identity, but with time and through building connections I hope I can become more comfortable with those parts of my identity that were lost.

When my brother and I were separated from our mother, it was not only the loss of a parent that we had to live with, it was the loss of a cohesive identity. It was a part of ourselves that was not understood and not encouraged by our non-Native grandparents. And what about my mother's identity? What about her story? Who is qualified to tell it? From the day she left us, everything that went wrong in my brother's life and my life, our mother would feel guilty about. My divorce, my brother's health problems, his dissatisfaction with his job, my bouts of unhappiness. Besides this self-imposed guilt, there were many other obstacles and challenges my mother faced in her life, some of her own making, others arising from the unlucky fact that she was a Native person in a certain period of history in her country.

In the end, I only had the opportunity of knowing my mother for a short period in both our lives. I will have to learn how to negotiate this grief. This mourning, though not completely unfamiliar, will not necessarily have a recognizable end. We've lost a shared future—a future of family and life events, weddings, births, celebrations, accomplishments. She did not raise me, I was denied this. She cannot now be my adult parent and my direct link to a lost culture; this is denied as well. Perhaps paper Indians are only accorded this legacy of denial and culture of loss.

I and other women with similar experiences must parent ourselves; we must deal with our own loss and the dysfunctions in our families and communities. I wanted a *kohkum* for my children. I wanted so many things that were taken from me before I even knew I wanted them. Perhaps that is why paper Indians, like me, choose to live in a paper world. We find it difficult sometimes to live in a world where nothing is made up, where everything is real, where people suffer and children hurt and mothers die.

I search for meaning in my mother's life story, in her Nativeness, in mine. I must learn what is needed of me. My voice wavers with the weight of it. My tears blur my vision. My anger betrays me. My eyes strain to see who is friend. My ears listen between the lines. My hands work for answers to questions posed at the dawn of my country. My skills and my intelligence guide me through the landscape of misconceptions, mistakes, mismanagement. My quest is for a kind of justice previously unknown in this country, a justice that honours our parents' journeys and gives our children hope.

I was three when my mother left the first time. I was 35 when she left for good. She was too young. Too damaged. Too innocent. And sadly in this post-colonial world, her experience is all too common.

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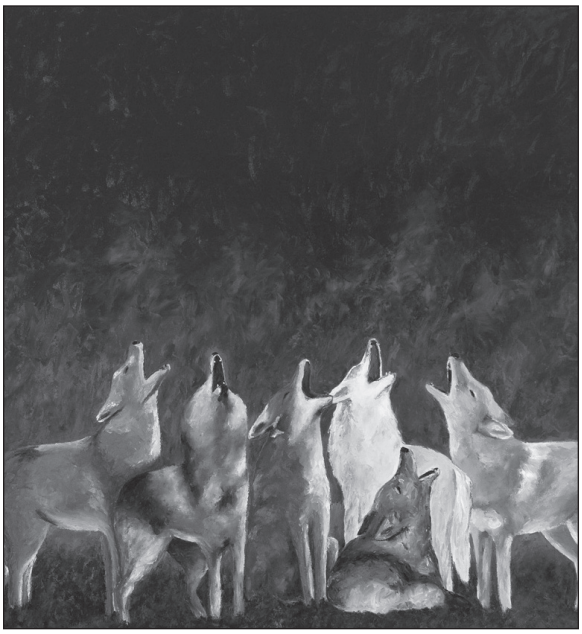
T. S. LA PRATT

Niso-Haiku

Grandmother moon sings
Your Indian name.
The red road is clear.

T. S. La Pratt's poetry appears earlier in this volume.



Judy Anderson, "Coyote Women Singing," oil on canvas, 8' x 8', 2007.

Coyote's Trick (pg. 51) is an installtion about one of my spiritual journeys. The four directions and four circles converge on the heart of the show, a woman's big drum. In Anishnabeg spiritual belief, the drum is the heartbeat of Mother Earth bringing women together to heal and celebrate. The medicines on the drum are women's medicines, the photographs show that women are the support of this drum and the empty chairs suggest that women and children are needed at the drum. Men are also encouraged to sit at the drum to show that they are also needed to support women and children. The paintings embody lessons that have been taught through two traditional Elders as well as holding personal experiences and stories. Most profoundly, this show represents Coyote's (the Trickster character in traditional Aboriginal storytelling) involvement in my life and the tricks played on me leading to the creation of this work.