

## Being a Good Relative

### Editorial

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It is late December as I write this editorial for the second issue of 2025 and fourth overall of *Pawaatamihk: Journal of Métis Thinkers*. It is an exciting time for Métis-specific scholarship as Métis scholar Lucy Delgado recently edited a Métis-focused special issue for the *Canadian Journal of Education*, and we have just released the call for proposals to *Mawachihitotaak (Let's Get Together) Metis Studies Conference*, to be held in Calgary, Alberta, from September 20–24, 2026. Métis people and voices are coming together in these spaces. Some, but not all.

As I reflect on the past year, the notion of *being a good relative* has been on my mind. The academic life is full of choices. We set our own priorities for how we spend our time. So many responsibilities and requests compete for that time. Our values are often reflected in the choices we make. Often, but not always. Sometimes, even when we are doing our best to walk well in the world, we can fall short of the expectations we hold for ourselves. Importantly, we can give ourselves grace but also learn from these times to re-evaluate, re-prioritize, and grow.

Thinking about the shambling work I have done with scholar Beth Cross at the University of the West of Scotland, we have asked colleagues to empty out their academic pockets and to think about something they hope others will take from their work. This request conjures thoughts around academics' true passions and their legacies. What do you want to be known for in your research? How do you want to be remembered in your life?

I am grateful to have strong Métis role models: aunties, sisters, cousins, and friends. These wise and caring Métis—mostly women and two-spirit folks, and occasionally men—show up for each other, co-establish spaces for Métis community to flourish, prioritize Métis research, and create opportunities for the next generations of Métis scholars.

None of us is perfect, but I argue that we do all hold positions of power as academics and that possessing that power begs us to reflect on the kind of relatives we can be. A few years ago, Mi'kmaw scholar Marie Battiste spoke at Mount Royal University. She talked about how some Indigenous scholars get into the academy and put a wedge in the door to keep other Indigenous scholars from getting in, while others work to throw open that door to welcome and support

those who are coming behind them. I have carried these words with me, from graduate student to postdoctoral scholar and then as an assistant and associate professor. I want to reduce the barriers for the Indigenous students who are coming after me.

In conversation with Métis, Algonquin, and Irish scholar Sherry Farrell Racette in an elevator during one of the *Rising Up* conferences in Winnipeg in 2017 or 2018, she said that we cannot keep making change in the institution on the backs of our graduate students (personal communication). Her words rang all too true, as I watched fellow students having to fight through dubious ethics, inhospitable relationships in faculties, and academic processes that did not reflect their values and goals. Most of these battles should not fall on the backs of students. As Indigenous scholars who already hold positions in the institution, these are our fights to take up on their behalf. If we want the system to be safer and more supportive and nourishing for Indigenous students, we must make that change.

Whether we like it or not, we are role models. The scholars coming after us see how we *show up* in the academy. They observe and participate in academic life alongside us. Graduate students submit papers for publication and receive our feedback—harsh or constructive. Our behaviours are the examples and non-examples that, in part, shape how they might walk in the university. Do they witness scholars striving for work-life balance or burning out under crushing academic demands? Do they see their writing received with care or sharp criticism? Do they see their academic heroes showing up to give their keynotes and leaving right after, or do they have their heroes in their sessions, offering positive and constructive feedback on what they have shared? I remember Carl Leggo's beaming smile and thoughtful remarks at my first solo presentation at the *Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies Pre-Conference* at the University of Calgary in 2016. His intentional follow-up and personalized comments left a lasting impression on me and who I aspire to be as a scholar.

With the upcoming Métis conference in mind, I have been dwelling on whether I need to make a concerted effort to try bringing certain Métis scholars back into the fold—established Métis scholars who choose to travel in other circles. The wise matriarchs and Elders in my life have reminded me that I get to choose where my energies are best spent. For me, that means contributing to *Pawaatamihk: Journal of Métis Thinkers*, stewarding Métis-specific books, co-organizing Métis conferences such as *Mawachihitotaak*, and supporting the development of Métis associations (forthcoming). It also means celebrating and expressing gratitude for the Métis scholars who do lend their prominence to our events and publications with generosity and support the up-and-coming scholars around them. The presence of these scholars has paved the way for us to be in the institutions, and we now have a responsibility to pay that forward.

The Métis academic community is vast and vibrant. Our kinship ties extend across the homeland. We participate in connection to family, institutions, locals, governing bodies, and beyond. We all have choices in how we treat our kin. And while we have no control over how others treat us, we can make choices that reflect our values. Just as we shed citations of people who have been found to be pretendians from our publications, I choose not to cite scholars who are found to be sexual predators or racists either. Why lift up the scholarship of people who do not walk well—with care and respect for others—in the world? Electing to cite or omit certain scholars' work is a choice, and I have the privilege of distance from most of the confirmed pretendians. Others are not as fortunate and have experienced the deep impacts of these harmful acts firsthand (see Hayward, Cyr, and Hallett, this issue); the consequences are real and far-reaching.

There are times, however, when our critics bring the fight to us. Sometimes bullies in positions of power attempt to silence our scholarship by targeting our graduate students, research, positions within institutions, events, funding sources, and personal credibility. When this happens, many Métis scholars will stand together. We are not easily intimidated, pushed around, or erased—historically or at present. By continuing our work and sharing our stories with honesty and vulnerability, we live Métis academic lives with integrity and autonomy.

As I stated previously (Vol. 1, Issue 1), the work I do in the academy might all be considered service. The research is in service of the communities I am partnered with; they set the priorities, they own the data, and they determine what to action. Similarly, the work our Métis circles do to create Métis-specific events, publications, community, and opportunities is for the Métis around us. In all these ways, we are trying to be good relatives. The spaces are inclusive of myriad Métis identities, as Métis scholar Laura Forsythe and I described in the introduction of our co-edited collection *Métis Coming Together*, published by Peter Lang in 2025. In many ways, our collective works seek to create spaces for Métis who might be written out of the fabric of our communities by those who seek to narrow the definitions of Métis identity in dangerous ways.

In this issue, Métis contributors share the stories, tensions, emotions, trials, histories, connections, and teachings that they have experienced. The work comes in the form of poetry, scholarly articles, community stories, and an artist feature. Some centre beauty, and others the struggle. While I will not reduce the introduction of each article and offering down to a few lines in this editorial, I do encourage readers to engage these works with openness, generosity, critical thought, care, and compassion. Each author and artist is part of our Métis community and navigating scholarship and relationships with respect, fortitude, and honesty. I see strength and courage in this issue throughout the submissions that our fellow Métis scholars have reviewed and selected for publication. The contributors are mentors, role models, trailblazers, innovators, carers, leaders, creators, and kin. Their works represent our stories, our realities, our challenges, and our triumphs. As Métis, we can easily choose to lift each other up or tear each other down. As you read and respond to the works shared in this issue of *Pawaatamihk*, I ask *what kind of relative are you choosing to be?*