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### Horse in Healing

As the novel starts, Saul Indian Horse tells us the story of his People. He tells us about his Clan, the origin of his name, and the history of his land. We also learn about his addiction to alcohol, and how he ended up in the hospital due to a binge. He ends up at a treatment centre, the New Dawn Centre. The novel itself, *Indian Horse*, is one of the ways he heals. In this novel, Saul journeys back to his childhood, telling us about the horrors of residential school, but also his victories in hockey and the family he had met on the way. Another crucial aspect of this book is the Visions that Saul can often see. He was regarded as a seer. Most of this book is about his experiences from residential school, including the abuse, mistreatment of himself and others, and even witnessing the suicide of other students. The residential schools took everything away from them, their culture, family, and identity. Saul attempts to find ways to distract himself from these horrors at first but eventually faces it head-on in his fight to heal. It was not until long after he grows up that we learn more about what he faced in residential school with Father Leboutilier. Saul was not able to completely heal from the horrors mentioned in the book. However, he takes advantage of his sacred connection to the land, the sport of hockey, and people who were like family to him to heal as many scars as possible. *Indian Horse* outlines the journey of healing, and maybe, just maybe forgiveness.

The land itself is one of the greatest healing powers for Saul. In the words of her grandmother Naomi, God's Lake is "a place where the air and the land could ease the spirit" (Wagamese 17)". Now God's Lake was a plot of land that belonged to Saul's family, and it

was passed down generations. God's Lake was a sacred place for Saul, and it was extremely special and symbolic to him. The spirit of their family remains there, as part of his family had died there. God's Lake is also where we would come to find out about his gift of vision since he was able to hear "the spirits speak from the trees" (Wagamese 25). He resorted to many different ways of coping, some of them harmful. When he was faced with racism, he often would resort to violence, which usually had him end up hurt. He would also cope with alcohol, and would eventually binge to the point where he ended up in the hospital with seizures. He would come to find himself at the New Dawn Centre, a rehabilitation centre for aboriginals. However, after a short treatment period, he stated that he had felt nothing had changed about him whatsoever. After leaving the New Dawn Centre, he finds himself back at St. Jerome's, his residential school. He would go on to explore what now seems like an abandoned and forgotten place, but to him, the memories of assault and abuse seem to have just set in. He would re-visit the old hockey rink that he used to play on, waking up every morning and cleaning the ice, practising with horse turds. Every moment from the past was so clear in his head, the way he played hockey, the way that Father Leboutilier would call him a glory, and how Father Leboutilier would abuse him, and buy his silence. Saul was finally able to face the horrors from the past head-on, and understand everything. To Saul, "Only the land offered him any kind of solace" (Wagamese 191). There is no healing if you do not confront the facts. Saul would end up going back to God's Lake after leaving St. Jerome's. At this point in the story, Saul's vision was long gone. Despite this, Saul was still able to see and talk to the spirits at God's Lake. To him, it was like the gift of vision was restored while he was on that land. He closed his eyes, and he could see vividly his parents, siblings, grandparents and even Shabogeesick himself "paddling solo in a birch bark canoe that looked ancient and brittle, but rode the water like a wisp" (Wagamese 205).

The sport of Hockey was also a great healing power for Saul Indian Horse. While surrounded by the abuse and inhumane punishments of residential school, hockey was the only thing he could find joy in. Hockey was like an escape from reality to Saul, as his brain would often wander off into his dreams of one day being a great hockey player. At night, while all the other students were asleep, Saul would get out of bed and look out the window, “picturing himself barrelling across the blue line with the puck tucked neatly on the blade of his stick” (Wagamese 62). To Saul, hockey was so much more than just a sport. He had felt that he was connected to hockey in a special way, different from everyone else who played the sport. Saul had a gift of vision, and he used it well in the sport of hockey. He was able to see the open ice, quickly skate to it, and predict the next moves of his teammates and his enemies. Saul was always in the right place when the team needed him, which is what made him such a good hockey player. He was not the biggest or the strongest player, but he was one of the fastest. He would combine his quick and nimble movement on the ice with sharp and clever thinking and strategy. Throughout his entire residential school journey, he would be solely focused on hockey, and he did not feel “lonely or afraid, deserted or abandoned, but connected to something far bigger than himself. Then he would climb back into bed and sleep until the dawn woke him and he could walk back out to the rink again” (Wagamese 62). In his case, having this escape from reality and something positive to focus on, was a great way of healing. Escaping all the things that troubled you, and stepping into a new state of mind. When Saul “hits the ice, he left all his horrors behind him. He steps onto the ice and Saul Indian Horse, the abandoned Ojibway kid, ceased to exist” (Wagamese 83).

The people all around him were also crucial in Saul’s healing journey. It would seem that everywhere that Saul ended up, someone would be there to support him and help him. One of these great men, for example, is Fred Kelly, who came to pick Saul up from

residential school so he could play hockey with the Moose. The Moose was an indigenous hockey team in Manitouwadge, and its captain was Virgil, Fred's son. Saul found a family in that team, as he had grown extremely fond of everyone there, especially Virgil. During his time on the team, Saul was living with the Kelly family, and Fred was his legal guardian. While living there, he became extremely close to Virgil. Virgil would act like a brother to him, helping him with homework and teaching him how to fit in. The Moose would go on to win multiple tournaments with Saul, the recruit. The indigenous team was later invited to play with outside teams, white teams. Despite all the racism coming from the outside, the team had tried to protect Saul from all of it, as he was the youngest member. The team performed extremely well in many tournaments, and the community was amazed. Saul thought that he had finally found a team for him, a place that belonged to him which he could dominate and express the talents that he never could before. However, the people of Manitouwadge were not the only ones who saw Saul's talent and potential. He would go on to catch the attention of something far greater than the Moose. Saul was invited to Toronto to play for the Marlboros. He, however, felt that he did not fit in with the rest of the team and was constantly ignored by his team members. Saul heads back to northern Ontario after he abruptly ends his training with the Marlboros. At this point, Saul has an alcohol addiction and is lost in life. He was at a bar one day and met Erv Sift, who came up to him and offered to buy him a drink. Erv claimed that Ojibways were amazing storytellers. Sift had offered Saul a place on his farm, and he would work and live there. Saul described Erv as an angel since Erv would always be there to take care of him. Erv would "talk to him when he got scared, calmed him down. When he was over the worst, Erv would help him walk out to the porch for fresh air" (Wagamese 184). Saul had finally found a stable source of income and a good place to live. For the first time in a long time, Saul had been provided with more money than he needed. Saul would later end up in the hospital due to a relapse in drinking. While being

treated in the hospital, he is introduced to the New Dawn Centre. The New Dawn Centre was a rehabilitation centre for indigenous individuals with addictions. He would go in and out of the New Dawn Centre, some days stating that he hated it there. However, he would eventually settle into the New Dawn Centre. That is how he meets Moses. He had worked closely with Moses and talked to him the whole winter. Just after the first thaw, Saul felt “strong, confident, secure with his feelings and his new set of skills” (Wagamese 207). With his newly acquired skills and knowledge of his own emotions, Saul is finally ready to return to Manitouwadge, and knock on Fred Kelly’s door. He had finally reunited with Fred and Martha, and he told them everything that happened in the residential school, now that he could understand it himself. He would later meet up with Virgil, who now coached a hockey team of his own. Saul opened up to Virgil about everything, mainly Father Leboutilier. The Kellys’ had comforted Saul and assured him that he was not alone in this. Fred had told Saul that every year he “still tries to find forgiveness”, but “forgiveness is a long road” (Wagamese 209).

The journey of healing is a long and tough journey. Saul questioned everything during this journey, who he can trust, what he remembered, and what words really meant. Although he never was able to completely heal from the horrors, he was able to use the power of the land, his connection to hockey, and communication with those who were close to him to heal as much as possible. Saul had a special connection with God’s Lake, where he first experienced his visions. God’s Lake was a sacred place, where Saul could connect with his family members after they passed. Saul is reminded that although his family may not be with him physically, they are always with him spiritually. When life got tough for Saul, sometimes escaping reality could be a great way to remain positive. Hockey provided Saul with that opportunity. Instead of focusing on the world outside, Saul is able to use hockey as a way of

distracting himself from negative thoughts. Saul also felt a strong connection to the sport of hockey. Hockey had reminded him that he was talented and amazing and destined for so much more. Through hockey, Saul found some amazing people, including Fred Kelly and Virgil. Saul had found a family in the Kellys'. They took care of him and were able to relate to all of Saul's residential school traumas since Fred and Martha attended residential school themselves. The residential school had bankrupted the indigenous community in every way. Saul, however, through these three methods of healing, was able to rebuild.