could add it. If you didn't have it in the show before, you could add it later on and who's going to care, as long as you got your point across.
Beckie used this approach with Sarah. The play always followed the storyline that she had drawn up, but the scenes became improvisational and changed somewhat from performance to performance. The LaRonge performance was therefore different from the one I had seen in Prince Albert two weeks before. As with the high school plays of Upisak Theatre, the dialogue shifted a bit, lines were added or fell away, and the humor seemed a little more geared for an adolescent audience. I was surprised to find one of my own suggestions integrated into the plot, surprised because I had only made it informally, and never to the whole cast. Somehow, probably through Beckie, it had been communicated to the others. To me, this demonstrated what Beckie and Maureen had already told me in their interviews - that there was a "stronger" sense of group in the new Collective. Maureen attributed this to the fact that they are now adults and that they have an even greater sense of ownership than they did as students.

In the Churchill High gymnasium, they performed for today's students an Upisak-style blend of Cree and English, pathos and humor, music and dialogue. At the end of the play, over the music of Kashtin, final words were spoken to those who once knew "Sarah."

Cynthia: Oh, Sarah... I don't know. I feel so bad. She thought that I hated her, but I didn't really. Deep down I really loved her. But I didn't know how to show that I cared. That's
no way to die! She was a nice girl.

Sarah: Cynthia, I tried to be your friend, but I was too busy. I guess I was too busy.. educating myself.

Cynthia: I guess I was wrong. I guess you can get AIDS in a small town.

Sarah: It's not your fault. It's nobody's fault that I died from AIDS. You have to understand that. The only way you can help people out now is to educate them. Let them know. Give them facts on AIDS. It's nobody's fault but mine.

Kohkom: [She went and left the baby for me. I told her not to go.]

Sarah: [Kohkom, it's not your fault. People have to understand what happened to me. I died. I died from a disease that has no cure. I should have listened to you, grandma. We should have moved across the lake. Nothing would have happened. But we can't keep blaming each other. It happened Kohkom, what you have to do now is tell people, young people, about this disease. The only thing left to do, Kohkom, is to tell people. To warn them. To educate them. That is the only cure.] To blame nobody.

As the applause subsided, Beckie introduced the cast, thanked the audience, and it was all over. It was dismissal time for the students and we had the gym to ourselves. Everyone was "high," buzzing and laughing about the performance and continually ribbing Maureen about her line slip: "I hope at least those girls are wearing condoms to protect themselves."

We packed up the props and lights and, in true
Upisasik fashion, headed off to eat. Less than an hour after performing an AIDS play the cast were in their hotel rooms, talking and laughing and watching a re-run of the Beverley Hillbillies.

That evening I sat with Jerry and Kenneth in a local bar, listening to Henry tell stories: a story of safecrackers in Ile-à-la-Crosse, of cigarette rip-offs, of catching crooks with baseball bats late at night. And stories of the future, of a golf course on the north field and waterslides running down into Ile-à-la-Crosse Lake.

Later, at the hotel restaurant, I listened to the women tell their own stories over pina coladas and brown cows, often with men as the target of their humor. I was not spared. When I left to visit local friends, the cast of Sarah was together, sharing more stories and laughter.

In the interviews I was told that drama trips represented a form of freedom for both Upisasik students then and Upisasik actors now. Whether it was with Me No Indian in 1984 or Sarah in 1992, the drama tours offered a chance to just "get away."

Randy: To be honest it was... it was the freedom. My own... doing what I want... And also I remember when we were going on tour, just being with these people my age. Walking around with them. Checking it out.

Beckie: Actually, it's pretty good for all of us, I find, because... Well, they do too actually... A chance to get away for a while without having... I
don't know, it's just a chance to get away and do something that's fun. we've found. Or I've found anyway.

Early the next morning, I left LaRonge and set off for Hall Lake, a small community just off the Besnard Lake Road. I had arranged for the cast to join me there, and we would then carry on to Pine House where another Upisasik graduate, Alice Ratte, was trying to arrange a performance.

At Hall Lake, I drove through scattered pine bush to Sally Ross School, a new building set up and away from the lake. Only two or three local homes were visible from the school, but over to the west was a cluster of teacher-trailers and that's where I was visiting when Upisasik Theatre arrived.

Within one minute Beckie had arranged a performance in Sally Ross School. (Pine House was a no-go.) A classroom was cleared, with desks and chairs piled against the walls. Windows were blackened with garbage bags and duct tape from the janitor's room, and the uncarpetted end of the room became a stage, with actors entering from the hallway. About twenty kids sat along the edges of this tiny northern classroom and watched a play about AIDS.

All of these students understood the Cree in the play. They laughed at all the jokes and after every scene they applauded. When it was over I listened to them: "That was good," one said. "That was real good," a girl responded. "It's too bad you can't stay," said another. Outside the
school, a few kids asked for autographs.

A light rain was beginning as we left Hall Lake. We drove Sarah down a damp dustless highway, home to Ile-à-la-Crosse.

Duane: I was fuelled by the energy and the laughter that people gave out... and for the sound of joy in the audience and people having a good time. It made me feel good. And if I made other people feel good, then I felt good. If people laughed, if I made people laugh, then to me, we were doing something right. Because... other than that, I don't think there's too much to laugh about, especially in remote northern communities. So if we can all share a good laugh and see the humor and bring out the humor even in serious issues, then I think we can better cope with our everyday life.
Sandra: I don't know. The dream scene maybe. That's where everyone's in there. I wouldn't want one of just two people.

Lon: Describe. The dream scene with Maureen on the floor...

Sandra: And all of us around her.

Lon: With the white masks on. And the hands joined?

Sandra: Plus the bowing at the end. (Laughs) All of us at different times.
CHAPTER VII

UPISASIK: PERSONAL AND SOCIAL MEANINGS

The myths of modern man [woman] are often unfocused; we don't celebrate our myths enough.... For a variety of historical reasons (the emergence of machines, cities, anonymity, money, mass media, standardization, automation) we've lost awareness of storytelling as a way to dramatize and order human existence.... We feel nameless and empty when we forget our stories, leave our heroes unsung, and ignore the rites that mark our passage from one stage of life to another.

(Keen and Fox, 1974, p.3)

When I asked what Upisasik Theatre meant to its participants, past and present, I expected many of them to speak of the self-confidence and self-esteem that it gave. I wasn't disappointed. Maureen had often spoken of how shy she was before taking drama and this theme was echoed in the interviews.

Maureen: You remember how shy I was. Och, it was horrible. I was really self-conscious of myself. And many of those warm-ups and exercises I didn't want to do. But you made us. You forced us. (Laughs)

Anna: It taught me not to be shy. I used to be shy before I got into drama. Like I wouldn't do silly things, you know? Like act silly? Until I went into drama. That's about it. It taught me not to be shy. To act, I guess.

Jerry: I don't know. It must have made me less shy, or gave me confidence to do something else. That's how it helped me out, I guess. Like before, I
think I used to be pretty quiet when I used to be in the lower grades.

Wanda: Fun, enjoyment. It's. I don't know. I found myself more open. I wasn't as shy, if I was shy at all. (Laughs). It was for me, a lot. It opened me up a lot. The trust, you know.

I always used games and dramatic exercises to develop trust within the group and to free up inhibitions. Because of this focus on play, the drama classes were an opportunity for students to have fun, to "let loose."

Rod: First couple I was shy. After that, people used to look forward to them. Used to be a reason to get away from real school. You had fun in the class, like after the exercises and all that stuff. You could be yourself in those classes. I remember that.

Elaine: Cause more than once my mind went back to drama. It was a form of letting loose. You could be the person you made up to be.

Wanda: Drama to me was... you go there. You relax. You let go. You just open up. You don't care. You let loose. It was more of a... I don't know how you say it... Just letting yourself go, you know?

Jerry: I think it was drama that kept me in school for most of those years. It was fun actually.

These feelings lay in the shadow of the play itself, of the performance. This is what every Upisaskik actor remembered, and a number of them described it as nothing less than a "high."
Maureen: Lon, you know what?.. You know how people drink to escape reality? That's what drama does. For me anyways. I go on stage, do a part. For forty-five minutes Maureen disappears. Maureen doesn't exist. I think that's why you get that high for so long after.

Rod: Yes, exactly. A natural high, but what a high. There's no artificial high that could beat something like that. Even during the play, everything rolling along.

Randy: I felt on a high without any drugs. I don't know how to explain it. Adrenalin rush, I guess. It was okay. It felt good.

Jerry: Yeah, you're pumping because you're up there and the applause makes you want to get up and do more. Like "I wish this play was longer," you know. That's how it feels.

Wanda: You know, there was a big crowd. You got out there and did something and you were complimented and everything after was a good feeling. You were high! (Laughs) It was nice. Like you did something. You weren't shy. You tried. That's what I got out of it. It was nice.

In the group interview we talked about this "high" and how good it felt. We laughed about how long it sometimes took to set up for a performance, but how quickly we could take down afterwards when everyone's energy was at a peak. I recalled the Meadow Lake performance of Sakitawak Kayas when I actually timed the cast as they packed up. In terms of costumes and props and equipment, this first play was a cumbersome production, but in only seventeen minutes the
bus was loaded and the cast was ready for pizza.

Although I couldn't help but be affected by the energy levels at the end of a performance, in my place behind the crowd and behind the light and sound controls, I experienced many of the emotions of the audience. Every performance was new, was different, and so I laughed at unexpected lines, agonized at awkward moments, growled at half-hearted acting, and sometimes wept when it all came together.

I remember an impromptu late morning performance of Gabrielle when authors Maria Campbell and Beatrice Culleton were visiting the school; I remember the magic of this performance and, at the end, waiting for my emotions to subside before I could join the small audience that had assembled in the Music Room. At the doorway I hit an emotional wall that made me turn around and and wait before I dared to try again. Later, Maria and I walked down the street to the local cafe, very quietly.

The performances of the new Collective revived the same emotional highs that the actors once experienced as students.

Maureen: Cause the feeling you get.. I, I just wanted to cry.. Our first show at BIEC this year when those students clapped and I come behind and the lights were shut. And I thought, "Ahhh, this is it!" They were still clapping, and some stuck around. You know, that's all you work for.. "That's it!" I thought. (Laughs)
Jerry: How was the audience going to like it? Will they like it? That's what I was thinking about. But after we finished, you know, those people were saying... Kept coming up to me and saying... "Good show! Good show!" And the one thing you don't know is how do you accept it? Like you say, "Yeah sure! Thank you man!" (Laughs)

For Sandra, who was new to Upisask Theatre, the energizing nature of performing was the same.

Sandra: Like, I never thought I'd be able to go up on stage, in front of people, eh? Now when I... When I first did it I was really nervous. Then in P.A. I thought I was gonna die. I got up there and... I didn't even know there was a crowd out there... I didn't see them. They didn't bother me. Like it helped me out.

Lon: How do you feel after performances?

Sandra: Good. Especially when the response is good. Then you feel really good. You feel like you accomplished something. Well, I feel like that.

Sandra shared with me her memory of a student at Big River Reserve who asked, "Where's Ile-à-la-Crosse? Is that close to New York?"

All of these individual responses to the Upisask experience were about matters of self-confidence and self-esteem. It helped students to overcome shyness, to let loose, to be themselves. It offered a form of freedom. It was an emotional high.
Duane: Drama was the most important thing in my high school life, I think. It gave me a lot of confidence. It definitely raised my self-esteem. It made me feel capable of doing a lot of things... It gave me a sense of pride, that I could step onto the stage and talk, and communicate with people verbally and openly in front of a crowd, and be quite humorous in a sense. Or serious. And I think it's a skill that I learnt that's helped me throughout my life after high school. I mean, and it's still helping me now.

As individuals, the students of Upisasik Theatre developed the confidence to "step onto the stage," and many of them pursued careers and interests that have extended their ability to communicate "verbally and openly" with the public. Among the graduates of Upisasik are teachers, radio announcers, a nurse, a mayor and nearly a dozen actors in the new Collective. All Upisasik alumni once participated in a collective process that empowered them to speak in their own language and idiolects and to tell their own stories; it made them authors of their own lives.

In the group interview, Maureen and Elaine found a humorous connection between Upisasik and their "real lives" after high school. We were discussing *Come Tomorrow Come* when it occurred to them that they had "become" their characters - Elaine, like Rachel, leaving to return again; Ida, like Margaret, moving to Saskatoon; Maureen, like Penny, starting a family. If their lives were to continue like the play, Maureen must leave. We laughed about this
and then recalled another coincidence: Elaine's sister, Delores, had married "a Hudson's Bay man," just as her character Angeline had in *The Pin*. All of this gave new meaning to Rod's comment, in his interview.

Rod: That's what our plays were about, real life. Wasn't no Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs kind of thing. That's what we lived through, what our community is about. That's why I think our plays were so powerful.

If these were the meanings, serious and not-so-serious, that individuals drew from the Upisasik experience, what were the group gains? Filewood (1982) states that, "Because collective creation synthesizes the artistic responses of a number of individuals, it must proceed from some kind of shared analysis..." (p.47).

Having witnessed this many times over, I naturally expected the interviews to unanimously emphasize the cooperative spirit in Upisasik.

I have already indicated how I disliked the competitive nature of the regional and provincial drama festivals, and how I saw competition as the domain of conventional or scripted theatre. This personal illusion was shattered in the group interview.

Jerry: In high school, I think, we tried to out-do everybody that was in the play like. So what if I have a small little role? I'll do my little role better than yours, cause you have a major role. I can do my little role better than you.
Elaine: Amen. (They laugh.)
Lon: Was it competitive?
Jerry: Yeah.
Maureen: Yes it was!
Elaine: Well, I don't know...
Jerry: It was really competitive, yeah. Like me and Paul... Remember when we used to do Another Home? I tried to do my Utin better than he could his Alphonse. (Everyone laughs.)
Maureen: Well, we were teenagers too. All teenagers are competitive and they want to stand out. I think.
Jerry: Like that competitive, sort of... was only in the drama room for me, I think. Because out of the drama room me and Paul were good friends. We didn't want to compete against each other. But when we went back to the drama room there was... (Laughs) I want do better than you today!
Maureen: You know who always...
Lon: You guys are blowing my mind here!

What I was being confronted with in this interview was a Freirean nightmare, the possibility that what I had always assumed as a collaborative process was in reality contributing to an "unbridled notion of individualism" (Giroux and Penna, 1981, p.223).

It was obvious that I should pursue this matter of competition when I interviewed the rest of the participants, and as I did this, it became apparent that
beneath the cooperative nature of the collective there was a level of competition, which usually revolved around the casting of roles for each play. Who would get the lead role? Although I do remember surveying the students for their input, ultimately the decision lay with me, and the interviews indicated that the students responded to this in different ways.

A few felt that the choice was predetermined, that I knew from the start who it would be.

Maureen: "No, let's try her out," you would say. You knew who your... You already had your person picked out and then you'd try the person out. Then everybody would say, "Oh yeah, she's good! Okay, leave her in." You'd try and get the group working together.

Others felt that the casting demonstrated favouritism towards the more experienced actors in the group, "cause they knew how already what to do." And others saw all of this as something that didn't concern them.

Randy: Well, I wasn't even worried about it. Sort of bugged me because it took them away from drama. It took them against each other. Like you know.. made them fight against each other. Not fight, but compete I guess. It took away from the group thing, you know?

There was some resentment about all of this at the time, and this was expressed in the interviews. For most participants it was not a major issue or concern, but for me it continues to be a vulnerable part of the collective
process. I do remember agonizing over the responsibility and trying to cast each person in an appropriate role, one that acknowledged the student's attendance and participation in the class so far. What made this difficult were the levels of ability in each year's drama group -- students who were new to drama mixed with "veterans" who were already hooked on the process: Drama 10, 20 and 30 students together as one group. As well, our plays never really got away from relying on one or two or three "lead roles."

Another factor that may have contributed to the competition was our first success at the regional drama festivals. Although *Come Tomorrow Come* did not win as a play, three of the five acting awards at that festival went to Upisask students, with the top award going to Maureen. They are still proud of those awards.

Rod: I still got that trophy, you know. I'm really proud of that baby. I was really surprised when they... I thought that Snow White was going to win one of the... the big award, and Maureen was going to win the one I won. When they said my name, I just about jumped off my seat.

Maureen suggested that it was still "a group thing" the first time we attended the festival, but that the trophies and the publicity and her trip to Stratford changed all that.
Maureen: It was really scary. But for myself, it was like the Actra awards. (Laughs) I sat there. My heart was skipping beats. This was the second time. The first time I didn't care, like I said, and I mean it.

Rod had a different explanation for the competitive spirit that he saw among Upisasik actors. He attributed it to the "strong-willed" nature of the personalities.

Rod: You know what used to amaze me about our classes? There was so many strong-willed people and we still got it going... It's just that I remember that you know... How the hell can you get all these people going in the same thing and we'd still get our plays going? It's amazing... Not only do you have to be a drama teacher, you gotta be just like a mini-psychiatrist. Because, like I said, you had to have all these strong-willed people together.

I remember my frustrations with some of the group dynamics in Upisasik Theatre, and although I tended to keep these to myself, Duane recalled me "getting angry a few times." In response, the students "must have took it in the context of what we had to do."

Bertola (1987) states that, although students often have difficulty in accepting group conflicts as a natural occurrence, harm comes "not from the conflict as such, but from the inability of groups to resolve conflicts or to move beyond a mere self-interest towards some form of empathy" (p.165). Duane, for example, saw the competition
among the students as a positive force. It was "challenging in a good sense because it forced people to be as creative as they possibly could be," and this contributed to their growth as individuals and as a group.

Duane: We developed relationships with one another that were strong. We were a close knit family that fought a lot, that laughed a lot... You know, we learned to leave things behind and block them out of our minds because I think somehow, through working together, we knew the importance of the show and commitment... and the importance of doing a good show. And that's what I liked about working with students from Upisasik Theatre. Regardless of what happened beforehand, we always went in there to do our best show, I think, in the end.

Whatever the source of competition, whether it was the casting, the awards, or the personalities of the actors, "the show always went on."

Rod: We used to have our scraps. Like you know.. Like I said, strong-willed people. We used to have our arguments and all that stuff, but the show always went on. .. When we took off with the van and on the school bus and all that, everybody was in that bus, even though somebody was arguing from a week before. We'd always be together. You'd never know that there was arguments when we were doing the play.

It was the cooperative spirit in Upisasik that was mentioned most in the interviews. From the very first trust exercises and games, a sense of "group" prevailed that always carried us through the collective process.
Rod: But... It's just like I belonged in a group. For the first time in my life I felt like I belonged somewhere. That's why I fell in love with drama those three or four years I was there.

Wanda: It was a good feeling, because we all pitched in. We all accomplished something. And when you first went to the class it was all these people you say hi to in the hall. But then after two, three months we were all friends, one big bunch, you know. All have a good time.

And when the play was ready for performance, everyone continued to "pitch in"; everyone showed ownership for every aspect of the work.

Rod: We did everything that's involved in the play. I can remember we had thousands of little things that you had to worry about. Everybody worried about them. Like it wasn't just one person worried about lighting, one worried about sound. Everybody did their part, making sure the show went on without a hitch. And most of the time it did. I noticed that about our plays. The show was always on.

When Gabrielle was published by the late Caroline Heath of Fifth House, I wrote in the introduction that it "created a bond among the cast that still exists today" (Heath, 1986, p.38). This was true for all of our plays, and this was articulated clearly by the past members of Upisasik Theatre when I interviewed them.

Wanda: Cause you have friends and they're friends, but you kinda lose interest along the way. But with us
it's different, I find. It's always something there because we all did this together. We were there, and it's with us.

Jerry: In drama too, you.. with a group you always made friends that.. I don't know.. You just made friends that somehow you'll never lose that friendship. Whenever you see each other, you're always happy to see each other.

Randy: It made friends for life, let's put it that way. It made me friends with people that I didn't know. Especially me, just moving back into town. Like I just moved back a couple years and I started drama. And it helped me make friends in the community.

Duane: And I think it developed and instilled a relationship within us that will never be lost.. We have something in common that we can laugh about, we can talk about, and look back on, and laugh and say, "Yeah, those were really great years." And they were really great years. I think the best years of my life.. is my high school years.. definitely.
PHOTOGRAPH

Elaine: But I'm just seeing everybody as they were. You know, dressed in their costumes, what we had when we were on. I think I can still remember what everybody wore that time. Do you know? Because everybody was different and nobody was the same even though we belonged to the same drama group.
CHAPTER VIII

STORYTELLING IN PLAY

Maureen: Oh I've always loved acting I guess you can say. Across the lake I remember my mom had a little corner for me behind the stove. Well, it was always warmer there, too eh? That was my corner. I used to sit there and play with my dolls and I used to pretend somebody was looking at me. But who? (Laughs) No. But I always had an audience, you know what I mean? I thought I had an audience... Then, when we started school, moved into town, Bertha and I got to be good friends and, oh my God, we never did so much acting in our lives... The most exciting thing was Saturdays. We could spend the whole day pretending... Oh we used to love it. One day we'd be playing house. The next day we'd be nurses and doctors. The next day we'd be country singers. You know what I mean? It was really, really exciting. Our stage was the clothesline, the poles behind Bertha's mom's place. So when she washed the clothes, we'd lose our stage there...

There has always been a sense of "community" within Upisask Theatre, but today's Collective has had to struggle with a problem that they faced in high school as well: the involvement of the outside community.

Although the school board always demonstrated support for the drama program, our local audiences were seldom large.

Anna: I don't think our community was involved very much. Like even when we performed here, we didn't get a very good turnout. They didn't... Some were interested. But there wasn't really... Like there's a thousand people living
in Ile-à-la-Crosse and say about 30-40 people would show up.

I always wondered why this was. In his interview, Rod remembered that in other communities "they would really welcome us with open arms, but over here it was different." He had no explanation for this, other than to point out that the school sports program faced the same problem as well.

Rod: You know what? I don't think people realized what was really going on in the school there in terms of drama. Like you know.. in town here. Even to this day people don't get involved in school enough like they do down south. They just don't get involved in the school. I can see that to this day.

As a community group, the members of the new Collective face the same problem. They too speak of low turnouts for local performances and they can provide no clear explanation for this.

A partial explanation emerged when I interviewed Maureen.

Maureen: That's why it's so hard for people here to accept it, because you don't know how to explain it. What is it? A play? In Cree, "to play"? You have to translate it to "emetawyin" and that's "playing."

I had never before considered what should have been obvious, that there is, of course, no word for "drama," "theatre," or "play" in Cree. Maureen's comment reminded
me of our very first performance in another community.

When we flew Sakitawak Kayas in to Pine House in 1978, we were told that our posters had led some of the audience to expect someone to "play" guitar that night. During the performance, one audience member stood up and yelled at our Commissioner McKenna, "What the hell has the government ever done for us?" To which McKenna retorted, "What the hell have you ever done for the government?"


Lon: So it's like pretending?

Elaine: Yeah. Yeah!

The members of the new Collective talked about this perception of drama, how they had heard their work referred to as playing, as "not doing something worth while" -- as an activity that is appropriate for children, not adults.

Sandra: Especially our families when we go somewhere. Like, I don't know, maybe because we're older.. I don't know. It was okay when we were young, but it's not time to play anymore! (Laughs)

I was intrigued by this concept of drama and even more so when Maureen spoke of a Cree expression that one elderly woman had used to describe our work. In English, it translates as "to tell a story in play" or "storytelling in
Drama as storytelling in play. Perhaps this helped to explain the contradictions that confused me and my interviewees when we talked about this question of community involvement.

Sandra: Right now I don't think we have very much... We have a lack of interest in this community. The older people... In fact, my grandma really likes the drama that we do here, eh? She really enjoys it, and she never did see us in... doing this play. But she always asks us, "How come you don't do that on TV anymore?" Cause they used to have about a 15 minute skit before the bingos, and she always looked forward to that.

Jerry: What I was thinking was... When you want the community support you won't get it. But if the community... Say our Another Home there.. It's over now, eh? People still want you to put it on.

On the one hand, Upisasik Theatre rarely had large turnouts for local performances. On the other hand, there was always a great deal of interest in the old and new version of Another Home, especially from the elders.

We certainly recognized the popularity of the original series. When students came to class on Mondays I used to ask for feedback on the Friday night show. From their responses I could tell that most of the community was tuning in to the antics of the Whitefish family and friends. In their interviews, the members of Upisasik
Theatre remembered this community response.

Wanda: Compliments. (Laughs)
Everyone enjoyed it. Before, you were told. They didn't tell you like it was good, but they'd say you're crazy and they'd laugh, and I knew they enjoyed it. They enjoyed watching the show.

Randy: You put it on and a lot of people would watch it... Even to this day when we air... when we were airing ours, the whole community was watching it. That's the way it is.

Anna: Back then when there was Upisasik Theatre, yeah... There was lots of talk going around. People would stop and ask you a few things on the street... What you're doing next... What's happening next in Another Home... Things like that. No they couldn't wait. They'd ask. Yeah, there was.. There was talk about Upisasik Theatre. Drama.

We gave Alphonse a problem with narcolepsy. We gave Joseph a tendency to be accident-prone. We gave Gertrude a pregnancy, for she was in real life expecting a baby. We created romantic flirtations and complications and videotaped all this live before student audiences or at various locations around the community -- the Bay, the hospital, the RCMP station, and in Gertrude's kitchen with her newborn baby. Every show began with Ricky Skaggs (1981) singing, "Off somewhere the music plays soft and low, and another home's the one I love so." And every show
ended with some kind of comic cliff-hanger.

From the new series came scene stories of the same kind. Stories of Gertrude disappearing in a cloud of steam (from a vaporizer), of the Nashville lady who auditioned singers at the "old" Old Folks Home, of a chain of electrical shocks when Utin plugged in the Christmas tree. And a story about an old couple coming to town on a winter day.

Jerry: And they were off to across the lake by skidoo and she was riding in the back of the sleigh. And she was covered up so she couldn't see. And here's Bully pulling along... The sleigh falls off. And Bully started going off, and here she is, under the blanket, and she's playing cards with a flashlight. (Laughs) And Bully gets to town and he looks back and the sleigh is gone! (Laughs)...And he got back to where he dropped off his wife, he left the sleigh? His wife was still sitting there, playing cards. And all this time she didn't even know that she was left behind. (Laughs)

What was it about Another Home that caught the interest of elders in the community? Was there a connection between the oral tradition of storytelling and this stuff called drama? The story of the old couple coming in from across the lake was one that had been told around the community. Word was that they had even seen it re-enacted by Upisasik Theatre. Drama as story? Drama as storytelling?

In the interviews, I asked participants to describe
storytelling as they had experienced it in the community.

How do the elders tell stories?

Maureen: Oh, I notice one thing. You pick out the right people, the ones that are funny, and you sit. And you finally convince them to start saying something and they start cracking a joke and you laugh and that's where it just picks up. They're just like, um, stand-up comedians, except they're sitting down. (Laughs)

Maureen described how her uncle would often begin his stories with teasing, and this was echoed in Sandra's interview as well.

Maureen: He just gets carried away. Once you start laughing? He'll start off by offering you tea, and he'll look you up and down, then... wondering what kind of person you are. He tries to figure you out first... And he'll start by teasing you, where you come from... And then if you get mad, he won't kind of... He'll be careful. Then he'll start looking at you a second time and then you know what's coming. He's gonna start teasing and laughing and joking. That's how they are.

Sandra: Like they get you listening, eh? Then they'll say something crazy... make you laugh. Like you're sitting there and they've got your attention... and they're really getting serious and then they say something crazy.

And that's the way it was with Upisasik Theatre. The students insisted on using humor as the dramatic spark in nearly all our plays because, as Jerry explained, "if it
Drama was used to mirror the laughter and the humor of the community. In Another Home especially, local jokes, anecdotes, characters and caricatures made their way into Upisasik Theatre plots and gave people an opportunity to laugh at what was already familiar.

Jerry: I guess they can just laugh at themselves, I guess, cause the things we do is things that happen in the community. And they just get a chance to laugh at themselves, at the community like. It's not in a mean way that we're laughing at each other because they see some things that remind them of themselves I guess. (laughs)

Duane: When I think of Upisasik Theatre, I think of Ile-à-la-Crosse. Because it was the people's experiences, you know. They were sort of, in a sense, remembering and laughing at themselves. And I think that's what made it so great. People watching us on stage, but in a sense watching themselves and things that happened to them in real life.

Some of these "real life" experiences were serious, but even these were explored through humor. Duane suggested that this was Upisasik's way of conveying a sense of hope to its audiences. Humor transcended hardship, just as it did in the community.

Duane: I think an old experience brought across in a different medium, by a different medium, which is of course drama... I think they see their
own lives as young people growing up and the hardships that they went through. But even through all the hardships they enjoyed and appreciated life and still had the humor that a lot of hardships would take away. I think, for the old people, it's a rewarding experience for them to watch a show that they can really relate to, that's not removed from the community, but is a part of the community.

Whether the issue was peer pressure, land rights or AIDS, the actors always found a way to state their message in a comical or satirical way. They always wanted laughter. In only one play (Napew) did they opt for a tragic ending, but even that play was essentially comic. As Maureen told me in her interview, you have to have a balance in your crying and your laughter; you can't have too much of one or of the other.

To what extent was Upisasik's humor derived from the storytelling tradition of the community? How important was this connection?

Elaine: Oh, it's very important. It's hilarious the stories that they tell. Why do you think we have such funny stories... I mean plays...? Not necessarily the whole play being funny, but I mean parts.

Sandra: There definitely is a connection because that's where we get our humor... from the old people when they talk about things, eh? That's where we pick it up from mostly.

Much of this humor was embedded in the Cree language
itself. To what extent, I cannot say, but I do remember playwright Tomson Highway once saying, "You can't hardly speak Cree without laughing." The actors of Upisaski agreed.

Sandra: But we always talk Cree to each other like, but it's always funny eh? Even when we're trying to be serious. But we're always laughing.

Elaine: There is a lot of humor in it. I think that's why most of the stories that you hear, that we say are humorous, and then when we say it in English it's not funny. Well, tough! You missed out.

Jerry: Because if you have a Cree audience, it's kind of hard to translate the Cree joke into a white joke. It sort of loses some of its zest. It's just not as funny in English as it was in Cree.

While we were working on one of the scenes in Gabrielle, I asked Nora (Gabrielle) to say in Cree what she would do if the government didn't listen to her. Her response caused the rest of the students to howl with laughter. When they finally translated for me I found the line funny, but we all knew that it wasn't as funny as it was in Cree: "I'll get my grandmother to go around poking them."

Students were encouraged to use Cree in drama classes. Maureen remembered being very shy about this at first, only later realizing how important it was to practise and
preserve her language. The proportion of Cree dialogue varied from play to play and performance to performance. In Ile-à-la-Crosse most of the dialogue in Wesakechak was performed in English, but in Pine House most of it was in Cree because kids there were more fluent in their first language. In Canoe Lake the play was performed entirely in Cree. I still remember the magical laughter that came with this blending of story, humor and Cree.

When I asked about the nonverbal side of storytelling, Maureen and Jerry described how elders would sometimes use mime for parts of their stories.

Maureen: Yeah. That's what I see. And these people, you know, Native people it seems. Well not. Yeah. When they tell a story, when you listen to older people tell a story, they put so much into it that they act it out half of the time, you know.

Jerry: There they are moving their heads, and they're going up and, you know, going down hills like that...

Duane agreed that there was a connection between this tradition of storytelling and the acting that he did on stage.

Duane: I think definitely, yeah, there's a definite connection. Because I remember long before I did drama, sitting down with my brothers and sisters and listening to a good story from my grandma, and just being captivated by what she was saying and how she was saying it...
I think it was just the technique, and just a natural ability she had of being able to hold us in suspense, in taking us along gradually. And each time she said something it would stir something within us a little bit more until it rose and rose, until it reached a climax, and then she'd let us have whatever she was building to.

Whether she was sitting with the kids or sweeping the floor or pouring coffee, she used movement and speech to engage her audience. Even if it was a story that had been told many times before, there was something about the pace and the timing and the expression and her movements that held Duane in a spell again and again.

Duane: With expression plus with her body language, her... her... her ability to make us believe that what she was saying was the absolute truth, and this is the way it happened and... detail. Every word was perfect. Nothing was missing.

Pausing... at the proper moments so you had to wait, until she sat down again and then she'd pick it up. But we always sat there waiting, you know. It was not like we'd forget what she was talking about. We all had it clear. And if she asked us where she left off, we could tell right away where she left off without thinking twice about it... As Rosen (1985) says, "We learn the story grammar of our society, our culture" (p.14). The actors of Upisask Theatre were continuing an oral tradition deeply rooted in the culture of their community. They performed in Cree, as well as English. They blended humor with hardship. They
used the elements of storytelling -- speech and expression, movement and stillness, pacing and timing -- to tell their stories. Their form of storytelling was drama; their story was the play.

Storytelling in play. After completing the Upisasik interviews I continued to explore the relationship between drama and storytelling and was often reminded of what Elaine had to say about it.

Elaine: I mean sure they put emphasis, and they want to express themselves, you know when they're telling a story, but it's like a dream and poem. How does that go? You know how some dreams are so colorful, and then you can write poems that are just as colorful, but...? You can't exactly write out exactly how your dream was, into a poem?

On June 8, I left Ile-à-la-Crosse, but I was only home for two days when Maureen called me. Upisasik Theatre had just been asked to perform for a Friendship Day, to be held the very next day at St. Joseph's Hospital. This would be a social gathering of elders from Beauval, Patuanak and Ile-à-la-Crosse and the organizers hoped that Upisasik could provide some of the entertainment. I cursed about the timing; other commitments made it impossible for me to attend.

A second reason for Maureen's call was to ask for some help in registering Upisasik Theatre in the Saskatoon
Fringe Festival (July 31-August 9). How to submit a synopsis of the play when it hadn't yet been created? I struck a deal with Maureen. I would write a generic piece for the Fringe if she would videotape the Friendship Day performance and keep it for me until I returned to Ile-à-la-Crosse. When I finally saw it I was amazed at how beautifully this twenty-minute video clip epitomized the work of Upisasik Theatre.

12:50 A quick shot of Maureen, Elaine and Sharon in the Upisasik space grabbing a quick bite to eat, then talking and walking their way through one of the scenes.
1:10 The camera pans the audience. Fifty or so elders, mostly women, crowded into a multipurpose room, somewhere in St. Joseph's Hospital. Two or three of the audience are in wheelchairs, the rest sitting helter-skelter but generally facing the doorway to the room, for this is the stage area for Upisasik.
1:11 A buzz of talking, mostly in Cree. As the camera pans for a second time, I hear in English, "movie stars", and everyone laughs.
1:12 A short scene to introduce the program. Maureen and Sharon as old people, asking Maureen's son the way to the Friendship Day social. He doesn't understand the Cree, so they try to ask in English: "To have fun"... "Friendship Day"... "Where? Where to go?"... "At the hospital!" The irony of going to the hospital to have fun strikes this elderly audience as hilarious. There is a din of laughter. The camera shakes so I know that Jerry is laughing too.

Four stories were presented by the actors and to this day, whenever I watch them, I laugh along with the laughter of those old people until I am in tears. The first was an old story, a joke actually, about a man who buys his very
first chain saw, but doesn't realize that he has to start it to use it. In his interview, Jerry recalled acting this story out with a real chain saw when he was working in the bush. His audience was a crew of nine.

The second story was one that Maureen had told me in her interview, one that she had heard from an elder. It was a "lie," but a story nonetheless, about a man who set his "great big metal cup" down on the ground when the tent caterpillars were bad. When he reached for his cup it was gone; when he found it, there was a big caterpillar underneath.

The third story was about a man who finds his mirror in the bush and thinks it's a picture of his father. When he brings it home, his wife looks at it and thinks it's a picture of "another woman." And when Kohkom looks at it...

The final story was one that we used in Napew, and we called it "Shake Well Before Using." It demonstrated the confusion that can occur when a Cree speaker hears an unfamiliar English phrase or idiom. This was a common theme in local jokes and stories, and in our plays as well.

As the Upisasik actors presented these stories they blended drama with storytelling; they acted and narrated at the same time. And the audience? The audience laughed hysterically, perhaps because they had heard, or even told, these stories before or perhaps because the stories were being told in their own language and in a somewhat familiar
way. The actors of Upisasik were giving stories back to their elders; they were storytelling in play.

Duane: And no one person can claim these stories. And we can't even claim them because they belong to the community. They belong to the people who existed in northern Saskatchewan for the hundreds of years that they've been there.

When it was over, there was an appreciative round of applause, and then... the elders themselves began to tell stories.
Jerry: Oh, Wanda and her cigarette smoking. The very very first scene of Another Home. Remember she stuffed it in the tea? (Laughs) She gave the cup to her grandma. (Laughs) "What the hell is that cigarette doing in my tea!" Then she blamed it on Maureen. Maureen's character, Sarah... And what else? There might be some of me that I don't remember, cause I couldn't hardly watch myself, I was so embarrassed.
I am holding this turquoise in my hands.
My hands hold the sky wrought in this little stone.
There is a cloud at the furthest boundary.
The world is somewhere underneath.

I turn the stone, and there is more sky.
This is the serenity possible in stones,
the place of a feeling to which one belongs.
I am happy as I hold this sky in my hands, in my eyes, and in myself.

(Ortiz, 1975.)

Maureen was ecstatic about the Friendship Day performance and amazed that some elders, especially from Beauval, recognized her and Jerry from their roles in Another Home. I, of course, was ecstatic when I saw the video.

We kept in touch through June because I had arranged to spend one more week in Ile-à-la-Crosse, starting on June 29. I planned to document some of the work on Upisasik's next project, the creation of a play for the Fringe. It was hoped that Duane would join this project after his performance at the opening of Wanuskewin Heritage Park on June 27. That performance was, in fact, the next step along my research trail, and on that evening I sat in the audience and watched the story of Wanuskewin unfold in the valley below.
Rocks. When you look across the valley at Wanuskewin you can't help but notice the rocks, sleeping boulders embedded in the valley sides. When Duane first visited the site with Bruce Sinclair and Kelly Murphy, they were struck by the beauty of the rocks, and the idea emerged that they should find a way to bring those rocks to life in the play that they had agreed to create. So it was that among the cast of *Living in Harmony* were actors who became rocks -- living, moving, dancing rocks.

Rock cairns, tipi rings, hiddescrapers, medicine wheels. Duane talked to me about the significance of rocks in Aboriginal culture, about the sacred power they hold in the four cycles of life: rock, plant, animal, human.

Duane: And the rock to me is the foundation of all those cycles. To me it symbolizes power, healing power anyway... So there's that gift to heal within the rock, as there is in plants, animals and humans, and therefore we should respect all creation.

He talked about the great respect that is given to rocks during sweat ceremonies. Different tribal groups might have different ceremonies, "but the respect is the same throughout." He said, "They [the elders] may joke and laugh, but when it's time to get serious, they get serious."

If the elders are the key to knowing and understanding
our world, the children are its future. For that reason it was decided that a troupe of children would be used to convey a final message to the audience.

Duane: Let's have the children of the future leave something with the audience to guarantee that the audience will never forget the show they saw here and the lessons that they learned.

And that is why, near the end of the performance of Living in Harmony, a mass of children came racing up from over the crest of a hill, then along the valley rim to the small stage where Duane as Wesakechak stood waiting.

There, from Wesakechak, they received small symbolic gifts for the audience. As they gave these gifts out to people, Wesakechak like quicksilver turned and ran from the stage. He ran across the front of the bleachers, gazed mysteriously around, then sprinted up some steps and into the crowd. There he reached across to me, placed something in my hand, and was gone.

I opened my hand. In it lay a small polished stone.

On June 29 I returned to Ile-à-la-Crosse, hoping to observe some of the work on the Fringe play and to assist in whatever way I could. It was to be a frustrating visit.

The town was abuzz with Canada Day preparations and rink renovations for the weekend performance of Trooper. When I met with Maureen she filled me in on their idea for
the Fringe play: "We have the thread. Now we just have to weave the story."

We met at their office -- Maureen, Sharon, Henry and, for a while, Beckie and Jerry. It was in fact a storytelling session: Sharon's sewer story, Jubbs' fishing story, the Cree chicken joke, the one-two-three monias hunter wake-up joke, Maureen and the poker rally and crying in the snow. Stories. Stories. Twenty-one stories in one hour!

We talked about how these stories might be chosen and woven together, some in Cree, some in English; some humorous, some tragic; some told, some acted. We talked about a plot that might bring the actors and audience back to the elders, back to the gift of storytelling. Lots of talk, lots of thread. And then it was over.

The rest of the week was a write-off as far as Upisask Theatre was concerned. Celebrations, floats for the parade, bingos and ball games, Trooper hype on CILX. The Collective was unable to meet again until July 6, the day I had to leave.

On that afternoon I met with Jerry, Beckie and Maureen at their office. We visited for a while, but with very little focus on the play. There was uncertainty over who could or would be available to perform at the Fringe, although Duane was expected back in town in two days' time. Because I was leaving, I suggested that we have a
brainstorming session to lay out a workable plot for the play, but this wasn't to be. Beckie had to leave, and I ended up on the front steps of the Local Community Authority building with Jerry and Maureen, watching cars and people pass by in the midday heat. The lake was silent and still, a mirror.

When Beckie returned we spoke only briefly of what this Fringe play might be. I told them a bit of what I had learned from Upisasik Theatre and from the interviews -- about the need to run with one idea or issue; to build on the power of Cree, humor and story; to expect fun from the first improvis and doubts thereafter; to trust that some creative strand would inevitably appear to tie it all together.

Of course, I was simply articulating what they knew already, but because I wanted so much for this play to happen, I unloaded what I could. My fear was that if this project failed and folded, so might Upisasik.

After final farewells, I drove with my family down the highway away from Ile-à-la-Crosse. On the drive south I felt frustrated and insecure, a web of threads untied, every single thread. Powerless. Between Beauval and Green Lake I turned to my wife, Val, who had shared this "road" with me many times before. "It'll be a miracle if they pull this off," I said. And then, "This is where my story should end..."
When I had left Ile-à-la-Crosse seven years before, the school continued the drama classes, but Upisasik Theatre folded. Why? When I asked this question in the interviews, the response was usually, "Because you left." Participants spoke of the need for "leadership," for "the right person," for someone who was "aggressive enough to do it," and when I asked what I might have done to keep Upisasik alive, I had few responses. Maureen suggested that I "could have given more people responsibility," whereas Rod felt that he "personally didn't want the responsibility."

Rod remembered the continuity that was provided by the students themselves.

Rod: There used to be a main core, I thought, of people throughout drama, right from when I was in grade ten, eleven, twelve. There was one main group, a core group, that you pretty much relied on. You knew they were going to be there. You knew you were going to have a play to take. A good play because these guys were always going to be there. You know... Even if they had kids.

Nevertheless, as I look back on that experience I see opportunities that I missed to involve this core group in leadership roles, as student-directors and writers, so that "individuals in both peer and group leadership roles are able to assume leadership positions formerly reserved for the teacher alone" (Giroux & Penna, 1981, p.224). It is possible that this might have provided some continuity for
Upisasik Theatre, that it might have prevented its demise in 1985.

In the days that followed my July 6 departure from Ile-à-la-Crosse, I probed and poked at my role in Upisasik Theatre. I recalled Margaret Meek Spencer's (1986) words - that the role of the teacher is to make herself/himself "progressively redundant" (p.54) and that, "Wherever the desk may be, the teacher's intellectual stance... is behind the head of the learner" (p.62).

I supposed I was being haunted by Paulo Freire and the critical educators who have shadowed him; I hoped to avoid the self-deception of researchers and pedagogues who believe their work to be emancipatory or liberatory, when in reality they have indulged in another form of oppression (Ellsworth, 1989).

Grundy (1987) states that "an emancipatory interest... engages the student, not simply as an active rather than a 'passive' receiver of knowledge, but rather as an active creator of knowledge along with the teacher" (p.101). My interviews indicated that the students felt ownership and authorship for their work, and that they were actively engaged in meaning-making as we collectively created our plays. They suggested as well a "partnership" (Freire, 1970), a sense of trust and mutual respect in our teacher-student relationship that enabled us to learn from one another.
Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.

(Freire, 1970, p.59)

But Grundy (1987) also says that the emancipatory nature of education lies "in the empowerment for groups of people to engage in autonomous action" (p.114), and Giroux describes "empowerment" as "central to the collective struggle for a life without oppression" (1986, p.58). And all of this defines a political dimension that seemed somehow distant from the day-to-day reality of those who were a part of Upisasik Theatre.

Ellsworth (1989) attacks the rhetoric and the "high level of abstraction" (p.300) that characterize the critical education movement:

...key assumptions, goals and pedagogical practice fundamental to the literature on critical pedagogy - namely "empowerment," "student voice," "dialogue," and even the term "critical" are repressive myths that perpetuate the relations of domination.

(p.298)

Rooted as it is in rational discourse, critical education actively perpetuates a power imbalance because of its exclusive reliance on reason as a way of knowing.

For the students and adults of Upisasik Theatre, stories were a way of knowing, and these stories were given
voice through a discourse that was very different from the discourse of critical educators; it blended drama and storytelling, Cree and humor.

**Tomson Highway:** When you speak Cree you laugh constantly and you laugh from the gut. It's by no stretch of the imagination an intellectual laughter. I find the English language quite by comparison to be extremely rational, an intellectual language, even scientific, beautifully applicable to the wonders of mathematics and science... But when you talk Cree you feel from the groin.

(CBC, 1989)

It therefore seemed appropriate that I should turn my attention back to the community of Ile-à-la-Crosse to explore the emancipatory nature of the Upisaskik experience. I interviewed a local writer and activist who had been an observer and supporter of Upisaskik Theatre since its beginning: Vye Bouvier. Her comments on the political nature of Upisaskik's work applied as well to my research process.

**Vye:** And I find that very political to know where you come from and to know what everybody knew then. And to not think that the only knowledge is in the university libraries, that there is knowledge here that will never be in any university library or any bookstore unless some of us do something about it, because it's all oral history. And to me that's very political, the sense of identity you have as a group.
Vye spoke of the oral tradition and the importance of drama in "passing on that storytelling tradition" especially now that "television is killing it for every community":

Vye: We didn't have television until the mid 70's and I loved it! I came home in my early 20's because there was no TV, and everybody was like in The Hobbit, you know. Like everybody visiting everybody, little paths going all over the place. Then when television came in, slowly... well, actually faster than it should have, people weren't visiting.

Upisasik Theatre resisted the assimilative nature of television and commercial radio, "which really is destroying what is valuable, what is already here."

Vye's words echoed Duane's memories of television and its impact on his life. For Duane, at the age of 10, 11, or 12, television "took over" and "kind of put storytelling on the back burner and it never really came out again."

And the school, with its focus on reading and writing, continued to keep this oral tradition on the "back burner."

Duane: Nobody, I think, gave us the opportunity to stand up and say, "Tell us a story." And I think that's where drama came in. And I think that's why Upisasik Theatre became so successful. I think it gave people who weren't necessarily skilled in reading and writing, but they had learned the skills of storytelling.

The drama program empowered students who spoke Cree and
could tell stories. Its characters were not "mainstream" role models, but "just people from here." In Vye's view, its work succeeded in spite of the educational system that spawned it, and that is how she explained the rise and fall of Upisasik Theatre.

Vye: I think when you work in an institution like a school, and you work in a system like the educational system, I think even if you're a super person that you couldn't change the system. I think you can create kind of a different environment for a while, but when you go, it's gone...

Although Upisasik Theatre folded as a school program, its revival as a community collective was certainly evidence of empowerment for at least some of its members. But what of the future? What dreams for Upisasik Theatre? Everyone I interviewed expressed the hope that Upisasik would continue as a community theatre group, but there were mixed opinions on whether this would really occur. Some felt the Collective would disappear once its funding was gone, that it would fall prey to a lack of community involvement and support. Others spoke of future projects and issues.

While Randy spoke of a "permanent place in town, a playhouse... where people might go to do their plays," Rod focused on the ambassadorial role that Upisasik should continue to play outside the community, especially in the
Rod: I'd like to show them that we have a life over here. We have problems... I'd like to show everybody down South that's it different up North here. It's beautiful up here. We're not stuck over here. Like people think I wouldn't want to be in those guys' shoes. Walk a mile in our shoes before you talk about it, cause I think we have a pretty good life here. It's not as bad as everybody thinks. I'd like to show stuff like that.

Beckie told me of the many phone calls that Upisasik still received "wanting us to go places," and the important role that the Collective might continue to play in dealing with issues. This focus on issues is evidence of Upisasik's continued affinity with popular theatre and popular education. Arranged as a spectrum from past to present to future they resemble the "thematic fan" that Freire (1970) suggested for reflecting on social injustice and social reality (p.107). If Upisasik Theatre continues, the folds of the fan may open, issue by issue, and contribute to the process of social "transformation."

Theatre as "a medium of transformation" (Kidd & Selman, 1979, p.16).

Beckie: There's a lot of people out there who are scared. And it's just like this whole AIDS thing. If you sit there and you're being lectured to, nobody wants to listen. But if you do it in a performance they're going to feel better and maybe go out, and help or whatnot, or think about what they're
really doing. I think.

Date rape was one issue that Beckie had heard raised by students. Sandra spoke of environmental issues and the Canoe Lake protest against clear-cutting. Wanda mentioned child abuse and impaired driving. And Vye hoped that Upisasik might "affirm the values of women, the vision of women and a wonderful future for women, which is coming too slow in the village."

It was Vye's feeling that the new Collective must be open to a "more modern definition" of culture in future work. She noted that often in our plays there was an elderly woman, a "sort of guiding light who would always have the last word." Her concern was that this might be their comment on where culture is today: "Our culture is the elderly people. When they die, it dies." On the other hand:

Vye: But maybe it says that the wisest person around and the one that can tell you where you're going and where you've been is just this elderly person. Because they're your library and your historian.

Vye felt that the future work of Upisasik Theatre would have to move beyond dealing with the past. If it was going to reflect the culture, "it has to deal with the future and the present as well." She looked forward to "some kind of vision of what's going to happen here..."
And one vision that emerged from many of the interviews was that someday there would be an Upisasik reunion, "to get everybody together" from all of our plays. In Elaine's words: "To get something together... something new. Because there would be lots and lots of ideas."

Late in the afternoon of Sunday, August 1, I sat with my family at Venue 4 of the Saskatoon Fringe Festival. This was our first play of the Fringe and we wondered what it would be like. Our program billed it this way:

KAYAS ATCHIMOWIN
(STORIES FROM OUR PAST)
By Upisasik Theatre
UPISASIK THEATRE
Ile-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan
The Upisasik contribution to the Fringe is a work-in-progress. It is a humorous look at the world through the eyes of young Metis people in northern Saskatchewan. The play blends memories of the past with a satirical look at the lives of "the people up north". The performance will be in English, with some Cree.
All Ages.
45 minutes
SHOW TIMES
Sun. Aug 2 - 4:45 p.m.
Mon. Aug 3 - 12:00 p.m. noon
Tue. Aug 4 - 7:30 p.m.
Fri. Aug 7 - 12:00 p.m. noon
Sat. Aug 8 - 1:30 p.m.
TICKET PRICE $5.00

The staging was simple and symbolic: a lighted lamp, a few chairs, a blank black backdrop with a poster that read, "Upisasik Theatre meeting tonight at 7:30 p.m."
In the cast were actors from all of Upisasik Theatre's plays, from Sakitawak Kayas to Sarah. The director was listed as "Collective." The playwright was listed as "All."

Together they told the story of a group of community actors in Ile-à-la-Crosse who have gathered to collectively create a play that they can perform at the Saskatoon Fringe Festival. As they tell their stories, they act them out. Eventually they realize that they need more stories and that they must go to the elders.

In the final scene of the play an old woman sits in the light of the lamp, with the actors of Upisasik before her. She says in Cree, then in English, "I will tell you a story..."
Beckie: Lights are dim. We are gathered around an elder in the community. She is happy we are here beside her. Finally, she has someone to talk to. Her shawl is covering her head. With a sparkle in her eye, she begins her stories of long ago.
CHAPTER X
CONCLUSION

People like us are predisposed to see stories as autonomous islands, becalmed in books or perhaps... reserved for special occasions around camp-fires, in family gatherings, at the child's flow of leisurely talk and most of all in the mind with its eternal rummaging in the past and its daring, scandalous rehearsal of scripts of the future. We might be disposed to take stories much more seriously if we perceived them first and foremost as a product of the predisposition of the human mind to narratize experience and to transform it into findings which as social beings we may share and compare with those of others.

(Rosen, 1985, p.12)

There is a story yet to be told about the spring and summer of 1992. It is the story of a series of personal, professional and family events that wove wildly in and out of my research process until it all became one.

There was the intense three-week school evaluation project on a nearby reserve that overlapped with my May 14 meeting with the actors of Upisasik. There were the SUNTEP Theatre performances of Wheel of Justice, a collective creation by students and staff of the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program. It was our irreverent response to the quincentennial celebrations of Columbus' arrival on this continent.

In June, I assisted my parents as they moved into town after forty-two years on the family farm. And in July I
shifted my time and energy towards Winnipeg where Donna, my sister, prepared to battle against leukaemia. And win.

In the midst of this emotional turmoil I attended an international drama-in-education conference in Porto, Portugal, and there participated in a workshop given by Wesley Enoch, a young Aboriginal actor from Australia. It took place in a bright, long, rectangular room with white stucco walls and warm wooden floors. The windows were open to the cool morning air and I could hear children's voices from the courtyard below.

Wesley spoke of Aboriginal culture, of dreamings old and new, of the collective theatre work of his troupe. He led us through a series of movement exercises, and then introduced an activity that was cathartic for me because it connected many facets of my life: past and present, childhood and adulthood, work world and family world. Academic illusion, personal realities. Drama and the human drama, Duane and Donna, love and leukaemia...

I sat quietly, eyes closed, and in my mind formed an image of a dark pool of water. Into that pool of water, Wesley dropped a word, a pebble... a small polished stone. The pebble that he dropped was the word "home."

I drop Duane's pebble into a clear pool of Portuguese water and I catch the first ripple... I see Donna's face, a teenage school snapshot but fear of sharing this lets me catch the second ripple where I see
myself standing on the edge of a stage
crowing like a rooster...

Later, in the heat of the street a pile of wooden
crafts caught my eye and I was busily admiring an intricate
jewelry box when I saw it. A little wooden figurine, a
brilliantly colored rooster with pink flowers and a bright
red heart. A feisty, arrogant, crowing cock, its head
thrown back as if in laughter. I bought it, of course, for
Donna.

...I fly all day
home pebble Duane Donna drama
the Portuguese rooster
perched on the edge of that school stage
in Rockglen Saskatchewan
crowing cock-a-doodle-doo, cock-a-doodle-doo
cock-a-doodle-doo
and I had no idea why..

I remember as a child collecting small stones and
pebbles from roadways and gravel knolls. In my imagination
I transformed these into gold, silver and the most precious
of gems, and then I hid and hoarded this wealth in special
secret corners of my mind.

Many years later I watched my two daughters, Kirstin
and Erika, do the same. I hold images of one and then the
other, squatting down on some beach or bush trail holding a
small stone up to the light, pinched between thumb and
forefinger. We still have a bag full of pebbles that have
somehow moved along with us from Ile-à-la-Crosse to our
present home.

And I still guard a small private collection of stones that were given as gifts from friends -- a greenstone from Aotearoa, a pink stone from Wanuskewin...

Stones, pebbles, bits of rock. Like stories, they are so common that we barely notice them. We find them everywhere, on playgrounds and city streets, in bistros and local bars, in prairie towns and northern bush. And we find them in school corridors and classrooms and, yes, even in the dusty print of academia. Everywhere.

And one thing I know about every stone, polished or unpolished, real or imagined... Drop it into any pool of water and it will create ripples.
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Saskatchewan Drama Association. Regional and provincial drama festival requirements. In Suggested policy for Saskatchewan drama association regional and provincial drama festivals and Stratford/Shaw study trip.

Saskatchewan Education. (1977). Drama 20 locally developed course of study. La Ronge: Academic Education Branch.


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APPENDICES
Letter to Participants

Dear ________________,

As you know, I am in the process of conducting a research project that will tell the story of Upisasik Theatre. To tell it properly, I hope to draw on your memories and your interpretations of the Upisasik Theatre experience.

With your permission, I hope to do the following:

1) conduct a group interview with 4-6 past members of Upisasik Theatre. (This will also be tape-recorded.)

2) Conduct individual interviews with at least 6 past members of Upisasik Theatre. (This will also be tape-recorded.)

3) Participate in the present work of the Upisasik Theatre Collective while I am in Ile-à-la-Crosse. This will involve taking notes during work sessions, rehearsals and performances, and helping out in whatever way seems appropriate.

Besides contributing to my thesis work in Curriculum Studies, I am hopeful that the story of Upisasik Theatre will be of interest to teachers who might be interested in collective theatre work with their students.

As a participant in this research project, you have important rights of confidentiality and anonymity. I have discussed this with you and have summarized these in the consent form (attached).

I look forward to meeting with you and to re-visiting Upisasik Theatre.

Yours sincerely,

Lon Borgerson
APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM
Consent Form

The purpose for the Upisasik Theatre research project has been explained to me. I understand that:

1) my involvement is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the project at any time.

2) all tapes and transcripts will be used in a manner that will respect my rights to confidentiality and anonymity and will be erased when the project is completed.

3) I will have the right to review the transcripts from my interview(s) to ensure that they are valid. Changes will be made if I feel it is necessary.

4) the researcher's involvement in the Upisasik Theatre Collective will be determined by the members of the Collective.

With these conditions, I hereby agree to participate in the project.

Signed: __________________________

Date: __________________________
APPENDIX C
REQUEST TO WAIVE ANONYMITY
REQUEST TO WAIVE ANONYMITY

I have participated in the Upisasik Theatre research project conducted by Lon Borgerson from May 14 to July 31, 1992. I have reviewed the personal references made to me in Lon's thesis and am therefore requesting the use of my name in the final document.

I HEREBY REQUEST THAT MY RIGHT TO ANONYMITY BE WAIVED AND THAT MY REAL NAME BE USED IN STORYTELLING IN PLAY: UPISASIK THEATRE REVISITED.

Signed: _________________________
Date: _________________________
APPENDIX D
GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
Group Interview Schedule
(Tentative)

1. If you were going to tell the story of Upisasik Theatre, what would you want to be sure to include?

2. What scenes from the plays of Upisasik do you think were most effective, and why?

3. What do you remember about the classes? the performances? the tours?

4. What were the highlights? the "lowlights"?

5. What effect did the drama program have on the students? on the school? on the community?

6. If someone asked you how you made your plays, how would you answer them?

7. What did the plays of Upisasik Theatre say to people? What were the messages? (Specific reference to plays.)

8. Why did Upisasik fold? What do you think could have been done to prevent this?

9. Why has Upisasik been revived? What importance does it have for you? for the community? for your culture?

10. What is the future for Upisasik Theatre? What ideas do you have for future plays? (What issues do you see as important for future work?)

11. Let's suppose that I am a curriculum developer in Regina, and that I am responsible for designing a drama curriculum for high school students in the province. What is your advice? (What should I include?)
APPENDIX E

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
Individual Interview Schedule
(Tentative)

1. Tell me what you remember best about the drama classes that you took in Rossignol School, the performances that you were involved in, the tours that you were a part of.

2. What were the highlights? (What did you enjoy most?) What were the "not-so-good" moments? (What didn't you like about drama? What did you find difficult?)

3. What reasons did you have for choosing to take drama then? At 2:30 on one of those afternoons, on your way downstairs from drama, how did you feel about going to class? What did you expect to happen there?

4. What importance did drama have in your schooling then? (How did it compare to your other classes?)

5. What do you think you learned from those drama classes? from the performances? from the tours?

6. Has your experience in Upisasik Theatre been of any use to you since leaving high school?

7. What do you think the community felt about Upisasik theatre then? And now? What impact do you think our plays had on other communities? On audiences in the South?

8. Do you think your culture was reflected in the work of Upisasik Theatre? (How?)

9. What did our plays say to people? What were the messages of the plays that you acted in? (Specific reference to plays.)

10. There are many decisions involved in the making of a play. How were those decisions made in Upisasik Theatre? (What was the role of the teacher-director in decision-making? of the student-actors?)

11. Why do you think Upisasik Theatre "folded" in 1985? How do you suppose this might have been avoided?

12. Why has Upisasik Theatre been revived? Why are you/aren't you with Upisasik Theatre Collective now? (What do you get out of Upisasik Theatre now?)
13. What do you see happening with Upisasik Theatre in the future? (What dreams do you have for the Upisasik Collective?) What of your future participation in this kind of theatre?

14. What is your most vivid (powerful) memory from your years in Upisasik Theatre.

15. If you were consulted about the importance of this kind of drama for students in our schools (for your own children), what would you say?
APPENDIX F
UPISASIK NOTES
UPISASIK FOR TALENT SHOW

1. Open Stage

Ask Buck to make the first or one of the first presentations.

- First person looking for the talent show - Jerry
- Yesyes - Bertha
- Buckley - Rod
- Old lady - Elaine
- Swam - Bebbie
- Flower child - Bertha
- Photographer - Jola (Costumes)
- Rock star - Rod (guitar) for all
talent show. Don't forget any lady - Laura (Last)

ORDER DOESN'T MATTER, EXCEPT LAURA

2. Bingo

Radio, groups, and discuss:

DO NOT USE ANY
THOSE KIDS - MARIJUANA
BEST - Buckley Belongs (Boy)
AS PEOPLE - A Cheater (Who cheats a couple times)
IN TOWN - Keeping town
- B9, B67, etc. (Not too loud)

Rita BINGSOS. At that point the players sit down and start playing Bingo. After 1 or 2 calls, light out.

Callers - Bertha
Ladies - Jola, Elaine, Rita, Bertha, Laura
Robers - Jerry, Frank, Rod
Guns - Jerry, Rod, Rita
Money - Broken Bingo, bars, chips - cereals, trinkets, etc. every own

LCA at 5:00 P.M. TODAY AND BE AT TALENT SHOW

(Have a good time - Join)
good intro, Alice

1. **Shepherd Boy**
   *Nova* - v. good. But Cree next time - rehearsal was better.
   The cue seemed to add. Ruby - No problem. Don't give up -
   deep, calm breath and talk to the kids. Sleep - don't
   forget to Baa! Village folk - very good!!!
   (Our noisy group scene worked best... figures!)
   Claude - try to be cleaner despite mask. Nora - scream once,
   then villagers yells from offstage ("You're just lying. You can't
   feel us... etc
   Claude steps on stage -> Nora screams 2nd
   time and villagers reply same. They chase around box 2013
   times then 3 scream. LOUD. Fights out.

2. **Wind and the Sun** - good intro, Carla!
   Rita and Anna - you both did well. Anna - 3: Blues and
   Alice - say line before you take coat off. Sit down, wipe
   off sweat. Alice - a fine job!

3. **Frog and the Ox**
   The parts were done well. (especially the demanding role of
   the Ox) But the ending nearly died. Anna saved it with
   her line (as if that. How you planned it). We have to... Bud?
   Carla: Better - HOW? If we can't find anything better, Carla will
   do the following on the 3rd try - inhale twice, on the 3rd time
   everyone in the room will stop their hands at once. Then should
   be a hard inhale, inhale, C-R-A-P. Carla sprang forward. Anna
   + the Anne. Keep focused. Look at Carla, look at each other.
   And say, "And the moral of the story is..." Carla looks up,
   hands on chin... don't be happy with what you are!

4. **The Fox and the Crow**
   Let's get real close. See Anna - a good job with the
   kids. Be more crackly? Yogi - Be more shy. Talk to the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Keep</th>
<th>Improve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hunting</td>
<td>man bumped + yelled loudly</td>
<td>Woman's voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>man advanced up ramp after shot.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delores D. is adding more good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campfire</td>
<td>Duane's exit was good.</td>
<td>And Doc. should have last line - &quot;we leave for flu-X tomorrow.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help from everyone - the</td>
<td>Should Duane be angrier?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>scene seemed good,</td>
<td>More from and Doc -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>natural - and funny</td>
<td>stories about his wedding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving In</td>
<td>He talk and actin as you moved in was</td>
<td>Let's have more. Phenomenal humor?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you moved in was good</td>
<td>Duane was v. good - dancing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duane was v. good - dancing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie</td>
<td>All of it.</td>
<td>Stage into each other's eyes for a second before the kiss (Oh yeah, how about the chair falling over, backdoor like Duane did before?):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackout</td>
<td>And Doc did much better - this is very</td>
<td>Nex is sick - other can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>much better scene.</td>
<td>ask about her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A fine scene of the</td>
<td>Thesima done it, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>talking got going.</td>
<td>Delores J -aporin is good - but it's hard to tell what you're doing when you go back again. Take more time. - Everyone C Discount, Leod Doc. + Delores D should teach he only absent change - Nex was late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>Excellent - this scene came into its own</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yesterday. Barn Strong. Talking with stethoscope was perfect. Training was just right. Delores Buck-a-frie fine scene.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Keep</td>
<td>Improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpse</td>
<td>Div. It Loved it. I don't know how you dvanced in - a fine job.</td>
<td>Jerry should give myself at least. I assume should leave more straight out to add to the scary mood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April Fool's</td>
<td>Poopf</td>
<td>We'll have to change Poop to a plane when we're on tour. (Or somehow explain what Poop is.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Buck is principal is becoming excellent. Timing was just right.</td>
<td>Horse is too nice. He must be bitchier. Always deep a straight face - try to smile (though it was funny when you forget Lula's name.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakup</td>
<td>We never knew Sarah was pregnant but that's O.K.V. was doing very good for her first try at the part. The whole scene has improved a lot.</td>
<td>Ending can be stronger, more emotional. Sarah will have to build that up more next time we do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amok/Bayda</td>
<td>3 instead of 4 parts worked good. Intermission by buck was nice. The scene is getting stronger. Ending is very strong.</td>
<td>Buck + shane shouldn't distract the audience while Sarah reads. - FREEZ Buck can be more pompous more of a asshole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bootlegging</td>
<td>I don't know what happens said, but the audience loved it. Horse is strong here.</td>
<td>Horse smiles too early don't look at me when i turn on the lights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>Jerry was excellent, esp. when Buck tried to make him and when he escaped. Buck added some funny lines when he entered. Horse kept dead very well.</td>
<td>Horse could talk about how he doesn't give a shit about me. School. Buck. Sarah (or maybe you mean Sarah) (or lift A toss)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quick Set Changes. Adding New Humor. Doing such a fine job. Always improving.</td>
<td>Backstage noise swearing little bits, etc. (I can hear from where I am.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UPISASIK — FEB. 2/83

1. 3 WOMEN
   SONG GROUP #1 Becky Mauren Elaine Rod Jerry (x 2 times)
   GROUP #2 John Rita Laura Ann Frank

   END WITH "I've been thinking"

   intro — Much of what we want to say is missing. E, I, and M should list the points they want to make:

   Margaret — no job in town
   - no training in the North
   - attitude of guys.
   - problems in town
   - "which full of kids" (Rachel)
   - "if you aren't a hockey player, you're a nobody... and that rules all women out."
   - what do you want to do as a northern reporter? - to accomplish? — your dreams, etc.
   Rachel - "show that you're worried. "How do you feel"加盟
   Elaine — "this is a good town. "This is our home... I like it here."
   Does he X — Now?
   - where do you want to go to university? - be a teacher...
   - why is your dream is?...

2. CAFE — More lines needed.
3. OPEN STAGE — Costumes, props, ENERGY
4. INTERVIEW — Track the good must know there lines inside out — and be prepared to improvise if necessary. He's "the Gather" must be strange and ending must be known very well — and done with FLAIR.
5. MOVIE — Voices — More comedic lines are needed. Rod and Mauren must allow a lot of physical humor during the 3 ARM segments.
   (Good smile last night, Mauren.)
6. BAR — Track the order of what you want to say on paper... so you remember it. The part may be done well, but more comments about "these native people" would be good. Steve can argue a bit longer, trying to get the guy out. He cpa should listen to the fuses for a bit then take the guy to the doorway, then turn back and say "you too, lady." Elaine protests, asks why. Jerry replies "you should know. I'm charging you with soliciting."
7. JAIL — Rachel should be more upset. Maybe she shouldn't say anything at first. Margaret can try to get her to talk, and hadel just turn away. Ending Should be stronger. Margaret should be a cool but confused lady on the phone and with her letter.
8. PREGNANT — Tim has to get his attack organized. How to end this with more punch? Maybe Penny should win "I don't need you."
   etc.
UPISASIK NOTES

This is our schedule:

**THIS WEEK**
- **Work on individual scenes**
- **Full Rehearsals**
- **In-school Performances**
- **Performances (Rehearsal?)**
- **Rehearsal & Performance in S‘Toon**
  - at Dance Theatre (University) or Centennial Auditorium (basement)

**MONDAY (TODAY)**
- **Noon**
  - Maureen + Elaine + Ida + Rita + Paul

**TUESDAY**
- **Noon**
  - Maureen + Elaine

**WEDNESDAY**
- **Noon**
  - CLASS — EVERYONE

**THURSDAY**
- **Noon**
  - Wanda + Allen + Ida + Paul

**FRIDAY**
- **Noon**
  - Ida + Jerry

*DO NOT MISS ANY OF YOUR PRACTICES — WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO WASTE*

Based on your votes (mainly) and in attempt to balance the parts out so everybody acts as much as possible:

- The girl — Maureen
- The guy — Paul
- Recommended? 2 girls share roles
- Reconsider? = Ida + Rita
- Kohun — Elaine

Wanda + Allen will both work on the Hercules part instead of Maureen.
The Key Take play will be done in S‘Toon.
Everyone will do the skill (the teachers)
offstage, final scene, and more.
I have made some changes, which have to be tried out:

**KEY LAKE**

↓

**TEACHER SCENES** (and/or *group discussion*).

↓

**MAJOR PLAY**

1. **LETTER**
   - Smoking Room?  
2. **GOODBYE KOKUM**
   - SLIDES (suitcase)
   - Bus Depot
   - UNIVERSITY PARTY + PHONE
4. **ROMANCE: 1-2-3**
   - KOKUM/GUY/DREAM/CRISIS
5. **FINAL (Metis)**
6. (Scene changes maiden poem???)

This is the *structure*.

The structure should work well. What we need are the new scenes. 

*V* = will work  
*?* = not sure
BINGO - louder, clearer. Jerry & Gerry must have masks and say clearly their lines. Women - Don’t just run. Let them rob you, then order you out.

OOPS - Opening speech: voices, esp. the cheering. The clapping - Voice. Jerry don’t talk so fast. Spider - must be B - not B. It won’t work. National - The chain was very good. How? Yogi. Hercules - Move on; show the (and where?) people in the North are affected. Don’t you realize that people live up there!!

End with pose + music, lights out, then lights up for:

First - are there all married. Must start as soon as lights come back on. Else they fast. Then each period runs out with lines.

Nee no Indian

1. Teachers: Each teacher’s part must be longer. This is up to you. I seem like we’re in a rut with these. We should be adding. In the constant. I never heard any teachers. (whatever) from Yogi.

2. Speed - need speed?

3. Yogi - Yogi must be liked. Be sympathized with. Maurer: can’t be harsh with Yogi. Affection needed. Star - when she has refused your necklace, say that you know that someday she will return and ask for it.

4. suitcase: Lilly


6. Cost/phone - this can quite well do. More

7. Romance: build this ¥ frustration when on phone. Library - good. Captain - that should be more seductive at end. So out say:

- Bus step - discuss practice teach, nervous grades. What are you going to teach? I bet you bomb.

See bottom of back.
Manan - the note is made.
Manan should edit (cut down) Grad speech and Puppet.

Grad Speech - Manan
Classroom - Everyone there? 
In case/ maybe - Spillers?
Bus sign - Frank. (check story)
Prop changes - Yogi, Liz, Anne, Jerry, Colleen, Brian.

**Trip Rules:**
* Be to all meeting points on time.
* No bores, etc.
* Custom as I set it.
* Don't expect to shop on Tuesday.

---

He does - take hands of Kokum, Music, fight face.

**FINAL**

Rec. must have some Act.

Bow = * This change - 1st = Right center

2nd = Alt

**CLASSROOM**

Will work if everyone knows their part.

**APR = DREAM**

Good. But they should let us know that Kokum is dying. Dream was good. Now

What did you dream?

Read carefully:

1. How - say you were dreaming? What did you dream?
2. See - see the dream. I see the bear-claw figure one in fashion dress and mask. The other in white mask. For this bear-claw figure one with the red mask offered me a bear-claw. He offered me a white mask.
3. What did you do?
4. Lloyd - I took the white mask.

And what happened?

I can't see, I am blind. I'm afraid I don't know what to do. I'm going to quit. (I don't want to be)

Lloyd tries to discourage her from quitting. And this is when she gets mad. You hear the rest?

Kokum = NOTE: When Kokum finishes her advice.

Kokum: When Kokum finishes her advice. Re: This quitting, she should sit - but head back, close eyes, doesn't notice. Talks, looking ahead. I'm sorry, I've been so wrong. I've rejected everything in my life. Kokum, I'm sorry.

Kokum: I want you to read me... (looks at kokum) Lloyd - the story, said, son, take her hand. Find the bear claw in it. Slowly fold it up. She knew I would need this...

Ask Lloyd to put it on...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIGHTS</th>
<th>SCENES</th>
<th>CHARACTERS</th>
<th>PROPS</th>
<th>SOUND</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TEACHERS: Strait, John, Maureen, Yogi, Jerry, Paul, Steve, Celeste, April</td>
<td>Nove - Costume though</td>
<td>BRICK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>GRAD SPEECH</td>
<td>Maureen</td>
<td>Nove</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>SMOKING ROOM</td>
<td>Maureen, Yogi, Jerry, South, Celeste, Sandra, April</td>
<td>Black Coxe</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>GOODBYE</td>
<td>Maureen, Elaine</td>
<td>Bar chair, chair</td>
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<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>SLIDES</td>
<td>Maureen (image), Elaine (stage)</td>
<td>(slide projection), 1 box + suitcase (blues)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>APARTMENT - CONFLICT</td>
<td>Maureen, John, John</td>
<td>Brief, 2 boxes, desk, phone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>- PHONE</td>
<td>Maureen, Elaine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>ROMANCE #1 (books)</td>
<td>Maureen, Paul</td>
<td>Maureen, Paul, Maureen + Paul</td>
<td>Bus stop sign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LIBRARY #2</td>
<td>Maureen, Paul, Maureen + Paul, all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>CAFE #4</td>
<td>Maureen + Paul</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#5 (bus stop)</td>
<td>Maureen + Paul</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>CRISIS - APARTMENT</td>
<td>Maureen, John, Rita, Elaine, Paul, Celeste, Sandra, Maureen + Celeste</td>
<td>Smoke, rope, lock, plane, Red, Red, red, CONFUSED, White, white</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>DREAM</td>
<td>Maureen + All (in audience)</td>
<td>Red, Red, Red, White, white, White, white</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>FINAL</td>
<td>Maureen + All</td>
<td>Paul + Elaine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>FINAL BOW</td>
<td>Paul, Elaine, Maureen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UPISASIK—NOTES

TEACHERS—Ida—O.K.
    Rita—Not tough enough—A little awkward. Let yourself go.
    Yogi—V.G.
    Lee Anne—Be louder a little longer.
    Maureen—a little weak.
    Paul—Good.
    Elaine—V.G. But remember how hard it is for teachers to keep kids in a straight line. Stop them on stage, line 'em up straight, then lead them off.

GRAD SPEECH—Dismal—Raced through it. It wasn't a speech. It said "Somebody wrote this for me to read so I'm gonna get through it as fast as I can." No power. No emphasis. No eye contact. My voice quivered a bit, as if to show how bored she was with the squad.

Kokum—A tendency in the whole play to leave out what had worked before, and replace it with "time-filler." Fortunately, most of the new dialogue was O.K. in this scene.

Bus Depot—Yogi—Excellent.
    Lee Anne—Excellent (but a bit quiet) (Good Seed)
    Fergy—a bit fast, but good.
    Rita—V.G.—well done!

APT #1—Everytime Mo read, she had big problems.

EDIT THAT DAMN STORY, ACT IT OUT, READ WITH FEELING (Make fun—be sarcastic). But if you race through the whole damn thing just to get it over with, we will not follow a single word.

Don't rush over good moments (i.e.—Getting him to look for the white horse—you did this so great, many people missed it. Slow down!! Use what is good, don't abbreviate it.

& [Ida—You forgot the apple.]
Sc. I) SASKATOON — just don’t forget that you don’t want that pit well to go ahead until the land question has been settled. You can mention the fact that they are having an strike right now. He just don’t want that they are going to recognize our right to sell, but it doesn’t look like they are ready to give native people any land rights. We don’t want that we will lose the land question as settled.

also don’t forget that you want Gabrielle, because she is an lawyer (you think) and she has been writing on the conservation

Sc. II — Vision I. When this ends, move the table off permanently.

(Alice, Dee, Anita)

Sc. III — Bill of Rights — Weeked fine, good last time. Do not allow pauses. Check script for order Show out other comments. Amelia — Know if Nora does this scene from stage I

— Vision II

Sc. III — Regina — Have black boxes and move out of audience to three pictures:

Vision III — Nora middle Stage 2.

Sc. IV REBEL — 1. Call in story and argument — what to do now? (No discussion of blacked out stuff)
2. Call — Motion — opening — arrest him for trespanning — mandatory.
3. Provincial Court

Vision III (Stage 2)

Sc. V SCOTT — Speech / Apology again (See Anita)

Gabrielle — takes to present Bill of Rights (this was your first time)

declassify Prov. Gov’t (see other)

Argument with Scott (are they for or “You’re crazy!...” “You can’t do that...” “you have no right...” “what are you going to silence me...

Vision V End Stage I

Sc. VI FINAL — I think we know this. Dee + Anita first. Alice last. (Dee + Anita; Alice should read the entire from left)

At very end — All look at Nora -> Nora at Bill

وص) — All look at Paul -7 rights are

When lights on, black blockade Bow. When lights on again — Clap on Stage 1 Bow

Removes The music and dimmers.
BA-TOCHE!

O.K. Gang... the holiday is over:

MONDAY 25th / DAY 6
Class at 3PM * Paul & Nora at 12:45 for VISIONS

TUESDAY 26th / DAY 1
Class at 9AM * Nora, April, Alice, Lee, Anna, Colleen, Anita, Dancy, Yogi; Paul at 12:30 to complete FINAL scene.

WEDNESDAY 28th / DAY 2
No Class BUT * Claude 12:30 - 1:00
* All paint scaffolding at 4:00 (to 4:30?) and move to music room.

THURSDAY 29th / DAY 3
Class at 3:00 * Paul & Nora at 12:45 (Complete Rehearsal - Music Room)

FRIDAY 30th / DAY 4
No Class BUT * All rehearsal at Noon (with lunch)

MONDAY 2nd / DAY 5
Class at 11:00 AND * Rehearsal at Noon (ALL)

TUESDAY 3rd / DAY 6
Perform at 3:00!

Scenes
1. SASKATOON / VISION 1 Nora, Alice, April, Lee, Anna, Paul
2. TOWN HALL / BILL OF RIGHTS (VISION2) All
3. REGINA / VISION 3 All
4. RESEARCH Nora, Alice, April, Lee, Anna
5. SPEECH / VISION 4 Claude, Nora, Alice, April, Lee, Anna, Paul, Dancy, Colleen, Paul
NOTES: Paul should write his script into the pages of a book that looks like the bible. (Handwritten, and type in.)
* Nora - What caused the war? Clothing - Suits, flimsy
* Title of play? Costume -_______ in hair
* Paul's suit? Land - Suits - Draper, York.

Scene 1 - Saskatoon - We were or have this together.
But add this: Gabrielle is on table, and asks what the
Bill of Rights is. Start with: You mean you haven't heard?... Do you remember the oil came up to the X a few years ago and drilling test hole around the lake?" (We add this so that the audience catches on - Most people we interviewed haven't heard about this.)
"discovered oil in Black Bay." "I'm going to start to drill for it this year." So go from Test Holes to Black Bay to Delineate this year. Part 1. Gabrielle will now ask what the problem is. Answer - "We want the land.
question settled first. "We want a land base before they can
get ahead." Black Bay is part inside our town Boundary. We
want Black Bay inside our boundary, so we can have some control over it." Etc. (Answer with land issue.)
Part 2. Gabrielle explains how they are trying to win
land settlements at the constitutional table. (Read, look.
I've just been reading about it here.) (Reads paper)
Answer: "But that will take forever! (Jokes about running in tree?)" "We don't have time!" "They're going to
drill this year." "We might have to wait 20 years for
any land settlements with Ottawa!"
Part 5. Gabrielle asks, "What have you done so far?" ->
Letters to Regina, to Ottawa, to B.C. and M.P. - no one wants to listen. "We want to draw up a Bill
of Rights of all of our demands." "It was decided at a
town meeting to get you to help us draw it up, and
present it either to the minister and the premier." "We
know you've been working on the Constitutional Issues
so we thought you could help." "We need a lawyer -
someone from the community."

Then - Gabrielle runs through it all, in Cee... More!
"Why not? you're a lawyer..." "I am not a lawyer," etc

So:
LAND BASE / town Boundary
Cost, taxes.
Letters, petition & bill of rights.
Closing.
Scene 2

Town mtg / BILL OF RIGHTS

1. Land - April - in oil (As a trapper in Black Bay area. Animals three more away. How can you make a living? Plus also the price, I gave you)

2. Land - Alice - Oil - We need a land base. We have no other hope for economic development here. Our tourism Bandwagon should be extended - we have been asking for one that the community of the Horseshoe control all development on their own. Give Black Bay is in our face block, and we should own any development there.

3. Profile - Lee - We should have a land base so that we own any development around here. We should get the profits from any development in our area. Why should the people go further, if the oil is here on our hand? Kind that we have hunted and trapped for over 200 years, etc.

4. RECP - Alma - We should be able to use money from oil sales for our community. (Create our arena - post house. Need for recreation center, descent culling rink, better park area, etc.)

5. Schools - Alice (Lee) - Money for our schools instead of taxes.

6. Housing - Anita (Lee) - Planning needed for single people like yourself - and for young married people - Hard to live with families - and rent too much to buy or rent a house. Appropriate size home needed.

7. Unemployed - Barry - Unemployed - I want to work. Promises from Cliff Joke - My take didn't come true - How many people are really hired?

8. Safety - Yogi - We have no control over the uranium mine. Talk at all of these spills (Coal Mines). How do we know that the same thing won't happen here? We should have a monitoring committee to watch over the oil field, or we might end up with a lake full of oil.

9. Land - April - Repeat - Sum up land base as more time...
UPISASIK  APRIL 3

Lee Ann — reliable, strong, voice needed, get into your part, good memory for lines in Rebel scene.

Claude — good speech, slow down a bit, 3 lines, other worked good, must OK but we’ll need a white shirt.

Paul — good — deep voice in final scene?

Nora — good Eff first speech in final scene — good emotions in last scene.

Anita — good first time, voice weak (but not when you give me hell in class, so you can do it), prepare your bill of rights speech — just talk — give ‘er.

Alice — a little weak at first — strong in final scene.

Anna — pretty steady — work on voice.

Yogi / Safety speech Claude get unplayed speech ready.

April — good, strong — trouble with new parts — do not mess up line of rights speech. Involve it. Prepare.

SASKATOON — spread out, explain more clearly, help each other.

Vista — “cheers”

Bill of Rights — everyone must learn their parts — strong — Yogi / Safety Claude — unplay.

REGINA — new music — good.

Vision II — good.

Rebel — very good.

Speech — very good.

Vision IV — good.

Final — good except for slips.

Don’t forget Diana held “spoke to me” / “she’s crazy,” etc. (Alice / Nora)

— speed up final hook-up.
ANOTHER HOME II

POSSIBLY

- You forgot a lot of your group.
- Keep energy and music UP (Gwen, Alice, Nova)
- It dragged a little — DO NOT SLIDE
- END with Alice exit — Mention basket chair + Joseph — Good funny exit line (like the rehearsal?)

Poachers / Log Cabin / Gertrude / Joseph
Melody / Alphonse / Dances / Rock & Roll / Shopping

NO: Note, let's have a different rumour about Gertrude each week. This week: ergo?? — lights. They take people to more and put them in gears, etc, etc.

WHITEFISH — Entrance good — unpacking (more comments)
- Soup in frying pan good. — More on the TV please
- Memories, Paul! Be romantic. Keep your head up. The cap shades you.
- Carla — Don't laugh! Jerry — Good, but can be better, good lines. Keep them. Do for the kiss. Be romantic — BOTH OF YOU! — Jerry — Don't forget to panic.
- Lee Anne — Louder! Diggin' please. ("I think you're so handsome!"?) (Paul can react to compliments)
- Nora — Good — Keep trying to help, to clean. You guys forgot clothes joke exit... 3 strings... Uttn — sprawl out laughing (the camera was waiting)
- NOISE!!! Nora was O.K. Carla was O.K. Uttn + Lee must join in!!! Paul don't cover your face. Look into high Clouter — more deep.

LAMBERT — Yogi — well done! Claude — well done! Tommy was good all the way around. Good table argument. Do not do THIS ANY FASTER TODAY. HAVE FUN WITH IT! Not much else I can say. Perhaps Nika can be heavier on the joke? OKAY, don't forget Lee's song — AFTER SHE HELPS CHECK, O.K. Revise? ^
Oh, I almost forgot! The dancing was fine, but—Lee and Carla SAT DOWN (gasp) and the energy evaporated, because Kohun sat down too. Traced LOUDLY—LAUGH TOGETHER—TALK AT SAME TIME—I imitate her.

(Just radio off Kohun, as soon as you've been caught if so all of this happens right away.)

Since I've started a second page, I'll add that the camera will be on Yogi's jumping jacks as the scene at the table starts. It will then go to the table. At the height of the argument, Yogi will hook his legs and someone will notice him and ask him what he's doing! The camera will then go to Yogi as he starts trying to unhook it. Give him time to try for a while! Then Lee moves into to help. Then Kohun gets the song going. Then as the song picks up, Claude has a shocking experience.

Next Show — FRIDAY

FRIDAY — We Plan The Show
WKN D — I make notes for you,
THU S — Release
WKN D 9:00 AM Tape for DIV. III
THU S 11:00 AM Tape for DIV. IV

What should happen in each house? — Due TODAY (I need this from everyone and you need the marks.)
APPENDIX G
UPISASIK "KAYAS"
During the stay in Alaska, the students visited a museum in Juneau, where they were given a special presentation on TV and movies. The next day, they visited Cunningham Museum and the Northern Lights Wheel. On the last evening, a dance was held in honor of the students and the farewell event. The teachers from Alaska were pleased with their counterparts in Alaska. The month in Alaska students spent there was a very short five days. While in the north, the Alaska students performed their play about Alaska while enjoying the wonders of the north.
CROSS-COLA

Twinning activities between Ile-a-la-Crosse and Arcola, known as Cross-cola, have been underway for the last few months. The many activities revolve around the communities' students and their exchange programs. Earlier in the year, the Ile-a-la-Crosse and Arcola students exchanged, via Canada Post, special work projects designed to inform the students of each other's community and history.

In May, Ile-a-la-Crosse students, as part of the exchange program, journeyed to Arcola and spent five days in the southern community. The highlight of the visit was a drama presentation which was researched, written and performed by the Ile-a-la-Crosse students. The play, titled "The Pin", was performed in a large upstairs room of the old Arcola Town Hall. A makeshift stage, special lighting and props had been constructed and arranged for the single evening performance. Very warm weather and a Stanley Cup playoff game could not keep 150 of Arcola's residents away from the special presentation.

The play, revolving around the Celebrate Saskatchewan 1905-1980 theme, provided the audience with an entertaining and informative visual history of Ile-a-la-Crosse. Tracing the many important historical events and developments of the northern community, the student actors created on stage, a brief history of the Metis settlement. Highly entertaining and innovative scenes such as the first outboard motor on the lake, the newlyweds and their plans for a "large" family and the delightful washing machine were just a few of the lighter scenes.

Also found in the play was a clear message that Ile-a-la-Crosse goes back to 1776 and that Metis community celebration extends beyond 1905, the birth of Saskatchewan. The "Pin" in the play was a Celebrate Saskatchewan pin and the elderly Metis lady, Old Angeline, was considering purchasing the pin after a young girl had offered it for sale. It is then, through Old Angeline's words, the audience discovers her memories and Metis roots dating back to 1776.

During the stay in Arcola, the students visited White Bear Reserve where they gave a special presentation of "The Pin". The students also travelled to Cannington Manor and the Medicine Wheel. On the last evening a barn dance was held in honour of the students and the twinning events. The Ile-a-la-Crosse visitors were billeted with their counterparts in Arcola. This month the Arcola students journey to Ile-a-la-Crosse for five days. While in the north the Arcola students will perform their play about Arcola while enjoying the wonders of the north.
Ida Johnson, Delores Johnson and Rod Belanger as the Speculators in *Scrip Van Winkle*, Upisakik Theatres' production which deals with Métis land being bought by white speculators for devalued prices.
September 23, 1983

Ile-a-la Crosse School Board
P.O. Box 89
Ile-a-la Crosse, Saskatchewan
S0M 1CO

Dear Board Members:

I thought I should outline my plans for Upisask Theatre, since some of it involves travel.

FALL - We are producing a soap opera, "Another Home," which is being aired on CILX-TV. We will also work on a major play and on the Christmas program.

JANUARY - FEBRUARY - We will continue work on our major play.

MARCH - We have been invited to do a presentation at the National Conference of Indian Educators on March 22, 23, 24 in Saskatoon. This will involve a performance and workshop for the total conference on one of the evenings (approximately 500 people). We would miss one or two days of school, depending on which evening it is. Gabriel Dumont will pay meals and accommodation. The most we would need from the Board is a bus and gas.

APRIL - I would like to compete again at the Regional Drama Festival in Big River. We would enter our major play there. We likely wouldn't miss any school. We might need some help paying for meals.

MAY - I would like to tour our major play for 1 week in May. This would be to northern communities. To encourage drama elsewhere, we would give workshops. All of our fund-raising would be aimed at this Spring Tour, so the most we would need would be a bus and gas.

I hope this meets with your approval. I have tried to limit the cost to the Board and the time away from school.

Yours sincerely,

Lon Borgerson

LB/ag


The 1983 Saskatchewan Drama Association Region 8 Drama Festival was held March 28 in the Big River High School Gymnasium. This year's festival consisted of two plays - "Come Tomorrow Come," a presentation from Ile A La Crosse, and "Snow White and Friends." a presentation from Big River. Adjudicator for the evening was Mr. Wilfred M. Dube, originally from Ottawa and now living in Saskatoon. Mr. Dube is a professional actor and has been connected with the Persephone Theatre and French School of Saskatoon and spent two seasons with the Stratford Summer Festival. He attended Drama workshops in France and at the University of Alberta. He is at present attending the University of Saskatchewan.

The play presented by Rossignol School from Ile A La Crosse "Come Tomorrow Come" was written and produced by the students and Director, Mr. Lon Bergerson. It was a very thought-provoking drama of a portion of the lives of three young Metis women who had recently graduated from High School. The social pressures they meet, the role of women and the many difficulties encountered were very well portrayed by the young actors.

Big River's play "Snow White and Friends" was a take-off of the famous Nursery Rhyme and excelled in stage setting and timing.

This play was directed by D. Lee Cooper. Presentation of awards was made by Mr. Dube following the performances.

First Individual Performance Award went to Patricia Watier of Big River for her role as a hostess "Pricilla Personality".

Second Performance Award - Karen Steed who was Snow White in the Big River production.

Third Performance Award - Rod Belanger of Ile A La Crosse as Jim.

Fourth Performance Award - Elaine Johnson of Ile A La Crosse for her role as Rachel.

The student selected to participate in the "Performers Showcase" at the Provincial Festival was Maureen Kypalin of Ile A La Crosse and the alternate student, Patricia Watier of Big River. The Best production went to Big River for "Snow White and Friends" and they will participate in the Provincial Finals to be held at the Dark Room, University of Regina, April 20 to May 1.

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE AWARDS - Karen Steed, 2nd; Rod Belanger, 3rd; Patricia Watier, 1st; Elaine Johnson, 4th.

Mr. Freda McColl
Chairperson
Ile a La Crosse School Division, #112
ILE A LA CROSSE, Saskatchewan
SDM 1CO

Dear Freda:

I am writing to congratulate your School Division on the excellent performance of your "Upisask Players" at the recent CITEP Conference held in Saskatoon, March 20-23, 1984. Having attended the performance personally I can assure you that it was received most enthusiastically and was a great credit to your School Division and to education in northern Saskatchewan. One of the educators in attendance told me the following day that the Upisask performance stood out above everything else at the conference!

Everyone involved should be highly commended for making Upisask possible: the student players (who were really quite outstanding); the director, Lon Bergerson for his fine leadership; the school administration for supporting such an event; and, of course, your Board for promoting such creative and worthwhile projects in the school.

The CITEP program described Ile a la Crosse as a 'remote northern community', but to the many uninformed people who came to CITEP thinking in such terms the performance of the Upisask Players must have come as a great shock: with a single stroke the 'remote' was wiped out and Ile a la Crosse was put prominently on the map!

Our very best wishes for the future of this fine theatre group.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Tymchak
Director
May 17, 1985

Dear Parents,

The Division IV Drama group, Upisasik Theatre, will be touring our two plays, GABRIELLE and WEYSAKECHAK to other schools and communities. Here is our schedule:

**WEDNESDAY MAY 22** - leave at 4:00 p.m. Perform at Beauval Residential High School at 7:30 p.m. and stay overnight.

**THURSDAY MAY 23** - travel to Pine House and perform for the school during the day, and for the community in the evening. We would drive back to Beauval and stay at Valleyview School that night.

**FRIDAY MAY 24** - perform at Valleyview in the morning, then travel to Canoe Lake to perform for students and community in the afternoon. We will then return home... tired.

(We will perform at Turnor Lake and La Loche on May 28, but this won't involve an overnight trip.)

Our "hosts" will be providing meals and sleeping areas. Our students will need only sleeping bags and snack money.

If your son or daughter has permission to take part in this tour, please sign the slip below.

Sincerely,

Lon Borgerson

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My son/daughter has my permission to travel on the Upisasik Theatre Batoche 85 tour.

Signature of Parent
## Itinerary

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Mr. Lon Borgerson,
Director of Drama Club,
Rossignal School,
Ile a la Crosse, Saskatchewan.
SOM 1CO.

Dear Mr. Borgerson:

On behalf of the Board and staff of the Saskatchewan Health-Care Association, as well as the guests travelling with us, I wish to extend our deep appreciation to you, Paul and Nora Daigleault, April Durocher, Alice Ratt, and Leanne Lariviere for making time to perform for us in Ile a la Crosse.

I need not tell you how moving the performance was for all of us, as each of our people took the opportunity to personally respond to you.

It is our hope that you will take every opportunity to carry your very powerful message to all corners of this province.

We wish you every success in the presentations that you will make.

Thank-you again, especially for waiting the additional time to accommodate our late schedule.

God Bless you All.

Yours very truly,

[Signature]

[Name]
Executive Director

cc: Sister Phil Dohmeier.
Upbeat show uses humor to detail Native concerns

By Cam Fuller
of The StarPhoenix

Kayas Atchimowina (Stories from our Past) is the latest work by Upisasik Theatre, a collective from Ile-a-la-Crosse. It's a witty, upbeat show about Northern life.

Sketch shows often suffer from weak transitions between the scenes. Upisasik gets around this neatly by setting up the play as a brainstorming session among the actors. Beckie Belanger, Buckley Belanger, Maureen Belanger, Rod Belanger, Leanne Daigleault and Duane Favel play themselves. They start new scenes merely by saying, "OK, let's give this a whirl."

Several sketches explore the language barriers faced by unilingual Native people. In a restaurant skit, the company has fun with Cree words that sound similar in English. A couple tries to order muskrat, which sounds like "what's us" in Cree. The white waitress is exasperated. It's like a Cree-English Who's-on-First routine.

The last skit shows the poaching trial of a Native woman. She claims the moose had a heart attack, rolled down a hill, and killed rabbits and prairie chickens along the way. Like most of the material, the trial scene contains great one-liners. (It's also an accurate representation of provincial court proceedings.) In this case, the prosecutor doesn't believe there were prairie chickens up North.

The woman says that, with so much forest clear-cutting going on, it's becoming prairie. Some of the gags, like the man who doesn't know how a chainsaw works, are merely recycled oldies. These could be clear-cut—or at least pruned. But in the main, Upisasik's way of communicating Native concerns through humor works well in getting the message across without preaching. Good show.

Friday, Saturday in Venue 4.

Kayas Atchimowin
1992