

**LIFE NOTATIONS OF DAISY SWEENEY:
REFLECTIONS OF OTHERMOTHERING, MUSICIANSHIP AND MONTREAL**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN EDUCATION

**YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO**

JUNE 2012

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Abstract

The life story of Mrs. Daisy Sweeney, an African Canadian native of Montreal, Quebec, helps fill a void in the historical documentation of Montreal Blacks (especially female elders). Of particular significance is her prominence as a music educator and othermother during her life. The current literature on African Canadian othermothering experiences is not synonymous with both White or African American females and inclusion of their voices in academic, as well as mainstream spaces, is virtually non-existent. This dissertation asks: What did it mean to be a first generation 'Negro' working class bilingual female in a largely hostile White francophone Quebec metropolis in the early 20th Century? How can her narratives help shape and inform life history and African Canadian othermothering research?

My sojourn with Mrs. Daisy Sweeney referenced African centered epistemology in my conceptual understanding of herself and community mothering. Capturing her conversations meant engaging with multiple methodologies articulated through African oral traditions, life history, archival canons and interdisciplinary inquiries. It is striking to note that there were not only certain tensions associated with memory loss and physical limitations (prompted by the aging process) that destabilized and enriched our 'interactive' communication, but also revealed a rupture and reversal of the participant/researcher dynamic.

In spite of blatant racial discrimination that plagued Montreal's Black communities during that time, Daisy Sweeney fulfilled a life-long dream and taught

hundreds of children the canon of classical piano for over 50 years. She lived her voice through her music, finding ways to validate her own identity and empowering others in the process. She used the musical stage as her platform to draw invaluable connections between race, gender, language and social class. Daisy Sweeney's generation of othermothers is dying out and, as the carriers of culture, the urgency to tell their stories must be emphasized. The account respects, reclaims and reflects those voices. It is time to *write in* African Canadian female elders and diversify the exclusionary genre of life history and archival research.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to three individuals who touched me in very different and equally meaningful ways:

To the memory of Professor R. Patrick Solomon, founder of the Urban Diversity Program at York University, Toronto, Canada, whose mentoring, commitment to social justice and spiritual guidance awakened and inspired my zest for teaching and learning.

To the memory of my father, Hobart DeCoursey Smith, a strong advocate and supporter of advanced education who himself was never afforded the opportunity to continue his own education at this level.

Finally, to my mother, Mildred Beatrice Watson Smith and all othermothers, past, present and future; the unsung heroines who guided, nurtured and loved otherchildren regardless of their backgrounds.

Acknowledgments

Without the guidance of Alison Griffith and Naomi Norquay, Professors at the Faculty of Education, York University, Toronto, Canada this dissertation would not have been completed.

Appreciation is extended to Josée Ledoux for her computer formatting skills and generosity of spirit which extended well beyond the typical borders of friendship.

My thanks to Nancy Marrelli, Director of Archives at Concordia University and Dorothy Williams, Historian, both from Montreal, Quebec for helping me further my archival research.

As always, many special thanks to my family who helped sustain the momentum, and particularly my sister Rosalind Smith who diligently read every word and offered her profound insights.

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Introduction

Black women in early twentieth century Montreal have left a profound, rich and lasting legacy. Scholars of women's studies have made impressive strides in integrating and broadening the story of women, yet they still ignore or give only token attention to "women of colour" (Winkler, 1986, pp. 6–7). Nearly 30 years after Winkler's statement, where is the documentation of their life stories? To illustrate my point—in the early phase of my research—I conducted a preliminary search through the ERIC database under the subject heading *Canadian Black Women* that yielded eight results. A similar keyword approach accessed eighteen publications—three of which were video recordings. This was truly surprising considering that people of African descent had settled in Montreal and sustained a viable economic, social and cultural community base over several generations. Many Black women, in particular, assumed important work in their home community, yet their commitment to morally, spiritually and intellectually uplift the race in an intolerant society has been rendered invisible and obscured. As cultural caretakers and othermothers, their voices were an integral element of communal life sustained through the African tradition of storytelling and other creative projects. Their interchanges were restorative, creative and valuable.

To center Daisy Sweeney in my research is paramount to my project (See Appendix A). To elucidate her understanding of her place in history, during tumultuous historical cycles, will add a dimension to our history both as people of

African heritage, and reimagine a brighter future for our next generation as well as the broader community.

Bell-Scott (1994) attests that:

In exploring what it means to be Black and female, we are presenting to the world mirror images of self and the other. In these lives, women who are marked by race and gender as objects and symbols of oppressions, there is much to be learned, by women of other races and by all men, about the nature of survival – the principle of life itself (p. 413).

My own interest in the subject, as an African Canadian female of Caribbean bilingual descent, has been shaped and informed by othermothers and extended kinship networks throughout my life. I relied on my “Afri/Cana” (my term) othermothers to exercise their autonomous, affective and authoritative license, which nurtured, mentored and guided me and other children in the community. My primary cocoon of othermothers consisted of African heritage *fictive* and kin aunties, grandmothers and great grandmothers. As a child, my peers outside of the Black community were bewildered by the vast array of grandmothers, grandfathers, aunties, uncles and cousins within my family unit. “Kin mothers, co/mothers and othermothers” converge, intersect and speak to the complexities and fluidity of “mothering” within the African Diaspora. For example, “fictive” female kin were respectfully addressed as “granny, grandmother, cousin or auntie,” followed by either their first or surname. Growing up in a small community certainly had its benefits because we were in close proximity to neighbours and interacted with them on a daily

basis. The mothers were stay-at-home housewives who developed a kinship among themselves based on close proximity and their respective children who attended the same school. Interestingly, another sector of White “adopted” othermothers (friends and neighbours) vigilantly watched from balconies and verandas as I crisscrossed the busy boulevard on the way to school, ran errands and played in yards and parks. I do not know if these “adopted” othermothers were aware of their relationship with me as an otherchild.

Othermothering, a phenomenon that predates slavery in North America, has been acknowledged within the past three decades in feminist scholarship (Bell-Scott, 1991; Brand, 2001; Brown, 1997; Butler, 2007; Case, 1997; Collins, 1991; Dua & Robertson, 1999; Edwards, 2000; Henry, 1998; hooks, 2003; Mogadime, 1998; O’Reilly, 2000; Terborg-Penn, 1996). The very concept of othermothering permeates the African Diaspora and transcends the dominant Eurocentric notion of maternal practices. Othermothering is:

Acceptance of responsibility for a child not one’s own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal. This practice stemmed from West African practice of communal lifestyles and interdependence of communities. The familial instability of slavery engendered the adaptation of communality in the form of fostering children whose parents, particularly mothers, had been sold. This tradition of communality gave rise to the practice of “othermothering” (James, 1993, p. 44).

Communal values in traditional tribal societies promoted complementary values which stressed cooperation and distribution, rather than individuality and accumulation of wealth. The significance of fostering children was solely based on a profound commitment, concern and love for the sustenance of the Black community. However, what does othermothering in the African Canadian landscape look like in contrast to its Diaspora (African-American) counterpart?

The key to addressing these questions lies in African feminist thinking elucidated by dynamic intellectuals such as Brand, (1991); Brock, (2005); Collins, (2000); Davis, (1983); Giddings, (1984); Henry, (1998); hooks, (2000); Terborg-Penn, (1996); and Wane, (2002). According to African feminists, historical reconstruction must rest first upon how women identify themselves and how they are identified by the society in which they live. It places themselves at the center of their own reality. Moreover, African feminist epistemology emphasizes that scholars engaged in research on the Black woman are involved in the process of liberation, as well as in a scholarly endeavour as research leads to redefinitions and critical examinations of concepts and methodologies used in research to inspire change. African feminism combines racial, sexual, class and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism – a human feminism where women are viewed first as human, rather than sexual beings. In fact, African feminist thought is a more inclusive form of feminist ideology by emphasizing the totality of human experience, portraying the strength and resiliency of the human spirit.

Collins (2000) notes:

In the Black Diaspora there is no distinction between our “blood” kin and “fictive” kin because their role is fluid and overlaps; it extends beyond the family unit to include the “othermothering” tradition. “Kin mother, co/mothers and othermothers” converge, intersect and speak to the complexities of “mothering” within the African Diaspora. (p. 179)

Some of the memories I cherish most about growing up as a Black child in Montreal include my familial experiences with its vast diverse community of kin mothers and “adopted” othermothers. These women, comprised of blood and fictive kin, offered maternal assistance to empower, educate and engage within the African Canadian community. As cultural caretakers, their voices were an integral element of community life sustained through the African tradition of storytelling; narratives that restored our spirit and sustained our history.

As stated earlier, some of my othermothers embodied different ethno cultural, racial, generational, socioeconomic, religious and linguistic backgrounds. I argue that these intercultural dimensions of Afri/Cana othermothering are critical to re-imagining alternative representations of othermothering that present-day literature does not mention.

As a school-age child, I cherished fond memories of Mrs. Lister, an Austrian Jewish Holocaust survivor and othermother who taught me a lot about the Nazi regime pogroms. Her stories introduced me to a broader understanding of historical oppressions around the world. Mrs. Lister was an actress who also shared her love of

fringe theatre. As a close friend of her daughter, I was welcomed as a frequent guest into their home for religious observances and celebrations.

To varying degrees, some othermothers were long-term constants in my life, while others drifted in and out depending on the circumstances. One such temporal othermother was Antoinette, a White Italian Roman Catholic teacher who supervised me during one of my teaching practicums. As an equity educator, she courageously identified racism manifested in test bias, labelling and tracking and emerged as a vocal advocate for the disenfranchised community entrapped within the confines of a rigid religious dogma. Antoinette played an active role in the racial socialization process for parents, as well as her colleagues. Our core values became inextricably interconnected.

One illustration of a transmigration othermothering account chronicles my own mother's (Mam/a) journey on a steamship to Montreal circa 1919, as a 4 year-old accompanied by "ma tante" (French/English translation, "my auntie"). Mam/a's parents and three siblings remained behind in their Caribbean homeland, Dominica. As a single othermother, "ma tante" assumed the temporary parenting responsibility of Mam/a's blood mother. Although "ma tante" was betrothed and married promptly upon her arrival in Canada, in my mother's memory she remained devoted both as an othermother to Mam/a and to her husband in her new status as a wife. Yet there was another side to this relationship, one that was more complex and curious. In a conversation with my mother, Mam/a also described her loneliness as a youngster in a strange country, and how she pined for her family reunification. She recalled that "ma

tante was very soft and kind-hearted towards me. She was a new bride but she spent a lot of time with “dadee” (uncle) and I didn’t understand why.” My mother’s family subsequently immigrated about four months later and established roots in St. Henri, Montreal’s Black community (Campbell, 2007).

Mam/a’s reminiscence suggested an ambiguity about her attachment to “ma tante” as an othermother, while simultaneously negotiating her feelings of separation from her own family. This was an interesting curiosity which begged for further inquiry of “voice”, agency, the affective domain of otherchildren and their particular positioning in the othermothering relationship. Voices from my mother’s past realities periodically accentuate the reproduction of this era because Mam/a and Daisy are contemporaries who offered differing yet comparable perspectives as othermothers.

As an otherchild and othermother, I will also reflect upon my own autobiographic experiences and multi-faceted relationship with Mrs. Daisy Sweeney.

Retrospect of my othermothers in Montreal

In the early twentieth century, the majority of Montreal’s Black community was situated on the fringes of downtown, demarcated by the railways in the shabby slum corridor known as St. Henri. My parents and Mrs. Sweeney were raised in that parish, a vibrant resilient community with a variety of Black business establishments.

When my parents married in 1942, they relocated to a bilingual middle-class suburban development, which bordered a hamlet of farmland. My family and extended kinfolk strategically built homes within walking distance of each other—

ensuring a safe and accessible route, building a close-knit community, sharing resources and establishing an othermother and support network.

However, my parents also strived to remain connected to their St. Henri roots. As a child, I recalled visits to my ailing paternal grandmother in her flat, shopping in the bustling open-air Atwater market, attending Union United Church and playing badminton on Friday evenings at the Negro Community Center (NCC).

It was during my teens that my longing to be identified as a racialized member of this Black community intensified. My residential environs consisted mainly of White ethno cultural pockets that skipped to an interracial tempo accentuated with racist syncopation. However, I sensed a unique rhythm and pulse at the NCC that was different and yet analogous to my suburban lifestyle. There was a wholesome sense of community and shared identity among the Black residents, despite their underprivileged circumstances. My disadvantage was being one of a handful of racialized students at school where I tried to blend in, even though racism reared its ugly head in both blatant and covert behaviours of certain principals, teachers, peers and neighbours.

My network of othermothers expanded in the wake of these new experiences in St. Henri. Mrs. Davidson, NCC's first librarian, possessed a treasury of knowledge about Black literature. I volunteered as her assistant and cherished those "Saturday sunrises" (her term) in her presence. Invariably her round table discussions explored esoteric topics which were at the time hard to decipher, but I found her eloquence most compelling.

On Friday evenings, I played rousing games of badminton with older women like Auntie Martha and Mrs. Braithwaite, who taught me skills, wit and strategies. I witnessed the unrelenting commitment and passion of Mrs. Daisy Sweeney, an icon in the community. She instructed animated piano lessons to 20 or more children in the stark basement music hall on a rickety second-hand piano with a few paltry music booklets while students sat huddled on makeshift wooden benches. These were women who touched my spirit and left an indelible memory.

Noted Black feminist scholars (Case, 1997; Giddings, 1984; Henry, 1998; Mogadime, 2000; Wane, 2002) similarly pave the way for clarity and critique and offer the following varied definitions of othermothering. Henry (1998) explains othermothering for Caribbean people in childrearing as “usually a shared responsibility between mother and others; in many cases another does become the substitute mother, moving from caring for to rearing the child” (p. 24). This was a feature of Daisy Sweeney’s othermothering activities that mold her life history. Mogadime (2000) incorporates Henry’s interpretation and defines the term “community othermothering as an ethical signifier of caring which Black women teachers impart to Black children as part of their commitment to the survival and wholeness of the communities” (p. 223). This particular analysis appears congruent with Mrs. Daisy Sweeney’s role as an othermother in the community. However, I contend that the definitive attributes of Daisy’s (and my mother’s) othermothering role represented a transcendence of race, religion and social class in conjunction with radiating positivity within the African Canadian community. While Daisy embodied

certain features aligned with traditional African American othermothering, she also reimagined this social dynamic by reaching beyond the borders of the Black community to embrace members from other backgrounds.

Presenting an historical reflection of Black community othermothers enhances our understanding of the rich cultural diversity of African Canadians and challenges preconceived notions of stereotypes. When the questions of social class, race, politics and gender intertwine, other complexities emerge in the fabric of social justice. As Hamilton (2005) declares: “to struggle with the past is also to pose questions of the present – what the past means in the present” (p.13)

A Vignette of Daisy Elitha Peterson Sweeney

Daisy (nee Peterson) Sweeney declared she was born “a Negro into poverty” on May 7, 1920, in Montreal on the tail end of the Depression. I use the terminology “Negro” to denote Daisy Sweeney’s preference for self-identification. Her parents were immigrants from the Caribbean. She was the second eldest of five and quickly assumed a mothering role when her older brother died.

Mrs. Sweeney held her father in high esteem, commenting on his self-taught musical genius and pedagogical prowess. She was a musical protégée who taught piano to her younger brother, Oscar, the late iconic jazz pianist.

As a teenager, she was employed as a domestic servant, a standard position for many Black women that was commonly marked by racism and abuse. Daisy also toiled in the garment factories and aircraft industry. She established a benchmark for future generations through her role as an educator, musician and community

othermother. She helped to uplift the downtrodden in Montreal's Black community from circa 1928–1988. As a music educator, community leader, consummate role model and epitome of excellence, Daisy was a paradox; outspoken in the private domain but doggedly resolute in the public sphere; a vocal advocate for children's rights, a teacher, entrepreneur and community advocate. Daisy Peterson Sweeney embodied what Brewer (1994) refers to as a "polyvocality of social locations" (p. 13), ranging from a poor working-class youngster to a middle-class professional. Her reminiscence of her earlier life portrayed strong images interspersed with vague recollections recounted in her octogenarian years.

Re/search and Life History

The paucity of historical records from African Diasporas points to a rich, large and undocumented chasm in our knowledge of Black women in Canada, especially about educators. When I initially conducted web-based and archival searches, the majority were historical publications by noted African Canadian historians (Cooper, 1994; Carty, 1991, 1994; Bristow 1994; Hamilton, 2007; Shadd, 2010) who examined the lives of women figures in Ontario and Nova Scotia. Hill's (1996) publication entitled *The Story of the Canadian Negro Women's Association 1951–1976* showcased middle-class Anglophone women. But where is the documentation of Black women who were not members of an elite organization who toiled, contributed to and shaped our collective sense of community spirit? Collins (2000) asserts that "Black feminist thought must be tied to Black women's lived experience and aim to better those experiences in some fashion" (p. 31). This generation of twentieth-century

othermothers is dying out and there is an urgency to tell their stories. Daisy Sweeney is part of a tradition of African Canadians who transgressed the boundaries of a stereotype. It is time to *write in* Black female elders in Montreal, a bilingual, vibrant and volatile metropolis.

Research in life history is an area of inquiry that has most recently intrigued me in attempting to gain insight and understanding about our elder distaff, which is the female side of the family. Over the past few decades, there has been a global resurgence of scholars using the life history approach as an interdisciplinary method of interrogation (Alabi, 2005; Borland, 1998; Casey, 1993; Goodson, 1992; Measor and Sikes, 1992; Middleton, 1993; Steedman, 1985; Weiler, 1998). We need to uncover the ways that socio-economic, racial, religious, age and gender dynamics reflect the diverse realities of women from the African Diaspora.

Black women's unique experiences influence the manner in which they tell their stories. According to Etter-Lewis (1991), it is critical to narrate our stories in our own words, while African Canadian scholar Wane (2002) asserts that "exploring the experience of ordinary African Canadian women is crucial because it enables us to re-tell our stories and develop an overview and an analytical framework for understanding our lives" (p. 193). It is also important to critically analyze similarities of "traditional" othermothering practice and its transformation within a more socially integrated Canada. Life histories, according to Dill Thornton (2004) are "active processes of rendering meaning to one's life – its conflicts, ambiguities, crises, successes and significant interpersonal relationships...by reconstructing and

interpreting their choices, situations and experiences” (p. 145). Daisy Sweeney used her musical expertise and entrepreneurial creativity to educate, socialize and uphold values in the community.

Life history also centered me, the researcher, as the prime-viewing lens within a personal reflective framework that guided and influenced the inquiry. W.E.B. DuBois (Crawford, 1985) invited a particular inquiry regarding the quality of empathy to Black scholarly work as “shared experiences...known as a double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others”. A key question was how do I negotiate and establish my role as a researcher and insider?

Daisy Sweeney’s Edited Educational Itinerary

Daisy proudly referenced her father as her “first teacher...because he taught us reading, writing and arithmetic before we went to school....He was a man of the books...and taught us classical piano.”

In 1926, at age six, Daisy began her formal schooling at Royal Arthur, a neighbourhood Anglophone public school. She enjoyed academics and excelled in mathematics. Although she completed seventh grade, her schooling life was abruptly interrupted when she contracted tuberculosis at age 14 and was quarantined for a year and a half. Daisy Sweeney’s academic gap in the public school system was also hindered by Williams’ (2001) documentation which concluded that “the fee schedule for education, books and uniforms forced poorer families to pull their children out of school in earlier grades and send them to work” (p. 44).

Approximately three decades later, Mrs. Sweeney earned her associate music certification at McGill University. Then in 1970, she completed high school through an adult education program at Thomas Moore Private School, an institution run by nuns. She was 50 years old.

During her retirement, Daisy remained active and enrolled in night classes to pursue her interests in writing, painting and sewing. Daisy Sweeney also acquired an honorary doctorate degree from Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the music profession.

Daisy's educational experiences illuminated and validated an ongoing passion for her vocation and instilled self-empowerment through the transformative power of education. She successfully navigated the arduous process of obtaining an education in an era when middle-aged women, particularly of African heritage, were discouraged and often barred from aspiring to higher education opportunities (Bertley, 1982; Campbell, 2007; Talbot, 1984). Mrs. Sweeney led by example, carved out a career and offered leadership and racial uplift to youngsters through her teaching, othermothering and community project work.

An equity and social justice educator, I similarly integrate othermothering skills into my personal and professional repertoire: guiding and nurturing students, friends' and associates' children; volunteering with community agencies; and teaching in schools in underserved communities. I rise to the challenge of mediating my own self-image as an educator-activist-scholar with the understanding of utilizing a multi-pronged approach to transform the lives of others.

In previous research (Campbell, 2007), I presented abridged stories of my own mother's life experiences as a transplanted Caribbean Francophone othermother. This dissertation extends that research as I investigate the life story of Daisy Sweeney, my former piano teacher and community othermother, a Christian, octogenarian, first generation bilingual African Canadian. She is my mother's friend and contemporary, although their realities differ in terms of social class, education, occupation and birthplace.

Daisy Peterson Sweeney occupied a unique and ambivalent position because, as the older sister and a gifted piano teacher, she was both enshrined and overshadowed by her younger brother, the late Oscar Peterson, world-renowned jazz pianist. Daisy Sweeney, as community othermother and classical piano teacher, played a vital role in the lives of hundreds of children whom she taught, yet international fame and fortune that followed her brother Oscar, excluded her. During this era, females of African descent were not embraced or promoted for their aptitude of classical music (Gilmore, 1989; Miller, 1997).

Daisy Sweeney's Musicianship

Daisy's father taught her classical piano and she, at age six, instructed her younger brother Oscar. Her exposure to classical music was combined with spirituals, hymns, testimonies and proverbs. At the age of eight, she also taught piano to Joe Sealy and Oliver Jones, both legendary international jazz pianists. As a teen, Daisy was a highly sought after accompanist for classical musicians who performed in churches and community centres.

From her twenties onward, she conducted private piano classes in her home. However, no event is more central as a focal point than when she accepted a position at the Negro Community Center (NCC) located in “Little Burgundy”, a Montreal ghetto. Mrs. Sweeney taught hundreds of Black children, established choirs, chorales, and summer music camps and shaped her influence upon the human experience. Her Saturday group lessons supplemented her income, but she significantly adjusted her fee for the low-income families that experienced tough financial constraints. All her students performed in recitals, while many entered local competitions, enrolled in piano examinations at McGill’s Conservatory of Music and received honours of high distinction (myself included). She left an indelible influence on generations of African Canadians who studied classical piano under her tutelage.

Mrs. Sweeney was the resident organist at St. Jude’s Anglican Church and actively participated in various musical capacities, most notably at the Union United Church, Montreal’s oldest Black congregation. She retained membership with the Quebec Professional Piano Teachers’ Federation. Her professional life as a piano teacher and entrepreneur was productive and sustained itself for over 60 years (See Appendix B).

Although I claim Mrs. Sweeney as an othermother, she has largely remained an enigma. As a child, I was both fascinated and fearful of her musical genius and persona. Her mastery as a piano teacher restrained any temerity on my part to engage with her in a deeper way. I was her student for six years and studied private piano lessons in her home. Initially, for the first four years, I adored playing, practised

diligently and excelled in my practical and theory piano examinations at McGill. I confidently performed at recitals and for house guests and relished this branch of the performing arts. Even though my final two years were not as gratifying, she undoubtedly left an indelible mark on my life.

My dissertation seeks to unfold the following questions. How did Daisy Sweeney challenge and/or conform to conventional social paradigms concerning Black women of her time? What were the different opportunities and difficulties she experienced and how did she cope? How can her narratives help shape and inform life history research as well as African Canadian othermothering?

The analysis of life history research embedded within African cultures and maternal functions finds and reinforces familial and community ties. Black women's life histories need to gain visibility because they embody experiences and wisdom, passed down in oral narratives from mother to daughter, grandfather to grandson, auntie to niece and so on.

So too life history research, an often-neglected historical and literary genre, offers insightful, powerful means of collecting such experiences. This methodology also presents complex, ambiguous and sometimes frustrating insights that support research with an infirmed elder. Aging people are a particularly interesting group for life history research, but there are difficulties: deteriorating mental and physical health, the death or estrangement of a spouse and the maturation and possible departure of children. In her octogenarian years, with lagging physical debility and

speech impediment, Mrs. Sweeney lives a dependent lifestyle and is now confined to a nursing home. These issues are present in my research.

Throughout the course of my dissertation, I focus on Daisy Sweeney's life as a first-generation bilingual woman in Montreal's Black community. I write her life into the wider context of life history traditionally dominated by White women (and men). Her narrative reclaims a piece of missing historical documentation in Canadian life and complements my mother's life story. Writing Daisy Sweeney's story is an act of making history by transforming a private member of Montreal's Black community into the public sphere. Her personal story deserves to be told and may be significant because it bears the story of the whole community.

In Chapter 1, I explore the othermothering phenomenon within a socio-historical and political context. I illustrate its evolution in West Africa through the Middle Passage to its present-day transformation in the African Diaspora. I present Daisy Sweeney as an othermother or community mother.

Chapter 2 explores life history, oral history and archival research methods. I discuss (a) the strengths of life history, oral history and archival research, (b) the challenges I encountered and how I overcame these obstacles, (c) the ethical issues I faced, (d) participant and researcher roles and (e) my observations, emotions and attitudes.

In Chapter 3, I examine the historical context of early twentieth century in Montreal and its remarkable Black community. I elaborate with relevant literary reflections of a bygone era interspersed with historical data. A specific element of this

chapter underscores the impact of institutionalized racism, with intimate connections to the unscrupulous immigration policies and assimilation strategies that affected the daily lives of Daisy Sweeney and other racialized minority groups. Nonetheless, the emergence of charitable organizations, community agencies, the music industry, business establishments and church life upheld the inherent traditions, standards and values necessary to the survival of the Black community. The oral history recollections of previously suppressed voices of elders broaden the topic of belonging and community spirit and create a testament to the art and act of othermothering.

Chapter 4 presents a portrait of Daisy Sweeney based on her life story, which I have chronicled here in a linear fashion.

In Chapter 5, I detail and analyze Daisy Sweeney's work life and the destabilization of her domestic and daycare employment. I attempt to explore her recollections about experiences that were both painful and promising to her upward mobility and career.

In Chapter 6, I document Daisy Sweeney's memories of her musical life as a piano teacher, accompanist, music educator and community music director.

The conclusion occurs in Chapter 7 with an interrogation of the importance of othermothering sustaining spirit and transforming community. We need concrete and culturally responsive life stories that must be documented, analyzed and integrated into our broader lives.

This dissertation project will acknowledge Daisy Sweeney's social realities and afford her the opportunity to express memories she might not otherwise have the

opportunity to—in an attempt to fill the void of African Canadian scholarship, transcend traditional paradigms of knowledge and open up new areas of inquiry in women’s life history. The urgency to restore a sense of rootedness with racialized communities through life history can also be a source of hope for our disenfranchised youth. It is critical to examine how first generation African Canadian othermothers developed lifelong survival mechanisms central to our mental, physical, spiritual and emotional wellbeing and how they can in the future empower, affirm and transform all communities.

Chapter 1 – Othermothering

In this chapter, I attempt to orchestrate a socio-historical chord of othermothering and its complex confluence to the African American Diaspora within a Canadian framework. I present my analysis of Daisy Sweeney as an othermother/community mother and interplay this historical inquiry with personal reflections and experiences within an African Canadian context.

African Othermothering and Community Mothering

The notion of othermothering, as documented by James (1993), germinated in traditional West African society, can be traced through the institution of slavery and continued to prevail in response to an ever-growing need to share the responsibility for child nurturance. Based on a social class commonality, everyone looked out for each other and othermothering adapted its tradition on the slave plantations where older women were essentially the caregivers to children of slave parents. These women, in turn, passed on African indigenous knowledge and taught their community mother role to the younger generation. As transplanted peoples, cultural traditions such as music, language and knowledge of food were kept alive and sustained within their new communities.

In advancing an African-centered epistemology, it is necessary to embrace the concept of 'Ubuntu' into the discourse. According to Gade (2011), Ubuntu is a humanist philosophy which originated in the Bantu languages of southern Africa. It provides insight in establishing and sustaining an African based leadership style which

values three tenets: spirituality, interdependence and unity. Ubuntu, as translated by Liberian peace activist Gbowee means “I am what I am because of who we all are.”

Mogadime, Mentz, Armstrong & Holtam (2010) articulate the key principles of Ubuntu as an effective leadership exemplar in their biological narratives about female school administrators. Their case study describes how Ubuntu transcends racial boundaries and enhances group/community solidarity to “redress issues of poverty, despair and hopelessness” (p. 801). Similarly, the notion of Ubuntu is applicable to Daisy Sweeney’s leadership as othermother and music educator which transcended the social constructions of race, in addition to religion and language. Hence, the survival of the African othermothering and community unity is based on the validation of its children.

Mbiti (1971) asserts his insightful documentation about African love and marriage: “children were revered and a high value was placed on reproduction as a means of strengthening the human populace to ensure its survival” (p. 104). A woman’s reproduction received supreme symbolic value since it strengthened the human group, ensured continuity of life and became equated with the life force itself.

In Diaspora societies, women continue to provide significant avenues for community survival and transformation. For example, hooks (1984) asserts that today, child care is a responsibility that can be shared with people who do not live with children and claims that “this form of parenting is revolutionary in this society because it takes place in opposition to the idea that parents, especially mothers, should be the only childrearsers” (p. 144).

The emphasis on mothering and nurturing one's biological offspring did not supersede child-rearing responsibilities for children other than their immediate offspring (Oppong, 1973). Specifically, women in traditionally polygamous relationships, who were compatible with each other, often shared the care of all children within the household so they could more easily and efficiently discharge their household maintenance responsibilities. This was especially validated in many traditional West African societies where the nurturing aspect of the mothering role also incorporated economic productivity (Henn in Hay & Stichter, 1984; Cutrufelli, 1983; Njoku, 1980; Smock in Giele & Chapman, 1977). Sudarkasa (1996) eloquently argues that "women's activities were not subordinate to men and the division of labor along sexual lines promoted reciprocity of effort; engaged in productive activity to produce different items (rather than subordination versus superordination)" (p. 82). The popular African quote "It takes the whole tribe to raise a child" illustrates this standpoint.

Distinguished as having origins within the kinship systems in early African societies, this collaborative maternal practice of community mothering was promulgated by biological or *blood mothers* with other women who, in turn, care for *blood children*.

African women also assumed a high degree of status, based both on age and othermothering skill sets and were revered in their community as they engaged in diverse facets of community life. Terborg-Penn (1996) asserts:

Older women leaders of military campaigns earned the title “queen” in traditional West African societies, a title sustained in African Caribbean society to address self-reliant women who developed survival mechanisms that challenged economic oppression. Often, these women established strong intra and inter networking systems through oral traditions that sustained the memory of these heroines and ensured the survival of equity and social justice. (p. 55)

The powerful social standing of queen reinforces a ruling status bestowed upon African elder women who have survived a brutal history of displacement, transmigration and enslavement. The economic and social power attributed to queens ensured the viability, sustainability and cohesion of the community through inter and intra dependent activities. This type of community leadership presented an alternative where the queen not only nurtured individual growth, but also empowered community members to effect social change. The usefulness of power in this regard becomes a conscious act of empowerment which leads to potential action and transformation for the common good. The African oral tradition bears witness and homage to the queen ancestors and their teachings, while their memory is kept alive.

Edwards, Lawson, Steele and Wane (2000) further attest to the relationships forged through othermothering and its impact on community transformation. Patterns of community othermothering exist, as Some (1994) recounts in his narrative about his childhood in Burkina Faso, West Africa, reflecting on his community’s “open door policy,” both literally and figuratively speaking:

Homes have door-less entrances to allow children to go in and out wherever they want, and it is common for a mother to not see her child for days and nights because he or she is enjoying the care and love of other people. When the mother really needs to be with her child, she will go from home to home searching for it. Wealth among the Dagara is determined not by how many things you have, but by how many people you have around you. A person's happiness is directly linked to the amount of attention and love coming to him or her from other people. (p. 23)

I extract the excerpt about the child “enjoying the care and love of other people” because it clearly illustrates the sentiments and harmonious communal values related to trustworthiness, protective care and effusive affection. In like manner to James' reference, Some describes the adaptable living arrangements, fictive kin roles and goes further to suggest the ease and spontaneity when mothers reunite with their children. This short-term fostering care depends on the well-being of its community members, temporarily relieves the biological mother of some of the childcare responsibilities and ingrains a continual patterning of othermothering skill sets. The fundamental notion of wealth is based on the social emotional nurturance of the child as an integral aspect of community life, which takes precedence over the accumulation of wealth as in material possessions.

In the following passage, Beah (2007) augments the importance of community interdependence describing his naming ceremony in Sierra Leone:

The imam waved to my mother, motioning her to bring me to him. It was my first time outside in the open. My mother knelt before the imam and presented me to him. He rubbed some of the water from the calabash on my forehead and recited more prayers, followed by the proclamation of my name....My mother passed me to my father, who raised me high above the crowd before passing me around to be held by everyone present. I had become a member of the community and was now owned and cared for by all. (p. 77)

The child is sacred because she/he belongs to the whole community. The community, as an extended family, regards children as precious gifts that represent hope for a sustainable future. The holding of life before birth, the caring for and the feeding of the young until they assume independence—this process is called mothering according to Reagon (1983).

African American Othermothering

The historical approaches that seek to address contributions Black women have made to Western society tend to emanate from studies in the United States. Throughout the decades, scholars such as Collins (2000), Hunter (1997), James (1993), Mullings (1997), Stack (1974) and Troester (1984) have analyzed othermothering in the African American culture from the inside out as an act of political expression and empowerment. Their analysis explores everyday lived realities as standards for interpreting values, initiatives and organizations within the community.

In mothering research, the othermothering tradition embodies a multi-dimensional approach to diverse settings within flexible time frames and adaptable fictive responsibilities. James (1993) maintains that othermothers can also be defined as those who assist blood mothers in the responsibility of child care for short- to long-term periods, in informal or formal arrangements, not necessarily confined to fictive kin. She defines fictive kin as “community members who assume multifaceted roles to non-blood related children” (p. 44). Some of these roles can take the form of mentoring, nurturing, counselling and negotiating. Reagon (1983) views this level of responsibility as, “the entire way a community organizes to nurture itself both physically and spiritually for future generations” (p. 358). Civil rights activist Ella Baker describes how informal adoption by othermothers functioned in the southern, rural community of her childhood:

My aunt who had thirteen children of her own raised three more. She had become a midwife, and a child was born who was covered with sores. Nobody was particularly wanting the child, so she took the child and raised him...and another mother decided she didn't want to be bothered with two children. So my aunt took one and raised him...they were part of the family. (p. 59)

James (1993) also offers an enlightened personal reference to othermothering in the African American community as, “the acceptance of responsibility for the welfare of non blood related children in their community as demonstrated by my grandmother and her fictive daughter” (p.44). Carol B. Stack (1974, p. 60) describes fictive kin as friends who assume the responsibilities of kinsmen and are given a

fictive kin term. According to *The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* (1971, p. 362), “fictive” is defined as fictional, imaginary, feigned (p. 44).

Interestingly, Reagon (1983) compares mothering within the African American community and through the Black Diaspora as a form of cultural work, which encompasses “the entire way a community organizes to nurture itself and future generations” (p. 309). She claims it helps to dispel feelings of impotence by illustrating historical traditional patterns of empowerment for Black women. Through examining the activism of elder women such as Daisy Sweeney, emphasis is placed on the conceptualization of power as a verb as opposed to a noun because she uses her power in a reflexive manner—to nurture their intellect, protect their well-being and impart children with a strong sense of group identity to ensure their survival in the wider community.

Within the African Diaspora, a transformative stance means developing survival strategies and adopting self-reliance through female community networks. Conflating this explanation is the issue of othermothering which “consists of a series of constantly renegotiated relationships that African American women experience with one another, with Black children, with the larger African American community, and with self” (Collins, 1991, p. 176).

Terborg-Penn (1996, p. 45) astutely documents how historians Mathurin’s and Reagon’s research (1983) reflect on and identify Black women leaders who provide strength, both physically and spiritually, to their communities. In her essay, Reagon

(1982) finds Black southern women to be the “major cultural carriers and passers-on of the traditions of our people”—a culture influenced by African survivals.

Community mothering survived the African Holocaust, transplanted and adapted its tradition on the slave plantations, when older women were essentially the caregivers of children of slave parents.

The African Holocaust refers to the Pan African study of 500 years of ongoing suffering of people of African heritage through slavery, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, oppression, invasions and exploitation. It is a crime against humanity and is recognized by the United Nations, scholars and historians who have documented the primary and overwhelming culpability of European nations for enslavement in Europe, the Americas and elsewhere. Halaqah Films (Producer). (2010). *Motherland* [DVD]. Available from <http://www.themotherland.info>.

Community mothering was a collaborative maternal practice promulgated by biological or blood mothers with other women who, in turn, care for blood children. Lawson (2000) expands: “Historically and presently, community mothering practices was and is a central experience in the lives of many Black women and participation in mothering is a form of emotional and spiritual expression in societies that marginalize Black women” (p.26).

According to Butler (2007), community mothering merges with the fictive kin model to combine Collins’ idea of othermothering and Gilkes’ description of mothering as a form of community-based activism and support a foundational component of the Black feminist standpoint. As women of African descent, the

community mothers applied their experiences to an often-hostile setting in response to the need to preserve their tradition and move the community forward. This excerpt from Collins (1991) illuminates the value placed on cooperative childcare:

She kept Vivian and she didn't charge me nothing either. You see, people used to look after each other, but now, it's not that way. I reckon it's because we was poor, and I guess they put theirself in the place of the person that they was helpin. (p. 47)

These relationships were based on caring, protecting and resisting oppressive circumstances. Their work was critical to the moral and spiritual “upliftment” of the Black family, as it is embedded in the larger system of power and dominance.

Collins (2000) describes this as “an exercise of power that allows a dominant group to control its destiny and realize its goals” (p. 229). It is a socially constructed process that commands attention to values, traditions and the “ethic of caring” and serves as an alternative to state intervention in child-rearing practice. In lieu of the ethic of caring, I adopt the term “affective license”—the ability of emotion-centeredness, which, irrespective of blood relations creates and connects the bonding between and among otherchildren and othermothers.

Brodber (1986) refers to this characteristic as “emotionally expansive” (p. 25), meaning that this experience can produce in individuals the ability to relate emotionally to a wide range of people as a result of the shifting and changing nature of relationships. The far-reaching effects of othermothering in my upbringing transcended the home boundaries to include the church, school, local parks and other

public spaces, such as community organizations. Not only was I exposed to alternative models of othermothering but I also engaged in a reciprocal relationship. To some degree, I offered a level of comfort and caring to an aging othermother. This is a significant dimension about othermothering one's othermother, that appears to be lacking in the theoretical discussions because the literature examines concepts of othermothering from the perspective of adult responsibility, overlooking potential reciprocal child affinities.

African Canadian Othermothering in Quebec

Closer to home on the Quebec scene, Razack (1990) offers eloquent historical insight from the mid-nineteenth century up to the late 1960s regarding maternal ideologies and practices that were driven by a nationalist ideal. In 1856, Abbé Laflèche published a small volume outlining the relation of the family to church and nation. He envisioned the family as a patriarchy, a divinely ordained system of authority within which the woman as wife played a vital role.

Endowed with special feminine qualities, (Razack, 1990) which made her one man's complement and his inferior, she confirmed his power in the family and by extension, the power of pope over king and king over man. Women played a more direct role in sustaining the hierarchical construct. As the educator of her children, a position once again inherited by virtue of the innate feminine qualities of *dévouement* (devotion) and *intelligence du coeur* (intelligence of the heart), she ensured the endurance of religious values over generations. To this base of ultramontanism, Laflèche added a few Francophone elements:

The French Canadian identity emphasized by elites (professionals such as lawyers, physicians, teachers, French Canadian Catholic clergy) drew upon ultramontaine and agriculturalist ideologies. Their emphasis was on cultural and religious dimension that is the French language and the Catholic faith. (Martel, 1998, p. 4)

Woman was expressly linked to the survival of French Canada, assuring *la survivance de la race* (survival of the race) by teaching her children the French language and cultural traditions and, of course, by preserving the numerical strength of French Canadians and by increasing the birthrate (Razack, 1990).

Only recently, in the course of the last two decades of the twentieth century, has motherhood research in Canada focused on African othermothering. Scholars such as Mogadime (2010, 2000), O'Reilly (2002) and Wane (2000) have examined mothering in the African Diaspora and made inroads in the analysis of variables of Black women's oppression and othermothering contributions to Black life. Arnup, Levesque and Pierson (1990) discuss the importance of motherhood affecting the important debate around public health, welfare policies and political realms in increasingly complex and multi-dimensional phenomena.

In ground-breaking work, African Canadian feminist intellectuals such as Bristow (1994), Brand (1991) and Cooper (1994) assert that women who assist blood mothers are integral elements in the institution of Black motherhood. Grandmothers, sisters, nieces, aunts, cousins, sister-in-laws and neighbours act as community mothers by taking on childcare responsibilities for one another's children. In many Black

communities, these women-centered networks of community-based childcare have crossed borders to include fictive kin or extended family members. When relationships are not between kin or fictive kin, community norms traditionally were such that neighbours cared for one another's children. Based on a social class commonality, everyone looked out for each other.

In my experience, this advocacy approach has transgressed social class, religious, ethno racial boundaries and occupations, as well as public and private spheres. It extended to restaurants, grocery stores, public transit, community centres and places of worship, town halls, libraries, amusement parks and other public domains. It reinforced a collective responsibility, a spirit of trust, cooperation and love, irrespective of social and geographic boundaries.

Growing up in an integrated middle-class, bilingual, mixed residential suburb, I attended an English elementary public school with a high enrolment of Jewish students. My friends were primarily first generation Europeans of Jewish heritage and Whites of British or Francophone descent. Their mothers were receptive, kind-hearted and imparted their commitment to the community spirit of othermothers as "fictive kin." They fed me, scolded me, encouraged me and cared for me as befitting their own blood child. Equally important, I felt nurtured and valued by this diverse community of mothers. Their othermothering skills helped sustain me over the years with their age-related wisdom, as well as the cultural, racial, religious and linguistic norms they reinforced. Hence, community mothering during my upbringing contrasts heavily with the African American experience which typically relies on a racialized

othermothering tradition. Granted, I recognize that some of my White fictive kin led “privileged” lifestyles unencumbered by racial, social class or religious intolerance. However, I would strongly maintain that the combination of othermothering and community mothering practices connected and sustained wholesome relationships between adults and children and validated “other” children. It was interesting to also note that this specific communal practice was unique in that it laid the foundation for developing a meaningful emotional and spiritual rapport with otherchildren and othermothers, irrespective of race, religion, generation and language. The boundaries of othermothers were blurred and often fluid, recognizing that adopted othermothers such as Mrs. Kojima (a Japanese mother), Auntie Emma Jean (an African American mother) and Mrs. Boyd (a Francophone mother) cared for both each other and other children as a cooperative community-based childcare unit. How does the notion of traditional African othermothering (Collins, 2000; Giddings, 1984; Terborg-Penn, 1996) transform and expand into alternative othermothering practices within the Diaspora and beyond?

Steele (2000) maintains that mothering in the African community is a basic element of African spirituality that has survived in spite of collective marginalized narratives of our experiences. She contends that in addition to strengthening and uplifting the Black community, many Black women engaged in policing the behaviour of other Black people to ensure that they adhered to proper family values (p. 22). In my role of othermother, I also often monitor the behaviour of otherchildren of African descent in public spaces with mixed reactions. For example one summer’s day, while

visiting an amusement park, I observed two little Black girls yelling and jostling in the lineup at the rollercoaster ride. Glancing around, I did not notice any caregivers so I greeted them and gently redirected their behaviour. They were quite flabbergasted by my cool, calm intervention and apologized for their conduct. My approach was gentle, firm and genuine, blended with a solid dose of colloquial speech to “straighten up and fly right.”

At another public venue, an international tennis competition, a little Black boy was talking loudly during the play, conduct which is strictly forbidden. He was accompanied by his parents/caregivers who tried to hush him; however, he continued to babble incessantly. It was apparent that no one else was prepared to intercede. At the appropriate time during a rest period, I turned around and advised him and his parents to refrain from talking during the play as it was distracting and violated tennis etiquette. Both the parents and the youngster appeared sheepish and dumbfounded by the fact that a stranger would intervene to correct misbehaviour.

In these accounts, I present a reflective lens into my experiences and the importance of othermothering in public spaces. I simultaneously utilize my intuitive power boldly, warmly and embrace my status of age, background experience and cumulative wisdom about certain cultural norms. There are no visible boundaries when engaged in othermothering as I am propelled by a sense of responsibility to reinforce positive socialization cues and behaviour at any given opportunity. My own othermothering upbringing transfers the ethic of caring, “attentiveness and emotional responsibility to the other as an intrinsic, ongoing aspect of one’s own experience”

(Jordan, 1991, p. 36). It is imperative that we own othermothering in our public spheres as well as private domains.

James (1993) argues that othermothers can assist blood mothers as intermediaries to alleviate tension between mothers and daughters. This reference supports my interactions with Mrs. D., an aging, bedridden White othermother. Mrs. D was very fond of daytime soaps (which I did not dare to interrupt) so I waited until commercial breaks when our conversation would flow and abate. Mrs. D was quite perceptive and her insights temporarily mitigated a stressful period with my mother as I struggled to negotiate with my own adolescent identity. This othermothering relationship concurrently appeased my mother and provided Mrs. D. with temporary respite care while she tempered my irascibility. This is a further example of the symbiotic relationship between othermother and otherchild; the instance of othermothering one's othermother.

Contradictions to traditional mothering

Othermothering contradicts the Westernized notions of mothering and femininity that subscribe to passiveness, dependency and mothering in isolation because it seeks to develop ongoing inter and intracommunity connections and transcend those borders. The presence of survival strategies and self-reliance as mothering attributes have not been featured among females of Western (i.e., European) origins, but can be historically traced among women of African descent throughout the Diaspora.

The concept of othermothering in African life experiences do not fit tidily into the sacrificial mothering discourse of post-war life as characterized by six interconnected, discursive tenets outlined and then challenged by O'Reilly (2004):

1) children can only be properly cared for by the biological mother; 2) this mothering must be provided 24/7; 3) the mother must always put children's needs satisfied before her own; 4) mothers must turn to the experts for instruction; 5) the mother is fully fulfilled, completed and composed in motherhood; and 6) mothers must lavish excessive amounts of time, energy and money in the rearing of their children. (p. 14)

Given the vast heterogeneous communities in the African Diaspora, these presuppositions do not accommodate but serve to render invisible our African diversities. This discourse is also based on a White, middle-class ideology, which promotes a race privilege that is taken for granted as the authoritative voice.

Chodorow (1978) has defined mothering as "tasks performed primarily by biological mothers within a nuclear family setting, who include the bearing, nurturing and socializing of children" (p. 31). She argues that the mothering role bears a major burden for the production and reproduction of dichotomous gender differences and also serves to perpetuate and reinforce the relative powerlessness of women within society.

Collins (2000) points out that "inaccessibility to mainstream institutions of power means that Black women exercise influence and exert power in everyday lived realities within the African community context" (pp. 208–209). The momentum that

othermothering has sustained through centuries of upheaval and uprootedness attests to its resiliency—a key character trait of Daisy Sweeney. Historically and currently, othermothering, with its concomitant community mothering, was and is a form of emotional and spiritual expression in societies that marginalize Black women. It is this emotional and spiritual expression that cannot be regulated in the White patriarchal capitalist state. Dei (2000) points out that the hostility against the Diaspora influences the particular option and strategies that are open to those who are minoritized. Understanding the nature of the hostility they encounter is crucial in order not to deny the intellectual agency and power of local subjects and the pragmatic political choices that they make. (pp. 208–209)

Othermothering and community mothering are innovative and vital life practices utilized to propel and sustain the continued existence of the African Diaspora community. These life practices interface and transcend social barriers associated with social class, age, faith, gender and language. Othermothering affects the configuration of the family unit and remains for most, one of our highly significant means of support and sustenance. Othermothering binds and unifies us as part of a community. When we make ourselves stronger, we make our African communities stronger by providing more role models, more opportunities and more hope. Ultimately, othermothering and community mothering resources utilize the power within communities to effect social transformation.

In contemporary society, community mothering has come to be a signifier of cultural resistance as a rising voice of transformation. Since many people of African

descent could not rely on or access mainstream traditional childcare systems, this cultural practice of cooperative or collaborative childcare continued. Community mothering as a familial system helps to maintain a communal and interdependent lifestyle. As community mothers, women of the African Diaspora envision themselves in relation to an extended family of Black children. It is a life skill and responsibility. It is a pathway that teaches children to navigate successfully in a racist and sexist world. It portrays a community spirit that otherwise is not acknowledged or validated in the dominant world. It is a source of empowerment and importance for the community at large.

However, othermothering and community mothering also appear to be in a state of flux as a sustaining life force in present-day circumstances due to economic and social upheavals within some urban centres and outlying areas (Case, 1997). In part, the insidious infiltration of gangs, guns and *ganja* (marijuana) within some Black communities has led to a growing disconnect between elders and youth (Dei, 2000). In spite of adverse conditions, such as murder, illness, drug or alcohol dependence, Black women continue to engage in community mothering as a natural, wholesome relationship. Herein lays the notion of a community of resistance—a community guided by a resilient and sustainable network of women who share power, agency and authority; a community inextricably bound together by elders, middle-agers and youth and a community that ultimately respects, protects, honours and transforms all children.

In Cosby & Poussaint's (2004) words:

We hope that young people...will see these elders as complex, complete individuals they can relate to- not icons, but vibrant individuals who laugh and cry, who've made mistakes, fallen down, but managed to get up and keep going, often with remarkable good humor... to know elders as children, much like themselves, ...to see that in fact age *is* a very relative thing (p. xx).

Chapter 2 – Methodology: Life History, Archival Research and Oral History

“Always, lives are understood within their respective and collective contexts and it is this understanding that is theorized” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 11).

Research in life history, best defined as “sociologically read biography” (Measor and Sikes, 1992, p. 209) is an area of inquiry that has most recently intrigued me in attempting to gain insight and understanding about my ordinary elder Black women in Montreal, Quebec.

It was 2007. I was sitting in a Japanese restaurant, wrestling with my dissertation project when my friend Sandra interjected “Whose life would you really like to write about?” I responded unequivocally and enthusiastically “Daisy Sweeney!” I remembered Daisy Sweeney—former piano teacher, a brilliant, humble, hardworking, rigorous music educator and othermother. Yet, in spite of her prominence as ‘the piano teacher’ in the Black community, she was commonly referred to as ‘Oscar Peterson’s sister’. The latter reference tended to elicit a rise from me because most stories about my community —engendered favour of male protagonists. I felt that this term of reference somehow diminished and minimized her stature, competency, knowledge base and left a deep void in understanding her character, charisma and competencies. On closer examination though, this particular connection also helped to simultaneously construct meaning on two levels. While the reference endorsed a somewhat patriarchal superiority and suggested a reductive quality, it also sanctioned a familial connection through association with another, and

perhaps linked Oscar Peterson to his first piano teacher. I felt a profound connectedness to Daisy Sweeney as my former piano teacher and distant othermother.

I started piano lessons with Mrs. Sweeney when I was eight years old—a willing, eager conscientious student who attended to my practice time diligently. I remember racing home to practise my scales, arpeggios and other exercises. The only thing I disliked was the hard backless stool which lacked support and exacerbated my poor posture. I used to wonder how piano stools or benches disadvantaged students like me with troublesome spines. Support I did experience in other ways. My mother would be preparing dinner in the kitchen adjacent to the piano room prodding, correcting, harassing, and praising. “You better redo that scale—it didn’t sound right”. My parents and grandparents were triumphant when I practised and learned my pieces well. And visitors warmly bestowed compliments when listening to my ditties, arpeggios, scales and selected pieces from larger compositions. My *pièce de resistance* (the showpiece that I played at the annual recital) — was intended to impress my piano teacher, Mrs. Sweeney.

This sense of connectedness, a tenet of African feminist epistemology is expressed by Collins (1991):

Connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process. Connectedness has always been an important part of African thought, as is evidenced by the assertion that the importance of community outweighs the need of the individual in African thought. This connectedness is related to a sense of being human. People become human

and empowered only in the context of a community, and only when they “become seekers of the type of connections, interactions, and meetings that lead to harmony. (p. 185)

I grew up immersed in that unique sense of harmony in Montreal’s Black community. It was customary to greet each other and ask persistent questions about relatives, residence and rootedness. To this day, I am Hobart and Mildred Smith’s daughter and my life story is rooted in and extends from this familial sociohistorical connectedness. I was not an entity onto myself because my kinship ties linked me to a collective unit of people, who nurtured, guided and loved me. Our familial socialization instilled and reinforced beliefs, traditions, goals and life strategies through a process of interdependence. My parents and grandparents socialized my siblings and me to function both independently and interdependently within and between two main social groups: mainstream White society and our distinct Black community (learning to navigate easily across socioeconomic, linguistic, religious and age based boundaries) while maintaining close family and extended kinship relationships. Our varied interactions with senior members of the community also exposed and cultivated a respect for our elders’ wisdom and diverse life experiences. As expressed by Braithwaite (1976), “Mothers, fathers and community elders passed on to the young, the accumulated vision of the group. They taught the young how to survive and they did this consciously and unconsciously, by the power of the word and the power of example (p. vi).

Bearing this connectedness, I want to read the life history of my elders; as keepers of wisdom who took risks, gave meaning to my life and influenced our world. Writing the life of Daisy Elitha Peterson Sweeney is history in the making.

Life History

Cole and Knowles (2001) purport that:

Life history inquiry is about gaining insights into the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of other humans, some of the day-to-day complexities and confusions within the life of just one member of the community. (pp. 10-11)

My own interest in life history was the result of an ongoing concern with the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of elder African Canadian women in current academic and mainstream literature. The portrayal of Black women has persistently presented monolithic, one-dimensional roles in Canadian society which are largely neglected and trivialized.

Cole and Knowles (2001) present the following succinct explanation of life history:

Life history relies and portrays the storied nature of lives by honouring the individuality and complexity of individuals' experiences within a broader context. Lives are lived within the influence of contexts as far ranging as cultural, political, familial, educational and religious spheres. Life history draws on individuals' experiences to make broader contextual meaning. (p. 20)

Life histories may be topical, focusing on only one portion of a life, or a complete one, attempting to tell the full details of a life as it is recollected (Neal, 1988, p. 42). My life history research based on Neal's (1988) premise situates Daisy Sweeney in relation to a portion of her life drawing from recollections of a historical period from the early 1900's to 1960 in Montreal. How does Daisy ascribe meaning to her life? I am concerned about presenting her life through a multidimensional lens that traces African-Canadian women and their social interactions in Montreal.

Since life history research offers a view into the life of a person in relation to social and societal conditions, prominent questions arise in my study. What did it mean to be a first-generation 'Negro' working-class bilingual female in a largely hostile white francophone Quebec metropolis in the early 20th century? How did Daisy's experiences shape and inform othermothering in the community? How will life history research capture her experiences?

Cole & Knowles (2001) also propose that a diversity of interpretations exist "based on the intersection of human experiences and social context". What is distinctive about life history is that regardless of their discipline, each researcher recognizes "the individual as a window into broader social and societal conditions". (pp. 9, 12)

Over the past few decades, there has been a global resurgence of scholars using the life history approach as an interdisciplinary method of interrogation (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Borland, 1998; Casey, 1993; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Etter-Lewis,

1996; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Goodson, 1992; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994; Measor and Sikes, 1992; Middleton, 1993; Steedman, 1985; Weiler, 1998).

In other texts, specific groups have focused research attention on their community and culture. Various forms of feminist scholarship have given increased attention to the use of life history, as a means of giving greater voice to women, thereby deconstructing Eurocentric and androcentric constructions of woman or womanhood. Voyageur (2008) wrote about First Nations women chiefs; Iwama (1998) and Kogawa (1981) theorized Japanese-Canadian female identities; as a non-native Cruickshank collaborated and developed innovative research with Yukon Cree female elders (1990); while Buenaventure (1998) published work about second-generation Filipina women negotiating their identities in a racist adopted home. Blackman (1992) documented the life history of Florence Edensaw Davidson as a good model in a particular native community: a Haidi woman of her time she did was expected of her and did it well; she is community-spirited and has tirelessly served her community through her various leadership roles within the Anglican Church (p. xii). Fosl (2005) explored an oral history account of Anne Braden, an elder Southern social justice activist and Kumar (1994) examined issues around global feminism of lower-caste women in India and the United States.

So too should we seek to uncover the ways that social class, age, racial and gender dynamics reflect the diverse realities of people from the African Diaspora. The vast majority were historical publications by notable African Canadian historians and writers such as Brand (1991), Carty (1994), Cooper (2006), Hamilton (2007), Hill

(1996) and Shadd (2010), who explored the lives of women figures in Ontario and Nova Scotia. There was a glaring absence in the literature with respect to life history about elder African-Canadian women and their vast and diverse contributions in other parts of our nation. The triple bind of racism, sexism and classism that Mrs. Sweeney encountered both within and outside her own community needs to be examined through a critical lens for a broader grasp of how othermothering is both a political act and an expression of a holistic self. In spite of these barriers, she learned how to maneuver an often-hostile system and fulfill her family, musicality and othermothering aspirations.

Life history researchers are the guiding influence, wear the primary viewing lens and shape the research which squarely places them into a reflexive frame. A life history researcher may also become preoccupied with her/his own research activities and monopolize the research stage, which Patai (1994) identifies as “nouveau solipsism.” She argues that “this theoretical obsession with self is a self-indulgent expression of those in the midst of midlife crisis” (p.2). Patai’s critique presents an interesting reminder to me, that as the researcher, integration of personal voice and detailed narratives makes me conscious of the need for close monitoring and scrutiny of ego. What is also a source of debate for me though is that integrating emotion, affect and feeling adds substantive honesty to the life story – as opposed to the dispassionate, detached analysis that is generally foregrounded throughout history. In likeness, Gershenowitz (2005) acknowledges that “the bond between subject and author can be intensely emotional and can mutate during the interview and writing

process” (pp. 71, 72). I contend that because Daisy Sweeney is a living monument and I am part of her story – to detach feelings and emotions would compromise the human process of my telling of her story which respects her individuality and my relationship with her. Writing Daisy’s story also helps me recall and engage significant stages of my life contemplations and personal growth. According to Delhi (1991) “any account of experience, whether it being the first, second or third person is a mediation, an interpretation employing narrative strategies and forms of theory in its telling” (p.118).

I collected Mrs. Sweeney’s life history by posing queries about: her family background, occupations, education, parents, place of birth, siblings, birth order, childhood, education, music, influences in life, the church, professional memberships, awards, hobbies, travel, as well as marriage, divorce and friendships.

A fundamental paradigm shift has occurred where the researcher claims a presence of an “intersubjective realm of being and meaning” away from the dichotomies of self-other, subject-object, subjectivity-objectivity (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 14). Behar (1996) notes “In current anthropological and feminist writing life history research...we are seeing efforts to map an intermediate space we can’t quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life” (p. 174).

In a similar vein, Bertaux (1981) argues that “when used within a truly sociological framework, life stories are some of the best tools with which to elicit the expression of what people already know about social life” (p. 39). Daisy Sweeney’s

life stories stimulate reflexivity about my own journey and othermothering practice where we simultaneously construct a dual intersection between the subject and the researcher. As an intergenerational process, we each have contributions to share; her life illuminates new insights and my life sees different ones. I am eager to revive and sustain her fame and portray her life as an example for generations of children, educators, men, women and othermothers.

Interviewing Daisy Sweeney, Poignant notes of ethics, reacquaintance and emotions...

A life history or personal history is a “written account of a person’s life based on spoken conversations and interviews” (Titon, 1980, p. 283). We see her life recreated. Writing the life of another through conversations and interviews is particularly delicate, difficult work because of the nature of disclosure. In addition to the challenges of disclosure are the intersecting dynamics of race, gender, social class, age and geographical time and space. Denzin (1989) offers a perspective about interviewing:

On the surface level, the person is what he or she does in everyday doings, routines and daily tasks. At the deep level, the person is a feeling, moral, sacred, inner self. This deep, inner self may only infrequently be shown to others. A life is an unfinished project or set of projects (p. 29).

Synge (1981) offers an insight into life history interviews with senior members of society:

Life history interviews with elderly people who were children in the early to mid-twentieth century can provide information on the nature and quality of

family relationships in those families that had young children in that era, and also information on the experience of growing up in the early decades of the twentieth century. (p. 235)

This reference supports the underlying premise that elderly participants will want to share their family lives with the researcher. I think it is worthwhile to note that multiple extenuating variables impinge on collecting that data. For instance, Daisy Sweeney, an octogenarian who suffered mini strokes, recounting certain aspects of her youth was extremely difficult and caused her to feel somewhat vulnerable and frustrated. In addition, an elder may not wish to disclose aspects of a traumatic childhood. My point is that a researcher needs to carefully manoeuvre through these tricky undercurrents.

Without a doubt, all research demands attentive detail and investigation to ethical concerns, life history research notwithstanding. Ethical considerations are vital to conducting research-informed consent, which implies that the subject has a choice about whether to participate (Green-Powell, 1997, p. 199). Oral history research, also as transformative complex inquiry offers unique ways to interrogate and center the social realities and life stories of African-Canadian women. Moreover, Barkley Brown (1991) attests that “any true Afrocentric (feminist) scholarship has to be based on placing oneself inside one’s community and inside one’s scholarship rather than standing in an ‘objective/outside position to each other (p.90).

I followed many of Edmonds Hill’s (1991) topic interviewing guidelines:

1. family background – education, occupations, and other information about parents, grandparents, date and place of birth, siblings, birth order; relationship
2. childhood – whether urban, rural, setting, socioeconomic status; significant events and influential persons in childhood
3. education – from elementary to tertiary; where, when, types of schools, parental attitudes about the education of a daughter
4. significant influences in life, including the circumstances around the choice of primary career or activity
5. how being Black and female affected the options available and the choices made
6. the interviewee's reflections on her most important achievement in life
7. the place of religion or the church
8. membership and involvement, professional, social, community organizations, civil rights, national groups
9. awards, honours
10. hobbies
11. travel
12. personal circumstances – marriage, divorce, widowhood, children, friendships
13. effect of skin colour on life (p. xvii)

My study of Daisy Sweeney's life encountered converging ethical, emotional and moral dilemmas. There were the typical challenges around ethical procedures that involved obtaining permission from the university, my participant, her daughter, and preserving and protecting my field notes, journal and tape recordings. Other ethical considerations focused on my elder narrator's senior age, deteriorating health, privacy constraints within the interviewing setting and memory loss. In constructing dialogue, Norrick (2005) suggests

that older narrators are very much aware of the significance of memory and they worry about forgetfulness as a sign of senility and impending Alzheimer's. It is important to reassure older participants that their memories from the distant past are as good as younger people in order to keep them remembering (p.19).

The act of remembering is potentially transformative. Sometimes Daisy struggled to recall specific details, usually numeric qualities (i.e. dates, numbers, ages) thinking that she had to find something significant. I remember the frequent wait times.

In my multifaceted role as researcher, friend, former piano student and member of an intimate Black community I needed to avoid awkward moments for Daisy. I would try to pick up on cues when she talked about her forgetfulness. For example, she would occasionally exclaim "I can't remember...I can't remember the details...or that was a long time ago" I would respond with "Yes, I sometimes forget details from my past. Let's just take a short break...how about a drink of water?" Other times, I

would fill in the blank with “I’ll ask Judy about that” or continue with the conversation which sometimes fills in the gap by allowing access to other events or names or follow up another time.

I acknowledge certain presupposed comfort zones and credibility as well as unsuspecting and nuanced barriers as I engaged with life history and oral narrative research. Analogous stories helped to validate our relationship and strengthen the aura of trust-building.

Borland (1998) investigates intergenerational narratives and the question of constructing meaning on two symbiotic levels. She argues for our mindfulness in how we present stories that grant the woman participant interpretive respect without relinquishing our responsibility to provide our own interpretation of her experience. In the spirit of feminist reflexivity, Borland underscores the importance of female autonomy in relation to “who controls the text” (p.70).

However, Measor & Sikes (1992) propose that the notion of controlling text complicates ethical questions because life history extracts evidence of the lives of others through a “tone of intimacy” in “prolonged interviews”. The researcher, as an active social being, observes records and makes connections in prolonged interviews while developing relationships which can compromise the element of trust. When the factor of intimacy crosses boundaries it has the potential to inflict a greater degree of harm (emotional and psychological) upon the participant. It involves the author and then the reader in a form of “licensed voyeurism.” (pp. 210, 213)

While recognizing this may constitute an acute ethical issue - the potential elements of harm—both psychological and physical, I prefer to argue in favor of hope as in struggle or as Thompson (1978) reflects “life history depends on the *spirit* in which it is used” (p. 2). I support his hopeful clause that reimagines the focus of history for the ordinary and unrepresented, calls for social transformation and social justice; cultivates a deeper understanding of our personal history and breaks down barriers between generations.

To facilitate access to the muted channel of women’s subjectivity, Anderson and Jack (1991) recommend that researchers ask the following inquiries: Whose story the interview is asked to tell? Who interprets the story and with what theoretical frameworks? Is the narrator asked what meaning she makes of her experiences? Is the researcher’s attitude one of receptivity to learn rather than to prove preexisting ideas that are brought into the interview? In order to learn to listen, we need to attend more to the narrator than to our own agendas (p. 11).

Certainly there were discrete boundaries that I dared not cross – out of respect and deference for my elders based on a set of cultural belief systems. “Many of us were raised to believe that we should never speak publicly about our private lives, because the public world was powerful enough to use such information against us (bell hooks, 1993, p. 17).” Mrs. Sweeney was a figure who occupied a cherished persona within the public sphere. Specifically, to broach topics relating to sex, sexuality and marital relations with an elder, was considered taboo. As the researcher, I wedged

open the door; she could peep, step inside and retrieve, reconstruct and/or reject those memories. That was the power she retained.

Herein lays the notion of fluctuating power imbalance between overlapping complexities of student-teacher-researcher and elder-teacher-narrator identities. To parlay the vision of African feminist theory, my work involves multiple tensions. On the one hand, I seek to empower the woman narrator by revaluing her perspectives, her life and her art in a world that has systematically ignored or trivialized women and especially Black culture. On the other, I hold an uneasy lens on my own subjectivity—that leads to presumed social behaviors of an elder and a piano teacher (Borland, 1998, p. 32). This relationship of negotiating power tested my questionable sensitivity as a scholar to this interpretive authority. Our relationship was dynamic, inspiring, painful and disclosed more about me than about Mrs. Sweeney, what Ball refers to as not as ‘interviewing’ but as interactive research (cited in Measor and Sikes, 1992, p. 213). It was painful interactive research because it exposed deep emotional wounds, insecurities and memories both of my younger life and of current times. These were inner places that exposed the harsh scrutiny I had tried to suppress; the scrutiny under the watchful, demanding and over-worked gaze.

It became apparent to me as a researcher infusing African feminist thought that my interpretive analysis concentrated on gender identity, sometimes as strongly as race, less so for social class, language and age. Since I wanted to move towards a more sensitive research methodology in the spirit of reflexivity, I followed Borland’s (1998) procedure substituting my own framework in the fourth stage: 1) summarize

the narrative 2) present Daisy's framing of the narrative 3) reframe during the interpretive process and 4) present other responses to my interpretation (Oral history project).

On the one hand, to accept everything I heard as "accurate" may be naive but I believed that Mrs. Sweeney had important and worthy things to contribute. During our conversations, I needed to accept that Daisy would say things that I was not prepared for and did not understand, in spite of clarification or repeated questioning. Did this mean that my misinterpretations and misunderstandings had no validity? I thought this was part of what research is all about—to learn, discover and encounter things we have no answer for and generate new depths of inquiry. In my conversations with Daisy, what did I learn about myself?

According to Gluck and Patai (1991):

Simply taping a woman's words, asking appropriate questions, laughing at the right moment and displaying empathy are not enough. What is missing is the realization that the interview as a linguistic as well as a social and psychological event can be better understood by taking into account the specific characteristics and styles of the group being studied. (p. 9)

So, my ultimate goal in my interviews and conversations was to eventually counterbalance the standard questions and in the long run allow the conversation to evolve naturally. Frankly, this was somewhat troublesome for me initially, because I wanted to exercise control over my questions along with ensuing discussion. However, after a few miserable attempts to control the interview I quickly learned that Daisy

was not a willing participant with my perfunctory interviewing style (I later address her swift and persistent response, “Your turn,” in another section). I had stifled her voice and her life. I changed my approach several times during our interviews and conversations as I became more relaxed and confident. It was also important for me to be able to ‘read’ Daisy and go with my ‘intuition’.

Ethical considerations also include securing the field notes and tape recordings, building trust, rapport and reporting results (Green-Powell, 1997, p. 199). My repertoire of interviewing techniques included observation of interactions, impressions, semi-structured interview questions, open-ended conversations, field notes, journal entries, photographs and tape recordings of conversations and piano playing. As a novice researcher I surmised that semi-structured interviews would be easier. I quickly discovered that semi-structured interviews were quite tricky because they required more spontaneity and innovation. Reading Wengraf’s (2001) study on qualitative research interviewing helped prepare me for greater success because preparation, more discipline, creativity and more time were crucial requirements after the sessions for analysis.

My field notes consisted of descriptions and particular observations about my surroundings, dates, times and impressions prior to the interviewing sessions.

It was important to support my tape recordings with my impressions of verbal, nonverbal cues, passive behaviors and styles of communication for both of us and self-regulate my own assumptions and biases in my reflective journal entries.

My journal encouraged self-reflection and helped tease out deeper questions, conundrums and personal issues that cropped up so, I wrote immediately following our conversations. As I wrote and reviewed the course of daily events, I engaged in what hooks (1990, 1994) imputes as self-interrogation, a critical analysis of my roles as mediator, interlocutor and outsider.

Reacquaintance

At an early point in my investigation, I had the good fortune to become reacquainted with Daisy's children, particularly Judy Sweeney, her daughter and my peer. I tracked down Judy through my sister, who was her colleague at the same hospital in Montreal. Although I had experienced a long and close association with the family during my youth, our ties had lessened over the years due to my relocation to Ontario. Gluck (1984) advises, "It is often difficult for the elderly to hear well on the telephone and it is best to try to communicate this essential introductory material first by mail" (p. 229). Bearing in mind that Mrs. Sweeney suffered a mild hearing loss, I contacted Judy (who retained power of attorney) via telephone and obtained verbal permission for Mrs. Sweeney's participant role in my research. I then followed up and mailed the written consent protocol which she promptly approved and returned. I encountered no difficulty in obtaining the necessary permission, as Mrs. Sweeney was eager to participate and responded quickly.

Initially Judy and I communicated via long distance phone conversations exchanging updates about our personal and professional lives, her mother's new living circumstances and health concerns, while I explained my research interest. Our

conversations were very pleasant. I entered this relationship based on suppositions of mutual childhood experiences, gender, race, geographical affiliation and social standing.

Judy was enthusiastic, indulgent and generous with her time. On several occasions during my visits to Montreal, she graciously drove me to Floralties Verdun Nursing Home where her mother lived (See Appendix C). She was the consummate host and provided detailed métro (subway) instructions, an engaging dinner companion and occasional interpreter of Daisy's less coherent talk. As a practising registered nurse, Judy maintained a watchful eye on her mother's health concerns and solicited ongoing information.

I also corresponded with her seeking clarification of information pertaining to precise dates, gaps and names of people and places. Although I bridged the gap during drives to the nursing home, phone and on line exchanges, I missed some subtle nuances. Here is one of those overlooked incidents. On several occasions I had inquired about including family photographs to enrich my historical data collection. Even though Judy acknowledged that snapshots existed, she also asserted that "we are not an album kind of family and so much is still in boxes". Meanwhile I persisted with my request and repeatedly overlooked the underlying nuance of her statement. For whatever reasons, Judy preferred not to share the family photographs with me and I did not honour her right to withhold that documentation. In all honesty I suspected that my persistent requests became tiresome for her. Although I continued to feel reassured by her level of trust, merriment and curiosity about my research a level of

skepticism and wariness arose. This particular moment was marked by resistance—a place where Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) asserts “there is risk that these ongoing relationships might be distorted by probing inquiry” (p. 611). My constant questioning and probing, particularly in relation to retrieval of family artifacts and photographs, lead to a misunderstanding via an email message, which alluded to both personal and family disruptions. I regretfully apologized. Yet I gained a deeper awareness—that even though archival research was valued from my perspective, this sentiment (for whatever the reason) might not always be reciprocated. As I sensed her retreat, one that implied, ‘don’t pry’, it became clear to me that I needed to exercise some restraint and recognize that everyone had his or her own priorities and vicissitudes in life. The conflicting messages contradicted my assumed interactive style of communication. It appeared our roles, presumably clearly defined in my mind—I as the initiator—her, the narrator did not overlap into active nurturing practice. Judy’s style of communication plunged me into a deeper part of my self than I had fathomed. It was interesting to note how I assumed a resistant communication stance during our encounters. For instance, when Judy inquired about my family relations, I treaded softly, while she unabashedly overflowed with stories and challenges about her childhood with her siblings.

One of the most intriguing and emotional moments was finally reuniting with Mrs. Daisy Sweeney in Montreal. Prior to and during my waiting, I experienced a mixture of anxiety and exuberance. A time lapse of three decades separated us geographically, generationally and socially. Even though we had met at a gospel

recital the previous year, the encounter was fleeting. However, my nervousness abated when her daughter, Judy along with Mrs. Sweeney warmly welcomed me and in subsequent interviews allowed me to take snapshots, including her playing the piano.

It was serendipity to meet May Peterson, Daisy's sister, residing in Toronto. My quest to obtain some photographs of Daisy in her youth continued to preoccupy my thoughts. In a conversation with Mrs. Husbands, an elder in Montreal, I mentioned my search for archival church records. Although she was not able to retrieve any documents, she located May Peterson's contact information. I quickly arranged a meeting at her home and enjoyed two wonderful encounters. May was extremely hospitable, shared her family history in St. Henri and to my utter delight made available to me a collection of family photographs featuring Daisy at different stages of her life. The most endearing was a childhood portrait of Daisy wearing a bonnet. Perusing the photo albums, I was plunged into Daisy's world spanning over a generation. Luckily my sister owned a digital camera so she photographed the whole collection. (See Appendices D, E, F, and G)

My next chance encounter was through the internet. During an online search, I happened to read a blog about a gospel tribute honouring Daisy Peterson Sweeney and written by Kenneth Hemmerick, her adopted son. I think I last saw Kenneth about thirty years ago but when I phoned he was helpful and confirmed dates and locations regarding Daisy's educational accomplishments. I gleaned some useful tidbits of information about her early life.

Added to the mix was my contact with Robert “Bud” Jones, war veteran, former boxer and self-proclaimed historian of African Canadian history. He was featured in a local newspaper found in my late father’s bookcase showcasing his enormous archival collection of Black history stored in his basement. I tracked him down through Dorothy Williams, the Black historian in Montreal and connected via email. Although he and his wife invited me to browse their collection, unfortunately I never finalized a trip to Brockville to talk further about my project.

I also reacquainted myself with Anthony Sherwood, a former resident of St. Henri and athletic coach at the NCC. As teenagers, we occasionally played badminton at the NCC. Anthony is now an award-winning African Canadian actor, director and documentary filmmaker. During a search at the Sound and Moving Image Library at York University, I viewed his short documentary about life in Montreal for Blacks which sparked a connection to my research. When I contacted Anthony via email, he was very supportive, reminisced about piano lessons with Daisy and referred me to various websites and books.

These reconnections were intriguing and reinforced that no single source (including Daisy’s sister) can know enough about a subject’s childhood. However it was Daisy Sweeney as a singular force who re/united us – she embodied the common link to the past as well as the present. I followed up on leads and these people opened their hearts to me.

At times, I felt like a detective looking for clues about Daisy, particularly pertaining to her early years. As I carefully amassed small bits of evidence I became

more aware of how little I actually knew about Daisy Sweeney which added to my frustration of how elusive she was. Yet, some of the sparse sources came alive from an eclectic collection of insights. This reacquaintance research experience proved to be one of the most uplifting.

Emotions

Emotion is an integral part of Black life; one filled with turmoil and strife; in the ways of speech, talk, thought, being in touch with your emotions is a reality for most Africans of the Diaspora. The pauses, laughter, silences, hesitations, repetitions, questions, inflections, and jumbled and clear speech intersect to convey powerful messages. To try to intersect emotions and intellect instead of examining them as separate entities extends the inquiry to a deeper level of synergy, sensitivity and intimacy as legitimate dimensions for the researcher and participant.

I would also suggest that any overt display of emotion is instructive and meaningful within a given context. Collins (1991) asserts that the ethic of caring suggests that “personal expressiveness, emotions and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process; the component of an ethic of ‘caring’ is the appropriateness of emotions in dialogue” (p. 215).

As an othermother, Daisy Sweeney assumed standpoints of agency and authority in her explicit aim to not only empower me but also affirm her maternal agency. She draws upon her mothering expertise to disrupt our space with the need to hear, understand, see and interact with the one who is conducting the research. Following two noteworthy poignant sessions filled with tears and hugs, Mrs. Sweeney

concluded with, “You renewed my soul, you renewed my soul.” Her comment indicated to me that I had touched her consciousness in a profound personal affirming way that reached in and proffered a lifeline, a renewed source of inspiration, energy and strength. Through our conversations, we embraced and rejoiced in the act of connectedness and in the process transformed some of the complexities of our lives into a source of inner healing, ancestral reverence and self-affirmation. Daisy was religious and believed in God in the traditional sense, while I sensed a higher creative force or consciousness. These differing perspectives enhanced our communication and helped us stay centered and connected.

This can be an example of how “healing...can protect us from dehumanization and despair” (hooks, 1989, p. 8). It underscores the issue of who was involved in the process of healing. These were the best interviews for me because of the spontaneity and self-direction. These self-defining episodes rang melodious and heightened the collaborative relationship between interviewee and interviewer. “We were both taking risks, grounded in mutual respect and fueled by the shared goals of using the subject’s life story to inspire” (Gershenowitz, 2005, p. 71). Her profound and spontaneous outpouring of emotions was important to our mutual healing and risk-taking. These healing dimensions of oral narrative were central to our need to self define and assert a sense of collective responsibility and empowerment. Restorative healing as a form of resistance and reconciliation to racist and sexist oppression cannot be ignored.

There were frequent intermittent periods when Daisy Sweeney also experienced hacking coughing spells. I immediately turned off the tape recorder and

waited quietly until she settled back into a more comfortable state. I proffered Kleenex, sips of water and murmured comforting words. Mrs. Sweeney would stop coughing, regain her composure, sip her “booze” (lemonade) and then apologize profusely for these coughing outbursts.

These were tough moments—the physical and emotional upset was evident; her body would be consumed by jerking motions, her face contorted, deep irrepressible coughing emanating from her soul. During those moments, I reflected upon many things; mortality, my father’s palliative care, Mrs. Sweeney’s condition, long-term healthcare and its systemic regard and disregard for our elder citizens. I felt ambivalent at times, mothering her and yet experiencing moments of inadequacy in terms of what more I could do to ease her distress. My limited experience with ailing elders signaled my lack of knowledge and also challenged my intuitive resources.

It was critical to also attend to the full range of unique qualities based on the narrator’s race, age, physiological conditions and gender dynamics. The active nurturing of this uniqueness demanded attention to the emotional, spiritual and cultural nuances in all its ambiguities and richness.

As a result, my role became more than interviewer; the fluidity of roles became interchangeable when I consciously switched to caregiver during those visits. I offered companionship and as an insider, recorded her life. Invariably, we digressed onto another topic, a discursive practice. I believe that this happened in both a conscious and unconscious manner. I would suggest that our shared racial history, extended relationship and gender afforded a comfortable opening for developing

rapport. Gluck and Patai (1991) declare that active nurturing situates gender as a basic unit of analysis in oral history methodology. I would propose that gender identity is not a standalone and intersects with multiple social constructions—in this case, of race, age, social class, discourse, religion, cultural norms and residency or geographical location, disability inextricably complicate and inform our communication scheme.

Ong (In Fulton, 2006) asserts “oral cultures have an empathetic and participatory way of knowing rather than the distanced objectivity found in literate culture” (p. 14). Here I became connected. These intensely emotional moments, strengthen the complex bond during the interview and the writing process.

However, in my post observation field notes, it occurred to me that my willing presence may be enough—transmitted through my sense of ease, empathy and positive energy. This spiritual connection transcended the physical contact, illuminated a metaphysical experience—a healing power that transmits through the spirit, a discursive practice countering non-traditional practices as central to redefining traditional interview strategies.

What bearing does this have on opening up the private life of Daisy? The constancy of her warm and endearing spirit was always present although there was reticence at times to elaborate on certain subjects such as her courtship and marriage. Marriage was considered a normative aspiration that was also seen by women as a refuge where they hoped to get male support and protection. Admittedly it was one of Daisy’s dreams that failed. I sensed that her reluctance stemmed from her possible

shame about his 'playing the numbers' (betting on horse races - a fact which May Peterson, her sister later confirmed in an interview). As a result, the strained marital relationship ended in divorce. This event resonated as another major chord in our intergenerational lives.

Daisy constantly acknowledged familial and kinship connections. On multiple occasions, she interjected the conversations to muse about my striking likeness and mirror image to my mother noting, "You look so much like your mother, so much like her...every time you turn, I see your mother." Other times, she would refer to my father as a "gentle and dignified man" and in doing so validated his memory. Her compliment also struck an emotional chord with me in my longing to reunite with my father. We look for traces of the familiar to affirm our everyday lives and establish an intimacy and familiarity in our relationships.

These intuitive feelings with Mrs. Sweeney are subconscious elements between people. According to Some (1994) there is no theoretical literature or quantitative research about these feelings. They just exist—in the mind, the inner spirit, and the nonverbal. The speech of silence that Some suggests has profound respect for the integrity of meaning as an entity separate from language. In silence, meaning is no longer heard, but felt; and feeling is the best hearing, the best instrument for recording meaning. Meaning is made welcome as it is and treated with respect.

Preliminary Visit and Impressions – Field notes

It was a warm, muggy summer evening. Judy Sweeney graciously picked me up at the downtown hotel and drove to Floralties Verdun Nursing Home, 1050 Gordon, Verdun for my preliminary conversation with her mother, Mrs. Daisy Sweeney. The nursing home was located on a quiet residential street dotted with small, tidy single detached and duplex style homes. When we arrived, I noted a lack of signage. The institution was a non-descript two-storey rectangular building couched in muted beige and yellow brick; the landscape boasted mature trees. As I entered through the side door, I was immediately struck by a familiar muggy, antiseptic odor permeating the air—a reminder of the seniors' residence where my Aunt Cynthia had languished in her final days.

Mrs. Sweeney was dining in her room so I waited in the lounge-dining area. Although the interior was stark and clean, natural light streaming from the large windows lit up the room. The spacious dining area consisted of melamine tables with four to six wooden chairs per grouping. There were a few White patients sitting in wheelchairs at the dining tables. They looked wan, pale and forgotten. Two female middle-aged staff (of African and Southeast Asian descent) served dinner in an almost robotic fashion. There were no smiles, laughter or even light conversation exchanged between and amongst them. The elders did not talk or interact with one another or with the staff members. At the opposite side in the lounge, overstuffed wing chairs, a sofa and a wilted palm slouched beside the window. An upright piano was wedged in

a corner. A pastel coloured still life painting adorned another wall. The room was enveloped in a blanket of melancholy commingled with heavy cooking odours.

As I observed the space, I pondered about the healthcare system, the treatment of our elders, employment opportunities for older, racialized females, intergenerational relationships and working conditions in the service industry within the broader context of the ethic of caring and creating a socially just world. I pictured a paradox in the face of longevity and the human condition. How could our elders affirm their sense of worth, mental and emotional wellness within the confines of these walls? What stimulus existed that contributed to wholesome longevity? I made a mental note to return to the lounge one day with Mrs. Sweeney to play the piano and chat with the other residents.

Upon entering her room, I observed Mrs. Sweeney sitting upright in bed, dressed in green pants and a floral hospital shirt. I introduced myself and Daisy Sweeney burst into smiles, nodded and was obviously delighted to see me. She identified my first name, my mother's name and remembered three of my four sisters. Out of respect for elders, I addressed her as Mrs. Sweeney. We kissed and embraced. Her brown skin was smooth and soft.

Mrs. Sweeney was 87 years old, rotund with soft grey hair. She had suffered a stroke causing weakened facial muscles. Daisy was also afflicted with arthritis, particularly acute in her legs and confined to bed or her wheelchair. I noted that her dry sense of humor was intact. She smiled easily and joked heartily with a distinct twinkle in her eyes. Her speech slurred at times, emphasizing sluggish intonation and

her enunciation was accentuated by coughing spasms that intermittently disrupted our conversation.

She shared a semi private room and her bed was closest to the hallway door with a separate adjacent bathroom. Her roommate, a frail, petite white Francophone woman sat by the window on the opposite side. The room was spacious and accommodated two standard hospital beds, nightstands, a lumpy floral armchair crammed beside an armoire containing a small fridge, and a storage cupboard containing sundry items. The most notable item was an electric keyboard. There was an array of family photos on the wall facing her bed (See Appendices H, I, J, K). A neglected ivy plant, a gift from her son Kenny, who sported a green thumb, withered on top of the armoire. I instinctively splashed some nourishment from my water bottle into its hardened soil. Due to the presence of another visitor, her roommate and Judy, I was compelled to adapt and defer my plans to commence my interview. The presence of kinfolk also narrowed the social distance between the participant and researcher in starting the process of “active nurturing of the interview process” as expressed by Gluck and Patai (1991, p. 9). In the meantime, I tried to create a relaxed atmosphere as we caught up on family history, exchanging stories about friends and members of the Black community. Daisy proudly showed me family photos. Later on, when Judy and Mrs. Sweeney explained the purpose of my visit to the guest, she amicably departed. I recognized that ideal conditions seldom prevail.

Admittedly, I felt shortchanged. Although the initial encounter with Daisy appeared stiff with an air of formality, the unexpected presence of a visitor and the

waning evening hour also compounded our limited engagement. However, upon further reflection in my field notes, I recognized that this opportunity actually allowed me time to recollect about our mutual Montreal connections and as conversation unraveled, the tone became more light-hearted. It created a comfortable sidebar because it lessened my initial awkwardness and reinforced the social purpose of oral history. I was able to read Mrs. Sweeney's interaction with her longtime friend and her daughter, deflect the attention from myself, as researcher, create a congenial space to establish rapport with Mrs. Sweeney and begin to acquaint myself with a sense of rhythm about her daily life in the nursing home. In tracing this rhythm, it was important to document the daily experiences of Mrs. Sweeney and the effect these rhythms impacted on her life.

Cutler (1984) asserts "rapport is another key to accuracy in touchy interviewing: creating a warm and friendly atmosphere is conducive to subsequent frank conversation. Cutler further affirms that accuracy begins before the tape recorder is turned on" (p. 82). Even though the participant agrees to embark on the journey with the researcher, there is still a certain degree of apprehension moving into 'unknown territory'. I accept responsibility for establishing rapport and building trust with Mrs. Sweeney.

Due to the late start, I proceeded to ask Mrs. Sweeney some standard questions about her family background such as: where were you born; tell me about your parents/occupation; where did you live; what was school like for you; who were your role models. The subsequent frame encapsulated her responses to her childhood.

Daisy Elitha ‘Trouble’ Sweeney (she jokingly inserts ‘Trouble’) was born in Montreal, Quebec on May 7, 1920. Her maiden name was Peterson. Her mother, Olivia Kathleen (nee John) born in St. Kitts, West Indies was a homemaker. Her father, Daniel, was originally from Tortola, British West Indies and employed as a railway porter in Montreal. They established their residence in St. Henri, now known as ‘Little Burgundy’ on Plymouth Grove near St. Antoine (See Appendix L). The family consisted of two girls and three boys. She is the second eldest, a year apart from her older brother, Frederick, who died of tuberculosis at age 15. Charles played the trumpet in Montreal nightclubs; Oscar, May and Daisy played piano. Later in life, her sister May taught piano and worked with Oscar as his secretary.

Daisy Sweeney attended Royal Arthur School at the age of six along with her siblings. She completed seventh grade. (In 1970, she obtained her high school diploma through an adult education program at Thomas Moore—a private institution operated by nuns.) She recalls having an affinity for mathematics—particularly long division. Her father taught all his children arithmetic, reading and writing before they started school. Daisy remembered the names of her grade one teacher Mrs. Langsdale, Mr. Bisset, the principal and recalled that all her teachers were White.

Daisy’s father was her most influential role model and mentor. He was a self-taught pianist and talented composer who taught his children to play the piano. It is noteworthy to discuss the absence of her father. Sleeping car porters were often absent from their households several weeks at a time, while Black women struggled to maintain the integrity of the Black family and were compelled to stay at home to care

for the children (Williams, 1999). In spite of his physical absence, her father played a major role in her childhood, as noted later in her life story. The documentary film *The Road Taken* (1996) notes that this occupation, dominated by Black men, became synonymous with *elite* in the Black community, particularly during the challenges of the Great Depression and World Wars. It was also instructive that her parents' singular and interdependent roles in raising a family overlapped with traditional western family ideology which presupposes a male breadwinner and a female homemaker (Enloe, 2000).

Mrs. Sweeney fondly recalled her father, "He was a great teacher and gave extra homework." Her parents valued education and were strict disciplinarians. The most important thing she learned from them was to "obey or strap". We both instinctively laughed at her blunt disclosure because of the commonality and shared experience of child-rearing practices, despite our intergenerational and differing historical contexts.

Daisy Sweeney's subsequent comment reinforces the notion of respect for parental status in the Black community entangled with the dire consequence of misbehavior.

We were taught to respect. And my father no way, no way. He was the master ruler. He gave me the strap. Whenever any of us did anything out of place, my mother would say "I'll tell your father".... My mother just had to say when your father comes home, because she was quiet. She just challenged us with

his name. Well, you know—a man’s voice is stronger so she just had to threaten us. She had to do the talking—we had to do the work (smiles).

My own parents echoed those explicit sentiments in their childhood anecdotes. There was no middle ground. The exposure of this truth—“obey or strap” where her tone changes to mimic her father’s words—encapsulates the stringent disciplinary measure from one generation to the next. It was the *force de rigueur* in our community that signaled a commonality across the intergenerational divide, caused me to reflect upon our respective upbringing and revealed important information about parental relationships with their children.

Daisy’s subtle reference to her mother in this instance was striking because although it may imply deference to physical disciplinary measures, suggested by her quiet manner, perhaps disquiet to corporal punishment was silenced by patriarchy. Daisy’s mother disassociated herself from bodily punishment and instead commanded respect from her children through her words. Her actions could also imply a veil of covert resistance in the face of male dominance affirming her mother’s sense of agency in her private domain as a homemaker. How would Daisy reinforce, reinvent or reject maternal influences in her roles as mother and othermother? In contrast to my upbringing, my mother and othermothers meted out the punishment immediately without threat or reprisal from my father.

Tracing her oral reconstruction, Daisy openly conveyed the patriarchal and dominant voice of her father and her mother’s muted authority. Mothering scholar, O’Reilly (2006) notes that “white mothering is defined and controlled by the larger

patriarchal society in which they live. Mothers do not make the rules—they simply enforce them” (p. 93). Daisy Sweeney’s mother actively opposed, manipulated and defied the rules on her own terms by deferring and perhaps obliterating the strap punishment. In the Black community the strap was the feared form of punishment, while the wooden spoon was considered a mild form of discipline. I recounted to Daisy how my mother splintered several wooden spoons while chasing me around the dining room table for some infraction. Sometimes we would all end up splitting our sides with laughter and the punishment forgotten.

My observations and reflections recorded in field notes before and after interviewing probed my own accuracies and inaccuracies in interviewing style and questioning techniques. The pre and post notes have been insightful avenues of information about my predispositions, assumptions and hopes. For instance, prior to my first conversation with Daisy, I experienced ambivalent feelings of excitement and disquiet based on my divergent perspectives of her life—as the former piano teacher and public persona. I was also a bit reticent about my upcoming encounter since I had not seen or spoken with Mrs. Sweeney for literally decades. Occasionally her name popped up as a random point of inquiry. Inadvertently the private and public imagery clashed as I reflected upon how our conversations would expose, conspire and mask my anticipation.

The following jot notes offer a sampling of my impressions of my first visit: “very pleasant intro – both DS and Judy were very welcoming; Daisy is surprisingly alert given her medical condition; DS adored the green throw I gave her; conduct

interviews during the day –sensed nervous excitement (both DS and me); did not want to really pursue my preset line of questioning given the circumstances; DS recalled my name immediately as well as my sisters’; talked about the weather – sweltering and muggy; compared/contrasted Montreal with Toronto; speech slurred at times; reminisced about some mutual family friends and acquaintances; some intrusion on my part because DS had not finished her dinner – entertaining a visitor; ask Judy in advance about potential visitors; remember the code for entry; DS inquired about my piano playing; DS anticipates next visit.

Obviously, I needed to make some adjustments to my upcoming interviews. My initial field notes tended to concentrate on logistical details that framed the sessions such as the time of day and the duration of the interviews. It was quite apparent that Daisy and I wanted to bridge the gap by discussing special events in Montreal, family life and of course the piano. Equally important was my awareness to tread slowly when posing questions and maintain an open mind and heart. I felt optimistic about the upcoming interview sessions with Daisy Sweeney.

Interviewing

Anderson & Jack (1991) contend that the interview is “a critical tool for developing new frameworks and theories based on women’s lives and women’s formulations” (p. 18).

My interviews were conducted at the nursing home and varied in length— between two and eight hours over a period of two months during summer vacation in addition to several other visitations throughout the year. My visits would generally

begin in the late morning allowing time required for her breakfast and other morning routines.

My interviewing format comprised both standard questioning and informal conversation. The standard questions allowed me to begin the conversations in a perfunctory manner at the initial stages of our sessions. For example, I grouped my questions into categories under 1) training, 2) pedagogy, 3) her interactions with the community, 4) being a pianist, 5) being a teacher, 6) work and 7) family, although they were not approached in a linear manner. At the onset of my interview, I inquired about her life experience as a piano teacher because I believed this topic constituted a major part of her/self. This would allow Daisy to express her story with less reliance on memory recall; and would help to overcome undue tension for both of us. For instance, I asked what did she enjoy most/least and who taught her. I felt this approach was necessary to capture rudimentary biographical data.

The most frequent model suggested by Gagnon (1981) is the 'in those days/now' opposition. He claims that it is the simplest way for an older informant, addressing a younger interviewer born in the new culture, to mould his memory (p.54).

On another level, answers to standard questions also required clarification and probing behind the conventional answers. When I posed an open-ended question that involved a recount of her family life, there were many opportunities to inquire about further details. Feminist scholars who conduct oral narrative interviews (Fulton, 2006; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Anderson & Jack, 1991; Norrick, 2005; Thompson, 1984; Vaz,

1997) counter this dimension, recognizing that standard questions can also limit, strain and interrupt the flow and relevancy of the conversation. I attempted to nurture my interviews in a natural, interactive and authentic manner by using my ‘gut’ and intuitive insights concerning her physical and mental state, the mood, the temperature and my persona. This tricky balance really stretched my boundaries as I wrestled with understanding the ambiguities of oral narrative methodology.

As time progressed it was apparent that I was not following the standard question and answer interviewing dictums. The African feminist life history method involves forging relationships and building trust, which relies on the ability to penetrate layers of access (Borland, 1998, Passerini, 1989; Alabi, 2005). To avoid assuming the air of ‘an armchair anthropologist’ and appropriating the personal oral narrative, I needed to establish ethical research methodologies. I needed to look within to find that which makes me—who I am in terms of feelings, beliefs, morals, hopes, dreams, fears and prejudices.

Secondly, I looked outward to understand our social world while defining the reality of Daisy Sweeney and myself. Finally I must analyze my personal experience and try to figure out what has happened in my past to bring me to my current place and how that relates to where I hope to go in the future. There was an internal dialogue on how to best design this life history research I know was needed (Brock, 2005, p. 127).

Engaging in conversations allowed a flow of ideas, actions and opinions to occur naturally. In this mode, questions generated about Mrs. Sweeney’s life arose

naturally within the embedded narratives and complexities of the interviewing process. Fulton (2006) posits that the “mingling of both standard questioning and natural informal conversations suggest a paradigm shift from either/or dichotomies to inclusive both/and that delimit our understanding of oral narrative (p.16).” For example, I would pose a question about her discipline strategies with her children and interject with personal stories about punishment my mother meted out to me. My mother was a strict disciplinarian and the wooden spoon was her trusted accomplice.

Me: How did you discipline your children?

DS: I strapped my kids. No really big reason. If they didn't come straight home from school....If they didn't do something at school.

While my interview strategies may be constrained by certain social parameters, unique moments and emotional responses such as this one conveyed a nuanced understanding. I accepted the foregoing expression at face value—a subjective response to a particular dimension of her childhood. Her vocal intonation and facial expression affirmed and maintained its accuracy and attest to a cultural sensibility. Daisy's bold, earthy, spontaneous response did not require my probing; it stated truth. This comment again illuminated her father's control...“My father was always a threat. All my mother had to say was when your father comes home. It wasn't the wooden spoon. It was the strap. The strap has a resonance.” Even after 80 years, the memory of this punishment was intact.

A moral predicament continued to haunt me though—to believe in my information was to believe in Daisy Sweeney, as subject or narrator, as elder, as woman. In her research, Peterson (1997) eloquently reveals:

Life history research makes it possible for the researcher to know an experience in the same way that the subject knows it.... The subject in life history research shares the details he or she thinks are important. To better understand how the experiences of black women influence the development of self, one has to be willing to accept the authenticity of their lives as they remember it. The stories that black women tell about themselves can be a rich resource for the recorder. These stories (both factual and fictional) provide little clues that enable the researcher to recognize the essential structures for the development of self. (p. 157)

When interviewer and narrator share similar backgrounds that include norms for conversation and interaction, interview strategies must be particularly explicit to avoid interference (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 14). Our conversations were interchangeably a *mélange* (blend) of Daisy's stories, brief responses to my queries, pauses, memory lapses, digressions, laughter, direct observation and silences. It was significant when Daisy shifted roles from narrator to interviewer and questioned, directed, redirected and ruptured conversation situating herself as the interviewer. During these moments, I became the storyteller, the *griot* and the respondent bearing testimony to my life episodes. This reciprocity of roles was an affirmation of the worth of my life and my wellbeing. It was an interesting aspect of this research.

There were obvious physical relapses. Sometimes, Mrs. Sweeney would appear oriented and alert, joking and engaging in repartee. Other times her energy level would be flagging and she would need to rest more. She was plagued with discomfort from headaches, arthritis and respiratory problems. She was constantly dabbing her eyes. I do not know what caused this irritation—sensitive eyes, a cold, fallout from her stroke, sinus condition, allergies and I did not ask. I talked to her soothingly, stroked her hand and rearranged her posture, as she would invariably slump over to the side during these spells.

Since Mrs. Sweeney was fond of soft drinks, her daughter, Judy kept the fridge stocked full of carbonated lemonade beverages. Daisy enjoyed sipping on soft drinks or “booze” as she liked to call it. Her candor and quick wit was refreshing. She was always gracious and offered me refreshment.

On occasion, I would brush, comb and braid Daisy’s hair, accompany her to the dining room for lunch and wheel her around the corridors.

The sweltering humid days would reverberate with the overhead ceiling fan droning insipidly as our conversations competed with notable hallway disturbances such as loud talking, yelling and patients’ buzzers, moaning, clattering of dishes and moving equipment.

When the heat became unbearable, I would wheel her outside for some relief as well as a change of location. I think she enjoyed being outdoors as much as I did. Her smile would become deeper, radiant and her hair would gently blow in the humid breeze. I would sense a contented stillness radiating from her and between us;

peaceful, calm, and reflective as I wheeled her up and down the street. She would comment about signage such as the For Sale posted outside a home across from the institution, the flower gardens, the grove of trees, and the greenness of the grass. She remarked about the chirping of the birds, the warm sun and the myriad sounds around her. Her sensibilities sharpened. I sensed a comfort zone between the two of us. People passing by would smile and say “Bonjour” (Hello). Daisy would reply “Bonjour, comment ça va?” (Hello, how are you?) I noticed she conversed easily in French, joking with the staff. She relished this interaction and took pride on her adept conversational proficiency.

Although the language barrier may have presented another hurdle for Anglo Black people in that era, Daisy hailed her bilingual status in her comment “I am a bilingual Quebecoise!” However, I was reticent because my verbal command of the language had deteriorated. While I sometimes uttered scrambled and unrecognizable responses, the staff, in turn, appeared indifferent and continued their banter. Mrs. Sweeney enjoyed a comfortable relationship with her roommate, residents and staff who fondly referred to her as “The Pianist.”

Similarly, I was curious about the specifics of her school day routine, friendships, dress code, gender specific and co-educational activities, assessment and evaluation. My data collection was quite sparse. Her memory was fragile. As Perry (1992) queries, “What is there to do when a crucial piece of information is missing” (p. 92) I traversed a similar course not to become immobilized by seeming gaps in her life story but to rely on materials found in many other sources. To that end, I

concentrated on her work, music education, community ties and the intersections of othermothering practice.

One day, I experienced a disturbing moment with the head nurse. I decided to rearrange the bedroom furniture to open up more space as Daisy's roommate had relocated to another floor. I shifted the empty bed over a few meters and reinserted its plug. Then I moved a chair closer to her bed and spread out my materials. The head nurse walked by, noticed the irregular angle and stomped inside demanding why the bed was out of place. I replied in my halting French that I had relocated it to make more room and would return it to its original position once my visit was over. She was infuriated and ranted and raved about the proper positioning, the need for the bed to be plugged in at all times, the importance of the uniform look of the bedroom, and the liability of having an outsider move furniture. I waited politely until she finished her diatribe, repositioned the bed and acknowledged *mea culpa*. While I acknowledged that her comments addressed due diligence concerns, I resented her patronizing tone. For me, social interaction was a neglected dimension of this discourse. My visit with an infirmed, elderly client in long term care facility was reduced and rendered to nothingness. Meanwhile, Mrs. Sweeney was dozing in bed, unaware of the brief encounter.

First of all, I noted the long interval of separation prompted a different view of Daisy. My piano memories resonated, sitting on the hard piano bench in the sun-drenched room while Mrs. Sweeney drilled, prodded, praised and demanded my best. I regarded her as the strong Black woman—capable, proficient, hardworking and

independent. She is now an elderly, infirmed person and those social dynamics influence my own psyche and interview approach.

An important reason for exploring the meaning of music in the lives of elders is that music is the most social of all the arts. The literature shows that it is the social aspects of life that can be most affected by old age. Music therapy has been shown to have a role in the care and support of older people whose lives are adversely affected by illness and marginalization (Hays, Bright & Minichiello, 2002, p.166).

For example, during one interview session, I spontaneously sat down at Mrs. Sweeney's keyboard and began to practise my scales. At that moment, I ceased to be the outsider researcher or interviewer. I felt transposed, entrapped and transported to an earlier time and place when I embodied a different set of imposing characteristics— anxious, awkward, powerless, and frustrated, by those by-gone feelings of ineptitude. Those buried emotions when I was a youngster learning to play the piano with Mrs. Sweeney were resuscitated. I was engaging in a public and visible act—and my piano skills were haphazard as I struggled to compose myself and focus on the keyboard and her tutelage.

Walkerdine (1987) suggests that this might have been “an engagement with the necessity for placing myself (sic) in history and history in myself (sic)” (p. 3). As the obedient piano student, boundaries became blurred within my interviewer-researcher-piano student role and, the tables were turned. How did our participation affect the kinds of interchange, impose limitations and reap advantages in relation to the

research sessions themselves? The obvious distinctions that separated me from Mrs. Sweeney were our generational, educational and social class differences. I was transformed into the privileged insider of her domain.

My awareness of how both our personal and collective agendas can diminish the listening process developed while interviewing on my third day and discovering that my expensive tape recorder was inoperable. The tape recorder repeatedly registered that all my file folders were full and that function would not permit me to open an empty file or folder. (Luckily, I later contacted a computer whiz friend who transferred my data with a flash key to my computer and created a compact disc). During that setback, I scribed quickly and erratically. It was quite frustrating because I could not scribe as fast as Mrs. Sweeney spoke. I continually stopped and asked her to rephrase, repeat and clarify her commentary. I noticed that there were many interruptions beginning with "Pardon me, did you just say, I'm not sure I caught that last comment..." How did this ineffective interviewing style affect my own attentive listening, the rhythm of the conversation, the imposition of another external disruption, the anxiety that Mrs. Sweeney and I might have felt, the reliance on technology, the lack of experience and how might that translate into a lack of research expertise on my part?

"Your turn..."

What was also revealing to me was how Mrs. Sweeney was able to reverse the hierarchal power of interviewer or researcher and collaborate as a partner in both our conversations and our silence. Silvera (1998) contends that in any situation where one

is the interviewer, a power dynamic already exists and it is critical that the interviewer freely exchanges substantive personal information to diminish the dominated/dominant effect.

Another instructive note was how various circumstances aggravated and invigorated the telling of Daisy's life story—her physical and mental condition induced by the aging process and illness, the semi-private interview setting in a nursing home, cultural norms and nuances and the geographical conundrums of conducting research in another city, my relative inexperience in interviewing, organizing and recording oral narratives.

Upon reviewing our conversation, I was dismayed and disappointed that this interview lacked detailed discussion of feelings, attitudes and values that give meaning to events in her life. There were times when I felt I should not probe, ignore or disengage with her thoughts however I listened with interest and accepted her comments at face value. I found it difficult to advance or include any pauses, words or expressions that might have invited Daisy to continue or expand. I did not engage with her body language since my eyes were riveted to my notepaper. I also experienced heightened sensory awareness in listening. I felt forced to keep my head down and write. I wondered how the meaning I remembered while listening to a taped conversation would have been expressed differently compared to a scribed transcription. The loss of inflection, vocal quality and body language was a significant barrier to my interpretation. I shortened the conversation because of this temporary technical malfunction.

What are the upsides to this upheaval in the interviewing process? I learned that it is wonderful to have a network of accessible friends to assist with technological difficulties. I learned that I needed to have a backup plan. I learned that patience and adaptability were required. I learned to accentuate my listening skills and accelerate my handwriting. Yet, how might this have affected Mrs. Sweeney's flow of conversation?

These important considerations sometimes led to hesitations, pauses and minor hurt feelings on my part in spite of my commitment when I entered into this project wholeheartedly. It seemed so long ago when I sat on the mahogany piano bench in the two-storey duplex on Draper Avenue. My vivid memories as a child playing the piano were initially playful, joyous and resolve to get it right. I loved the slippery feeling of the ivory keys, as my fingers fumbled, and then became more fluid. However, I recognized that she also had a certain amount of input. She desired to be seen in a favourable light too. She traced her memory in a series of remembrances, denials, refusals, repressions, and dementia. Her memories were all tangled up sometimes. How did she understand her own struggles to remember? What risks did she recognize? What risks do I perceive? As her former student, I still stand in awe of her and in reverence. Nevertheless, a part of me shivered because of her sternness, her sharp wit, her keenness and obsession with perfection. I remembered those times of trepidation when I could not find those slippery black and white keys because of my blurred vision. My blurred vision was because I did not practise enough and my feelings were hurt when I received reprimands from Mrs. Sweeney. My maternal

grandmother was my steadfast interlocutor to whose home I would retreat to restore my spirit. My grandparents owned a roll or player piano. I loved that old piano partly because I didn't have to remember my exercises, scales or arpeggios—it just magically rolled out the tunes when I sat down to play! I was always fascinated with the internal mechanisms and remembered lifting up the wooden flap to peer and poke around. All those gizmos and gadgets in perfect order and working collaboratively were so fascinating!

My sisters and I regularly entertained a slew of kinfolk and friends including relatives and visitors from abroad. These piano playing occasions were initially enjoyable during my earlier years, but later on I rebelled. My interest in piano was replaced with a yearning to be outdoors—playing badminton in the backyard with friends, biking, skipping, and going to the park, making snow forts, snowmen, skating, and skiing, tobogganing, horseback riding and later - boys. I relished these activities more—playing the piano confined me to the indoors imposed like a prison sentence, particularly on a sunny day. My resentment spilled over into my former enthusiasm and dedication. This lack of motivation transferred into my daily practice and rolled over into my lessons with Daisy Sweeney. She was a sharp intuitive teacher, sensed the change and of course kept in touch with my mother about my progress. I suspected that Mrs. Sweeney conspired and colluded with my mother. Although I do not recall specific phone conversations or meetings, I developed an uncanny instinct and heightened sensitivity when I entered Mrs. Sweeney's home for my weekly piano lesson.

As a teacher, I experience the same intuitive sense when a student presents an incomplete assignment. Is it the absence of that confidence accentuated by the halting gait into the room, the downcast eyes, the muttered greeting, and the slouched posture? How do we read our students? How do we un/read them? How do we prejudge them both in a positive and negative manner? How does that impact on our engagement with them? Why do I still experience hesitant feelings with some parent interactions and not others? How does this influence my expectations and exchanges with my students?

We shared many intimate moments that reconnected us after a decades apart, although my idealized memory of her erupted. I crossed into uncharted territory, beholden to an intuitive command “to play” and I felt dis-ease, unbalanced, less powerful.

According to Heald, there are not only rules about how to comport oneself as a piano player; there are also rules about who one must become (cited in Norquay, 2006, p. 116). Suddenly, I felt transformed back in time—into a submissive, dutiful classical piano student who fumbled and questioned her talent and skills. I was transported back into the practising mode not the playful which meant reproducing the correct body stance, finger positioning, head posture and feet placement. This deportment was a forgotten or more precisely a subconscious element of my being. I was now experiencing the constraints of a power imbalance—one of revived teacher-student relationship in a way I never had before. The gap of older-wiser pivoted against younger-inexperienced. Mrs. Sweeney was able to penetrate my psyche and reverse

the power roles. Her spirited command of the piano, her status as an elder, her status of a dependent, infirmed patient; all acted in tandem to consciously and/or unconsciously subvert and challenge my role of researcher. This was the power of the Black woman.

Mrs. Sweeney was caught in the juxtaposition. She had not submitted to traditional roles of a working-class woman or in her upward status to middle-class. She carved her own economic and social space within the private sphere of her domicile. Her work offered not only material independence but also emotional sustenance and a social identity. She was caught between breadwinner roles—that of enhancing the quality of life for her family and at the same time behaving like a housewife with a family in the 1950s. This was an era when working-class Black women were tied mainly to White women’s notion of motherhood. The reality of Black working-class women and the complexity of working class women’s struggles are often excluded by feminist chroniclers. “The lack of analysis has privatized the *woman question* to white middle class women and appropriates the sex oppression of women as a white, middle class phenomenon” (Brand, 1999, p. 83). The emphasis on upward mobility in terms of social class also shifted the focus of responsibility to Mrs. Sweeney because her husband was absent, working on the railroad. Her father was absent due to his work on the railroad while her mother remained at home nurturing and caring for Daisy. It is interesting that Daisy settled into a similar lifestyle with her husband, although she was also a breadwinner. How does the absence of the male breadwinner affect familial socioeconomic conditions? How does Daisy Sweeney’s

income generating revenue alter the face of femininity as a capable woman in a labor force where labor demands are not as high and where the definition of femininity is that of the ultra feminine, helpless female?

King (1973) points out:

White definitions of Black motherhood foster the dominant groups' exploitation of Black women by blaming Black women for their characteristic reactions to their own subordination. To understand this balancing act, as an othermother and the need to ensure the emotional resiliency of *otherdaughters*, African women are often described as strong disciplinarians and suggest the apparent contradiction that othermothers "do not socialize their daughters to be passive or irrational. (p. 12)

Othermothers are domineering precisely because they are determined to mould their otherdaughters into whole and self-actualizing persons in a society that devalues black women (Collins, 1991).

Sociologist Cheryl Gilkes suggests that community othermother relationships are sometimes behind Black women's decisions to become community activists (cited in Collins, 1991, p. 50). Motherhood, whether blood mother, othermother or community othermother, can be invoked by Black women as a symbol of power. A substantial portion of Black women's status in African-American communities stems not only from their roles as mothers in their own families but also from their contributions as community others to Black community development as well.

Herein lays the notion of power between researcher and participant. To parlay the vision of African feminist theory, my work involves a contradiction. On the one hand, I seek to empower the woman I research by revaluing her perspectives, her life and her art in a world that has systematically ignored or trivialized women's culture. On the other, I hold an uneasy lens on my own subjectivity that leads to presumed social behaviors of an elder and a piano teacher (Borland, 1998, p. 32). This relationship of power tested my sensitivity as a scholar to this interpretive authority.

This was painful, stressful work for me in that it exposed memories, joys and insecurities as a former piano student and my piano lessons where I felt scrutinized under the keen, demanding gaze. Although we shared many intimate moments during our conversations that served to reconnect us after several decades apart, Mrs. Sweeney ruptured my internalized idealized memory. I crossed borders, beholden to an intuitive command to play. I felt uneasy, no longer in control of the conversation, or my role as an interviewer. Suddenly, I was transformed into the submissive, dutiful classical piano student who fumbled and questioned her talent. I assumed a practising mode not the playful style that freed me of the encumbrances of reproducing the correct body stance, finger positioning, and head posture and feet placement. This memory—forgotten or submerged in my subconscious revived the teacher-student interaction of long ago. Mrs. Sweeney penetrated my psyche, reconstructed the medley and reversed the power differential.

Themes implicit in White perspectives on motherhood are particularly problematic for Black women and others outside of this debate. First, the assumption

that mothering occurs within the confines of a private, nuclear family household where the mother has almost total responsibility for child-rearing is less applicable to Black families. However, while the ideal of the cult of true womanhood has been held up to Black women for emulation, racial oppression has denied Black families sufficient resources to support private, nuclear family households. Mrs. Sweeney's circumstances dictated that she work—the fact that she could work inside the home was a bonus. Her husband was a chef and during The Depression and for decades later, the primary type of work available to Black men was on the railroad as porters, red caps, chefs or performing other menial wage labor (Dorothy Williams, 1997).

As a piano teacher, she could provide the family with her constant presence and child rearing and also supplement the family income. Mrs. Sweeney needed to work and secondly, the scope of occupations was essentially limited to certain occupations (e.g. domestic, service industry) (See Appendix M).

Fulton (2006, p. 3) maintains that because of Black men's absence from their households, due to their "distant employment", high mortality rates and large scale unemployment and incarceration rates, historically Black women have struggled to maintain the integrity of Black families. Secondly, rigid sex-role segregation with separate male and female spheres of influence within the family, has been less commonly found in Black families than in White middle-class ones. The assumption that motherhood and economic dependency on men are linked and that to be a good mother one must stay at home, making motherhood a full-time *occupation* is similarly uncharacteristic of Mrs. Sweeney's domesticity (Collins, 1991, p. 44).

Barbara Christian (1988, p. 103) states, “There is no doubt that motherhood is for most African people symbolic of creativity and continuity.”

Language then becomes a dialogue between two subjects which speaks to the importance of community as well as the construction of knowledge, and wisdom which is reinforced through the ethic of caring. My conversations with Daisy Sweeney peppered with laughter, giggles, tears, pauses, cryptic communication and silent moments unveiled reflective and hesitant voices from hearts, minds and soul.

However there was another powerful source that I explored when interviewing Daisy Sweeney—the presence of her dreams, her slippage between two worlds and the balancing act that allowed me a view into those worlds.

In many non-western cultures, the ancestors have an intimate and absolutely vital connection with the world of the living. They are always available to guide, to teach and to nurture. They represent one of the pathways between the knowledge of this world and the next. Among the Dagara, the older you get the more you begin to notice spirits and ancestors everywhere. When you hear a person speaking out loud, alone, you don’t talk to them because he or she may be discussing an important issue with a spirit or an ancestor. (Some, 1994, pp. 9, 23)

During our conversations, Daisy was often somnolent and drifted off into her dream world. She would awake and share her dreams. “Sometimes I woke up teaching—I woke up getting ready to go to the Center (The Negro Community Center).” Other times, Daisy would stir and appear poised to say something but would

just nod her head. I would wait. These moments were comparable to Kogawa's reflections about her elder Uncle.

He seems about to say something, his mouth open as he stares straight ahead, his eyes wide. Then as if to erase his thoughts he rubs his hands vigorously over his face and shakes his head.... We sit in silence sipping and turning the cups around on the tips of our fingers. (Kogawa, 1981, pp. 3, 12)

After several intense experiences with Daisy, I began to understand when it was useful to probe what I was learning and when it was better to not continue. My acknowledgement to discontinue did not mean I disconnected with Daisy. On the contrary—it meant that the power of quiet, the power of silence conjoined and generated a conduit of trust, comfort and love. This contemplative peace did not require words, gestures or utterances and yet the meaning was still apparent.

Some (1994) addresses the speech of silence in the following passage:

The speech of silence has profound respect for the integrity of meaning as an entity separate from language. In silence, meaning is no longer heard, but felt, and feeling is the best hearing, the best instrument for recording meaning. Meaning is made welcome as it is and treated with respect. (p. 272)

There was certain vulnerability when these dream episodes occurred. Initially I grappled with the ineffable silences. I felt awkward, waiting and wanting to fill the silence with light-hearted useless chatter or continue onto the next question or topic. By the end of our interviewing I had achieved a measure of equanimity.

Intergroup interviewing by gender and race does not guarantee a bias-free interaction, yet such a combination “is more likely to create an empowering environment for the narrator (and for me as interviewer) and a more reliable finished product” (Etter-Lewis & Foster, 1996, p. 8).

Our conversations had an established routine with light chit-chat about food, community events, the weather, a brief synopsis of news events from the daily Gazette, followed by Daisy’s favorite topic: her family. There were many digressions in the process, as we commented on people and places that came to mind, discussed friends and family, and got reacquainted. Our dialogue was not always comfortable. There were paths I would not tread. Daisy never spoke about her courtship, marriage, sex, death or divorce.

“A house full of children is like a garden with flowers”—Daisy Sweeney

My husband said no children—I didn’t pay any attention. That was no problem. My husband said that. I said if he left me alone I couldn’t have them on my own (laughter).

I couldn’t see my home without children. There are many problems when they’re small but...if I could have children I wanted to.

According to Barkley Brown, (1991):

...for her, the decision to be a wife and mother first in a world which defined Black women in so many other ways, the decision to make her family the most important priority was an act of resistance to a system which would define her

place for her in terms of its own economic and racist needs. Thus, the maintenance of her children and family became the priority of her life (p. 81).

Furthermore, women of that time were expected to seek fulfillment within the confines of marriage, with their husbands functioning as providers and their children as evidence of their worth as human beings (Davis, 1999, p. 11).

As a married woman, Mrs. Sweeney had already planned to raise a biological family. It was the “natural order of things.” In the midst of objection from her husband, she forged ahead with her dream. “I couldn’t see my home without children”... suggests that the onus falls on him “if he left me alone”. Mrs. Sweeney was determined to become pregnant, give birth and raise a family, regardless of her husband’s opposition. She would not allow any obstacles to deter from that longing. Daisy valued motherhood, in spite of “the many problems when they’re small”.

In a similar biographic account, Paley (cited in Arcana, 1991) says that: she always wanted to be a mother; she never considered a life without children and thought about having them as soon as she married, at the age of nineteen. She considers her attitude “part of my general optimism” and views the bearing and raising of children not only as a natural outcome of love between women and men, but as a commitment to human life. (p. 199)

I understood and honoured her story and what needed to be protected from scrutiny and exposure because on several occasions, she would avert her eyes, close them, or change the subject. Daisy was always attuned to the risk to expose herself. One day, she vocalized her discomfort—“You want to put all my business out there!”

At that point, I withdrew and switched topics. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) asserts that “In reconstructing life a level of restraint and the discipline of disclosure is ever present. There are always things left unsaid, secrets untold or repressed, skeletons kept closeted” (p. 612). Family secrets are the private domain for many families – the other side of the family’s public face (hooks, 2001; Kuhn 1995).

In order to conclude Daisy’s complete portrait, it is instructive to present a glimpse about her suffering. There were intense and delicate moments that were often highly intrusive. Yet Daisy demonstrated an open willingness to share her suffering with me every day. She suffered from a stroke so the limitations of her illness varied from day to day. Sometimes I noticed she had less stamina to actively counteract her problems. “I feel sad today, I don’t know why; I’m drowsy; I feel hyper today; you have to excuse me.... I’m not doing too well; I feel great today; I feel pretty good thank; I don’t know why I’m getting these headaches”.

Although she took medication, she did not know what caused the pain. Despite being confined to the nursing home, Mrs. Sweeney kept in close touch with her family and friends. She maintained a sense of humour, sustained faith in a benevolent God and relied on prayer and song for solace. Daisy’s life is about history—a life story that hopefully inspires and teaches about how she influenced the world by taking enormous risks. But it’s also about developing a bond between subject and researcher.

As the sessions unfolded however, I began to appreciate an intergenerational bond. Daisy and I were both African-Canadians born in Montreal. She maintained a

professional although distant personal attachment with my parents. We were members of a large family. We both had connections to Royal Arthur Elementary School—she as a student and I, as a teacher at the beginning of my career. Daisy and I shared religious and social affiliations with Union United Church as well as the Negro Community Center respectively. Her children and I were peers and developed casual friendships at her home on my weekly treks for piano lessons. Her value system and upbringing reflected my parents. I saw my own face, looking back at me and Daisy may have seen herself in me.

Throughout her storied life, Daisy spoke of the survival skills she learned growing up in her household, the values of hard work, resourcefulness and extending herself, values instilled directly and because of her life experiences. Daisy consciously shaped her children's and other children's lives to ensure them access to and facility in various cultural contexts.

This final and special interview is engraved in my memory.

You revived my soul. You revived my soul. When you get together with your family and you say remember this, remember that, it glues you together. Your smile, your laugh invigorates. When you're alone, it's difficult; family is important. Don't say good-bye. Au revoir. Go to church. Play the piano. You didn't think you'd have so much fun with old people, eh? God bless.

Daisy followed a long tradition and urged me to do same: spend time with family, attend church and reignite my passion with the piano. These passages mixed with her inner emotions were clearly reflective of her heartfelt wishes for me. Our

intergenerational bond emerged; we bridged the distance; our trust in each other had grown and we had created an intimacy between us.

Her steadfast and plainspoken words reinforced her desire to bear children. Mrs. Sweeney carried out her desire to have her “garden full of flowers and plant the seeds” on her own terms. Her actions reveal a confident, obstinate, rebellious and independent character. She exercised her right to an autonomous voice and would later on adopt three more children—Kenny, Joan and Tina, in addition to three biological offspring and a blended family of two sons from her husband’s previous relationship. Although many Black families in Montreal engaged in adoption, most studies ignored the importance that Black women place on economic self-determination. Mrs. Sweeney recognized that she could exercise some control over her life. She used her resources and power of authority to effect change in the lives of other marginalized children. She instilled hope. Despite the socioeconomic hardships, Mrs. Sweeney (and her husband) responded to a pressing need to adopt guided by a deep rooted sense of loyalty to the ideals of family and community.

When I asked her why she adopted children this was her reply:

“Well, first of all I wasn’t sure I was going to have children because I lost one. A garden without flowers, not natural to me. So my husband at first...he didn’t want to, but I went ahead...not by myself (laughter) but he liked them. I think sometimes people are influenced by other people. I am influenced by myself.” With the same spirit, energy and straightforward manner she lead the way.

In this commentary, Daisy revealed a loss through miscarriage. Although she does not dwell on her bereavement, later on she also mentioned the death of one of her twin daughters.

She died a crib death...I was shocked. She wasn't sick. They said it was a crib death. She was just a few weeks I think. You can't deal with it because you don't expect it. I think my husband took it badly. It would be a shock.

In spite of the previous comment attesting that Mr. Sweeney did not want children at first, his grief was unbearable and both were stunned by the suddenness of the baby's death. At this point in the interview I was shocked by this news because I was never aware of her loss. I was speechless, offered my condolences, and remained quiet. Nothing seemed appropriate at this point so I waited for Mrs. Sweeney to continue. How did she feel as a mother bringing up this memory? What old wounds resurfaced? How did she tell her children about the death? What coping mechanisms were in place to help her and her family deal with the death? All these questions whirled around in my head but I declined from further inquiry. Why did I hesitate? I was only scratching the surface. I felt awkward posing these questions - out of respect for her as an elder woman—was an ingrained cultural and ethical impediment that overpowered my curiosity. My awkwardness at dealing with the question of death reverberated from childhood. In my family circle, we mourned in private. When my grandparents, relatives and friends died, disquiet took over the household space. We honored the deceased in a stoic manner, with only fleeting portrayals of our deep-seated grief. As an interviewer then, how do I interrogate these private spaces? I need

to pursue these questions at a later time in the conversation or at another scheduled session. How do I make visible these underlying hesitations? Do I push the boundaries to honor silence about private family matters, and if so how? This painful matter has gone unspoken for a long time or perhaps only in private spaces to confidantes. Daisy had decided to make it part of the public record.

As an adult, the task of maintaining a productive professional life, raising seven children, assuming community mothering responsibilities and enduring a marital breakdown became more complex but they did not stop her. Part of my reluctance was based on my own socialization of what was appropriate conversation with one's elders. Later on in another conversation about her marriage, Daisy disclosed that her husband was a gambler which strained the marriage and resulted in divorce. In some way, I sensed Daisy's strong aversion towards gambling by her intonation and facial expression—it remained a troublesome spot. I wanted her to talk for herself. I can only speculate that given her strict Christian upbringing, gambling was off limits and perhaps impacted negatively on their financial circumstances. Secondly, having experienced an impoverished childhood during both the Depression and World War II might have influenced her leisure pursuits.

Nasstrom (2005) suggests that to “acknowledge the constraints imposed on the authors or oral history-based biographies both the refusal of biographic subjects to discuss certain matters and the need to know complicates the process further” (p. 77). She also argues that oral history based biographies need to be about negotiation, compromise and dialogue that pushes boundaries. In Mrs. Sweeney's case, I have lost

something of her life history. At least if I had pursued the line of questioning I could have gathered more insights about her experiences and the kind of mothering she engaged in; and how it differs from othermothering practice. What kinds of social values in terms of grieving did she pass from one generation to the next? How did the grieving process open new spaces of emotional expression? There is so much of importance to be learned from her experiences about the kind of mothering we engage in and how it differs from other mothering practices: how did her children experience the loss and how does it shape their development and beliefs? My untested assumption is that she would have chosen to respond and share her painful experiences.

As a researcher I felt the tightness of cultural boundaries entrap my spontaneity to engage any further inquiries. I was hesitant to push because of our intergenerational interplay. I did not feel at that moment that the door was wedged open for further dialogue due to my own cultural and familial notions about discussing death. I read her nuances, her tone, her emphasis, her gaps and silences, they all resonated pain.

She possessed an inner strength grounded in the familial past. She found ways to believe and survive beyond the boundaries of her otherness and how she experiences the world. What can I learn from the exploitation of Daisy Sweeney? Wisdom is an important ingredient in African thought. The person who has knowledge but lacks wisdom is joked about in the Black community—“they have ‘book learning’ but no ‘mother wit’, knowledge but not wisdom” (Collins 1991, p. 208). Knowledge allows Black women to understand the interlocking systems of race,

class and gender oppression. Wisdom afforded Daisy Sweeney the tools needed to survive in this system and is essential to the survival of those subordinated by hegemonic forces. "Wisdom is lived knowledge" (Brock, 2005, p. 23).

Using the heuristic approach according to Patton (1990) to research being used places an emphasis on personal knowledge, in dwelling and the tacit dimension, thereby fostering a better understanding of Black women's survival. Patton also states that "tacit knowing is the inner essence of human understanding; it is what we know but can't necessarily articulate" (p.72).

The importance of family is another commonality, especially relationships with fathers. How does she come to understand the ways race constructed her realities? The qualities of her effective or affective teaching for words carry power in the African Canadian community. Connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of African knowledge and community and outweighs the needs of the individual in African thought which is related to a sense of being human (Asante, 1991; Brock, 2005; Collins, 1991). This reference supports my claim that I engaged in an interviewing style that reflected my intimacy and honesty with my deeper feelings of being human. Mrs. Sweeney and I shared a common bond that surpassed a detached male-oriented exchange; it was a female African way of knowing one that relates learned knowledge to actual experience; either personal experience and that of the community in general. To elicit dialogue and create the condition for me, as researcher to learn with the participant and to reflect on why we do it in a manner that

is akin to Douglas' creative interviewing strategy in which the interviewer engaged participants in a mutual search for self-understanding.

To consider emotions as a factor in both the data collection and the data analysis and the research design to establish a relationship with the study participant, the researcher must develop the capacity for empathy (Brock, 2005, p. 123). This bespeaks of an intimate connection with the subject under study. The relationship is more than researcher and researched; instead a connectedness develops between researcher and participant in their shared effort to interpret the essence of a critical human experience, as opposed to object and subject—a synergistic relationship develops bringing about co-researchers. Heuristic inquiry legitimizes and places at the forefront personal experiences, reflections and insights of you, the researcher (Patton, 1990).

Douglass and Moustakas (1984) posit that in heuristic inquiry discovery comes from a kind of being wide open in surrender to the thing itself, recognition that one must relinquish control and be tumbled about with the newness and drama of a searching focus that is taking over life. (Patton, 1990, p. 72)

The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre tradition or novelty has a universal and general claim as the right or privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism suspects all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural and political struggles. But postmodernism does not automatically reject conventional methods of knowing and telling as false or archaic. Rather it opens those standard methods to inquiry and

introduces new methods, which are also, then subject to critique (Richardson, 1998, p. 348). We need to seek multiple truths, multiple stories and importantly, make the connection between multiple selves— in my case as female person, teacher and researcher as inseparable.

There is an internal dialogue I am having on how to best design this life history research I know is needed (Brock, 2005, p. 127). I search within to find that which makes who I am, to experience feelings, beliefs, morals, hopes, dreams, fears and prejudices. I look outward to understand the environment, define the reality of those with whom I speak and myself. Finally, I analyze my personal experience and try to determine what has happened in my past to bring me to my current place and how that relates to where I hope to go in the future. Measor and Goodson (1992) argue that, the life writer-sociologist is not a passive transcriber, nor a dispassionate observer. I had to acknowledge and negotiate my different and shifting subject positions, contradictions and ambiguities along with memories reconstructed and perhaps not reconciled with Mrs. Sweeney as my piano teacher, with memories of my deceased father, and deeper introspection of myself as the personal me.

Borland's (1998) research carefully explores the interpretive conflict involved in the intergenerational story as "looking inward toward our own experience (our interpretive shaping of it as listeners) and outward to our audience (to whom we must display a degree of scholarly competence)" (p. 332). This was problematic for me; because I attempted to empower Daisy Sweeney's life by valuing her life and her art form in a world that has systematically marginalized her and her community. But I

found myself in an uncomfortable position of criticizing an individual who was already considered a role model. Conversely, I also wrestled with the fact that many may not recognize her life as valid, particularly – to quote Borland (1998) by “letting the subject speak for herself” (p. 64). This was tricky because I needed to respect her sense of herself in my presentation. There were several courses of action that my supervisor recommended that I followed. I talked to Mrs. Sweeney about my writing and research on an ongoing basis. I presented her with drafts which I read aloud so we could discuss misunderstandings and misinterpretations and negotiate issues. I tried to ensure that my selective narratives did not merely fit tidily into my preconceived notions.

On the one hand, I seek to empower the woman I research by revaluing her perspectives, her life and her art in a world that has systematically ignored or trivialized women’s cultural knowing. On the other, I hold an uneasy lens to my own subjectivity...that leads to presumed social behaviors (of Daisy Sweeney) as an elder and a piano teacher (Borland, 1998, p. 32). The relationship of negotiating power tests my questionable sensitivity as a scholar to this interpretive authority.

Our relationship was dynamic, based on interactive research, according to Ball (Measor and Sikes, 1992, p. 213). I was now experiencing the constraints and celebrations of our dynamic relationship—one as relived teacher-student relations. Mrs. Sweeney destabilized my preconceived notions of an equilibrium based on past realities. The overlapping spaces of agency, authority and autonomy were subtleties in the re-connecting relationship. This re-connection struck chords of dis-ease,

discomfort and dialectical critique and exchange. She defied the woman-centered, race-centeredness assumptions that I brought into the interview. Daisy Sweeney claimed her central place in our exchange; her place as elder, music teacher and othermother. These are her spaces of empowerment.

In spite of her diminishing physical abilities and memory loss, Daisy Sweeney continued her othermothering work in her explicit aim to empower Black children who even now are adults and especially me, as adult, teacher, doctoral candidate and researcher.

Oral History

History—as we traditionally know it in the mainstream, the written chronicle, has been ultimately justified and legitimized in our schools and higher learning institutions. At the other extreme, oral history—a social construct passed down through the tradition of oral storytelling helps us understand and validate our upheavals, and may change the trajectory of our lives.

Oral history defined by scholars (Brown, 1997; Hill, 1991) as historical information obtained through interviews, dates back to ancient storytelling times and has regained its popularity since the 1960s. It is a valuable tool that; collects oral accounts of women; motivates students to do research; teaches about the past and present contributions of women and explores the cultural and traditional portraits of Black women in the Diaspora. Hill (1991) also cautions that oral history may “reflect the biases and personal interests of the interviewer - a different story might be obtained by another interviewer” (p.xv).

According to scholars and historians (Bannerji, 1993; Gluck, 1991; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1998; Thompson, 1984), documentation of women's lives has been onerous because of their peripheral status and western academia's preoccupation with legitimizing the written word as more reliable and authentic over oral accounts. Oral history signifies a first step towards ultimate emancipation and opens up important new areas of inquiry for groups of people who have been ignored. Similarly, African womanist thinkers and historians (Brock, 2005; Davis, 1998; Etter-Lewis, 1996; Fulton, 2006; hooks, 2000; Terborg-Penn, 1996; Vaz, 1997) affirm that the oral history methodology is often unorthodox to traditional historians, because the concept of African diaspora women's oral history requires non-traditional methods and sources. Furthermore, traditional sources, those recorded in manuscripts or official documents failed to include the female presence and a female perspective when analyzing the data collection.

Researchers such as Brand (1998) and Hamilton (2007) have written about African-Canadian indigenous women. They documented the long tradition of oral history where stories are passed down through various oral mediums such as song, poetry, proverbs and personal histories (Brand, Bristow et al., 1999). In Daisy Sweeney's case, she focused her personal story reflecting on the values of hard work, family and community othermothering – going the extra mile because of her ingrained family values and life experiences. Her dedication to pursuing education was also an important ticket to her own emancipation.

Oral history can be readily integrated into the curriculum, although students need to be taught sensitivity to the subject, as well as their own. As a classroom social studies teacher, I sometimes employed this methodology to elicit deeper insight and knowledge about traditional and cultural issues encountered by their elders (Campbell, 2008.). Oral history is an accessible and democratic methodology which helps to open spaces of inquiry.

Thompson (1984) claims:

Oral history is not necessarily an instrument for change; it depends upon the spirit in which it is used. Nevertheless, oral history certainly can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of history. It can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of inquiry; it can break down barriers...between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside; and in the writing of history—whether in books, or museums, or radio and film—it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place. (p. 41)

Essentially we learn from our elders in the process of oral history. (Daisy Sweeney was the gatekeeper of stories. We need stories for disrupting Black women's identities, in order to oppose and affirm African humanity). It is through Daisy's (and others) voice and experience that we can hear sounds of resistance and healing. Fulton (2006) asserts that Black women's narratives show that oral histories are not mere 'anecdotal' tales but are frames through which Black women develop identities and understand the world.

Interestingly, the field of oral history in this context depends on the memories of elder informants. Lo Gerfo (1984) explains that the frequency of reminiscence increases markedly with age and there are vast differences in content, function and effect of this behaviour whereas Neuenschwander (1984) advocates that most interviews with elder participants over 60 accelerate reminiscence in long term memory. Perhaps, external and internal factors related to the environment and physical/mental wellness are some variables governing the reminiscence.

It deserves mention (Weidman, 1987) that oral history interviews with the same informant does not deplete the reservoir of the entire historical memory and the data collection will generally be the result of a selection produced by the interactive relationship. As a result, oral historical projects always have the incompleteness of a work in progress. In this sense, the control of the project remains in the hands of the researcher.

The eyewitness testimonies extracted from audiotapes by the Little Burgundy or La Petite Bourgogne: 1840-1980 Oral History Project provided ancillary accounts to those of Daisy's. The elder community members' voices supplemented and enhanced my historical data and I recognized some of their names through my association with Union United Church.

The first-hand recollections from the seniors provided a rich, deep backdrop about life in St. Henri in the early 20th century (See Appendix N). Rocky Friantii (Bindon Interview, Feb 7, 1982) presented the following scenes:

The fruit sheds started at Richmond Street—it ended up around Chatham. It was like an auction place...they'd have a number on each of the sheds, then whoever bought it would load it up into his truck.... The Rockettes, Café St. Michel used to be big entertainment places over there on Mountain, St. Antoine and Notre-Dame...Big clubs on Notre Dame Street.

Anne Packwood (Bindon Interview, 1982) recalled:

An ink factory on Canning, a toilet factory, a home preparation factory, Lambert's cough medicine, grocery stores, Brewer's drug store.... There was a small consumptive hospital on the corner of Atwater...the general hospital in those days was down below Dorchester Street.

The seniors described a bustling, productive neighbourhood teeming with a diversity of small industries – which served as the economic base of St. Henri and its residents. They painted a picture of a vibrant community describing the business establishments and rhythm of the streets—laundry, cleaners, button factory, doctor's clinic, Northern Electric, Nordair, Imperial Tobacco, horse stables on Chatham and Canning Streets, multistoried flats and horse drawn wagons selling ice.

In contrast, their reflections from the distant past captured the commercial, social and cultural rhythms of St. Henri and their explicit recollections sanction the trustworthiness of their memories. In many cases, the elders vividly recalled details and the names of places and events. The elders' interviews helped to develop a deeper historical scope over the last ninety years. Their participation contributed to breaking down the barriers between the academy and the outside world.

Archival Research

Archival research yields a watershed of convoluted, finite and infinite currents—and, exploring the life history of an elder Black woman in Quebec during the early twentieth century proved to be no exception. Archival research is frustrating, painstaking and time consuming; but it is also fruitful, interactive and fascinating. I was amazed and humbled by the reception of strangers—who flowed like tributaries into my path. Most notably, I remained buoyed by the generous spirits and aptitudes, both familiar and alien that I encountered on my sojourn. My quests also lead me to people's homes—including my own family—unpacking my father's modest, personal archival collection. The subsequent subtexts will present insights about my archival research with both kin and strangers alike.

Archivists, Academics and Ancillaries

According to Meese (1982):

It is wise to consider the institutional politics underlying the development of archival collections. Archivists are primarily interested in collecting documents of an obvious historical and literary value. This attitude results in collections that, in organization and content, mirror traditional academic attitudes toward significant figures and important events. (pp. 41-42)

The question becomes what is obvious historical and literary value given that traditional mainstream archival research poses an insidious problem for my archival activities. My inaugural electronic searches under subject headings such as: Black woman-female-community-people-elder-aged-senior citizen-music educator-

entrepreneur yielded a plethora of diverse hits. However, when I narrowed my inquiries to specific and various permutations and combinations based on elder, Montreal, Quebec, Canadian, I encountered texts peppered with nebulous references about blues, jazz, domestic work, race statistics, railroad porters and immigration. A vast majority of searches with Canadian historians (and I include Francophone scholars) also yielded a dead end. These scant entries personified a group of people as void of significant historical, economic, social and political leadership or contributions and reduced a group of indigenous inhabitants to a rigid, stereotypic category. The lack of archival research by and about Black women, (historically excluded or uninvited to participate in the discourse), prevented me from gaining an understanding of their experiences and perspectives. Vaz (1997) eloquently asserts “We must acknowledge that our limited access to African American women’s writing is largely the effect of scholarly neglect and correlates directly with the fact that the subjects were Black, female, poor and illiterate or poorly schooled” (p. 32).

This statement implicates African women throughout the Diaspora and specifically translates to the lack of history making of elder African Canadian women within geographical and socio economic status frames. In Montreal, Black newcomers from Eastern Caribbean nations did not generally speak French. This barrier coupled with wariness to interact with White officials who frequently ignored or maligned them, magnified the absence of both official and unofficial recording of their lives. As a member of the younger generation, I found it difficult to truly understand how viciously racist acts were applied in my hometown, despite stories told by my parents

and grandparents. For many female (and male) Blacks to survive in the presence of Whites they appeared obedient, humble, withdrawn and/or used street wits. My women folk developed carefully contrived ways of presenting themselves to Whites who held authoritative positions. Although the public domain heightened street smarts and honed survival mechanisms, these women also retained a semblance of dignity and agency for Whites who really did not know what they were actually thinking or feeling.

I commenced my archival journey by rereading *Working in women's archives: Research women's private literature and archival documents* edited by Buss and Kadar (2001). In the introduction the authors state, "the problematic nature of archival research increases when we are dealing with the activities of marginalized people, those not of the traditional white male Elite" (p. 1).

My archival investigations to reproduce the community setting of Daisy Sweeney experiencing life in Montreal, Quebec during the 1920s-1940s were both potent and problematic, due to a number of different issues. For instance, I discovered that primary sources during the early twentieth century, such as newspapers, newsletters, bulletins, flyers, announcements were virtually nonexistent, fragmented, a product of incomplete storage and/or had vanished mysteriously through the process of relocation. Then one day an elder exclaimed an obvious oversight, "It was too expensive to write things down on paper in those days!" At that moment, it became clear to me, the deplorable economic conditions suffered by Blacks, combined with discriminatory schooling practices resulted in soaring and debilitating illiteracy rates.

My lens was initially blurred by my middle-class value judgments; publicly funded education and access to literacy was not deemed a universal right in that period. I would imagine that many Blacks struggling to survive lacked the inclination and the monetary resources to retain written life history accounts vis-à-vis journals, diaries and even snapshots of family events. Thompson (1978) asserts “the more personal, local and unofficial a document, the less likely it was to survive...of working-class men and women...very little has been preserved anywhere” (p. 3).

Consequently, it was difficult to learn much about Daisy Sweeney’s schooling years and my investigation failed to produce a single document except one snapshot taken when she was about seven or eight. It was problematic even when I searched for documentation to confirm her associate’s degree from McGill University. As a result of these dead ends, I focused on the broader historical information about the educational system in Quebec.

It was while lounging in my mother’s living room discussing my triumphs and tribulations about literacy that my sister Valerie suggested I browse through father’s private archival collection. I had completely overlooked the accessible resource that was within arm’s reach. Inside the mahogany glass framed bookcase, I stumbled across a *Gazette* newspaper article written in 1991 featuring the multifarious life of Bud Jones. Mr. Jones, a retired senior, who amassed archival collections dating back to the 1700s, was researching Montreal’s Black ancestry. This was truly serendipity!

Then Mrs. Husband, a longstanding church elder recommended *The Hostess Memory Book*, a source I had already retrieved from my deceased father’s personal

library. This was an historical register, a unique family directory that recorded the biography of the congregation of Union United Church over the past seventy-five years. The *Hostess Book* confirmed some concrete information about Daisy Sweeney's family background.

At first, I naively assumed it would be relatively straightforward to maneuver through community centers, libraries, archives, churches, museums and universities in my hometown. Here I was, a transplanted homespun Montrealer armed with some semblance of familiarity with the public transit system, alma mater status at both English universities, nebulous association with the defunct Negro Community Centre, rusty oral French proficiency, capped with a generous dollop of competent reference library skills. My pre-packaged gear also included contact information of local archives, bibliothèques (libraries) and museums.

On one of numerous journeys to Montreal, I encountered Nancy Marrelli, Director of Archives at Concordia University—my undergraduate alma mater. During our phone conversation, regretfully, she affirmed my prediction about the lack of written historical documentation about Blacks in Montreal.

My long time absence from Concordia and McGill Universities proved that buildings indeed transform and relocate. As I crisscrossed along rue de Maisonneuve, and retraced landmarks of my undergraduate life—fringe coffee shops, eclectic bookstores, steamy bistros and low-grade housing facilities, I entered the main building—swallowed up by an oppressive, decayed cavity. I ascended the clattering escalators—with flashbacks etched in my mind of a gleaming, sunlit, architectural

atrium trimmed with student photography, sculpture and paintings. I had always contrasted Concordia as the cosmopolitan outgoing trendsetter sibling with McGill's traditional, conservative diehards. As I ambled along dimly lit hollow corridors, thankfully, the sluggish layer dissolved as I entered the University Archives.

Nancy Marrelli graciously welcomed me into her department and produced two rare pieces of film footages featuring Black people in Montreal. I was particularly enthralled with *Show Girls*, a multiple award winning film that featured three Black female burlesque dancers during the swinging jazz era in Montreal. This documentary recorded rich first person narratives against a backdrop of black and white photographs to capture what social life was truly like on both the *glitterati* and glum political front. For these women, music was their lifeline. I recognized some of these faces—Olga Spencer, Bernice “Bunny” Jordan-Whims and Tina Baines-Brereton; they were my mother's contemporaries. I worshipped with them at Union United Church, mingled with them at teas, picnics, concerts and soirees and admired their creative work at The Negro Community Centre.

Nancy took the time to understand my research quest and offered her insights. Some records, hastily retrieved from the Negro Community Centre expropriation by local historian Dorothy Williams, were stored on the premises. Unfortunately, since the documents lacked proper catalogue their contents were unavailable for my perusal. Here again I encountered the question of funding—the access to monies to allow for appropriate investigation, scholarly documentation and storage of lost eras in the Black community.

She also directed me to a website by Dorothy Williams who published research about Montreal's Black community and operated the Centre of Black Studies. After the film screening, I immediately headed over to the Centre located within walking distance from the Campus, only to confront a locked door. This obstacle underscored a premonition about variable hours of operation related to funding, later confirmed during a telephone conversation with a part time employee.

While my investigation yielded paltry results about Black inhabitants in Montreal, one particular publication captured my imagination and intellectual curiosity. Dorothy Williams enthusiastically directed me to her body of research, which expanded my historical and demographic framework about Montreal and its racialized population. The rich chronicle of Black history so meticulously documented by Williams provided innumerable examples of the fortitude, resilience, resourcefulness and creativity of Blacks in Montreal during the Depression. As a historian, she succeeded in maintaining a balanced critical reconstruction into the lives of Black male and female subjects alike. Her vast knowledge and deep insights validated their contributions during this turbulent era. She also assisted my search in contacting Bud Jones.

A subsequent internet search steered me back to Concordia's Archives. I had overlooked a rare find from private fonds and collections: a Black oral history project that featured several taped interviews with residents of St. Henri (now septuagenarians and octogenarians), entitled *Black Montrealers: A piece of the multicultural mosaic*. Since it was a sound recording kit consisting of audiotapes and transcriptions, the

University did not authorize interlibrary loans. Nonetheless, given her cooperative spirit, Nancy Marrelli coordinated retrieval of the tapes with a staff archivist. When I arrived, archive boxes, transcriptions and audio equipment were set up for my use.

The audio recording was a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)—AM radio interview with Daisy talking about Oscar Peterson. Henry Whiston was the producer; writer and researcher of *Jazz at Its Best* and Ted Miller hosted the show. I jotted down snippets of information that Mrs. Sweeney had previously recalled about her family and their musical upbringing playing piano, trombone and trumpet in a family band. However, there was nothing particularly revealing about Daisy's personal or public self since the interview focused on her brother's fame. At one point, Daisy expressed an ambivalent comment about Oscar's repertoire, "I believed that classical scope would have broadened his playing. Classical can be confining and then one is not able to break out". Daisy had confined herself to classical repertoire and perhaps alluded to her own musical career.

The archival searches navigated me to other reference libraries and bibliothèques. I discovered a bibliographic guide written by Govia (1988) about the history of Blacks in Canada. York University produced a plethora of books, journal articles and micro text. I spent countless months scrutinizing primary sources in the micro text room and in the stacks. Initially my searches were too broad-based and brought few relevant results however, after following dozens of leads, some paid off, others not. One of the clues which directed me to The Harriet Tubman Institute at York University was interesting but not relevant. I learned not to be discouraged, for I

found information less often from tracking topics than I did by following hunches from subject categories and listening closely to librarians' suggestions. Even if I failed, I usually emerged with a new and different perspective on an issue. I examined scores of film footage and DVDs at the Sound and Moving Image Library, notwithstanding, the National Film Board of Canada, Veterans Affairs Canada and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Digital Archives.

As the project meandered and matured, the depth of my tasks became richer. I discovered the interdisciplinary aspects were becoming more cogent—expanding my knowledge of Canadian history, women's history, biography, gender studies, music education, oral history, qualitative interviewing and methodology. My research interest focused more sharply on women's history, biography, reflective analysis and the path to the Nellie Langford Rowell Library at York University was heavily trodden.

One of the drawbacks of my research included my limited ability to read and comprehend French academic publications. Since my French communication skills have greatly declined, I appreciated and relied on the assistance of both a friend and family members for some translations. Professor Marcel Martel of York University's History Department recommended various French publications, devoid of English translation and, unfortunately reduced to vernacular. The librarians at Montreal's Grande Bibliothèque were incredibly helpful. Although they warned that primary sources on the Black community were scarce, they diligently conducted extensive searches and enthusiastically presented me with several bilingual leads.

Local public librarians responded swiftly to my queries and located novels by Quebecois writers who depicted rich and daring conflicts within communities in the 1920s-1940s. The literature helped to evoke certain moods and mindsets that were prevalent during Daisy's early life. I endeavored to capture the political and social climate through this literature—to breathe new life force into Daisy's memory. Overall, the storylines focused on Francophone, Anglophone and Jewish odium sprinkled with referrals to a stereotypic Negro community but I was astounded at their richness.

The Library and Archives Canada search uncovered a host of electronic print sources on Black Canadian History through The Encyclopedia of Canada's peoples, although it was not an exhaustive list. Some resources were useful and again, widened my collection. The archival sources also listed the 'Roy States' private collection stored at McGill University. Although I actively pursued leads through several reference librarians, I again arrived at a deadlock. Even the Black Montreal portal offered minimal information and I noted that the information was predominantly male-centered. My quest to the Centre d'histoire de Montréal exhibit, Group of Archivists of the Region of Montreal and the Ontario Black History Society brought similar results. This sometimes proved downright frustrating.

My excursion to McGill University exemplified such a moment. I had anticipated that Dorothy Williams' research and Mrs. Sweeney's long standing music education connections would present insightful findings. Prior to the visit, I compiled a list and emailed contacts at their History Department, Conservatory of Music and

Head of the Roy States Black History Collection—Rare Books-Special Collections.

The Roy States Collection, while vast and deep, focused on African-American politics and events within a male-centric worldview. The department's advice was circuitous and pointed me back to Dorothy William's website. Their Internet search yielded puny results. I was dismayed that no archival records based on Daisy Sweeney's inveterate professional association existed, given that she had acquired an associate degree and registered piano students for invigilation over a period of fifty years. Fortunately, there were serendipitous finds such as, the vivid photographs of working class conditions during the Great Depression at the McCord Museum.

As a novice archivist, I equated my searches to circumnavigating bubbling, drifting tributaries that mutate, meander and, occasionally vaporize, to merge eventually into a reservoir of data. I experienced giddy white water twists, turns and belly flops interspersed with glacial, static and murky dives. The currents propelled me beyond Toronto to the shores of Brockville and Montreal where I encountered diverse people of various backgrounds.

Archival research produced intermittent crests of raw material, ripples of awareness and circuitous navigation. Community members and academics brought a level of social interaction that channeled oral history into the open. It legitimized its existence through voices of the past.

From Quebecois (and Canadian) social history I focus on a group of citizens, who despite being marginalized in the wider society because of their race, gender and socioeconomic status, were accomplished within their ethnic community. Daisy

Sweeney's discourse about her early life during The Depression, the complexities of her realities, juxtaposed with other voices from her past provides further insight into the sociology and history of Montreal.

Chapter 3 – Historical Context of Montreal

“The word to describe my community was poor. The hard days were when my siblings grew out of their clothes and we’d want for each other’s shoes. But we ate every day.... We were contented with what we had.”

Daisy Sweeney, 2009

In this chapter, I explore Montreal’s Black community from a social and historical perspective during the early to mid-twentieth century. Montreal had established itself as a formidable city, even as deep-seated linguistic and racial conflicts co-existed. To examine Quebecois social history in a Canadian context, I focus on a group of citizens who, despite being marginalized in the wider society because of their race, gender and socioeconomic status, were accomplished within their ethnic community. Daisy Sweeney’s discourse about her early life during the Great Depression and the complexities of her realities, juxtaposed with other voices from her past, provide further insight into the sociology and history of Montreal.

Montreal, Quebec—20th Century

Montreal was a world-class city because of its geographical location within the nation, its relative easy access to overseas markets as a port and its extensive railway infrastructure.

From 1892–1941, Montreal found herself stepping up the activity of her factories and shops so effectively that she began to take her place among the leading manufacturing cities of North America, certainly the leader in Canada...with the largest port in the dominion with the largest grain export

business in the world...ideally situated for service as an airport and able to call upon larger supplies of labour than any other manufacturing city in Canada. (Gibbon, 1947, pp. 149, 201)

At the turn of the century, the 1901 Census of Population reported 17,400 Blacks (or what the early censuses refer to as “Negroes”) living in Canada, or 0.3% of the population (Milan & Tran, 2004, p. 2). The 1920s in Canada was essentially comprised of White and British residents in the urban centres, as opposed to Quebec, where the highest percentage of Blacks tended to be urban dwellers (Bertley, 1977, p. xiv). By 1921, there were about four hundred West Indians in Montreal (Walker, 1985, p. 17). At the end of the 1920s, there were 3,000 Black residents in Montreal (National Film Board of Canada, 1996).

Callaghan (1977) acknowledges in his epic novel, *The loved and the lost*, that “there weren’t many Negroes in Montreal, and those who were there lived between St. Antoine and the railroad tracks, with Mountain Street the base of the triangle, and the apex cutting east across Peel” (p. 41). The neighbourhoods were demarcated along ethno cultural, racial, religious, social class and linguistic lines.

A larger question emerges about the democratic process and its political and economic powerbrokers. Who were the key players? Historically, the French dominated the religious and agricultural sectors. The English occupied the higher positions in government and corporate affairs. The Jewish population tended to corner the entrepreneurial marketplace (Behiels, 1991; Bergeron, 1975).

Behiels (1991) affirms similar ethnocentric and ethno pluralistic solitudes in Montreal in the following statistical account.

By 1931, over sixty percent of Quebec's Anglophones lived on Montreal Island alongside nearly 80 percent of all Quebec's non-French and non-English speaking citizens, generally referred to as Allophones. Montreal was often described as "la ville des petites patries" that is, a city of well-defined cultural communities. Many of these villages and parishes acquired very special communal identities often demarcated by unique architectural styles appropriated in the early decades of the twentieth century by particular ethnic groups or social classes. (p. 4)

It is interesting to note how Anglophones, Allophones and the French mode of expression are clearly identified. The demographic expression of Allophones virtually excludes the presence of non-White immigrants, native Canadians and indigenous visible minorities and obfuscates Daisy's life based on linguistic, racial, gender and religious factors.

In her novel *Earth and High Heaven*, Graham (1944) also attests to the existence of linguistic, religious and ethnic enclaves.

Montreal society is divided roughly into three categories labeled "French," "English" and "Jewish" and there is not much coming and going between them, particularly between the Jews and either of the other two groups....Hampered by racial-religious distinctions to start with, relations between the French, English and Jews of Montreal are still further complicated

by the fact that all three groups suffer from an inferiority complex, the French because they are a minority in Canada, the English because they are a minority in Quebec and the Jews because they are a minority everywhere. (p. 13)

This quote supports my argument of a conspicuous absence of research about West Indians or Negroes (as they were identified at that time) in Quebec's history. I would suggest that mainstream Quebecois literati ignored the presence of Black and other ethno cultural groups, which further entrenched their invisible status and alienated the dominant groups. While Graham suggests that each group may be classified as underclass, where do other groups factor in the reconstruction of the past? An observation is the demarcation of inhabitants along ethno cultural, racial, religious, social class and linguistic lines. Certainly it was practical for immigrants to reside close to one's place of employment because cars were not a popular or accessible mode of transportation for working class citizens. On the other hand, working-class residents were trapped within a maze of grimy factories, noisy grain elevators, smelly cigarette factories and warehouses and lacking adequate green space, clean air and quiet surroundings.

How does this ethno cultural ranking system foster and/or truncate interconnectedness in the St. Henri community when glimpsing into the window of Daisy Sweeney's world as a bilingual, protestant Negro female? In her life story, Daisy described a close family upbringing with limited supervised interaction with the outside world. She would typically stay indoors, either completing her homework and extra studies assigned by her father, attending to chores, supervising her younger

siblings and/or practising the piano. Her initiation to othermothering skills originated within her home as an older sister responsible for her younger siblings. Daisy affirms:

“I was more or less a loner. I kept to myself....It was music lessons or school lessons. I played a major role in raising my younger siblings and teaching them piano. We all taught each other. In any family, one helped the other.”

In sharp contrast to Daisy's upbringing, I remember stories about my mother's childhood in Montreal where she learned to speak “habitant” (vernacular French) from her neighbours. Mam/a was athletic and participated in swimming, badminton, skating, sleigh rides, tennis and volleyball. She described her boisterous interactions and how she, along with her brothers, gleefully engaged in the occasional wintery street fight with the French kids, pelting them with horse manure encased in snowballs. Same neighbourhood, divergent childhood experiences.

What other factors demarcated the living spaces of various groups? One of the most important consequences of low-income families was the inability of most wage earners to afford the purchase of even the most modest home. Montreal was pre-eminently a city of tenants. Urban statistics reported that over 80% of the population rented their dwellings and absentee landlords were the norm in Montreal. This may help to account for the poor condition of much of the housing. Certainly one of the most prominent features of the city in the first three decades of the twentieth century was the steady growth of *instant slums*—poor sanitation, rear tenements, high density of population and a lack of yards and open spaces. Overcrowding placed enormous pressure on the already inadequate housing market. Rent increased by 50% by 1904

leading to a doubling-up of families in the same apartment or house, causing overcrowding and ill health (Copp, 1974, p. 70).

The lack of leisure green space and hygienic, safe playgrounds could partially account for why Daisy's childhood was generally confined to indoor activities. Moreover, gender-based presuppositions about domesticating girls and their "place in the home" reflected a strong precept during this time period. Her othermothering duties combined with her schoolwork, housework and intense piano studies probably left her precious little time to explore the outdoors and cultivate friendships. Yet she cultivated a love for music and teaching piano, which eventually shaped her life's course.

In describing the intensity of this problem, Copp's (1974) chilling statement declared that Montreal earned the dubious distinction as, "the most dangerous city in the civilized world to be born in" (p. 25). In spite of an exorbitant infant mortality rate each year, health and social welfare were not high priorities on either a municipal or a provincial level. These problems were shrouded under the guise of religious institutions, private charitable organizations or individual philanthropists (Williams, 1997).

To contrast this fragile paradox of poverty, Cooper (1969) documents Greater Montreal's affluent position during the first quarter of the century with the inception of three new banks, bolstered by the rise of the newsprint industry and the expansion of hydroelectric plants. Montreal conveys an aura of prosperity and progress, marked by the transformation of the city's skyline where edifices such as Bell Telephone on

Beaver Hall Hill, the Royal Bank on St. James Street, the Great Tower at Windsor Station and the Sun Life Building dominate the financial district, while the Université de Montréal is perched on the majestic slopes of Mount Royal. According to Callaghan (1977):

Nearly all the rich families in Montreal lived on the mountain. It was always there to make them feel secure. At night it rose against the sky like a dark protective barrier behind a shimmering curtain of lights, surmounted by a gleaming cross from the slope you could look down over the church steeples and monastery towers of the old French city spreading eastward from the harbor to the gleaming river. Those who wanted things to remain as they were liked the mountain. Those who wanted a change preferred the broad flowing river. (p. 1)

St. Henri

A critical retrospective of Montreal's demographic, political, social and cultural landscape is a prerequisite for framing Daisy's life and indeed the hardships of the Black community in St. Henri during this period. Quebec ministries of culture, education and immigration (Ministère des affaires internationales, 1995) depict the following collaborative demographic origin of Daisy Sweeney's hometown.

St. Henri and Little Burgundy are now part of the City of Montreal, but that was not always the case. For a long time, the city founded on the spot now known as Pointe-à-Callière extended no further than Old Montreal. Small villages randomly established on the island gradually became industrial towns and were annexed to the

City of Montreal in the early twentieth century. These districts bear the names of the original independent towns or villages as was the case with St. Henri which was annexed with Sainte-Cunégonde in 1905. Sainte-Cunégonde's name was later changed to Little Burgundy (See Appendix O). There were three major groups who resided in this area—French Canadians, Irish Catholic immigrants and, especially to the north of the canal, they were joined by Blacks Canadians, African American or Caribbean immigrants. MacLennan's (1945) description reinforced the community aspect. "Every house in the block was exactly the same as every other house, and on fine days in summer all the balconies were crowded with families rocking back and forth, watching each other" (p. 139).

St. Henri was characterized as a poor neighbourhood during the twentieth century and bounded by Atwater, St. Antoine and Peel Streets and the Lachine Canal. These districts were developed to the north of the Lachine Canal, located to the west and east of what is now Atwater Street. Factories and warehouses sprung up with the construction of the Lachine Canal and the railways.

There had always been a larger White population than Blacks in St. Henri in the early twentieth century. Yet the "Montreal Negro District" was so named because, while successive waves of White immigrants passed through, Black residents remained for generations. This neighbourhood was a stepping stone for Whites, but due to economic and social deprivation, most Blacks were not able to reap the benefits of acquiring greater social hierarchy, hence in many instances they were confined to this area (Williams, 2008).

Mrs. Sweeney recaptured an image of her childhood environs:

We lived in a duplex, a flat. Most people lived in cold water flats. We lived across from the church manse. I remember looking out the window and listening to the people singing hymns....I remember when the trains used to go by our home and we'd wave at my dad.... There were small grocery stores, newspaper vendors and handy stores like cobblers, hardware shops....Royal Arthur School was huge—you had to walk up three flights of stairs.

“Poverty,” Daisy’s catchword, the *rigueurs du jour* (daily rigours of life) in Montreal’s Black community of St. Henri, similarly marginalized other ethno cultural groups (Ukrainian, Irish, Jewish, Chinese). Black people suffered from insidious economic and social hardships and conditions worsened during the Depression. Poor Blacks withstood hardship and survived, adopting the “right attitude.” Daisy Sweeney’s above mentioned quote at the beginning of the chapter implied a candid and stoic acceptance of her family’s indigent lifestyle and, even though she wore second-hand clothes and shoes she outgrew or that were handed down from her siblings, a general ethos of contentment prevailed.

The eyewitness testimonies extracted from audiotapes by the Little Burgundy or La Petite Bourgogne: 1940-1980 Oral History Project provided ancillary accounts of life in St. Henri.

Richard Lord (Bindon Interview, 1982) detailed some more specifics:

There were basic streetcars. One went along St. James Street, and one went along St. Antoine Street...Redpath Sugar on the south side, Imperial Tobacco

on the west side. Most people worked at Northern Electric. Ferron was the undertaker in the area—he buried Blacks, Whites, Greeks and Russians.

Mrs. Braithwaite (Bindon Interview, 1982) recounted: That people “mostly took the streetcar or walked, there were (sic) some horse and buggies.” Mr. Pion (Bindon Interview, 1982) remembered, “A cigar store, buggies – all pulled by horses, dump wagons...St. James Street was always flooded when you had big rainstorms. You could row yourself down St. James (*laughs*).

In previous decades, Anthony Sherwood was a young Black resident in St. Henri. Today he is a social activist, award-winning actor and documentary filmmaker who devotes his life specializing in the production of Black history projects regarding the African Canadian experience. His interviews with two senior residents offered similar recollections of this time period. Bud Jones (Sherwood, 2007) reflected, “A lot of people suffered at that time, especially Black people.” Mrs. Woods echoed these sentiments about living conditions, “Food was scarce. It wasn’t the norm. Some people did have it tough.” It is interesting to note that neither interviewee attributed the suffering to their personal circumstances, nor was the language couched in words to downplay any personal misery.

In order to reconstruct the milieu in which Daisy was raised, I also relied on novels written by White authors who produced rich textured descriptions of Montreal in that bygone era, along with vague, homogeneous references to the Black community. Callaghan (1977) dabbles with such an interpretation in his novel, *The loved and the lost*.

It's the Negro section and there are some Negro nightclubs down there. And some fine people too...In their own small neighbourhood they took in one another's washing and had three nightclubs and the French liked them; but they couldn't live in the good hotels or go into the select bars and knew it. There was never any trouble. (p. 41)

Quebecois writer Roy (1980), in her groundbreaking novel *The tin flute*, captures a snapshot of this wretchedness in the following passage:

A crowd of ragged children were playing on the sidewalk among the litter. Women, thin and sad, stood in evil-smelling doorways, astonished by the sunlight. Within a few decades, the areas north and south of the canal experienced unprecedented growth. As a result, crowded housing conditions and poverty combined with long hours at work were the norm for the families that lived there. Others, indoors, set their babies on the windowsill and stared out aimlessly. Everywhere you saw windows plugged with rags, or oiled paper. Everywhere you heard shrill voices, children crying, cries of misery coming from the depths of this house or that, doors and shutters closed, dead, walled up against the light as if it were a tomb. (p. 97)

The foregoing passage imposes a homogeneous view of women and children. It is powerful in that it captures the hopelessness and despair of the underclass during this period.

The unsanitary living conditions for Blacks in the St. Antoine area and lack of a health services network prompted community action, especially after an excessive

death rate from pneumonia that occurred among West Indian porters (Williams, 1997, pp. 52, 74). Daisy and her brother Oscar contracted tuberculosis during the Depression and were isolated for long-term treatment in a healthcare institution located outside the city:

When I was fourteen years old, I developed tuberculosis. I recovered in quarantine at a sanitarium with my brother Oscar in St. Agathe, Quebec. It was commonplace for children of that generation to rest in a country setting.

St. Henri was also a bustling hub with a diverse mix of shops. Rocky Frianetti (Bindon Interview, 1982) recreated the scenario:

One stable on Chatham Street. There was another one on Canning. There was a big, big market there on Mountain Street.

Mrs. Braithwaite recalled:

Oscar Peterson's people lived at the corner in a little house on the corner on the street....Oscar Peterson lived right there. The back door let on the UNIA Hall. His sister, Daisy used to learn [*sic*] him to play. Daisy used to learn [*sic*] him to play piano.

Writers of the period often romanticized the misery and despair inflicted on the working class citizenry:

Streets with low houses descended in two directions....All the houses—but how can they be called houses when only the number over the door tells one from the next...where St. Henri stuffs in mattresses, spins its thread of silk or cotton, runs its loom, reels off its spools, while the earth trembles at the

rushing trains and the foghorns blast and the ships, engines, rails and whistles spell out. St. Henri's houses had stood there facing waste fields and an almost limpid, rustic air hung about their simple gables and tiny gardens....The houses are still there with their wrought-iron balconies, their tranquil facades and the faint, sweet music that sometimes filters out from behind closed shutters....A persistent wind carried the sweet penetrating odour of tobacco up from the nearby cigarette factories, along with a bitter whiff of hot paint and linseed oil. (Roy, 1980, pp. 33, 34, 98)

The lengthy text is crammed with insightful information, which tell mini stories about St. Henri and its population and is meant to support my claims about writers' romanticizing the dismal living conditions.

The tone of this piece resonates with a clear patronizing ring in its description of the houses as unworthy of its designation. It further denigrates and excludes the occupants, the residents as invalid and unworthy of attention. I also note that, Roy illustrates a vivid sketch of the primary industries, such as the tobacco, paint and dressmaking factories, as well as the railway and seaport activities that sustained (and also suffocate) the community. Her references about the homes with their wrought iron railings may be symbolic to the resiliency of St. Henri residents' that validates their stance of resistance despite hardships.

Roy (1980) offers another stunning glimpse of St. Henri in her award-winning novel, *The tin flute*:

From the bridge over the tracks...he could look around the whole neighbourhood. Below the bridge was the St. Henri quarter along the canal, a small industrial city with wretched houses along the tracks, houses so old that some had earthen floors, and in the summertime barefooted children, running into the houses, came out with muddied feet.

Immigration

Black people moved to Canada as hopeful immigrants, as migrant adventurers, as hardworking domestics and indefatigable railroad porters, as skilled professionals, as ambitious and clever entrepreneurs, as industrious labourers, as talented artisans, as creative artists from the Caribbean - Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica or Trinidad-Tobago (Madibbo, 2006; Pachai, 1987; Walker, 1971; Winks, 1971). Many of the West Indian immigrants were skilled professional and tradespeople, but were unable to find jobs in their professions, making it necessary to work in low-paying, unskilled jobs (McClain, 1979, p. 18). The trend of migration to the city continued throughout the 1920s; 56% of Quebec's population lived in urban centres (Allan, 1992-93, p. 160).

Others migrated from the United States or other regions of Canada. Mensah (2002) also acknowledged that the primary reason Blacks immigrated to Canada was the quest for "a better standard of living and political freedom" (p. 67). However, Milan and Tran (2004) report that the growth in the Black population did not keep pace with that of other racialized groups.

The quest for a better life was fraught with inconsistencies for other racialized immigrants. In 1903, the Government of Canada raised the head tax on Chinese

immigrants, originally established at \$50 in 1885 to \$500. In 1914, a boatload of 376 Indian refugees was refused permission to land in Vancouver and suffered incredible deprivation because we were stingy, to put it kindly, about providing them food and water (Fraser, 1987, p. 184).

Thompson (1991) documented that “More immigrants arrived in any single year between 1905 and 1914, than during the entire decade of the 1930s” (p. 11). As a result, there were fewer foreign-born civilians and a slightly greater degree of emotional security for White Anglophones. *The Sixth Census* reported that the Black population, however, had decreased to 0.21% and White Canadians were assured that immigration policies would continue to be designed to maintain Canada as a “White man’s country” (p. 7). West Indian immigration was steady during the first two decades.

Meanwhile, Greaves (1930) noted that the majority of West Indian immigrants directly from the Caribbean were female:

From 1916 to 1928, only 238 West Indian males came directly into Canada from the West Indies. Of the 411 West Indian women who entered Canada during the same period, 329 or eighty percent came to work as domestics. This was their stated area of employment on entry, although their work background revealed something quite different. (p. 56)

To a varying degree such measures reflected the prevailing mood of (White) Canadians. There was a startling level of Negrophobia in Canada and petitions were

sent to Ottawa demanding restrictions on Black immigration. Discriminatory bills aimed specifically at Blacks were tabled, but defeated in Parliament (Winks, 1971).

After 1923, immigration of British subjects was confined to citizens of Commonwealth countries with predominantly White populations. As a result, West Indians were deprived of preferential status to which, in theory, they had been previously entitled. As citizens of Caribbean countries under British rule, and as British subjects in their own right they were refused entry to Canada. An example of this rebuff occurred when West Indians came to enlist and found that His Majesty's armed forces in Canada did not want Black men in Canadian uniforms (Winks, 1971). The following reference illuminates this discriminatory policy. In 1940, Reverend Charles H. Este of Union United Church wrote a scathing letter (on behalf of the Black community) to the Royal Canadian Navy which expressed his disdain about their "intolerant attitude regarding the admission of coloured men to the Navy" (Bertley, 1976, p. 43).

An order-in-council passed in August 1930 restricted immigrants to members of the immediate families of men already established in Canada and farmers with enough money to start farming at once. The migration and settlement of Blacks, particularly from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, continued to be opposed. Both Americans and West Indians classified indigenous Blacks, particularly those identified as migrants from the Maritimes, as Canadians. Their inferior status as farmers and unskilled labourers was a stigma that called attention to their lack of education and social graces (Williams, 1997). The dual role of Canadian and Black was a thorny

problem. There was a distinct ranking system within the Black community. African Americans were perceived as the most desirable, followed by West Indians and then Canadian Blacks. The Americans formed the largest contingent and created Montreal's reputation for its lifestyle. They were the citizens who first planted roots in the city.

What did this ordinance mean for Montreal's Black community? It entrenched the role of *de facto* gate-keeping through immigration law and reinforced the Black immigrant's status of *persona non grata*, outsider, interloper, as not belonging. It became a common held view that "Canada was fully settled and never again would need to absorb immigrants, especially British immigrants" (1988, p. 44).

In his oral narrative, Richard Lord (Bindon Interview, 1982) recorded the following:

Try to immigrate to Canada and say you're a shoemaker and they won't take you. But you can bet your bottom dollar that if a fellow opens a shoemaker shop around downtown Montreal, a shoeshine parlour: I bet you you make a business of it....When the experts tell you it's redundant, it's redundant.

Mr. Lord's statement reflected the systemic racism that was entrenched in Canada's immigration policies and procedures.

The film, *Long way to go* (1996) featured the story of a young Caribbean woman who applied for a job as an experienced and skilled machinist. It portrayed the difficulties with West Indians immigrating to Canada in the mid-nineties. In light of underemployment or demand for a particular skill or trade, immigration yielded the

power to deny entry to willing and competent Black immigrants. More importantly, there appeared to be no political recourse or advocacy group to address and correct these injustices leaving Black people disempowered and disenfranchised.

Racism

Daisy's parents arrived in Canada at the peak of immigrant admittance. In spite of her parents' residence spanning two decades, she experienced a pervasive climate of alienation perpetuated through racist attitudes and stereotypes. In the words of Dua (1999), "the most difficult aspect of talking about racism in Canada was that it was so common sense – so embedded in everyday life" (p.12).

Thornhill (2008) attests:

It was law during the period between the two world wars, that the right of a White merchant to contract freely with whomever he pleased outweighed the right of a Black member of the Canadian public to be shielded or protected from discriminatory treatment. Blacks enjoyed no entitlement, nor were they perceived to be of any account in the eyes of the law. (p. 323)

Whether the law stated outright discriminatory practices and or policies, the covert and subtle daily occurrences remained constant reminders of the systemic racism that existed at all levels. Smith (1974) astutely observes that:

In society where blackness is met with implicit and explicit forms of racism, the understanding of that very racism, its motivation, its effects upon the self and the society at large is tantamount to the understanding of one's identity. (p. 120)

The institutionalized racism in schools, public forums and churches compounded a barrage of racist slurs. Thelma Wallen recounted that “racism in the 1930’s and 40’s was subtle and not cultivated...and the nuns at schools called her ‘sunshine’” (Bindon Interview, 1982).

Another historical incident occurred in 1936:

Fred Christie entered the York Tavern with another African Canadian and a White but was refused a beer. Although he decided to take his case to court, the Supreme Court upheld racial discrimination which shocked the Black community. (Thornhill, 2008, p. 330)

My parents also recounted numerous verbal and physical attacks on their person, as well as their peers and relatives. Here is one incident recorded by Anne Packwood:

All of the children around there—the only ones who ever called us “nigger,” were the French ones—“nigger black.” And then when we’d come out of the door they’d run and shut their door. (Bindon Interview, 1982)

Mrs. Woods’ experiences expressed a different point of view:

“There was always a little bit of name calling and that as far as racial fighting, there was none of that.”

From my childhood days as a student attending the English public school system in the 1960s, I retain graphic images of being confronted and repeatedly attacked by three boys in my class who would huddle after school on and off the school property to pummel me with vicious blows and kicks amidst taunts and jeers.

After I reported the incidents to my older sister, she and her friends administered some very effective retribution. Even though their rescue efforts quelled the physical attacks, the verbal torments persisted. The principal and teachers were indifferent.

Due to systemic barriers in housing, employment and education, the lower- and working-class populace was barred from attaining a better standard of living. Winks (1985) documents that “in 1919, the Quebec appeal court declared it legal for Loew’s Theatre in Montreal to continue its practice of restricting Blacks to balcony seats (p. 16).

The Chez Maurice Danceland (a dance hall) had a similar, if subtler policy. Allan Wellman remembered a typical scenario at the front entrance. “Well, we’d like to give you a seat but we’re filled up...that seat there? Well, it’s reserved” (Miller, 1997, p. 146).

Blacks barred from taverns, restaurants, music halls, theatres, cinemas and banned from burials in church-owned cemeteries across the nation could not participate in the artistic, cultural and social showgrounds of mainstream society (Boyko, 1998, p. 176).

Judge Stanley Grizzle (National Film Board, 2000), the first African Canadian Citizenship Court Judge, recalled:

KKK was prominent in Canada and the colour bar was firmly in place. I was refused accommodations in hotels on my honeymoon....In 1939 Black men wanted to join (World War II) but were refused. By 1940, forty-one were accepted.

How did this exclusion further compound the gender-based discrimination Daisy Sweeney experienced? Bernice Johnson maintained, “There were no segregation signs in Montreal but no Black women were permitted in the ‘Y’. They would do it in a diplomatic way” (National Film Board, 1998). What were the emotional burdens that Daisy and other mothers carried?

Daisy was unwittingly thrust into this tumultuous setting as a first-generation Black female child. How did she view herself in relation to racism in Canadian society? How did Daisy reconcile her social position? Although Canadian Blacks experienced subtle and overt racism and the same type of systemic racial oppression and discrimination as their American counterparts, we hear Daisy negate the presence of racial discrimination in the following comment: “There was hardly any racism. We didn’t associate with the States. On an individual level, but not on the whole....I had two brothers and that was always a help.” Her comment reveals a much-needed perspective about race and racism, as seen through the eyes of a female octogenarian, then and now. Daisy’s perception affirmed that racial discrimination was minimal and the incidents she experienced and recalled were generally confined to her school days. According to her testimony, I can only surmise that her brothers acted as allies against her tormentors. This was a commonality that we shared in that our siblings advocated for us.

Villarreal (2005) also illuminates the way elder Mexican women in the music industry encountered racial discrimination: “She stated that she did not pay attention to discrimination if she encountered it and it did not keep them from

performing...remembers little of their stops except that people stared at her as she walked through downtown” (p.53). In this way, oral history can give new meaning to the collaboration, analysis and interrogation of race in an intercultural context.

Daisy remarked that racism differed from that in the United States. Collins (2000) reminds us that the rhetoric of colour-blindness was a new model for equal treatment of individuals regardless of differences that segregated them under the law in the United States. “The new color-blind ideology emphasized individual merit and the overriding notion that working hard should lead to success irrespective of one’s race” (p. 279). Daisy’s perspective became more revealing when I later explored and analyzed other aspects of her life story. In fact, Black Canadian elder women’s original oral histories have not included or deeply analyzed this subject matter in social science, Afrocentric history, women’s history or Canadian history.

The Depression

The subsequent documentation presents an historical backdrop for Daisy’s growing-up years in Montreal during the Depression. It was autumn, October 24, 1929, and Daisy Sweeney was 9 years old. Montreal was experiencing the most ruinous period in its history, plagued by massive unemployment and the Great Depression.

Anne Packwood (Bindon Interview, 1982) foreshadowed the wretched state of affairs. “Depression—oh, very hard. Women were working for seventy-five cents, one dollar a day and carfare. And so many men were out of work. It was pitiful to see.”

The 1930s Depression was particularly acute in the St. Antoine community because “No other Canadian city was subjected to the same degree of unemployment and underemployment during the 1930s” (Copp, 1974, p. 148). Marge Thorne (Bindon Interview, 1982), a Black senior who weathered this decrepit period recalled that there were “extreme hardships, all the women had to work very, very hard for one dollar a day or five dollars a week, but everybody had everything—you only had a little bit of money.” This comment is instructive because it suggests that material wealth and possessions partially maintained a degree of wholesome lifestyle—indeed, collective family and kinship units were essential to one’s well-being and sustenance. Her statement firmly aligns with Daisy’s previous affirmation about the importance of familial bonds. According to Duncan, Walsh & Beckley (1999), it was commonplace for the poor to describe how their parent or guardian “was a good provider” saying they did not “want for anything” (p.143).

The Depression further aggravated Montreal’s ethnic rivalries and “competition” for employment, housing, social assistance and healthcare. By March 1931, close to 80% of the Union United Church congregation was unemployed (Bertley, 1976).

In her analysis of employment opportunities for Black women prior to World War II, Brand (1994) concedes, “As a consequence, the majority of Black Canadians were forced into positions that placed them at the lower end of the economic strata” (p. 172). I contend that Black women in particular were always at the bottom of the public workplace hierarchy during this period because 1) most were not economically

privileged to continue their education and 2) the colour barrier and gender inequalities further exacerbated accessibility and upward mobility. My research (Campbell, 2007) revealed that Mam/a was refused admittance to nursing school in Canada although she was academically qualified. Richard Lord (Bindon Interview, 1988) recalled, “When Depression hit, many Blacks worked in mines, boats, railroads fled south to Boston, New York and Detroit in search of employment.”

Fringe assistance was provided from the government. Mrs. Sargeant referred to a provincial office:

During the Depression...the release office...wasn't exactly called welfare and they gave so much money and they gave you so much coupons that you could buy butter and stuff like that. You weren't allowed to use too much.” (Bindon Interview, 1982)

The majority of the relief was generated from prosperous private sources. Despite their segregation by language, race and religion the English/French Protestant, French Catholic/English Catholic and Jewish communities sponsored annual appeals and donated generously to the impoverished, irrespective of their community affiliation (Jenkins, 1966). An illuminating comment from Richard Lord (Bindon Interview, 1982) recalled the presence of specific welfare agencies. “If there were any money to come our way there [*sic*] was always the Salvation Army. The Old Brewery Mission was always there to take care of families whose fathers drank too much.” Mary Wand elaborated, “The Old Brewery Mission which was mainly a place for homeless men, was down on St. Antoine on the other side of Inspector Street” (Bindon

Interview, 1981, 1982). I wondered if there was a homeless shelter for women and children but did not detect any specific information in my search.

Not surprisingly, Thomas (2001) from Nova Scotia presents the following account:

Black traditional social networks of kin and neighbours assumed greater significance because money and social services were uncertain or nonexistent. They depended on both their neighbours and family for mutual assistance during the Depression. Oftentimes these supplies were shared with families who didn't have what they needed at the time. If a family had no goods to share, they would still receive goods from others in the community. In return, they allowed their children to run errands or to babysit. Because the sharing system was in place, there was no sense of urgency in paying back favours, nor were favours counted up. (p. 154)

Sherwood's (2007) documentary recorded that Black men worked two jobs and some became successful entrepreneurs. In families where both parents worked but were still unable to cope, children were placed with relatives, friends or sometimes with private and public child welfare agencies. This exemplified the adoptive and temporary stance of othermothering. With fewer resources to manage on the home front and a status further relegated to the margins, Black mothers assumed more inventive childcare arrangements. The traditional community othermothering and kinship networks operated with increased vigour. The documentary, *Fields of endless day* (1978) recorded that the Black community in Montreal flourished in the 1920's.

In her ground-breaking oral history work with married French Canadian Catholic women and housewives of working-class Montreal, Baillargeon (1999) concluded that “the Great Depression did not have a particularly catastrophic effect on their work in the home, or...on their standard of living” (p. 168). Just as she witnessed the importance of family networks and community supports that supplemented government relief payments, in a similar manner, the Black community depended on their own community mothering, agencies and missionary aid services.

In spite of repressive policies and practices, the Depression produced a positive effect for Black citizens by strengthening their communal ties, transcending their struggles and ensuring the survival and enrichment of community life. Daisy Sweeney tenaciously practised her othermothering skills to assist and uplift student and adults over the next several decades.

Employment

Organized labour in Montreal, as in the rest of North America, was on the defensive throughout the 1920s. Strikes by both organized and unorganized workers (longshoremen, the tobacco industry, street railway workers, electrical workers and other trades) constituted by far the largest number of overt demonstrations of unrest. Montreal was the scene of frequent and often violent manifestations of labour unrest due to a higher proportion of the labour force employed in low-wage industries, such as textiles, boot and shoe manufacturing, and the needle trades. In 1920, 10 thousand Montreal workers went on strike, but the abrupt break in inflationary trends in the

middle of 1920 cut into union membership and labour militancy. In 1921, more than twelve hundred garment workers went out on strike.

Public suffering traipsed on the heels of the stock market crash. According to Jenkins (1966):

Most people thought that the breakdown was only temporary. The construction industry virtually came to a halt, while the harbour, shipping and exports diminished miserably. To further complicate this hardship, there were salary cuts, layoffs and applications for charity soared to an unprecedented high. Unemployment insurance was non-existent. In spite of the generosity of private citizens and charitable organizations, they could not cope with the mass of distressed humanity...February 1933, which is generally considered to have been the depth of the depression, saw Montreal's relief bills pass the million dollar mark. (pp. 473-474)

In 1936, Quebec premier Maurice Duplessis and his Union Nationale Party upheld the merits of private enterprise and the freedom of American capitalism as long as it inflated the treasury. His reign of terror enforced the Padlock Law, the famous act that allowed him to seize all so-called subversive communist literature, intimidate and incarcerate perpetrators and padlock any premises where alleged communists congregated. This law was an effective tool against organized labour that attracted militant and knowledgeable immigrant workers and leaders (Behiels, 1991; Bergeron, 1975, pp. 180, 193).

Bindon's (1982) oral history research at Concordia University in Montreal affirms that “in terms of labour practices, the tannery and rolling mill employed French Canadians; Lachine Canal attracted Irish workers and the railways prompted the settlement of Black porters and their families” (p. 1-3). Some of the Black residents were employed by the canteen (The National Film Board of Canada, 1996). This reinforced a distinctive, yet interconnected mix of residents.

When Quebec-born males reached employable age, it was hard to find work. The face of the railway's workforce changed and there was an increase of non-African American men seeking employment. The railways remained the greatest single source of employment for the Black community (Ministère des affaires internationales, 1995, p. 11). Most of the employable men worked for the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway). Despite the existence of surplus labour in Canadian cities, CPR continued to import American sleeping car porters and ignored men listed in Canada's unemployment depots, including Montreal. Although there were few jobs and the money was less than it had been in 1920s, the railway offered some a degree of financial security. Daisy Sweeney's father worked as a sleeping car porter. This occupation was considered *elite* in the Black community (The National Film Board of Canada, 1996). However, the inordinate on-the-job harassment and management abuse counteracted the safety net (Williams, 1997). Judge Stanley Grizzle (National Film Board, 2000) recalled:

Black men were only welcome on railways. Porters were referred to as “George”—regardless and considered like equipment—not treated like a human being.

The White working class had always objected to Blacks because they did not want them competing for jobs. During the Depression, the professional White class began to exhibit the same type of behaviour. The handful of Blacks who wanted to, or could afford to, become professionals were perceived as a threat. The White majority did not acknowledge Blacks because they did not want competition in the shrinking job market (Williams, 1997, p. 79). Widespread unemployment during the Depression forced the government to cut back on immigration into Canada.

My father was a rare exception. He assumed the role of primary breadwinner (his father died at an early age) after successfully completing his high school matriculation. Although he was an honours student and applied to Sir George Williams University to pursue an accounting degree, he was denied admittance based on his colour. He found employment with CNR (Canadian National Railway) as a stenographer/telegrapher and was eventually promoted to a middle-management position. My father recalled many incidents of both subtle and blatant racism in his workplace.

Brand (1994) and Fox (1978) further reveal that with the majority of Black men working as porters on the railroads, the income generated by Black women was also necessary for survival. Most Black women worked as domestic servants, laundresses and in factories doing menial tasks. Drawing from my own background,

Mam/a was a dressmaker and also rented a room to boarders to generate extra revenue. Auntie Nervie took in laundry to iron and Auntie Catherine was a milliner. Daisy Sweeney maintained a teaching business in the privacy of her home. These women operated resourceful and innovative small businesses within the “cottage” industry sector.

An interesting migration shift arose during the 1930s that affected the Black community. Black American men started to leave Quebec, relocating to Ontario. The railroad industry replaced their permanent positions with temporary workers and sufficient numbers of Black men did not immigrate as replacement workers (Brand, 1994).

The dimensions of poverty were significantly higher in Montreal due to a much higher level of seasonal unemployment. Another striking feature of the occupational profiles in Montreal was the high proportion of unskilled labourers that constituted about one-sixth of the labour. The two dominant objectives were wage increase and job security, whereby grievances like working conditions and hours of work were of secondary importance. As a result, workers sent their children out to work, accepted boarders or reconciled themselves to substandard housing, a cheap monotonous diet and other restraints (Copp, 1974, p. 128 -131).

The racially segregated public domains stifled any opportunity for Black women to secure gainful and meaningful employment, develop skills or training and seek advancement. Daisy was effectively shut out. Black women continued to earn paltry wages primarily in the domestic and service occupations. If the general

population was already in dire straits, Black women's marginalized status became further entrenched via Canadian jurisprudence.

Montreal Blacks who wanted to improve themselves academically and professionally during the Depression found it was almost impossible because economic insecurity led to intensified discrimination (Williams, 1997, p. 78). They suffered from this discriminatory measure as it was generally accepted at the time that racial groups varied greatly in intellectual ability and character (Burnet, J.R., 1988, p. 44). This discriminatory factor raised important implications in the employment sector. The dominant positions were occupied and controlled by White Canadians of British origin that practised nepotism and effectively excluded African Canadians from a multitude of job opportunities.

In an effort to alleviate hardships, there were creative solutions ignited by the women in the Black community. Women with rooms to spare converted their homes, or parts of their homes, into rooming houses. These rooms were rented to transient porters, visitors to the city, and in rare instances, to permanent bachelor residents. These rooming houses were a conduit for information and social conventions and news was exchanged about other parts of the Black Diaspora. As well, the resident gained the benefit of being introduced to St. Antoine's life through the family's connections. For women who lived in a world circumscribed by racism, opening up their homes to roomers was a creative way to make money. Daisy Sweeney, my grandmother and othermothers also rented rooms to boarders on short-term and long-term contracts.

The close proximity of the lodgers' section benefitted Black women as well. St. Antoine "above the hill" was well served by the domestics who lived below. Alongside the Irish and British women of St. Antoine, Black women worked in the homes of the wealthy who lived on the upper sections. This was a daily phenomenon they shared with other women of the neighbourhood as domestic service "continued to be the single most important paid employment for women" (Prentice et al., 1988, p. 123).

Nevertheless, some Blacks persevered and established their own small businesses. "Their establishments occupied a certain area where many worked in a variety of skilled trades, clerical and technical area" (Bindon Interview, 1982). As a matter of fact, Matilda ("Tilly") Mays, affectionately known as "Grandmother Mays" (my othermother), was a long-standing community activist and resident of St. Henri. Her father owned a barbershop on McGill Street.

Olga Spencer-Fotheringham, the dance instructor at the Negro Community Center for 50 years, recalled her father's business enterprise. In 1903, he was the first Black man to own and operate a restaurant called Spencer's Café located on St. James/Windsor. Anne Packwood (Bindon Interview, 1988) recalled several Black businesses such as newsstands and a barbershop on Canning Street. "A Black woman owned her hairdressing parlour on the corner of Greene Avenue. Above a store owned by another Black woman was a doll store. There was also one factory owned by coloured people in St. Henri."

Women who did not work outside the home were more flexible with their time and were able to involve themselves with activities that improved their community, such as running youth programs and creating social clubs and other institutions (Williams, 1997, p. 50).

Rising above the gloom of the Depression were hopeful glimmers of entrepreneurial fortitude for those Black people who resorted to creative money management to sustain themselves and their community. Daisy Sweeney grew up amidst this tumultuous period and based on her surroundings forged a career and lifestyle that emphasized hard work, a vision, perseverance and, equally as important, instilling a sense of community.

Jazz

Montreal was considered the work place for jazz musicians, from the 1920s to its demise four decades later under the onslaught of television, rock music and a new mayor's vision without vice.

This was a field where musicianship transcended race, class and language. There were literally hundreds of nightclubs in the city offering some type of entertainment. The music reflected the city's embrace of both French and American cultures. After World War II, jobs were plentiful. Some musicians initiated a variety of their own opportunities by conducting private jam sessions, large concerts and after-hour engagements, "The Jazz Workshop" lecture demonstrations and a Montreal cooperative big band (Gilmore, 1988). The electrifying sounds of cool jazz trickled

through the downtown quarter exploding with a crescendo in Montreal's Black community of St. Henri.

Opening a grand period, Montreal became known as the crown jewel of Quebec, the Paris of North America. Free flowing sale and consumption of liquor with the related illicit activities of gambling and prostitution lured American patrons and entertainers alike. Americans flocked to "sin city" Montreal to experience the exotic burlesque shows at the numerous nightclubs, such as Café St. Michel and Alberta Lounge. These nightclubs are now empty lots and a grand hotel dominates the skyline.

Jazz musicians and clients helped to establish a jazz tradition in Canada. International celebrities such as Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Louis Armstrong, Pearl Bailey and Billie Holiday opened at Rockhead's Paradise in 1929. Rockhead's was immortalized by Canadian author Morley Callaghan in his novel *The loved and the lost* (Miller, 1997, 2002, p. 108). Rockhead's was known as the glittery mecca for jazz musicians, students, servicemen and fans and was the longest running nightclub in Canadian history. It was owned by Rufus Nathanael Rockhead, a Jamaican-born immigrant who served in World War I and worked as a CPR porter. He was originally refused a liquor license because of his race. When he reapplied, the new head of the liquor commission turned out to be a friend of his lawyer (Williams, 1997).

Daisy Sweeney declared, "The jazz scene was mainly for males. Girls didn't go for jazz as much. Girls were not encouraged to go to jazz clubs...so it was more a

male thing.” Anne Rockhead confirmed, “Your parents might go, but your parents wouldn’t let us go.”

A typical Saturday night produced three shows followed by a 3:00 a.m. breakfast show, in which champagne and snacks were served, plus a weekly Sunday afternoon jam session that ran until 7:00 p.m., followed by a late-night show (Nulman, 2002, p. 107).

Olga Spencer-Fotheringham and Bernice “Bunny” Jordan-Whims recalled their career as showgirls who performed the Charleston, lindy hop and jitterbug dances at these nightclubs and toured during the Depression. According to Bernice:

We were called “hoofers” (dancers). We were the first Black Canadian dancers in all of Canada. We worked with Sammy Davis. We did our job and took our money, then home. We were brought up in strict households. Our mothers wouldn’t allow striptease.

In addition to the American legendary jazz musicians, there were many Canadians who launched their careers in Montreal. Yet their existence has also escaped the notice of history, which has accorded them a place only on the occasion of their success in the United States and then often without acknowledging their country of origin, effectively rendering them Americans by omission (Miller, 1997, p. 8).

Unlike his counterparts, piano virtuoso Oscar Peterson, Daisy’s younger brother, transcended that regional view of the Canadian jazz scene. His career flourished in Montreal for many years through domestic recordings, nightclub appearances, cross-

country broadcasts and private radio. At this point, Daisy was engaged in teaching piano lessons at the NCC and in her home.

Education

For the first few decades of the twentieth century, urbanization and industrialization served to deepen the conviction of many Catholic educators that it was more necessary than ever to carefully prepare girls for their familial obligations. Feminism and women's work outside the home were signs that women not only were reticent for marriage and motherhood, but more fundamentally were unwilling to limit themselves to their traditional roles (Razack, 1990, p. 212).

Educational reforms of 1937 heralded the dawn of a new education system in Quebec. Curricula were revised to facilitate access to technical training schools, universities and ultimately to the job market. Girls now had choices among options that included: a general program for:

teacher training; commercial courses for future secretaries; a classical program including Latin and la section menagerie, a program which combined some classical training with domestic science and which was now designed to prepare future domestic science teachers. (Razack, 1990, p. 213)

The education of girls and their success in fulfilling religious and cultural obligations became recognized as an important connection. Girls from lower socioeconomic status were streamed into training as good housekeepers and farm wives. Girls of the upper classes, on the other hand, needed more sophisticated training commensurate with their position as wives of the elite (Razack, 1990).

Education was a high priority for Blacks as evident in Daisy's testament about her parents' expectations. However, Montreal's school systems did not provide adequate opportunities for Black students. Mrs. Cocculuzzi plainly restated adherence to this value system. "Education was the key. It came before anything. They figured a girl didn't need that much education and you'd get married" (Bindon Interview 1982).

A critical point is that all provinces had sanctioned legislation which placed importance on education, except Quebec. "Quebec had no compulsory school attendance legislation. Education remained the responsibility of the Roman Catholic and Protestant committees for public instruction" (Thompson, 1985, p. 11).

There were no laws restricting Blacks from attending schools, but prejudice discouraged them from continuing their education. My own parents recalled how their parents endured great sacrifices to pay for school fees, books, lunch, streetcar fare and uniforms. Generally speaking, only the well-to-do could afford to attend school. (See Appendix P).

Community Uplift and Othermothering

In the words of Mrs. Sweeney, "Montreal was a city of organizations or clubs which met either at the Church, the NCC, the UNIA or at individual homes" (Bindon Interview, 1980). Not only did the special groups exist for specific purposes, but they also provided an important means of gaining experience in leadership and organizational abilities so imperative for the young people and adults of St. Henri. The concrete realities and challenges were layered and complex. During this difficult

period when their economic footholds was sinking lower and lower, Black women and men rose to overcome adversities and forged steadfast alliances with the church, community groups and charitable organizations. In the competition for jobs, Black women and men lost out. At the same time, the more fluid boundaries of extended families and community-based child support networks persisted contrary to the dominant social environment of this period.

“The Church, it’s almost like heaven. An oasis. A rock. A beacon of hope, a spiritual haven. We like to sing and clap our hands” (compiled from quotes by various members of the Union United Church congregation, Sherwood, 2007).

The church was the heart and soul for healing in Montreal’s Black community. This institution grounded personal, social, economic, political and religious intersections among African Canadians and uplifted the race as a whole. In our efforts to circumvent adversarial conditions, oral traditions prevailed – passing on cultural knowledge through song, dance, music, drama and storytelling (See Appendix Q).

A formidable institution, the Black church exercised a conspicuous and positive social activist influence for Black Canadians. It reinforced the notions of self-efficacy and self-affirmation, a spirit of mutual solidarity and cooperation. The church not only provided religious, spiritual upliftment and leadership to its congregation on Sundays, but also channeled its benevolent spirit into parishioners’ daily lives. Reverend Frank Gabourel passionately proclaimed that “it occupied a unique place...to address racial issues....It was a national voice that reached coast to coast. It embodied a spirit to help people walk with dignity” (Sherwood, 2007).

However, in spite of the tireless efforts of Reverend Este of the Union United Church—who offered sustenance on Sunday, established a soup kitchen and who, in partnership with Reverend Ellis of the High African Methodist Episcopal Church, canvassed for donations of food, clothing and money—the circumstances were grim (Williams, 1997). In reflecting upon my personal attendance at church social functions, I equated the preparation and serving of food by our women to symbolize nourishing the body and also fostering a collective spirituality. This act signified a deeper regard for creating and sustaining connections among each other, regardless of social status, religion, gender or national origin.

The impermanence and loss of jobs often meant that rents were in arrears. Not only did some Blacks become homeless; others starved to death. Dislocation and high residential turnover was inevitable for many Blacks and families who had moved away to other districts reluctantly returned to St. Antoine as their incomes dropped (Williams, 1997, p. 75). I do not presume to romanticize the poverty-stricken conditions in the Black community. However, the relocation, although not necessarily welcomed, reunited families within familiar neighbourhoods in close proximity to hometown friends and existing social networks. This intensification of a cramped lifestyle signalled a deeper, mutual respect for each other, albeit under dire circumstances. As a result, the extended family network could reinforce the continual significance of the othermothering practice and kinship networks in the Black community. It was a survival mechanism to help cope with the subtle and sophisticated racism and poverty in this country.

Union United Church's Sunday school took pride in the fact it had able and experienced female teachers to teach elocution, public speaking and drama. Many well-educated Blacks contributed to the community's intellectual life and aided in the training of the children. These activities culminated in the production of many skits and pageants. In the community, an important element of a child's education was learning to handle oneself in public—skills that equipped youngsters for future leadership roles (Bertley, 1982, p. 33).

Black women sustained a lengthy history of volunteerism and community activism. Even during the depths of the economic and social crisis, drama and literary clubs continued to nurture young people. By encouraging social contacts, volunteerism and philanthropy, the whole community maintained a sense of belonging and self-discipline (Williams, 1997). Many of the groups that emerged and flourished during the 1920s adapted to the trying circumstances within which Blacks found themselves. They were visionaries who used their collective energy and executive abilities to promote charities. As voluntary societies, the women responded to and met the vital social welfare needs of families from basic needs to medical care (Bertley, 1976; Best, 1977; Williams, 1997). These women commanded respect and were mentors for the younger generation. This was in accordance with the traditions and practices of othermothering within the Black community (See Appendix S).

The Coloured Women's Club of Montreal was established in 1902 and remains the oldest women's club in Canada (Best, 1977). Their membership was comprised initially of educated Black American women whose husbands were employed with the

Canadian railroad companies. The women taught the values of motherhood and community service (Sherwood, 2007). In 1933, the Coloured Women's Club began a soup kitchen. Anne Packwood recollected:

And there was a club, a group called the Coloured Women's Club. And they would feed those men. It was there on St. Antoine Street, near Mountain. (Bindon Interview, 1982)

Then, in 1935, in response to tremendous need, the women raised money to purchase and maintain a bed at Grace Dart Hospital for Blacks without the resources to pay for hospital admission (Parris, 1988).

"The nine women of this club raised substantial sums for charitable purposes during the Depression. They managed to set up a scholarship fund for children who achieved high academic standing" (Hostesses, 1982, pp. 41, 364).

Philanthropic funding came in many guises. Julius Jones and Maude Jones operated a soup kitchen and made an impact supporting the arts (Hostesses, 1982, p. 277). Isabella Johnson, or "Granny" as she was called, maintained a drop-in centre for the whole community in Plage Laval (now Chomedey, Laval). Each Sunday afternoon, groups of people would congregate. This special support made a difference in people's lives during hard times (Bertley, 1982, p. 33; Hostesses, 1982, p. 278).

According to elders, "Each family looked out for each other." Another exclaimed, "The community was closer-knit than the White community, so they shared whatever they had" (Sherwood, 2007). "Black people didn't suffer as much because we were used to doing without" (Brand, 1991, p. 15). Her remarks

acknowledge supportive kinship bonds, gratitude for the simple necessities of life and a perception of discord within the White community. This was reflected in the following disclosure by an elder citizen who stated that “Black people didn’t suffer as much because we were used to doing without” (Brand, 1991, p. 15). This comment parallels Daisy’s statement about her growing up years—“We were more content with what we had” and solidifies the fluid boundaries that intersect within the Black community—the church, community organizations and family networks. The strength in numbers equation was firmly in place.

Daisy and Anne’s words echo a bold sense of resolve despite their life’s circumstances. It was a common assumption and commitment that those with greater resources would share among themselves. My father also recounted how his mother would share their supply of coal that he would deliver to needy neighbours.

Community activist, Richard Lord encapsulated this vibrant community spirit: We knew if our neighbour was sick or dying you would bring him a bowl of soup or a cake, a tart. If somebody got married, you weren’t invited, you bring your best wishes and take some cake and bring some gifts. At Christmas time people went out and shared things and it was a whole block thing. It was a community thing. (Sherwood, 2007, p. 17)

When interviewing Mr. Pion (Bindon Interview, 1982), he recollected:

And many times, I remember that...going to St. James Street and go to College Street or even as far down as Green Avenue and look out for somebody’s children while the mother went to see the husband in the hospital and they did

a lot of that here. And even make a pound of gingerbread for eating and even make three pounds of cornbread. Mrs. Brown would cook a chicken and Mrs. Taylor would cook a ham and people who were in need were helped. You would come home from church and I know many Sundays my mother had someone from Church who make her the salad.

How did African Canadians view themselves in relation to Quebecois society in general? In what ways did they seek to redress their grievances and as a community engage in collective action? Daisy Sweeney addressed her involvement with this local organization:

We had the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association). They had boys' band at the UNIA. No girls' band (*laughs*)—it started way back then. We would debate, sing, do plays and dance. I remember Alan Husbands, the leader, saying every time, "You have two left feet." He'd get you up to do something. There was always something to do there (See Appendices R, S).

In reconstructing Daisy's subtle references around gender issues, it is apparent that she was aware of inequities. Her outright aversion for domestic work, especially kitchen duties that involved cooking, bold statements about bearing children contrary to her husband's wishes and nuanced conversation regarding the exclusion of girls/women in musical bands are rare indicators of her preoccupation about traditional notions of power. Daisy was a complicated woman who shaped her adult life according to her agenda.

Bill Trott, a tailor, was president of the Montreal branch of the (UNIA). He was also the editor and co-founder with E.M. Packwood of the *Free Lance*, one of the first Black weekly newspapers in Montreal in the 1930s (*The Gazette*, 1992). The UNIA, dependent on community funding, was hit hard as attendance and membership declined, although it maintained a small, loyal following motivated by the movement's founder Marcus Garvey's belief in the importance of pride and self-worth.

Montreal historian Williams (1997) affirmed that, in 1931, Liberty Hall had to be vacated and the UNIA planned to move to Fulford Street (now George Vanier). Neighbouring White residents protested, but after the UNIA obtained 50 signatures from residents who did not object, the landlord relented, a lease was signed and the UNIA moved in. The protest was coordinated by the district's alderman, Joseph Maurice Gabais, who lived a few blocks west at 2407 Coursol Street. Losing the fight to keep the UNIA out of his neighbourhood, Gabais then tried to thwart the UNIA's efforts to obtain its annual dance license. According to Gabais, the parish priest was dead set against having the UNIA in his parish. It was suggested that the priest threatened to work for Gabais' defeat in the next election should Gabais allow the license to be granted so Gabais would not be moved. This forced the UNIA membership to curtail certain fundraising plans, but despite Gabais' machinations they were determined to carry on with their regular activities and be guided by the principles of living in harmony with their neighbours (p. 75).

The spirit of defiance instilled by Garvey was prevalent throughout Black life with particular appeal to working-class Blacks. In her seminal book *When and Where*

I Enter, Giddings (2001) claims that Garvey understood the needs of the dispossessed and focused on Black self-pride, racial dignity, economic independence and a dream of a new society in Africa (p. 193).

Although the UNIA was a nationalist grass-roots organization, the constitution called for the sharing of gender power because “no race can rise higher than its women.” From the beginning, as the backbone of the UNIA, women played an integral part at the executive level. The UNIA constitution called for the establishment of a joint presidency and local membership elected “lady” presidents. Although her role was not equal partnership with her male counterpart, the female president was to assist where necessary and to coordinate the women volunteers in the various UNIA programs. There was an awareness that women, who had been “instrumental in the formation of the UNIA” and, “who were always there first and foremost in activities,” needed to be recognized. The major role of the “lady” president was to “give these women a voice that would be strong and clear.” In Montreal, with their tradition of leadership within the church and other organizations, women accepted this and for many years played a major role in maintaining the organization (Giddings, 1984; Williams, 1997, pp. 58-61).

According to the NCC website, Gyles (2012), president of NCC/Charles H. Este Cultural Centre and the Coloured Women’s Club pronounces that: The Negro Community Center (NCC) was created in 1927, in the living room of Reverend Charles Este, along with 11 members of the congregation of the Union United Church. The NCC’s purpose was “to alleviate social and economic conditions among Blacks in

Montreal” (para 1). During the early years, there was close identification with national events sponsored by Blacks in the United States and the Center’s programming (para 4).

Gyles (2012) affirms that the original group was sponsored by the CNR until it received municipal funding from the Financial Federation of Montreal in 1929 (para 1, 2). Over the course of several years, the organization occupied many different venues, including space in the Union United Church. The programs were coordinated by the original founders and friends until administrative duties became too complex (para 3).

In 1931, Dudley Clyde was hired as executive director and he guided the community through the Depression and World War II (Williams, 1997, p. 77). During his tenure, Mr. Clyde, a trained social worker, received funding through both his personal and business connections on the interracial board, so the NCC was not exclusively dependent upon its hard-hit community for income. This mix of funding enabled the NCC to support programs that attracted an average monthly attendance of 1,000 (Williams, 1997, p. 78). According to Gyles (2012), the NCC also developed age-specific activities and health and welfare services were inaugurated to fill the gaps existing in the total welfare scheme: an employment service, school lunch program and a dental clinic, etc. There was even a credit union (para 5).

Mrs. Sweeney recounted:

The Center was the focal point of everything. We had a lot of students at The Center. I mostly taught classes and uh, various ages in our small community

where everyone knew everybody else....We had large classes....Busy, busy time. Busy Saturdays; it was an interesting time.

Most of the NCC's activities were geared towards children and youth, but due to lack of space the centre was forced to hold many of its activities at Royal Arthur School. In 1949, the Board incorporated the NCC in order to enable them to acquire adequate property under its control.

Daisy Sweeney's name was synonymous with the NCC. Every Black child who studied piano received her dedicated instruction in this majestic multi-levelled grey brick edifice (See Appendix T).

Gyles vividly remembered the NCC of old. "I went between the ages of 7 and 12. I lived in Montreal East and it took me two hours to get there! That's where I had my piano lessons (with Mrs. Sweeney)" (Burnett, 2007).

While still maintaining its strong youth program, the NCC in 1958 received government funding for citizenship education, adult programming and local public affairs issues and evolved into a full-service community centre, serving a multi-ethnic clientele of all ages. Mrs. Sweeney's music classes expanded to include a more diverse multicultural population (para 6)...A milestone occurred in 1965, when the NCC acquired the deed to the building on Coursol Street (Gyles, 2012, para 8).

During the 1930s new groups focused on the performing and literary arts. The Excelsior Debating and Dramatic Club was formed in 1933 and was considered to be a revival of the intellectual and social ferment that had existed in the UNIA's term. The

Excelsior Club fostered public speaking through poetry readings, dramatic monologues and critical forums (Williams, 1997, pp. 76, 77).

The most ambitious artistic endeavour was the Negro Theatre Guild, which evolved out of the Phyllis Wheatley Art Club in the mid to late 1930s (Winks, 1971, p. 417). Elders confirmed that the Negro Theatre Guild evoked a sense of great pride in its day. “A hallmark of perfection and excellence, the Guild mounted productions for nearly twenty-five years to acclaim beyond the environs of Montreal” (Hostesses, 1982, p. 181)

Each production called on the talents and time of many community members, including tradespeople from a variety of backgrounds. The Guild was a success because it created cohesiveness and was an outlet for creativity. The fusion of its diverse talents, skills and energies coalesced into several mega-productions which launched stars, the brightest of whom was Percy Rodriguez, who went on to become a well-known stage actor (Williams, 1997, p. 77).

Hill (1981) maintains these foregoing entities helped to establish a distinct Black culture. He states, “From the 1830’s Blacks formed societies to strengthen their culture and to help the needy in their communities” (p. 179). These sentiments reinforce the active participation of Black women in all aspects of their community life.

However, Walker (1980) presents an insightful observation about the history of Blacks vis-à-vis its importance for White Canadians:

On the most simplistic level, yet still valid, the answer is that Black history is a part of Canadian history and that to understand Canada, one must understand all the parts. The mainstream-development line in Canadian history teaching suggests that everything important, everything worth defining as “history” is White, male and political. (p. 6)

It is not surprising that community activism was high in the Black community. The role of community has therefore become a fundamental theme of Black history in Canada and it can be recognized in several features of African Canadian life; the insistence upon strengthening the group from within, through self-improvement and self-reliance, not as individuals but as a group; assistance to less fortunate group members and the advancement of community rights within Canadian society (Walker, 1999, pp. 152-153).

Chapter 4 – Daisy Sweeney’s Narration

Je me souviens (I remember)....

When some friends came to the house they heard me playing and said they wanted me to teach their children. I was teaching when I was very young. I was about eight years old....I might have been older. I taught music all my life.

My Birth—My Parents—My Family

I was born Daisy Elitha Peterson in Montreal, Quebec, on May 7, 1920. I was the oldest daughter, the second of five children. I was born at home. In those days, everyone was born at home. I remember the day my brother Oscar was born. I remember the nurse coming and he was born in the manse. We lived across from the manse. I remember looking out the window and listening to the people singing hymns.

My mother, Kathleen Olivia (nee John) was born in St. Kitts, Eastern Caribbean. Olive was a cook and housekeeper before immigrating to Canada via Nova Scotia between 1906 and 1908. My mother worked as a homemaker.

My father’s name was Daniel Peterson. He was born in Tortola, British Virgin Islands. He used to be on the navy boats and worked as a boatswain. When they came to Montreal, Dad worked for Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) as a sleeping car porter. Father taught himself and all five of us to play piano.

I remember when the trains used to go by our home and we’d wave at my dad. My mother said we’d just wait for my dad to leave. She was right; he was very stern.

My relationship with my parents was one that commanded respect. We were taught to respect...and my father, no way, no way. My father was always a threat. He

was the master ruler. All my mother had to say was “When your father comes home...” because she was quiet. Whenever any of us did anything out of place, my mother would say, “I’ll tell your father!” She just challenged us with his name. Well, you know a man’s voice...is stronger so she just had to threaten us. It wasn’t the wooden spoon; it was the strap. The strap has a resonance. He gave me the strap. My father didn’t wait for the strap. She had to do the talking...we had to do the work (smiles).

There were five children in the family—Frederick, Daisy, Charles, Oscar and May. Frederick was the oldest and there was one year’s difference between him and I. He had musical talent. Frederick played the trumpet. We used to play duets together very much. Frederick died at 15 years of age from tuberculosis. After that, my brother Charles....We played a lot of home music together. He was five years younger. We had a house band and had fun doing that. He was in the brass band.

I would play the piano and trombone by ear and Oscar would copy me. Oscar played the trumpet and the piano. I helped him learn the piano, but he was a natural.

Charles played the trumpet and later played jazz in the Montreal nightclubs. Chuck also worked for Canadian National Railway (CNR) later on in life. May taught piano and later worked with Oscar doing secretarial work.

I played a major role in raising my younger siblings and teaching them piano. We all taught each other. In any family, one helped the other. I liked to play badminton.

My Community—My School

We lived in St. Henri, also known as Little Burgundy, on Plymouth Grove, a street north of St. Antoine. In those days, apartments were for the big shots. Most people lived in houses and duplexes.

The word to describe my community was poverty. The only hardship was the days my siblings grew out of their clothes and we'd want for each other's shoes. We ate every day. We were more contented with what we had. Today people are less content. You don't move forward if you keep looking backward.

I attended Royal Arthur at six years old. I liked it. Arithmetic was my favourite subject. I found it interesting. I liked to do long division. I had all White teachers. I remember my Grade 1 teacher, Mrs. Langsdale and Mr. Bisset, the principal. Of course, I was a good student. With my father, you didn't have a choice. I finished public school at Grade 7.

Yesterday's students are not like today's students. They wouldn't talk back. As a child, all they had to say was "You go to the principal's office."

When I was 14 years old, I developed tuberculosis. I recovered in quarantine at a sanatorium with my brother Oscar, in Ste. Agathe, Quebec. It was commonplace for children of that generation to rest in a country setting. I remember walking to the village one day with a friend; only rich folks went there. I was the only Black. A crowd gathered and surrounded me...my friend picked up a stone and threw it at the crowd. Later on, my friend told me she tossed it at the crowd because she feared for

my safety and was so startled by their presence. This was the first time I realized that I was the only Black in the village.

Sometimes name-calling. On the whole it (racism) wasn't relevant...if you had to fight, you fought. Yeah, once a boy in the class said, "Do you know the difference between a Black boy and me? There's no difference 'cause you're both niggers." I had two brothers and that was always a help (laughs). The boy who called me the name would disappear! There was hardly any racism. We didn't associate with the States. On an individual level, but not on the whole.

Everything revolved around the church. We attended St. Jude's Anglican Church on Vinet Street every Sunday. We went to Sunday school in the afternoon and had a weekly lesson to study along with Catechism—a form of service. The church held concerts, plays, recitals and we sang hymns.

We had the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association). They had a boys' band at the UNIA. No girl's band (laughs)—it started way back then. We would debate, sing, do plays and dance. I remember Alan Husbands, the leader, saying every time, "You have two left feet." He'd get you up to do something. There was always something to do there.

My musicianship

Well, my dad was my first teacher. My father inspired me because he was a composer. He taught himself the piano. My father also taught all of us reading, writing and arithmetic before we went to school. He would sing the timetables $1 \times 1 = 1$, $1 \times 2 = 2$. I remember how my father would get us lessons. Get your books. Whether it was

music lessons or school lessons and we didn't dare make any mistakes. My father taught us and there was no two ways about it.

He was a man of the books...and taught us classical piano. He just showed us and that's what we did. You just play. You don't think much about it—especially in those days. We didn't have a choice. Actually, I didn't enjoy it as a youngster. I was around eight. I didn't dislike it. But you know the saying you have to practise—we couldn't escape it (laughs). He was a great teacher. He gave us homework and was a great teacher! When my father was out of town working, my mother took over the piano instruction.

I remember also taking piano lessons from Mr. Smythe, a Black man from the community, originally from the States. He owned a studio on Ste. Catherine Street and Mountain.

I won a silver medal at the Ivory Settlement that preceded the NCC (the Negro Community Center). Presumably, I was the best one there. You know, as a coloured child, you just say, "Thank you." There's not the hoopla like they have today. My favourite composition is "Für Elise" by Beethoven.

I got my associate at McGill when I was an adult, yeah, in my twenties. Strange...I don't remember what happened. I was so nervous. I made the examiner nervous. It was a terrifying time—when I took my associates exam. They had a syllabus and you could choose certain pieces, certain pieces you would choose. When they would do two octaves, I'd have to do four—certain speed by metronome. Certain tones.

My brothers Oscar and Charles played jazz. At that time, the jazz scene was mainly for males...mostly it was the men who went...girls didn't go. Girls didn't go for jazz as much. Girls were not encouraged to go to jazz clubs...so it was more a male thing.

I woke up every Saturday morning at 5:30 to go to the Center (the Negro Community Center) and taught piano classes all day until 5:30 p.m. The pupils came from the community and the suburbs too.

Mr. Clyke was a good director. We pulled no punches and we had no failures. Mr. Clyke knew what he said and he said what he meant. Mr. Clyke gave the welcome and helped. He was down there when we came and he helped organize. He enforced rules. You know, because sometimes there were people who thought they were special and of course I didn't feel that way, but he always stuck by me. Made it easier for me.

We had a lot of students at The Center. I mostly taught classes and uh, various ages, in our small community where everyone knew everybody else. So, so you know, some people expected me to give them special favours, which I didn't. So, uh, I was also a private music teacher—Monday to Friday, except for the classes on Saturday at the Negro Community Center where I charged 25cents per lesson. We had large classes. There was about 30 something students each week. I didn't play favourites. Busy, busy time. Busy Saturdays; it was an interesting time. So, uh, that's as far as I remember. The Center was the focal point of everything....

I had a group at the NCC and had them singing and I said, "You never know." I wanted them to sing. I can't sing. They figured they came for piano, but you never

know who comes along to hear you. And that's how it started. I said that to inspire them. It was better to have a choir. We could do a group. You never know, someone might come along who hears you. It so happens that Trevor came along and it wasn't called the Jubilation Choir. I can't remember what we called it. That's how that got started.

In those days, there were no female anything. We women—in the kitchen (laughs).

I was more or less a loner. I remember how I kept to myself. I was quiet—not one of the popular ones (laughs). I came across as a person who was very, very quiet. I was quiet because I was scared. I was afraid of everything. I was a coward. I was terrified of dogs until Oscar brought one home and then I was better.

I was slow at noticing people's ways because we grew up as a family and everyone was treated the same. None of us were treated differently. It took me a while. Some of my outside friends weren't even my friends. As family, you play together and don't think of the world. It took me a long time to figure out who was my friend. It's all part of life's experience. Funny, as a child you don't think about people's ways...people, people get confused or whatever. Once they smile, they're my friends. You become...realize not everybody's your friend...which is sad. Have you ever had that experience? Little voice, little remarks that make you realize. I guess it's all part of growing up. The people who say they're your friends...usually jealousy is part of it. That's part of life.

My Work

I didn't have any trouble finding work. I worked very hard. People would hear the piano playing as they walked by the house and ask me to teach their children. They would hear me play—in those days there was lots of community. It was good because in those days there was little money. It was a lot of help. It was small but good. I think it was fourteen dollars a month. I taught male and female Black children. They were mixed—all ages.

It was more or less through the Center...I taught most of the children in the community. It was my training—my childhood, classical music.

My first student was Oliver Jones. He was the big one! He was an excellent student—no problems. Talent...God-given talent. I think he was seven or eight. Oliver lived near to us—a couple of houses down from us. He said he heard Oscar play and would sit on the steps and hear Oscar and that would inspire him. That was one good thing about our neighbourhood. I never advertised. I didn't have any trouble. Delinquent payment—I can't say they didn't pay. Most paid. When you live in a neighbourhood everybody would know—word of mouth.

Someone, my aunt, worked for as a domestic. This person asked me to play and asked if I'd teach her so I went to teach her—in a haphazard way. I was in my teens. She lived in Westmount. She was an older woman who was my first pupil. I worked for her.

Oh, yes, I remember—the first employer was annoyed at the bracelet I used to wear. When I had it on—she said, “I don't want you to wear the bracelet. I just want

you to be Plain Jane.” I hadn’t remembered that for years. I can even hear the way she said, “Plain Jane!” [her emphasis]. And it was a plain bracelet. I hadn’t thought of that for years. I hadn’t thought of that for years. So I was a Plain Jane for a while...I was thinking I should have worn a whole set of West Indian bangles (laughs). But today, no one would say that...I can still hear “Plain Jane!”

Actually, one of the things that made me perform—locally, community-wise when they had something and asked me to accompany—at the church, especially. Play this for me. The key thing was, “Oh, you could play that.” They assumed I could play anything. I knew what I was doing but it wasn’t officially, I just played the way my dad taught me.

I was in a position playing hymns in the church. I taught at the Sunday school. Sometimes I performed at home for guests.

When they had church, usually they’d call me to play for Christmas plays and recitals. They’d call me to sight read if someone came and there was no one to accompany them. One good thing is when you accompany, usually the person asks on the spur of the moment. In those days, they didn’t have money (laughs)! I didn’t receive anything. I got the training.

I played whatever was put in front of me (laughs). You know—“Play that.” You didn’t have much of a choice. You just followed along, as young people did at that age. You didn’t have as many distractions or choices. Most of the time it was Chopin, ’cause of his music—well, he was sort of a romantic.

Chopin's "The Minute Waltz" and Beethoven's "Für Elise" were favourites too. Beethoven was one of the first classical composers. His type of music was inspiring and extra deep.

Well, I remember that the parents were all nice mostly, but some of them thought they were Beethoven. Well, everyone wanted their child to play like Beethoven. Some see it as a matter of competition. If you have more than two people in the room, you can expect that. Either they didn't practise, or they wouldn't practise. Then they say, "My child this, my child that." There weren't too many problems. It depended on the parent. There were good and bad.

Once, when I was working at the Unity Boys' Club and a lady came in, and she went to the supervisor and told him that I'm not treating the child right. He said, "Does he practise?" She said, "Well..." (laughs) And that was enough!

We weren't hired any place. Whether you were in the factory or whatever, either French or English. Even housing.

My first experience working—I ended up working for someone through my aunt and she asked me if I was interested. That was one of my first jobs, as a domestic. I guess I was in my early twenties or younger. The money was good—it was four dollars per week. It was all you could do. Jobs were hard to find, especially when you showed up and you weren't White. My duties as a domestic were housecleaning, washing the floor by hand, no vacuums, whatever they didn't like to do. We didn't have any vacuums then. Mind the children.

Once I had a little problem because I was cooking (it was my favourite occupation—sarcasm) but you know how West Indians season food. At that time, those folks only knew salt and pepper (laughs). It's true—salt and pepper big time (laughs). So I seasoned the food the way we do at home. The husband liked it, but apparently the wife was jealous. The next evening she said, "We're having that again because Frank liked it." But she said to me, "Just make it plain." I got the drift. I didn't walk that path anymore.

I wasn't quick at noticing people's attitudes. I was slow at noticing people's ways because we grew up as a family and everyone was treated the same. It took me a while. Some of my outside friends weren't even my friends. As family, you play together and don't think of the world. It took me a long time to figure out who was my friend. It's all part of life's experiences.

Until the war...when the war came there were greater opportunities. I guess they needed more people. It was because of the war...men went overseas so there were jobs for women; otherwise, we were confined to the trains and domestics.

The aircraft was the only opportunity and they took everyone. It was freer. I was called Rosie the Riveter. I did it fast. Usually when I did anything, I was speedy. So you could have a race. I usually had a race with myself...with anything I was doing. I guess it was to deal with the boredom.

I remember going for a job and the person coming down the hall (Daisy makes the sound of heels—click, click, click) and she saw me—I heard her footsteps, coming

to interview me. The minute she saw me she said, “We don’t need anyone.” I said, “I know I just came to see if I could get an interview.” I was used to it.

Then I was in a dress factory. I don’t remember what I did. I think I cut threads. I think I cut threads off of the clothes.

I remember when a man used to bring his children to the nursery. I couldn’t believe when I saw him with the children. He just dropped them off and he didn’t even look back to say goodbye. He didn’t kiss them. That always stayed with me. I couldn’t believe he didn’t look back to say goodbye. I played nursery rhymes with the children at the Montreal Day Nursery.

Mr. Clyke recommended me for the job.

I remember one time my brother won a watch and uh, he was trying to sell it. Oscar. I’ve forgotten how it came about. The thing that was funny—he was with a friend. He wanted to buy the watch at a ridiculous price. The dealer was offering them some ridiculous price. So his friend said, “I wasn’t thinking about the strap” (laughs). His friend was a cocky person.

My marriage—My family life

I must say—you have to have a purpose in life. And I loved children. I love children. What’s a home without children? The best mothering experience was everything. A house full of children is like a garden with flowers. You have your ups and downs. We’ve had upsets, but I wouldn’t want to not have a family. Sometimes there are disappointments, but that’s life.

Judy was a twin. Her sister died. She died a crib death. I picked up her sister, little Heather. I was shocked. She wasn't sick. They said it was a crib death. She was just a few weeks I think. You can't deal with it because you don't expect it. I think my husband took it badly. It would be a shock.

Well, sometimes they have done things you'd rather they didn't. When you're a kid—don't poke your nose too far. Come out wherever you are. Do you remember that saying? Don't look too deep. You might see something you don't expect to see.

It's funny; I never used to like to cook (smiles). My mother said I have to learn to cook. I said, "Why?" I said I'll marry a cook and I did. Do you remember my husband? He loved to cook. He's an excellent cook. My husband, James Sweeney—he was chef on CP (Canadian Pacific Railways). He worked for CN too. He opened a restaurant on Royal and Monkland. He started it with both of his sons, Essley and Joseph, from a previous marriage. He's a very good chef.

Well, first of all...I wasn't sure I was going to have children because I lost one. My husband said, "No children." I didn't pay any attention. That was no problem. My husband said that. I said if he left me alone—I couldn't have them on my own (laughs). I couldn't see my home without children. There are many problems when they're small but...if I could have children I wanted to. A garden without flowers, not natural to me. So my husband at first...he didn't want to, but I went ahead...not by myself (laughs), but he liked them. When he brought for one, he brought for all. I think sometimes people are influenced by other people. I am influenced by myself.

I have a beautiful family. I loved my children. Joan and her brother. Joan was the first, Kenny was next. Judy and Sylvia were natural births. Sylvia's touched all bases. She's into everything. She's my powerhouse. Judy is my pet—well, most of the time (laughs). I used to have a phone. She took it out. Apparently, I was making up stories. She's a hard worker all her life.

I adopted three children—Kenny, Joan, Tina. I adopted her when she was about six years old. She lives in Toronto. Do you remember Kenny? Kenny sang. Joan studied ballet.

My husband was good to them too.

Sylvia was really good. And Judy too. They were very musical, God-given talents. Of course, I saw that they practised after school—as long as I could catch them (laughs). And my son, Kenny. They also belonged to church groups and Judy played the violin—not by me of course. We went to St. Jude's Anglican Church. I was the organist and taught Sunday school.

I enjoyed the community spirit at St. Jude's because it was lively, happy and everybody knew everyone from way back. I also attended Union United Church from time to time.

I strapped my kids. No really big reason. If they didn't come straight home from school. I don't remember. If they didn't do something at school...I can't say they were disobedient.

One of them...Sylvia—she'd test the teacher instead of the other way around. One day I went to the school and the teacher said, "What are you going to do with Sylvia?" I said, "I don't know."

She was defiant. She had a special seat and if that seat was taken, she'd move her. She was tall and threatening. Sylvia now lives on Ward Island, Toronto; Kenny is in Montreal. Joan lives in Ottawa with her family. She adopted two children (one is native, the other is mentally challenged). Tina lives in Toronto and Judy is a nurse practising in Montreal.

No Black teachers. I don't think my children had that problem with racism. For one thing, I taught all races. I never encouraged it—people started to encourage it—confrontations instead of education. You are what you are and be the best. The race problem...Black power was just coming in then and I think that some of the leaders...they didn't know how to deal with power and they taught children to be confrontational instead of developing them. Me and my husband wouldn't accept that—they didn't make the difference between children and adults. All of a sudden, the children become adults. Me and you are the ones—as teachers who have to deal with it.

I completed high school through adult education in 1970 at Thomas Moore Private School—an institute run by nuns. I was 50 years old.

"Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose. Dare to make it known. And I used to teach the children. I always tried to include hymns, to have something to stand by and they—Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare

to have a purpose. Dare to make it known.” (This is a verse from the hymn entitled “Dare to be a Daniel.” Lyrics and composer: Philip P. Bliss, 1873. It is a Bible reference to Daniel 6: 1-16, which describes the 70 years of exile of the Jews in Babylon.) There was a time when all the hymns and scriptures were the best way I could teach and most of the time they got the message

The recitals were the most memorable thing I recalled about my career. The one the child would do best, you’d want to show off the child, the one they’d play best. Sometimes it’s a piece that is catchy, that everyone would want to play. You’d have to see how they respond to the piece. You’re not always right, but neither are they. You’d have to use your judgement ahead of time.

I’d decide by grade or else by the type of piece. You don’t want two slow pieces together. You want to keep people interested in the program. They’re going to be nervous anyhow. You have to realize that the child needs to be comfortable; it won’t be good for the child or for you.

Well, I had to prepare for it and their parents would know. And I would explain to them the importance of their attitude and their dress. It didn’t have to be fancy, but it had to be neat of course. And you know when you tell a child he’s going somewhere special how to prepare and their attitude, and their, what do you call it? De-de-decorum.

Well, the parents and friends would come to the recital night, and uh. Every time we had a recital, parents and friends—very enjoyable for all of us, except the children who would be sort of scared (laughs). Mainly I might have scared them

because I demanded perfection for the recitals and discipline. So that made them sit properly, walk properly, dress properly and when you tell this to a child they become very stiff, but I wanted them to realize that they had to have discipline, dress properly, act properly. So they realized that there was something important they were doing (pauses).

The recitals were held at the Fraser Hickson Institute or Library in NDG (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce) in the evening after supper.

And they had to remember that people were coming to hear them and, you know, when you tell a child they're going to somewhere special, they had to be neat, and clean of course. And to respect the audience. So all of it was good, no problems. I guess I put the fear of God in them (laughs). So we had nice times (pauses).

Start with middle C. Everything else went from there. Scales, more scales (laughs). C scale because they said it didn't have any black keys. The thing is, you didn't have anything else to think about.

Arpeggios came later because of the thumb. Scales open the lesson so they would know the same manner at home when they practise their scales and arpeggios and their study. Position your fingers. As long as you do one thing at a time—position the child's fingers and move on from there. Sometimes I'd play with you. Start with middle C and move on from there and how to use your middle thumb. Remember, you're not doing everything at once. The metronome helped.

I started with the right hand and then the left. Not both hands at the same time. Explain it, listen, the progressions, the notes how they got there. One of the pieces they had to prepare that came after and exercises of course.

What we would learn in the lesson was part of the recital. You're thinking of a recital, of what's happening, what you're going to do and how you're going to do it. At the same time, you're preparing the first day. That's why it's not so difficult. Who would make a good recital—which one of your students would be fit to play? Who benefits? The pupils. You look to see what piece. I didn't ask them—they'd say I can't play that. Some children would play a piece and you'd know because they felt comfortable playing it and you too (laughs).

The piece I liked, they'd always get nervous. That's natural, normal. If they don't, they're too relaxed or figure they can do anything.

They had marks, they'd know how much for each lesson. It would be on a percentage based. So they got marks for their scales and their exercises and studies you'd know from the book. Every lesson was marked.

It's difficult sometimes when you come across parents who think their children should have As. And you know better and—I usually felt that in order to achieve something you have to have a certain point and let them know I'm the one who's teaching and ahhh—it was more or less about class work...

I remember one lady came to me one day with her hands on her hips and she said, "Huh! My child this, my child that, I want to know why." I said, "Did you look in the book?" And I said, "Every week I write in the book." Then she came with a

friend who said, “Well, look in the book.” She wasn’t pleased with that and said, “Well, if you don’t understand my child, it’s too bad.” And I said, “Yes,” (laughs) “every child is different.” If you’re willing to understand that, your child is your child so she came back to reinforce this. Some people thought ugh! They didn’t scare me though. (chuckles). One told me...“If you don’t want my child here.” And I said, “Yes, ok. Well, my door’s always open.”

There was one I didn’t get to. The parent said I picked on her child. How did I pick on her? Some parents will say anything. I wasn’t surprised.

One parent accused me of not giving her child certain things to do. I said, “I haven’t even seen her.” She turned to the child, “You haven’t even seen her?” The child was playing hooky, but she blamed me. He started to stutter.

She asked, “Why should you make my child do this, why did you make my child do that?” “Because,” I said, “you can’t have everybody teaching the same.” Anyway, we managed to work; we managed to work out the difficulties. We have to. But you have to always realize, you are being judged and not be intimidated by some people who try to rule. She tried to control me, but I controlled her. We went way back—that was her problem, not mine, so anyway we pulled through it.

I began to prepare the pupils in the fall to see who was good for different exams held at McGill Conservatory of Music. You have an idea this child likes this piece and can do it well. Sometimes a parent wants differently, but I know better.

I would fill in an application and when I got a confirmed date, that’s when the pupil would start to tremble and start to practise. That’s the time to practise.

You have a chance to know the child better. They'd tell me their problems. You expect a certain reaction. They say what they did and not what they didn't do. Sometimes I can talk to the parents.

You have to remember that you can't pull any punches and have any favourites. Uhhh... (laughs). I remember a woman who came to me and said (laughs), "You didn't give my child so and so" and the woman came up to me and she said she was going to fire me and that didn't even bother me—you have your principles and you can't please everyone, so you please yourself (chuckles)...and you do what you have to do and that includes everybody, including yourself. Yes. We had little problems, but I can't say that I had any major problems because if you realize your duty and you do it and that's your responsibility, that's it. What's right is right and what's wrong is wrong. You try and do what you think is right. It will be right. You can't expect everything to be perfect, but you do the best you can and that's what makes it perfect. You also want the best for people, from each child. The only time you have difficulties is with the parents, some parents, because they want special treatments and that didn't work with me (pauses)...one lady came down—she said that I shouldn't be there. You do the best we can and you stick by your principles. You try to help who you can help and you don't worry about who you can't help because they don't want to be helped or even those who complain...I have my complaints...you want to get the best out of everybody if you can, but you do the best you can and you get the best from everybody. One young girl came to me and she said I didn't realize what it was all about—life—how you made it meaningful. And she

said you helped make your future and I was shocked when she said that. Because you know women talk, talk, talk and half the time you don't know what to say, so I encourage, really encourage. So, to always improve, improve, improve. You learn to meet different kinds of people and each has their own agenda, but you have to have a firm purpose; you can't please everyone you do the best you can—same principles for anyone—know right from wrong and you hope for all of that!

I retired from teaching piano when I got old.

Chapter 5 – Daisy Sweeney: The Destabilization of Domestic Work, Dresses and
Daycare

My first experience working—I ended up working for someone through my aunt and she asked me if I was interested. That was one of my first jobs—as a domestic. I guess I was in my early twenties or younger. The money was good—it was four dollars per week. It was all you could do. Jobs were hard to find when you showed up and you weren't White. My duties as a domestic were housecleaning, washing the floor by hand, no vacuums, whatever they didn't like to do...Mind the children.

Daisy Sweeney

Domestic Work

What kinds of images are summoned when we hear the term 'domestic'? How does the Black woman counteract, uphold and sustain the notion of mothering and othermothering in the context of being a full-time domestic for White people? Smith (1999) claims the term usually conjures up an image of a Black woman, the mammy, an "ideological construct of the plantation's faithful household servant...and most perfect slave" (p. 62).

Brand (1991) also subscribes to the slave-master relationship entrenched in the psyche of the dominant White group as similar to the United States (p. 15). Williams (1997) proclaims the legacy of slavery documented in Quebec created a social distance created by race as well as gender.

In effect, these scholars conclude that domestic servitude is a subjugated role attributed to African women throughout the Diaspora and reinscribed over a long, tortuous history. It is a position that reports to a higher, usually White, authoritative figure. It is a position that is inextricably bound by visible and invisible standards imposed by the dominant culture. It is a position that is equated with the shackles of slavery. King (1995) posits that “a Black woman’s survival depends on her ability to use all the economic, social and cultural resources available to her from both the larger society and within her community” (p. 298).

In its earliest records, Bristow (1994) reported that “private domestic agencies employed 41% of all working women in 1891 and most of the domestic business in Canada, except for Quebec, was handled by private domestic agencies” (p. 218). Not only did they work in the least desirable and dirty jobs but Black women were also responsible for their own household and childcare duties.

At the turn of the century, domestic work was a nation-wide industry (Alexander & Glaze, 1996; Brand, 1994; Bristow, 1994; Fraticelli, 1989; Winkler, 1986; Winks, 1997). Filmmaker Prieto (1989) revealed poignant portraits of women who shaped this legacy and discovered that at least 80% of Black women in Canadian cities worked as domestics and were responsible for cleaning the whole house in one day for \$1.00. In her historical study, Davis (1981) claims that “throughout history, the majority of Black women have worked outside their homes...and have seldom been “just housewives” (p. 230).

By 1921 in Black communities across the country and in Montreal's English-speaking Black community, the figure of working women who were domestic workers was closer to 25% while the national average was only 18% (Leslie, 1974, p. 71). Bertley (1982) pushed this figure to 80% in the 1940s when Black females were imported from the Caribbean to specifically perform domestic duties (p. 121).

When I compare these circumstances with current contemporary conditions, the lack of government monitoring and sanctioned regulations places the domestic worker at a greater risk of harassment, intimidation and exploitation. The dire circumstances experienced by both indigenous and foreign domestic workers perpetuated the cycle of marginalization and suppression of voice.

Leslie (1974) claimed that "by the twentieth century, women were rejecting domestic service whenever the opportunity arose, because working conditions were better elsewhere" (p. 74). I question her argument given the economic and historical implications of domestic service for Black women, which was firmly entrenched in the psyche of the public and government policies and practices. Black women were the maids about town—disposable, deprived, demeaned and highly visible.

Calliste (1989) documented a short-lived scheme initiated by the federal government in 1911 to provide French-speaking Black women from Guadeloupe, West Indies, for the Francophone elite of Montreal:

The women were expected to be between twenty-one and thirty-five years old, single and childless. Under this plan, one hundred women from Guadeloupe came to Quebec as domestics. Initially it was a success, because in the eyes of

their Quebec mistresses, these domestics were fond of children, knew their place, and were acceptable as long as they remained in the country as servants. Employing Guadeloupe women presented a number of benefits to the mistresses. Firstly, the women were granted a two-year contract. Secondly, they were paid only \$5 per month compared to the \$12–\$15 monthly paid to White Canadian and European domestics. (pp. 135–136)

However, Bristow (1994) divulged that the scheme was terminated when some of the single women gave birth to children. All the women were eventually deported back to Guadeloupe—including those with children born in Canada.

This treatment of Black female labour was not unique. The deportation of Guadeloupians coincided with the deportation of other women of African Caribbean descent. As Calliste's (1989) in-depth analysis of domestic work disclosed:

As a result of the recession Canada experienced between 1913 and 1915, there was pressure to open jobs for Canadian White women. Based on stories of scores of unemployed Canadian women in cities and towns willing to do domestic work, and worried that Black women might become public charges; immigration officials deported other Black Caribbean women as well. For decades, these deportations were used to justify the restricted entry of Caribbean women. (p. 138)

Domestic workers faced possible deportation and criminal charges, while their employers involved in skullduggery skulked around avoiding inquiry and impunity. Similar adverse conditions existed and continued to plague women who occupy other

unskilled manual jobs, especially for women of colour, non-English speakers, immigrants, lower socioeconomic status workers and the physically challenged. These jobs maintained economic exploitation, intensified emotional investment, stress, solitude and harassment, assumed deference to the employer, long hours, multitasked roles and lack of unionization. The broader global issue of smuggling women across international borders exposes greater risks to forced servitude, prostitution, drug peddling, mental health issues and the breakdown of mothering, families and relationships. The dominant patriarchal society feeds on the subjugation of its underclass female population, which results in some women of the dominant group becoming the ultimate benefactors (Jones, 1985; Strong-Boag, 1981; Kobayashi, 1994).

Although most African Canadian females worked as domestic day labour—doing laundry, childcare, housekeeping, washing windows and assisting in the kitchen—European immigrants also formed a large contingent during the pre-Depression era. Carty's (1994) research revealed that the wealthy Whites of upscale St. Antoine recruited their high class domestic servants—butlers, cooks, nannies and governesses—from the United Kingdom (p. 218).

Mrs. Sweeney recalled, "It was all you could do," reinforcing the prevalence of domestic labour as a female-dominated occupation commensurate with subsistence wages and low or no prestige. She was compelled to work as a domestic due to lack of other employment and educational options. "Domestic work was work that women did only when they had to." This statement resonated with the wives of the fifty red caps

(porters) of the Canadian Pacific Railroad. The seasonal nature and tip-reliant wage structure (ranging from \$4 per day in the summer to \$1.50 per day in the winter) required that their wives and sometimes their daughters were almost always forced to work outside of the home—usually domestic work (Williams, 1997, p. 49).

Carty (1994) juxtaposes her analysis with life history research about her own mother who asserted, “Well, the women were never at a loss for work because all they could get to do was housework. A few of them did work in dress factories, but the majority was just housemaids” (p. 207).

Young Blacks were often forced to drop out of school and seek employment to assist the family financially (Este, 2004). Like most young women, Daisy began domestic work as a teenager, earning \$1 a day or less. As an elder daughter, Daisy was expected to contribute to household expenses as part of the family. Her father’s position as a sleeping car porter was fraught with instability, long work hours and absences from the homefront. At one time, Daisy briefly worked two domestic jobs simultaneously. Williams (1997) documented that it was not unusual for women to hold two domestic jobs and still run their own households (p. 49).

Still, Daisy communicated a disdain for housework and maintained her personal dignity despite the drudgery. “Housework I didn’t like. I didn’t like anything about the house. I was always trying to escape the chores in the kitchen.” In spite of the tedious backbreaking work, Daisy Sweeney felt useful. She learned to be self-reliant. She was raised by two hardworking parents who instilled a strong work ethic through the power of the word and the power of example.

According to Talbot's (1984) autobiography *Growing up Black in Canada*, "some White employers would hire a few relatives if one proved to be acceptable—that is to say appropriately hard-working and respectful" (p. 74). In Daisy Sweeney's circle, her mother, aunties and other women engaged in domestic work and she was recruited as the result of her auntie's referral. It might appear that this mere act of hiring a Black woman reflected a humanitarian gesture for some employers; however, it actually revealed how some Whites maintained an exploitative grip on this labour market which gave them easy access to a pool of disenfranchised workers. Fortunately for Daisy, her foray into this labour market was relatively short lived.

Scholars and government agencies paid little attention to Black women workers, except as domestics and during the labour shortages of World Wars I and II (Harley, 2002, p. xviii). Black women in the lowest occupations found themselves at the mercy of their employer where internal conflict and personal dynamics festered in subtle ways. These women scrubbed and cleaned in isolation from their peers in the homes of prosperous bourgeoisie. In 1928, *Chatelaine* magazine pointed out that "old feudal conditions had not changed; the servant's life and time is not her own...she is not an adult of free will" (Thompson, 1985, p 150). What has been generally excluded from the literature were the ways in which women engaged in sites of resistance using voice, power or agency.

According to Jones' (1986) analysis, "domestic service was a tradition of women's work that was dirty, tedious, low-paying and undermined the African American woman's own role as mother and homemaker. The lack of other

employment opportunities forced women to accept paltry wages” (p. 127). Williams (1997) reported that “payment of five to eight dollars a month per job made the difference between marginal and satisfactory living conditions” (p. 49).

I would argue that this line of analysis by Williams does not fully explain the impact of how domestic work reinscribed the interlocking social dynamics of race, gender, educational background and social class. These women were excluded from fully participating in the wider Quebecois society regardless of whether they earned \$5 or \$8 because they were economically and socially exploited. Moreover, the overdependence and necessity to work in manual unskilled jobs kept women “in their place,” left them with no career options and maintained social and economic hierarchies. In spite of a recommendation, the work conditions were far from ideal and coupled with the duties of childcare, domestic work offered no employer benefits, job stability or legislative regulations. Domestic service was work conducted in the private sphere, unprotected, undervalued and ultimately, underground.

During the Depression, a tide swell of farm daughters moved to the city to join their counterparts seeking work in the 1920s and 1930s (Brand, 1994). A local Black community group in Montreal established a Little Mothers’ League, a Negro self-help society that sought to educate young women and train them to become “proficient in household duties” (Winks, 1997, p. 417).

As I contemplate this initiative, I fully appreciate that during the Depression the need for sustenance and family survival was paramount and this innovation suggested a redefinition of Black people’s fragile existence and on their own terms.

However, I also recognize some contradictions. The organization recognized economic limitations and hardships suffered by its Black people and simultaneously promoted the exploitation of its Black women who supported the middle- and upper-class echelons. Collectively, the Black community aspired to the notion of upliftment in academic and professional domains, but the lines became blurred when race writes out the dynamics of gender. It was a slippery slope. As a creative option, the Little Mother's League jeopardized and entrenched Black women's subordination and helped women secure a place in the labour market, restructure certain features of the domestic service and maintain some semblance of self-worth and personal dignity. It was also quite possible that many Black women at the time did not view their condition as different from that of Black men.

The increased unionization of the Canadian workforce during the 1930s and beyond did not help these women. As isolated employees, their wages remained stagnant. Lack of extended formal education contributed to restricting many to a lifetime of domestic service (Alexander & Glaze, 1996; Leslie, 1974).

Deference mattered and those women who were submissive or who successfully played the role of obedient servant were perhaps more highly valued by their employers. Domestic servants were often subjected to the arbitrary demands of their employers (Glaze & Alexander, 1996; Leslie, 1974). Daisy Sweeney recalled two specific instances when she deferred to her employers in order to avoid conflict.

I was cooking—it was my favourite occupation (*laughs*). But you know how West Indians season [their] food. At the time those folks only knew salt and

pepper (*laughs*). So I seasoned the food the way we do at home. The husband said he liked it, but apparently the wife was jealous. She said, “Just make it plain.” I got the drift. I didn’t walk that path anymore.

The first employer was annoyed at the bracelet I used to wear. She said, “I don’t want you to wear the bracelet. I just want you to be Plain Jane.” So I was a Plain Jane. I can even hear the way she said, “Plain Jane!”

Daisy’s employers used subtle means to exercise their power to structure and control the domestic work relationship and elicit the desired passive response. The technique to admonish her cooking skills or dictate the amount of jewellery Daisy wore was evidence of the unreasonable control and superiority exerted in the workplace. The employers attempted to reduce Daisy’s womanhood and sense of self to a childlike state. Clearly, Daisy held no bargaining power and tolerated the situation possibly because this was a transitory stage in her work cycle. In spite of her ambivalent status, Daisy exercised a subtle way to resist by ignoring the comments and avoiding any direct verbal confrontation. “So cooking dinner, scrubbing floors, washing dishes and performing other physical tasks were not the only demands of domestic service. They are called upon to perform extensive emotional labour” (Kousha, 1999, p. 89).

However, Hambrick and Cannon (cited in Vaz 1997), an Episcopal priest, coined this experience differently:

as ‘invisible dignity’ which means finding and maintaining feistiness about life that nobody can wipe out despite the amount of suffering inflicted upon you. It

meant that Black women living through the suffering of being Black would not allow the wrong to stop or overwhelm them. They understood and have invisibly fought back by totally renaming their reality, salvaging their selfhood and courage. It's an attitude." (p 74, 77, 78)

Equally important, I would also argue that Daisy used her ingenuity to manipulate otherwise powerless situations and exercised her inner fortitude as a defense mechanism. On the one hand, Daisy seemingly disassociated herself from those comments and people who undermined her sense of self. On the other, domestic work placed her in a unique position of understanding the nuances and mannerisms of White middle-class society which could be used to great advantage in her (and her otherchildren's) ability to navigate this contested terrain.

There were other persistent undercurrents facing domestics that were ignored and rarely challenged. "Domestics were occupations considered less than respectable by the Black bourgeoisie" (Decker, 1996, p. 104). Domestic service in West Indian culture was perceived as a sign of low-class standing. Some African Canadian men would shun such a woman, regardless of her fine character traits. They were invisible in their own community and the very nature of their work—with its long hours—made it impossible for them to participate in community events. Black women ended up feeling further stigmatized as a result of this insider rejection (Williams, 1997, p. 108).

There was also tension between individual and community. My mother identified and discussed the latent notion of passing—in my research (Campbell 2007)—the persistent colour hierarchy that was prevalent in the Black community

during Daisy Sweeney's growing-up years. The notion of passing reinforces racism as a sophisticated weapon that further denigrates Black women and men as 'other'. The disparity of African Caribbean people was heightened under a veil of multiple shades and mixed-bloods; usually the lighter the melanin, the greater the social and economic opportunities. "Blacks with White forebears usually had more educational and economic opportunities and were more easily accepted in White society" (Giddings, 1984, p. 186). Many Black people internalized these stereotypes. It was generally accepted that lighter-skinned women were more desirable and held in higher esteem than their darker-skinned counterparts. My mother and othermothers who were light-skinned admitted that they would not consider employment as a domestic and were in the fortunate financial position of not having to. They were members of a Black middle-class that eschewed dirty work in White people's homes and by virtue of this social class breeding were in some ways elitist. In effect, the type of work African Canadian women performed was framed by an obsession with pigmentation. They worked mainly in the needle trade or as waitresses and a few were able to obtain work in daycare, offices or stores. In my mother's case, she was a dressmaker and one of my aunties was a milliner.

For selective groups (my mother, grandmothers and some othermothers), freedom meant that they could withdraw completely from the labour force and in doing so, concentrate their efforts on mothering, homemaking and othermothering activities, while their husbands worked outside of the home to support the family.

However, the economic realities did not make this a viable option for most Black women throughout their entire lifetime.

Passing became a by-product of assimilation—if we pass, then we are rewarded for assimilating and negating our Blackness wanting to imitate Whites, while resisting the pressure is part of the collective struggle. In his groundbreaking research Winks (1997) refers briefly to the notion of passing:

Without question many Negroes are passing as White in Canada today; and with good reason since, except in those nations where a minor portion of Negro “blood” defines one as Negro; they would be regarded not only “cosmetically” but racially as White. (p. 489)

Ironically, this maneuver presented a double oppressive bind for Black Canadian women. On the one hand, they were denied access to educational opportunities and entrapped in domestic and service roles perpetuated by racist practices. On the other, in spite of their bilingual status, age and marital status became discriminatory social factors which further limited prospective employment in the very labour market that they abhorred. What is apparent to me is the constantly shifting dynamics that determine the economic and regional destinies of women of African heritage. Indeed, most African Canadian women in Montreal were bilingual, having been raised in Francophone neighbourhoods, yet they were pitted against an international demographic imperative.

It also created a two-tier system where Eurocentric views of mothering clashed with mothering in the African Diaspora.

Talbot's (1984) autobiography presented her mother's recollections—"after all, a girl doesn't need a fancy education to be a housewife, or failing that, to be a menial worker in the business world or a domestic—at least so it was said" (p. 74).

During World War II, some Black domestics worked for other Black women who were employed in the wartime industries. With a high demand for domestics, the federal government began to recruit domestics from the West Indies, which was quite a departure from the deportation practice of 20 years earlier.

Domestic service was also found in institutional settings. Hotels used women as housekeeping staff and, during the 1920s, the YMCA's (Young Men's Christian Association) head housekeeper and several other members of the housekeeping and kitchen staff were Black women (Williams, 1997).

Domestic work was a means to an end and many Black women vowed that their children would accomplish greater heights than cleaning other people's houses and caring for their children. At the same time, I argue that it instilled and sustained a strong work ethic with a value for diligence, in spite of pitiful wages, long hours, lack of autonomy, solitary and unsavory working conditions. There was a striking ambivalence; that although negative stereotypes were prevalent in the local Black and wider society, the community support also acknowledged and validated the personal worth of the individual. The sense of connectedness within the community made everything bearable. I would further suggest that Daisy's status generated by her musical talents (and her family's) elevated her to an influential position of power within the community and thereby minimized her inferior role as domestic servant.

Fortunately for Daisy, her participation in the domestic market was short term. She forged her own success as a trailblazer because she rewrote her own script to improve her life chances, developed a marketable skill, exercised a certain degree of autonomy and agency over her work, maintained close contact with her children and avoided the intense scrutiny of an employer. These attributes were critical components of othermothering in the Black community. Daisy demonstrated the importance of motherhood and family that extended beyond blood relations to include an entire community. Although she temporarily found herself at the bottom of the socioeconomic stratum, she embodied the fortitude, optimism, humility and resilience that were passed on by her elders to carve out a new path.

It would be several decades before Black women replaced the first and second generation Irish and Scottish women who had flooded the domestic field during the last two decades of the nineteenth century (Williams, 1997).

Dresses and Daycare

“Jobs were hard to find, especially when you showed up and you weren’t White. We weren’t hired anyplace.”

Daisy Sweeney

In the following two subsections, my interviews focused on Daisy’s work in both the garment industry and daycare sector. Her recollections about these jobs were meager.

Montreal emerged as the leading centre for women’s clothing and employed a substantial part of the labour force at very low wages (Linteau & Robert, 1991). Daisy

made a conscious choice to take advantage of another labour market with her eyes wide open. However, in spite of a demand for factory workers, she was barred from employment:

I remember going for a job and the person coming down the hall (she mimicked the noise of heels—click, click, click) and she saw me. I heard her footsteps, coming to interview me. The minute she saw me she said, “We don’t need anyone.” I said, “I know I just came to see if I could get an interview.” I was used to it. I guess I was in my early twenties or younger. That was in a dress factory. I think I cut threads. I think I cut threads off of the clothes.

Factory work in the needle trades was parallel to domestic service. Black women entered the factories bearing a long history of racial subjugation. The long, gruelling hours, relative anonymity and constant monitoring were also institutionalized parts of the needle trade. Harley’s (1978) analysis reveals that yet again, factory owners stipulated that job seekers “be of good moral character and industrious” (p. 9). The significance attached to moral control automatically served to exclude women of African descent since the widespread sentiment among Whites was that the entire Black race was generally corrupt.” Clearly, this was another example of outright White supremacy. It is no wonder that the Black community consciously and effectively refashioned and reinvigorated the notion of “moral character and uplift” as a guiding principle of othermothering to countervail these negative perceptions.

How has the notion of moral character been transmitted to benefit the Black community? The preoccupation of “moral character” and subsequent rejection of

people of African heritage purported by the dominant group reinvents itself as “moral uplift” for Black people through othermothering and community mothering. In Collins (1999) theorizing, the “moral and racial uplift” clause forms the basis in nurturing the Black community to attain self-reliance and independence so desperately needed for community development under oppressive conditions.

By the late 1930s, the unions in the needle trades had broadened out from their Jewish base to include French Canadians and other workers (Thompson, 1985, p. 291). I will assume “other workers” to include immigrant women as well as women of African heritage, although I could not locate any primary or secondary source to support my claim.

Daisy briefly recalled how she also worked with young children at the Montreal Day Nursery. She was recommended for the position by Mr. Clyde, executive director of the Negro Community Center. It is reasonable to assume from this referral that Daisy had established a responsible, mature profile within the Black community.

Mrs. Sargeant (Bindon Interview, May 11, 1982) referred a short comment about *The Montreal Day Nursery*, where Daisy once worked:

They used to take infants when the mother worked by the day...a tavern on Dominion Street beside a bicycle store.

Rosie the Riveter

The outbreak of the war in 1939 found Montreal in a particularly strong position to help Canada in the production of equipment for the armed forces on sea,

land or air. Montreal was the largest port in the nation and could ship whatever manufactured goods to replace lost ones. Montreal during the war became the home of two volunteer naval reserve divisions which supplied many thousand recruits to the Canadian navy. Montreal held an advantage in having her port on a broad river which gave access to the Great Lakes as well as to the ocean (Gibbon, 1947, p. 150). Furthermore, Montreal was ideally situated for service as an airport and became the national Canadian terminal for the bomber ferry command.

Brown's (1989) study elicited the following important historical events:

- March 24, 1942, Prime Minister Mackenzie King officially announced the creation of a National Selective Service
- The purpose would be to mobilize and control all available sources of manpower, with special emphasis on the recruitment of women workers
- A special assistant from Quebec – Florence Martel was appointed to act as special representative of French Canadians due to their staunch conservative opposition (p. 12)
- Mayor Jean Drapeau and Andre Laurendeau felt that the employment of women threatened not only the traditional family unit, but the welfare of women workers as well
- A compulsory registration in September 1942 of all Canadian women between the ages of 20 and 24 was conducted – Daisy Sweeney was part of that registration (p. 13)

- As a result courses were offered to women under the emergency training program, instructing them in trades such as welding, bench fitting, and industrial chemistry
- Only very basic training was offered with less detailed instruction
- There was a marginalization of the work as characteristics such as patience compensated for their lack of male expertise
- In some types of employment, such as munitions work, which require absolute precision, women actually proved more successful than their male counterparts (p. 16)

Rosie the Riveter was the stereotype—the White housewife who heeded appeals to her patriotism and donned denim overalls for the duration of the conflict, to *do the job he left behind* with the war on, so the story goes. Women worked shoulder to shoulder with men in factories, on airfields and on farms. They drove buses, taxis and streetcars. This level of female participation in the workforce was unprecedented (Veterans Affairs Canada). (See Appendices U, V)

Women were in favour of seeking employment during wartime mainly to meet the financial needs to survive in a wartime economy (Brown, 1989, p. 12). Although massive labour shortages during World War II finally opened new employment doors for Blacks, only a tiny proportion worked in war-related industries:

Black women were encouraged to enter “war services” by assuming jobs that White women readily abandoned—laundry, cafeteria and domestic work. By mid-1943, there were labour shortages in service jobs long dependent on

female (i.e. White) labour which opened doors for Black women. (Brand, 1991, p. 21)

Daisy Sweeney walked through the door and was employed as a riveter at Noorduyn Aircraft Limited, a company founded by a Dutch-born engineer in 1935 and a forerunner in the war industry. Mrs. Sweeney recounted her impressions:

When the war came...there were greater opportunities. I guess they needed more people. It was because of the war...men went overseas so there were jobs for women; otherwise we were confined to the trains and domestics....The aircraft was the only opportunity and they took everyone. It was freer.

“There were greater opportunities...It was freer.” Brand (1994) contends that while “things opened up, Black women felt freer at least to argue against racism on an equal footing with the White women they encountered during the war” (p. 182). At first glance, Brand’s insight implies a more level playing field for Black women employed in the war industries. Upon closer analysis, I assert that her standpoint disregards a number of circumstances. First, subtle and more treacherous racist practices were harder to pinpoint and deconstruct. Secondly, private industry and government continued to discriminate against Black women who worked at the lower rungs of the ladder through racist hiring, retention, firing and promotion practices (Alexander & Glaze, 1996; Brand, 1994; Collins, 2000; Duffy, 2007; Harley, 2002; Jones, 1985). Black women continued to be the ‘last hired and first fired’, were excluded from membership in trade unions and assigned difficult and dangerous entry

level jobs. Black women were invariably at greater risk of losing their jobs if they challenged the status quo. This was a fine line to walk.

There were several significant features about war-related jobs. First, they were usually the dirtiest, hardest and most dangerous jobs. Second, Black women who worked in munitions factories handled explosives and were hired for jobs that other workers refused to perform. Riveting required more manual dexterity, but there was the ever-present danger of contact with rivets that got red-hot (Coleman, 1995; Veterans Affairs Canada). Black women were specifically selected to fill those positions which served to reinforce the fact that racism still existed in the war plants.

Most Black women measured the impact of the war on their own lives primarily in terms of the quality of their jobs and living quarters (Jones, 1986). Daisy obtained employment riveting aircraft parts while she continued her career as a piano teacher, which helped her to achieve increased financial security, some status and a higher skill level. Daisy could not recount any specific elaborate details about her job.

She earned the nickname ‘Rosie the Riveter’ from her colleagues, who acknowledged her rapid-fire skills assembling rivets. Daisy remembered:

I did it fast. Usually when I did anything I was speedy. So you could have a race. I usually had a race with myself...with anything I was doing. I guess it was to deal with the boredom.

Brand (1991) further suggests that “widespread expansion of goods and services during the war made it palatable for the employment of Black women in jobs

where their labour was once unacceptable both in terms of their gender and race” (p. 21).

“Through the war, we just worked like dogs, trying to improve ourselves and counting our blessings that we had the chance.” (Delany & Delany, 1993, p. 145)

When the war ended, women surrendered their jobs to the returning male population, lost the paid employment that had given them independence and returned to their role as homemakers (Heron, 1985, p. 5). At the end of the war in 1945, “Rosie the Riveter” women relinquished their riveting gun to take up a new duty, the production of a baby boom, on a full-time basis.

Quebec remained resistant and felt that any employment of mothers threatened the stability and welfare of the family unit. In Quebec, reflections of this kind refashioned the old ideal and the maintenance of a high birthrate became a precondition for a high standard of living. Hence, Francophones were persuaded to regain their once remarkable fertility. Quebecers were hardly unique in envisioning the collapse of society, once women departed from their traditional realm. Journalists nationwide sustained the theme when they recorded with dismay, female participation in the workforce and in the wartime amusements of dance halls and cafes. (Brown, 1989, p. 23; Razack, 1990, p. 215).

However, for a disproportionately high number of Black women, the only available work after the war was domestic service. Daisy Sweeney was unique to that social reality because she ultimately established a public career within her own private domain as a music teacher.

Chapter 6 – Daisy Sweeney’s Musical Memories

Yes, it was fun....As a teacher I had to talk more than I wished to. I taught all races.

Daisy Sweeney, 2009

From the early 1930s through to 1992, Daisy Peterson Sweeney was a venerated and much sought after piano teacher. *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (2009) acknowledges her contribution in the following succinct passage under “Early Piano Instruction in Canada”: “Daisy Peterson Sweeney, sister of Oscar Peterson, has been an important teacher in St. Henri.” This became Daisy’s classic “catchall” introduction to the outside world (Alexander & Glaze, 1996; Bertley, 1977; Moses, 2008; Williams, 1997). The brief acknowledgement in this chronicle legitimizes her worthiness to those who did not know her, partially based on the stature of her former piano teacher, Paul de Marky, and her megastar brother, Oscar Peterson. He achieved the economic viability and social standing that was unattainable to Daisy. Although Daisy’s name is not listed as a “Notable Piano Teacher in Canada” in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (2009) her piano instructor Paul de Marky received recognition. Now it is time to speak about her legacy.

The teaching of children has long been defined as “women’s work” (Henry, 1995, 1998; hooks, 1994, 2003; Giles, 2006; Weiler, 1998). The first piano teachers in Canada were European emigrants and later included Canadians who had studied abroad for advanced studies. The earliest written recollection was T.F. Molt (1795–1856), who began his career in Quebec City in 1823. In his Master’s thesis,

Stewardson (1994) documented The life history of Hattie Rhue Hatchett (1863–1958), which remains the singular record of an African Canadian female music educator, composer and arranger in North Buxton, Ontario.

After the middle of the twentieth century, the piano became an accepted and prominent household instrument in many middle-class family homes in Montreal. Black culture thrived on this instrument. Everyone in my own friendship and family circle owned a piano and there was the expectation that we all study piano, regardless of our economic circumstances. Talbot's autobiography (1984) reminds us of that:

As far back as I can remember there has always been a piano in our home or in the homes of most of our immediate relatives—grandparents, uncles and aunts...As soon as we could read, we were given piano lessons. (p. 55)

Her statement echoes my experiences—not only did we learn the practical exercises; theory, ear training and voice were also necessary components of conservatory music training.

“You have to practise”

Tradition dictated that no young lady was spared the lessons necessary to impart skill in the rendition of dance and parlous pieces and accompaniments (*Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*). In her music education research, Heald (1991)

notes:

Playing the piano is an “appropriate” activity for young girls, an indication of “culture” and “femininity” and an alternative way to spend the time that might otherwise be spent in more “negative” pursuits. Furthermore, the music other

piano students and I learned to reproduce and respect was “classical” music: Beethoven and Bach, Hayden and Mozart. (p. 133)

My interpretation of Heald’s insightful comment signifies important metaphorical implications; that “playing the piano” in a patriarchal society, represents a proactive controlling mechanism to stifle and suppress girls’ innate desire for social interaction and reinforces the adherence to an acceptable conventional public image. Furthermore, the notion of “culture and femininity” which is profoundly dominated by a White-male power structure controls the “classical” canon and overshadows other legitimate musical genres. “Playing the piano” exercises a taken for granted assumption in terms of claiming a personal identity, authoritative voice and broader community collective. It is clear that this excerpt also illustrates a perpetuation of gender stereotype that attempts to defer the independent spirit or “rebel” within. This concept suggests a challenging tension with institutionalized systems of gender oppression used to define women as passive, weak subordinates and to hamper their struggle to maintain a level of autonomy and agency.

Talbot, Heald, Daisy and I practised the classics dutifully but not creatively. Heald (1991) asserts that “creativity is assumed to be a property of anyone who engages in activities which are assumed to demonstrate creativity. What playing the piano meant for me was not an opportunity to express my “creativity” but to have some control” (p. 131). The control, infused with creativity, was what mattered to me.

We all in some way succumbed to the concept of practising and complained of its tedium. I constantly struggled with the backlash unleashed through free exploration

and experimentation of other contemporary genres that appealed to my sensibilities and divergent exposures. Daisy described her early piano experiences with ambivalence. “We didn’t have a choice. Actually, I didn’t enjoy it as a youngster...[but] I didn’t dislike it.”

Piano lessons were akin to a rite of passage in the Black community regardless of one’s social class. Mrs. Sweeney adjusted her fee for group piano lessons at 25 cents a session at the NCC since she recognized that many families were experiencing financial stress. This was a noted feature of her othermothering skills. She was very sensitive to the needs of others.

During my early years as a piano student, I dutifully sought Mrs. Sweeney’s approval and my performances were polished. I blossomed into a focused and devoted student for about six years. I practised diligently, confidently memorized my compositions and played Beethoven with flair. I enjoyed my yearly trek to McGill University’s Conservatory of Music where I demonstrated my skills and received honours on my examinations. I relished performing at the annual spring recitals, which tested my resolve before an audience of my peers, family and community. Most of all, I appreciated the pomp and ceremony at the annual spring recitals. According to Heald (1991), “this kind of music was an acceptable activity and my skill became public property” (p. 132).

However, when I approached adolescence, I started to rebel. I became less enchanted with learning classical piano and preferred to improvise. Jazz, soul and rock and roll played a more prominent role in our home due to my older sister’s acquired

record collection. I would attempt to imitate the jazz masters when practising, but my mother would swiftly redirect those sputters of creativity and bellow, “This is not practising.” My enthusiasm continued to wane. I resisted requests to perform for visitors, even though my parents insisted. At my final recital, I started to play with gusto and then went completely blank. After a few more false starts, my younger sister reluctantly mounted the stage to hand me the sheet music. Naturally, my parents and Mrs. Sweeney were mortified while I was totally humiliated. Strangely enough, this act of forgetfulness conveniently marked an abrupt closure to my musical pursuits. Thankfully, there remained some positive by-products from piano classes. My lessons enhanced my teaching portfolio and recruitment for a position and gained the adoration of my students. Although I no longer practised the piano, I could read music and play reasonably confidently on the ebony and ivory keys. Moreover, I responded to classical and other genres of music with a heightened acuity due to my ear training. So in the long run, practising proved to reap some benefits.

Similarly, Daisy’s sister May reflected that “Daisy played the piano all the time—she was always practising,” reiterating Daisy’s fortitude, remarkable talent and commitment to practising.

Why did Daisy teach piano as a full-time occupation? Partially out of economic necessity; partially because of her passion for music; partially because her musical training presented an opportunity to leave the world in the public sphere as an invisible, marginalized domestic, dress worker and riveter and devote her time to

raising a family; and partially because she could acquire a certain amount of autonomy and agency over her own life.

Barkley Brown (1991) presents an insightful lens "...and so she chose, as many other African women did, despite economic hardship, to leave the world of Black women's work inside the household outside her home and raise a family which would have her time and attention (p.81).

As a White middle-class music educator, Heald (1991) offers a different perspective. In her account, "it was the norm for girls who played the piano to become teachers, not musicians...who could offer their students an enriched musical education, but we did not enter the 'bohemian' world of the musician" (p. 133). Similarly, Daisy commented about the elusive and exclusive world of jazz: "The jazz scene was mainly for males. Girls didn't go for jazz as much...they were not encouraged." Similarly, Citron (1990) documents women's exclusion from the musical canon in terms of professional concert programs, music histories and anthologies as dismal.

Mrs. Sweeney was initially taught classical piano by her parents, received further training from a prominent music educator and quickly developed a respected and lasting reputation within her Black community. According to Gilmore (1989), Daisy also honed her skills, was classically trained at the McGill Conservatory and became an influential piano and music teacher throughout Montreal (See Appendix W).

Daisy was born and raised in a community surrounded by entrepreneurs. She defined her family as her most important priority—“a home without children is like a garden without flowers.” For her, the decision to be a mother and wife first in a world which defined African Canadian women in so many other ways was an act of resistance to a system that defined her place in terms of its own economic and social needs. Within the private sphere, the maintenance of her children and family became the priority of her life. Then in the public domain, as an authoritative figure she could also raise, nurture and guide other children in the community through her musicality. Daisy formulated a deliberate pathway in her zeal to uplift Black children and adults.

Heald (1991) analyzes the notion of talent in a biblical sense by asserting that “the talent of the Bible story is used to show off, to impress, rather than to create community or connectedness” (p. 135). This is instructive because as a devout Christian, Daisy did not hide her musical talent. Her credo was “Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose. Dare to make it known.” During our conversations, she frequently repeated the words to this inspirational hymn. I think it became a self-motivating mantra for Daisy that empowered her to persevere despite hardships in pursuit of a better life for herself, her family, her community. The lyrics, which originated back in the 1800s, reflected the captivity of the Jews in Babylon. Daisy embraced and encoded this hymn as a prophesy which speaks to her consciousness of self.

Mrs. Sweeney modelled excellence as a music educator when she accompanied visiting musicians at various venues, assumed the role of church organist and youth

choir director, organized piano recitals and engraved her leadership skills within the spirit of community mothering. She was categorized as a community mother in the uplift of Montreal's Black community (Bertley, 1976, 1977; Hostesses, 1982; Moses, 2008). Daisy was an innovator; she took risks and initiated several projects. For example, she was the founding musical director of the Ukelele Ensemble, comprised of children from the Sunday school at Union United Church, and co-founder of a choir at the Negro Community Center (NCC). As she recalled:

I had a group at the NCC and had them singing and I said, "You never know." They figured they came for piano, but you never know who comes along to hear you. And that's how it started. It wasn't called the Montreal Jubilation Choir then. I said that to inspire them.

The choir was initially formed in 1972 to honor the 65th anniversary of the Union United Church, but it quickly developed into a long-term project. Daisy recognized that succession planning involving a younger musical director was essential to mentoring the youth, so she passed the baton to Trevor Payne, a local musician (Moses, 2008). In her othermothering role, Daisy demonstrated ongoing commitment to her community and closeness with her students even after they had grown up and relocated.

Mrs. Sweeney lived what hooks called "engaged pedagogy," which emphasizes well-being and an active commitment to the process of self-actualization (1994). The complexities of her legacy promoted a commitment to empowering her students and the community to the highest level of achievement, while pushing herself

to the limits. Her praxis combined a deep commitment to religious dictums and racial uplift that guided her through contested terrains of teaching, community mothering and education. Her love of family, service to others, commitment to musical excellence and passion for religious spirituality and lifelong learning formed the basis of her belief system.

Earlier, I explored Daisy's childhood and young adulthood life in St. Henri through distinct eras, which were marked by turbulent social, political and economic hardships. It was here that she learned how Black women constructed a place of othermothering, inextricably tied to her self-definition, commitment, creativity and empowerment. Her lifestyle could have induced bitterness and a sense of defeat; instead, she asserted her strong sense of family values and deep religious convictions to help deflect pernicious situations. Daisy's upstanding personal and professional behaviours were a consequence of her resistance to the stereotypes of immorality and low intelligence associated with Black women at that time. Daisy's life reflected her strict upbringing where social activities revolved around church events with children and youth.

In the early 1930s, as a pre-teen, Daisy launched her music career, teaching piano and mothering her younger siblings. This early exposure to mothering might account for her serious focus, strong work ethic and independent spirit.

How did she recruit piano students? Daisy recounted, "People would hear the piano playing as they walked by the house and ask to teach their children. They would hear me play...In those days there was lots of community."

Mrs. Sweeney did not need to advertise because she lived in a community where word of mouth was the optimum social form of communication. As previously noted, elder community member Gwen Husbands (Interview, 2009) explained that flyers, bulletins and other print advertisement were expensive mediums that very few in the Black community could afford. Daisy was not concerned about delinquent fees and remarked, “It was good because in those days there was little money. It was a lot of help—it was small but good. I think it was maybe fourteen dollars a month.” Daisy had always made a financial contribution to the family. The presence of her young children did not represent a major obstacle because even when her husband was away, she was home to care for them and her mother pitched in. Daisy was not immune to managing full-time household chores, raising a family and working for pay.

However, an interesting phenomenon of Daisy’s self-employed career was that her income fluctuated depending on her clientele. Private lessons were about \$1 and group lessons were 25 cents per child. I did not feel comfortable discussing her income and how she distributed and managed the household budget, so I did not pursue this topic and she never offered any information about her business management.

Interestingly, Daisy blazed many trails within her musical settings. For example, she registered her music students for annual exams at McGill University’s Conservatory of Music—an institution which practised racist policies and denied admission to a previous generation of topnotch Black students. Several decades later, Daisy earned her associate degree in music and taught music classes there. (When I

contacted the Registrar's Office at McGill University, about Daisy Peterson [Sweeney], they reported having no record of her achievements.) Mrs. Sweeney reminisced in the following passage:

Strange one year, I don't remember what happened. I was so nervous I made the examiner nervous. It was a terrifying time—when I took my associates' exam. They had a syllabus and you could choose certain pieces, certain pieces you would choose. When they would do two octaves, I'd have to do four—certain speed by metronome. Certain tones.

This is one of the rare moments that Daisy acknowledged raw emotion in the form of anxiety when taking her associates' exam at the McGill Music Conservatory. As her former student, I only wish that she had divulged her feelings in an effort to appear more humane and then present strategies on how to counteract those inadequate inner doubts. I think one of her flaws was ignoring students' trembling and trepidation (or at least mine), Because her focus centered on decorum and excellence of execution, it clouded the psychological aspect of teaching and learning.

Her first teaching experience as a private music teacher (outside of her own neighbourhood) was for her own employer as stated:

“...so I went to teach her—in a haphazard way. I was in my teens. She lived in Westmount—an upper-class neighbourhood. She was an older woman who was my first pupil. I worked for her as a domestic (sic).”

An important component of Daisy's ongoing music education was involvement in a professional association, but the catch was that women were institutionally

excluded. According to Banks (1996), Black women of equal intellectual stature and talents were never admitted to the group. Even if Daisy wanted to apply, a significant outlay of money was required. Her experience at this level was virtually non-existent; however, she occasionally participated in an informal professional association.

Her life reflected the social activism that was modelled in her community. Even though she exercised the strict Christian model of womanhood, she also carefully disrupted and redefined it. Her perceptions and expectations of herself were slightly different from the larger society due to the emphasis placed on her by the Black community. Daisy believed in the transformative power of education, devoted her professional musical life to the advancement of the Black community and became an othermother matriarch.

What were the ingredients for her successful career as a music teacher?

Initially, Daisy was refused the position as piano teacher at the NCC, despite her outstanding reputation and high standards, due to an element of exclusivity. Apparently, membership in the club was restricted to hand-picked women who shared the same skin colour, values, education and she was not considered “fair enough in complexion”. Here was a record of discrimination within the ranks of the Black community. Not only did she confront racial discrimination in the mainstream world, but she also had to contend with racialized conflicts within her own community. However, Mr. Clyke, executive director, challenged the decision and it was overturned. They developed a close professional alliance based on shared educational

philosophies. Daisy depended on his steadfast support throughout her career at the NCC. Here is Daisy's recollection of Mr. Clyde:

Mr. Clyde was a good director. We pulled no punches and we had no failures. Mr. Clyde knew what he said and he said what he meant. Mr. Clyde gave the welcome and helped. He was down there when we came and he helped organize. He enforced rules. You know, because sometimes there were people who thought they were special, and of course I didn't feel that way, but he always stuck by me. Made it easier for me.

Mrs. Sweeney abided by rules—just as she had demonstrated in her domestic service job and ammunitions factory. Daisy's productive and busy professional life continued to flourish. During the 1940s, she established and operated her group piano lessons at the Union United Church, the Unity Boys' Club and the Negro Community Center. Daisy remembered her hectic schedule:

I woke up every Saturday morning at 5:30 to go to the Center (the Negro Community Center) and taught piano classes all day until 5:30 p.m. The pupils came from the neighbourhood and the suburbs too. There were about thirty something students each week. I didn't play favourites. Busy, busy time. Busy Saturdays. It was a very interesting time.

Her most memorable times were the piano recitals. She acknowledged that it was "enjoyable for all." Daisy reinforced strict rules of comportment, attire and communication as essential elements of the performing arts.

Comportment and cultural values reflected upbringing and music was the touchstone. It was very much part of a healthy and loving family environment. One elder mused that,

Music was the way we showed love to each other because a house was not a home until there was a piano in it. Everybody played an instrument. Music, with its roots in gospel, jazz, and show music, had always been an important aspect, both privately and publicly, of the Black community. (Williams, 1997, p.76)

Her anecdotal reflection states:

The children would be sort of scared. Mainly I might have scared them because I demanded perfection for the recitals and discipline. So that made them sit properly, walk properly, dress properly and when you tell this to a child, they become very stiff, but I wanted them to realize they had to have discipline, dress properly, act properly. So they realized that there was something important they were doing.

In contrast, Daisy assisted with personal problems and behavioural concerns. She invested time listening to both students and parents to understand them better, as described in the following remark:

My door's always open....Some time a child needs someone to talk to. They'd tell me their problems. They say what they did and not what they didn't do. Sometimes I can talk to the parents. There was one I didn't get to. Some

parents will say anything. I wasn't surprised. At times you have a chance to know the child better.

She not only instructed her students about these expectations but also informed the parents about decorum. This was another indicator of her othermothering role extended to adults:

They had to remember that people were coming to hear them and, you know, when you tell a child they're going somewhere special, they had to be neat and clean of course. And to respect the audience. So all of it was good, no problems. I guess I put the fear of God in them.

Her classroom management skills suggested a structured, teacher-directed instruction guided by high expectations. Her procedural lessons included drills and exercises, along with homework assignments that were marked on a weekly basis. Respect, following the rules and decorum were her mainstay pedagogical expectations.

Daisy fondly recalled one of her first students, Oliver Jones (today an international jazz pianist), "an excellent student—no problems. Talent. I think he was seven or eight and lived a couple of houses down from us. I taught him for about seven or eight years."

Daisy also commented effusively about her own children—Judy, Kenny and Sylvia. "They were very musical. They were God-given talents. Of course I saw that they practised." When I asked her how long they would practise, she replied jokingly, "As long as I could catch them."

Daisy also performed at the local church, community centre and at functions in private homes. Many of her performing invitations were impromptu when she was asked to accompany at church recitals. Mrs. Sweeney reflected:

Play this for me. The key thing was “Oh you could play that.” They assumed I could play anything. I knew what I was doing but it wasn’t official. I just played the way my dad taught me. I was in a position playing hymns in the church. I taught at the Sunday school...they’d call me to sight read if a guest came and there was no accompaniment...on the spur of the moment. Sometimes I performed at home for guests. In those days, they didn’t have money (*laughs*)! I didn’t receive anything. I got the training. I played whatever was put in front of me (*laughs*). You know—“Play that.” You didn’t have much of a choice. You just followed along, as young people did at that age. You didn’t have many distractions or choices. Most of the time it was Chopin, ’cause of his music—well, he was sort of a romantic.

Overall, she described her clientele as “all nice mostly, but some of them thought that they (their children) were Beethoven.” She explained that regardless of whether the child practised or not, a few parents bragged about their child’s supposed musical aptitude. In one scenario, a parent lodged a complaint with the supervisor at the Unity Boys’ Club. When Daisy inquired about the child’s piano practice regimen, the truth prevailed; the child was not practising:

For exams you start in the fall. You’d see who was good for different exams.

You have an idea this child likes this piece and can do it well. You look at

them immediately. Sometimes a parent wants differently, but you know better. Easy [to] take the same pieces. You have the opportunity to prepare. You register like anything [else], you would send in an application. Some parents see it as a competition.

In an effort to support a successful experience for her students, Daisy concentrated on her superb organizational and planning skills. She developed a series of strategies based on her understanding of operating a private business supported mainly by her Black clientele. However, as her business expanded, Daisy's teaching spread to embrace children from multiracial communities. So, her influence was felt beyond the margins of St. Henri and her public sphere identity was significantly expanded and redefined by these experiences. There was no shame in this kind of work and certainly no invisibility. Daisy viewed her own success as inextricably bound to uplifting the race.

In an interview with Daisy's sister, May Peterson confirms Daisy Sweeney's zeal for piano, dedication to music education and indefatigable spirit. Her sister also affirmed Daisy's fortitude and vision:

Music was Daisy's forte. Daisy knew what she wanted. She seemed independent-minded, focused. She was very goal-oriented. She confined herself to music. She liked music, loved piano, loved to teach...She gradually built up a teaching career and her dream had come true...She taught at the NCC and was highly respected...She was always poking into ways to acquire

more. McGill was the only place to broaden her musical abilities. (Phone interview, August 15, 2009)

Hers was a dream fraught with social class, race and gender-specific constructs that invariably hampered her ambition. Daisy engaged in both paid work concurrently with unpaid work in the home sphere. Some feminist scholars have argued that women's continued responsibility for unpaid work in the home disadvantaged them in the labour market due to both periodic and long-term absences and through the burden of the second shift that wage-earning women still bear in the home (Hochschild, 1989). These labour-market disadvantages restrict women to lower-paying, lower-status jobs, reinforcing men's greater access to both resources and power. This inequality at the macro level maintains material constraints and ideological norms that uphold the gendered division of labour in the home (Chafetz, 1991). However, in Daisy's circumstances, the concept can be expanded to bridge both the unpaid (private) and paid (public) spheres, for now she performed the laborious tasks of maintaining the home while she worked within the home. This addresses an issue that is not advanced in any analysis of work for women, particularly in light of the fact that her husband was absent for long periods working on the railroad.

Daisy's journey as an othermother and community mother points to her unwillingness to accept defeat. "Little dreams, say the Elgon forest dwellers of central Africa, are of no great account, but if a person has a 'big dream' the entire community must be gathered and told" (Ford, 1999, p. vii).

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

“The peony is the flower of Montréal – a hardy shrub that thrives in the extremes of Montréal’s climate” (Gibbon, 1947, p. 175).

By inserting the analogy of the peony, I compare the official flower of Montreal to Mrs. Daisy Elitha Peterson Sweeney. A standard description reveals that this flower thrives in Asia, Europe and North America. It represents a hardy, pioneering and enduring spirit and is among the longest-used flowers in ornamental culture. According to Greek mythology, it was used for medicinal and healing purposes (<http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peony>).

Similarly, the daisy is a flower indigenous to the same regions of the world. It is a robust plant that is not affected by mowing. According to etymology, a daisy is interpreted to mean a “day’s eye” because daisies open at dawn as the day just starts to begin. A daisy symbolizes innocence, purity and new beginnings. In ancient Rome, daisies were used for medicinal and healing purposes. In preparation for battles, slaves of the Roman Empire would extract juice from sacksful of daisies. The juice was used to soak bandages which were applied to sword cuts and spear wounds (<http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daisy>).

I present this brief analysis of Daisy’s name to provoke an interesting comparative entry point about her othermothering and musicianship attributes.

The vast contribution of African Canadian women, largely gone unnoticed, has also been traditionally excluded. Women of African ancestry who immigrated to Canada as well as those who were first generation have lived through callous

conditions in which they had to reinvent themselves in order to survive. Elder African Canadian women have been particularly neglected both as a group and individually. Their life history stories in oral form offer a provocative means of collecting their experiences in Canada in the twentieth century. I felt the urge to record the life of one who not only touched my life, but guided scores of others.

To capture Mrs. Daisy Sweeney's voice is central to the "art of memory which establishes an important connection to her past and awakens our sensibilities for the future... glimpse of the past stirs optimism for the future" (Fisher, In Greene, 1995, p. 165).

My exploration of Daisy Sweeney's life was profoundly influenced by historical, socioeconomic and educational contingencies. My research conjoined life history, oral history and archival research methodology to cull understanding about her othermothering and musicianship roles. As I wrote about her dreams, her beliefs, and her theories about life I related them to broader circumstances while reflecting upon my own understandings about pedagogical knowledge and practice. Daisy's life history portrayed the struggle of one person, her tenaciousness, and her will to accomplish her dream one small step at a time. However, other peer voices such as my mother, (Mam/a) and Daisy's sister, May Peterson and her daughter, Judy also became a part of her storied life which affirmed Daisy's fortitude and vision. The polyvocality of voices resonated throughout the community.

Daisy Sweeney's life was highly focused despite her varied roles, since everything concentrated on children. Othermothering was ingrained in daily

experiences; raising her siblings and her own blended family of seven; adopting three children, teaching piano to a Black community; engaging in a host of community mothering activities and othermothering children at lunch and after school. The acts of ‘uplift’, self-help and community-building as central notions of othermothering endured survival ... (Collins, 1991; Mogadime, 2000). Similarly, Daisy’s leadership style also exemplified a distinctive African-centered philosophy based on the central tenets of Ubuntu – summoning interdependence, spirituality and unity among people regardless of social class, race and religious differences. Her work as a community mother and music educator both stabilized her family unit, transcended boundaries and also ensured community survival.

How did Daisy Sweeney socially construct her ideas of success and community uplift? While Daisy Sweeney lived her life through service to her community (unity and interdependence) and strived for a better life, a curious paradox persists. Daisy peppered her conversation with hymns, parables and biblical proverbs which I found irritating as I was not interested in religion. One of her popular proverbs was “Dare to be a Daniel” signified her relationship as an accomplished self-reliant woman, while simultaneously strengthening community relationships, sharing her resources and talents as a music educator. Daisy was a trailblazer and forged new paths by daring to “stand alone”. She dared to apply for certain jobs knowing fully that she would be denied the opportunity. She dared to apply for a piano teacher’s position at the NCC, despite the fact that some in her own community shunned her because of her colour. She dared to enroll her students in piano examinations at

McGill University in spite of their exclusionary policies. She dared to convey personal high standards of self-empowerment through her own resistance work. For instance, she progressed from domestic work to industrial work and accepted employment as a riveter in a non-traditional role. She created her own personal network (with Mr. Clyde, neighbours, McGill University and Paul de Markey) to ensure continuity for herself and other children. She established a home based business as the only Black piano teacher to supplement her family income and promote her passion for classical music. Her love for learning defied age restrictions and her personal educational vision was fulfilled when she acquired her high school diploma at age 50. Daisy was constantly evolving both as a professional and person even after retirement at age 72 when she enrolled in creative writing and painting courses.

I came to realize that Daisy was purposely asserting herself, her values and her life through these proverbs. This was how she defined herself and how she enacted her role as a community mother. These words served as a source of comfort, motivation and affirmation.

Mrs. Sweeney provided students and parents a glimpse into another world – a middle-class domain that was essentially cut off from most of their social realities. She helped her piano students negotiate middle class nuances – in mannerism, dress code and comportment. She artfully conformed to and simultaneously improvised ‘establishment rules’ focused on bringing out the ‘best’ of her students to act in a manner appropriate to the performing arts and imparted inspiration. She demanded

high expectations from her otherchildren, and their parents. Although Daisy may have been under pressure to conform to dominant practices of proper decorum, she also demonstrated a rebellious negotiation with those same hegemonic forces to offset deep-rooted and gendered stereotypes about Black women and their place in society. For instance, her actions consciously sought to debunk the stereotype of the maladjusted 'Negro' by staging recitals in concert halls located in White middle class neighbourhoods. She enrolled her students in rigorous piano examinations at McGill University's Conservatory of Music – an imposing, elitist and officious tertiary institution. As an agent of change, Mrs. Sweeney created a space for Black children to develop their self-esteem and character through community-based choirs, recitals and musical productions, projects that were dynamically connected to her understanding of her own accountability to the community. Daisy Sweeney was engaged in a process of continual transformation as an othermother and community leader (See Appendices X, Y).

I assert that Daisy Sweeney's spiritual and moral commitments were embedded and affirmed in her upbringing which instilled potent family values, high achievement orientation, strong religious codes and work ethic. These strong family bonds symbolized endurance through an early life marked by hardship and poverty.

Although I really looked forward to our visits, Daisy also complicated my role as insider/outsider researcher through the art of music. One day, I spontaneously burst into song as she played hymns on her keyboard. This was quite a revelation because I am not a religious person, but the music facilitated by-gone memories and fond

associations with Union United Church. Bunt (1996) demonstrates how music can be used to assist people in releasing their feelings, resolving hurt and pain. It was one of the very special moments we shared. Music developed a greater intimacy between us.

There was a particular nuanced code that Daisy inserted in our conversations. When she finished answering a question, she would turn; look me straight in the eye and remark “*Your turn.*” This was a summons for me to reciprocate, disclose and engage in dialogue. I recognized this cue as a call and response technique associated with African storytelling when the speaker (griot) invites the listener to interject whether it is by way of song, dance or speech. Her command was also a way for her to save face and retreat when the topic was too difficult for her to remember or divulge.

This project enabled me to situate myself within the St. Henri Black community, learn about the importance of their unity, interdependence and spirituality in addition to learning more about myself. I entered the relationship as a beginner, resulting in a study of my own subjectivity while the inward focus provoked a reshaping of my image of Daisy Sweeney in a bygone era. It was a turning point for me in my own personal and professional development because it forced me to analyze myself both as researcher and participant within the staging of this history making. This experience enabled me to explore and negotiate a complex relationship with a former piano teacher and othermother across generations and geographical locations as both insider and outsider. We sometimes shared power, sometimes othermothered each other and other times skirted around delicate material because of my own hesitancy to deal with heavy ethical implications, sociocultural taboos and a matter of

conscience. As a result, my voice did not always reflect or represent the whole of Daisy Sweeney. In spite of our reciprocal and 'interactive' relationship, my ability to probe and reflect on her comments penetrated only certain layers since self-disclosure for her was equally as difficult for me. Admittedly, my status as an otherchild based on our historical relationship invoked both ambivalent and common ground. I learned that my listening had to go "beyond what is said" (Measor & Sikes, 1992, p. 215).

During the course of the interviews and conversations, Daisy's experiences unfolded in a random, nuanced fashion. The very nature of the community she served became a site of resistance to the status quo. Although she did not express outright how the community helped her resist social inequities, the symbiotic relationship taught her how to advance her othermothering practices in a broader, deeper way.

This study expands life history research and African Canadian othermothering scholarship. It offers insight into othermothering as liberating through my personal reflections as a researcher. It opens up dialogue about the advantages of inter/cross disciplinary studies in this case, women's studies, history, music education and African-centered epistemology. It is unique in that my othermothering research explores the tangible life history of an African Canadian female elder. It references the distinct principles of African-centered epistemology based on Ubuntu's three principles – interdependence, spirituality and unity as central leadership qualities. Ubuntu frames community work within specific contexts of marginalized communities and contributes to the idea of a multiracial integrative approach to othermothering on a global scale.

In the course of this research, I discovered that life history supports a cross cultural framework. The experiences, values and traditions that Daisy internalized were also part of the larger historical context in which she was raised. We need to listen to our female elders – especially those who are in opposition to our own thinking. Daisy Sweeney’s gendered generational experiences were unique. Throughout her life, visions of a more equitable world, accentuating hard work and giving back to the community were endearing characteristics that need to be critically examined and discussed with the younger generation as they seek to find their voices with their families and within the broader community. As a first-generation Canadian, Daisy Sweeney set the stage for future generations. The immigration barriers that her parents experienced as ‘New Canadians’ in the early 20th century no longer exist. Furthermore, my othermothering perspectives lend a broader lens to this social phenomenon based on a multiracial, multilingual, multifaith based framework within a bilingual context. I have also addressed an awareness of the construction of the otherchild’s role in developing further inquiry.

As a result of this study, significant issues about broadening the scope of African othermothering evolved which needed to be deconstructed within the African Canadian context. The central tenets of ‘uplift’ as in moral consciousness, self-motivation, community spirituality and interdependent “connectedness” are key factors in assuming othermothering and community mothering responsibilities and leadership according to the tenets of Ubuntu. We need to listen to our female elders When Daisy named the scenarios surrounding the ‘invisible dignity’ of her employers;

it was a signal to critically dig for deeper meaning behind her apparent silence and passivity. When Daisy echoed the lyrics of “Dare to be a Daniel,” what resonated for me was her way of challenging her inner spirit to rise to enormous challenges and step up and out of her comfort zone. Although Daisy Peterson Sweeney was once a girl bound by enormous restrictions, she remained determined to forge new pathways and assist others in the process.

It could open up debate about the very topics I pursued: gender, race and social class inequities –‘then and now’ in cross-disciplinary intersects. Just as the ‘daisy’ symbolizes a “new dawn” so too does othermothering signal a new beginning in the quest for an expanded area of life history.

Othermothering is a social and political construct. It is crucial that we grab onto its universal philosophy of connectedness and establish its intellectual and imaginative contribution in our classrooms across the nation.

The [heroine’s] challenges are our very own, the inevitable passages each of us faces in life, birth, maturation, setbacks, accomplishments, pain, pleasure, marriage, determination, faith, love, compassion, and the many other traits the heroine displays to answer the challenges of the quest are symbolic of those inner resources on which we too must call to meet the challenges of our life. Ultimately, the heroine’s quest is not along an isolated path, but on one traveled by all humanity; not a victory over outside forces but over those within; not a journey to far-off worlds but to the very center of one’s self (Ford, 1999, p.4).

Othermothering can create new responses to the human social conditions in deeper global context. Othermothering offers the connectedness and closeness that we so desperately crave in our communities around the world. Othermothering deserves a starting point and it is imperative to start now. I now challenge others to *write in* a new direction focused on the worldview of African Canadian experiences spearheaded by elder women who embody a legacy of new strategies and perspectives (See Appendix Z).

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Endnotes

Introduction Endnote

Throughout this dissertation, the terms *Black* and *African Canadian* are used interchangeably.

Throughout this dissertation, the terms *Daisy*, *Daisy Sweeney* and *Mrs. Sweeney* are used interchangeably depending on the context.

Chapter 1 Endnote

Ultramontane: (Christianity / Roman Catholic Church) of or relating to a movement in the Roman Catholic Church which favors the centralized authority and influence of the pope as opposed to local independence.

Chapter 2 Endnote

Fonds: an archival term used to describe a collection of documents originating from the same source.

Chapter 4 Endnotes

Daisy was an accompanist for classical music. The performances were public and both parishioners and the public attended. They were held in a church hall Saturday night or Sunday afternoon. Many times Daisy was approached while sitting in the audience as a spectator. If the musician was local, there might be a rehearsal. Daisy also accompanied choirs and vocalists. She disliked solo performances.

(J. Sweeney, personal communication, December 2008)

Daisy Sweeney was the recipient of a number of distinctions later in life.

1. Daisy Sweeney received an honorary doctorate degree from Laurentian University.
2. She was featured in the 1999 Round Table Black History Month Calendar.
3. Daisy Sweeney was a recipient of the Martin Luther King award from Montreal's Black Theatre Workshop.
4. On September 18, 2005, Daisy Sweeney was honored as part of a series of gala gospel concerts celebrating the 250th anniversary of the Lachine Canal, which feted significant women from the Montreal area who made an outstanding contribution to the community.

5. Daisy Sweeney was presented with a Certificate of Recognition from the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration validating her selfless contribution to the local community and Canada.
6. Daisy Sweeney was a member of the Quebec Professional Piano Teachers' Federation. Student exams for practical, ear training and theory were conducted by the McGill Preparatory School of Music. Many of her students won honors of high distinction.
7. When she reached 65, her family held a surprise grand fete and presented her with a Caribbean excursion to Barbados and Montserrat. She also enjoyed trips to Alberta and New Brunswick with her daughter, Judy. Daisy frequently travelled to Toronto and Ottawa to visit grandchildren and family. She remained active in various churches, enjoyed reading, sewing, painting and playing the piano. Mrs. Sweeney also enrolled in writing courses.
8. In 1992, at seventy-two years of age, Daisy Sweeney retired due to failing health. She experienced TIA (transient ischemic attack) which is a mini stroke and was relocated from her home to a long-term healthcare facility located in Verdun, Quebec.

(J. Sweeney, personal communication, April 18, 2009)

(K. Hemmerick, Blog: Dr. Daisy Peterson Sweeney, September 26, 2005)

Chapter 6 Endnotes

Daisy married July 5, 1950, separated in 1974 and divorced January 1981. Daisy lived in NDG (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce) in different rental properties. She purchased her home in 1973.

When Daisy celebrated her 65th birthday, her family treated her to a trip to Barbados and Montserrat.

Daisy retired in 1992 at the age of 72 after suffering a stroke. During her retirement she enjoyed road trips to other provinces to visit her family. She remained actively involved in church activities, played the piano, enrolled in writing courses and enjoyed reading. When arthritis compromised her mobility, her family relocated her to a nursing home in Verdun, Quebec.

Daisy received an honorary doctorate degree in 1987 from Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario.

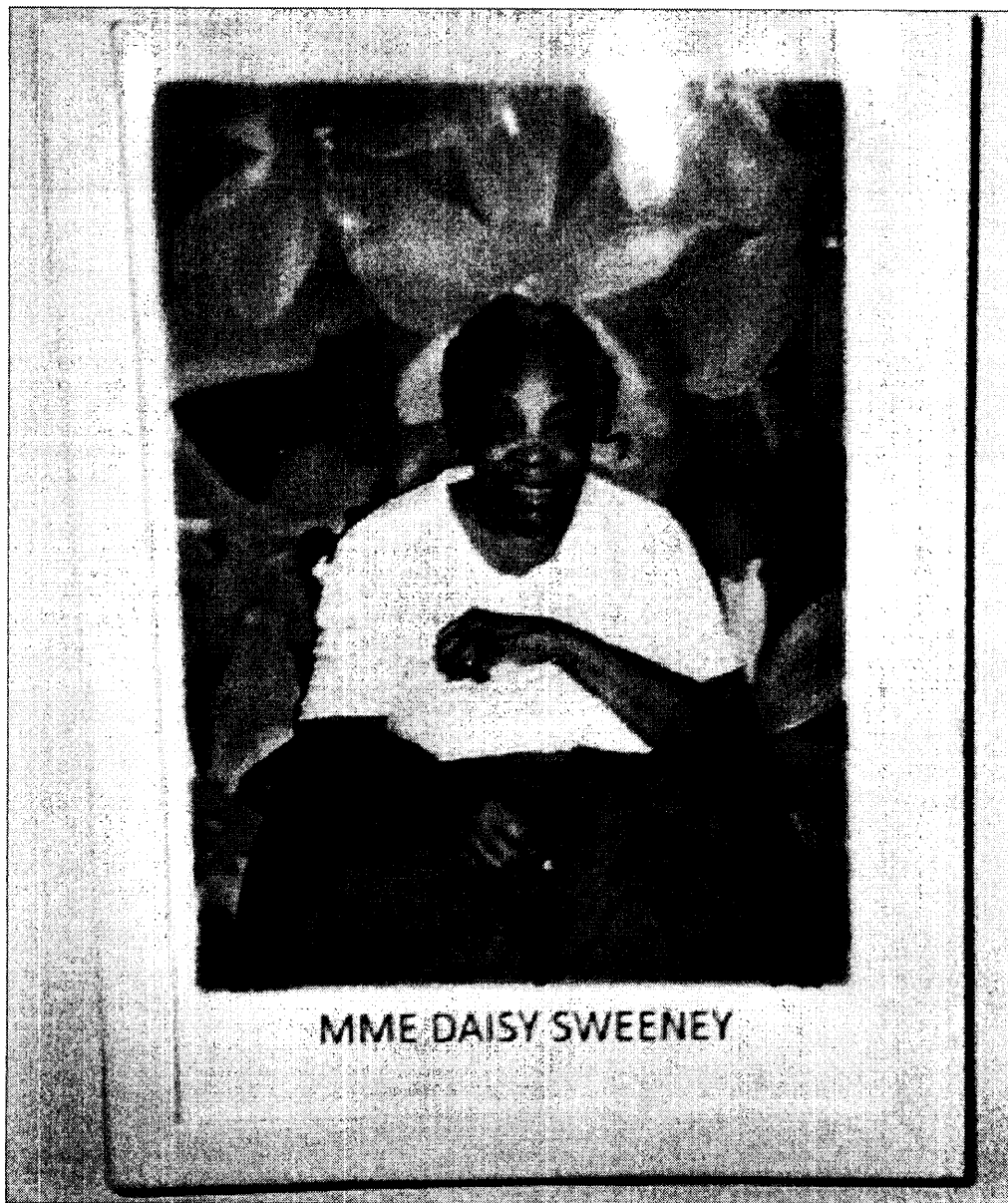
In 1993, she received the Martin Luther King Award from the Montreal Black Theatre Workshop and was featured in a Black History Month calendar.

One of Daisy's highlights was a gospel concert held in her honour at Union United Gospel Choir in October 2005.

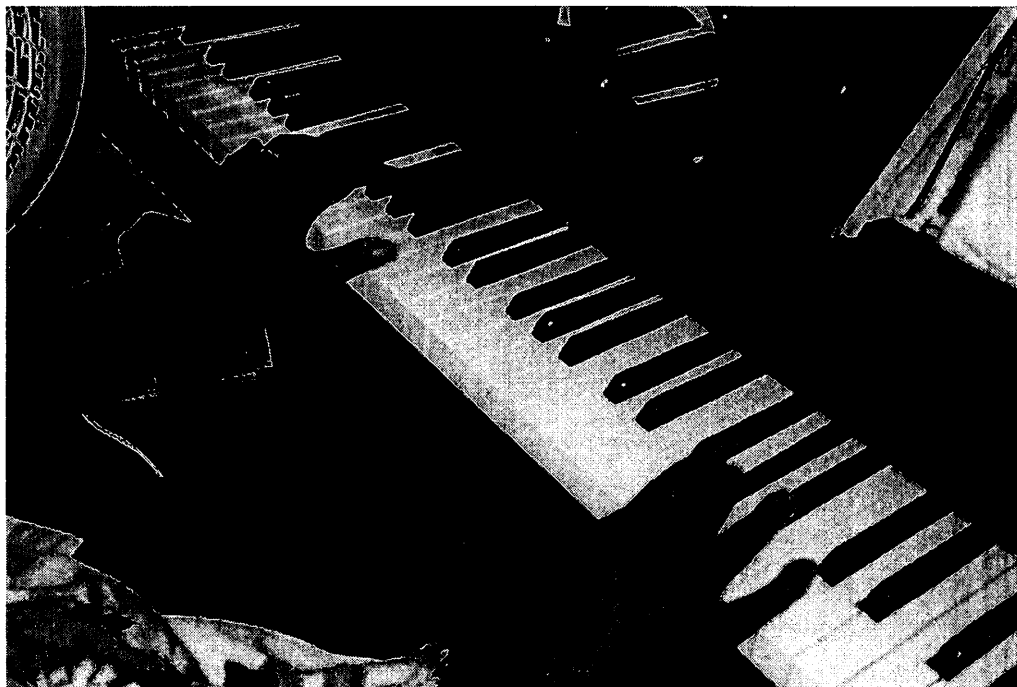
After all, it was Sweeney's passion for music and community that initially inspired many musicians who participated in both Union's gospel choir and the Montreal Jubilation Gospel Choir. It was Sweeney's musical leadership that helped propel the music which emerged out of Union and the Black community as a whole. (Moses, 2008, p. 181)

Appendices

Appendix A – Mme Daisy Sweeney



Appendix B – Daisy Sweeney playing her keyboard (2009)



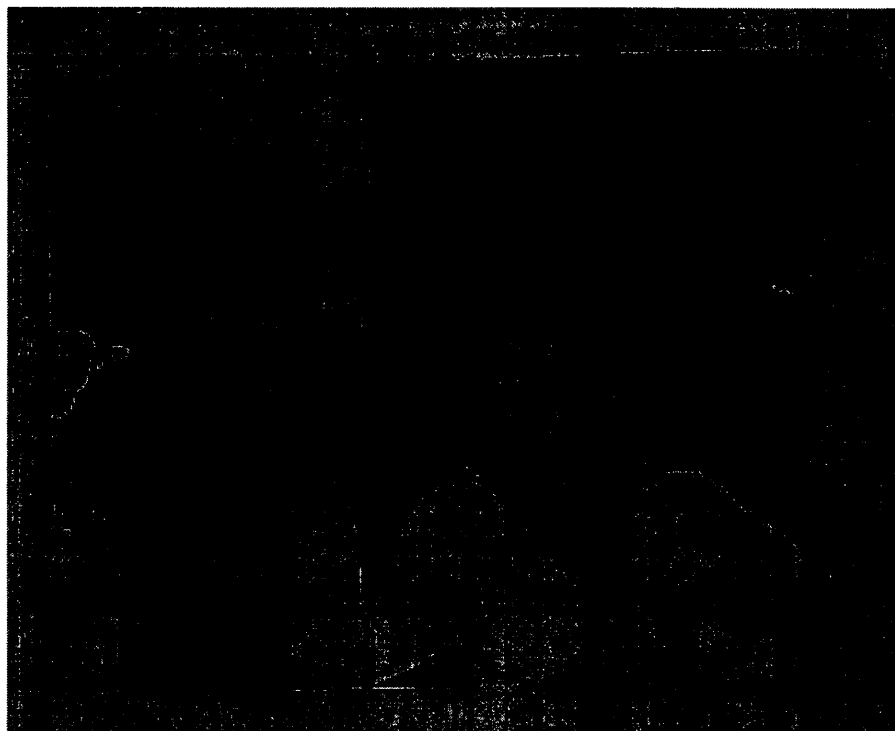
Appendix C – Daisy Sweeney at Floralties Verdun Nursing Home (2009)



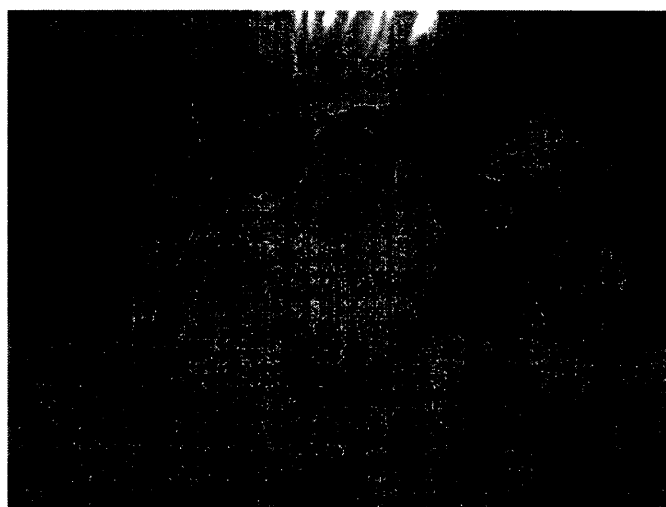
Appendix D – Daisy Peterson Sweeney circa 1926, 6 years old



Appendix E – Daisy Sweeney and her mother



Appendix F – Daisy Sweeney's Wedding Day



Appendix G – Daisy Peterson’s Family



Oscar Peterson poses with his family in one of a series of photographs commissioned by the Canadian Pacific Railway, for whom his father worked as a porter. Left to right: brother Chuck, father Daniel, mother Olivia, sisters May and Daisy. *Canadian Pacific Corporate Archives.*

Appendix H – Daisy and Oscar playing the piano



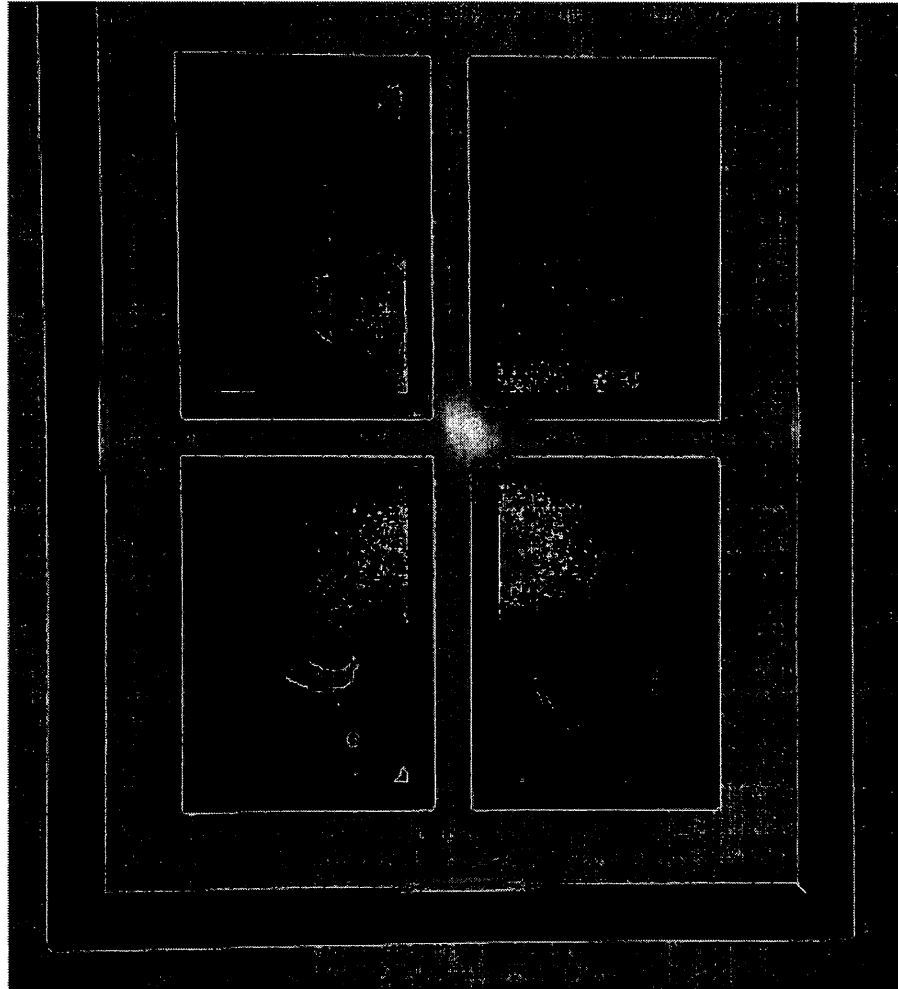
Appendix I – Daisy Sweeney with her daughter Judy



Appendix J – Family Photomontage



Appendix K – Daisy Sweeney’s grandchildren



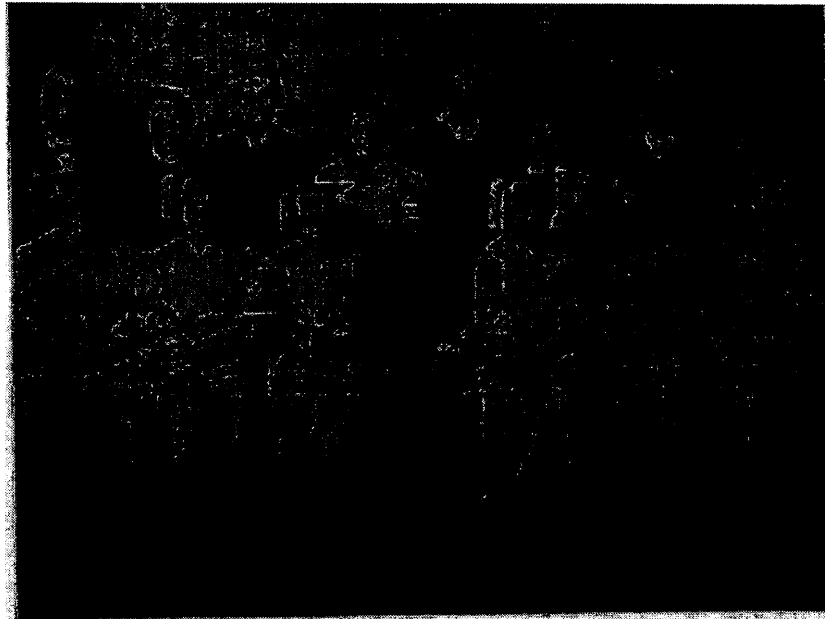
Appendix M – Daisy Peterson as a young adult



Appendix N – Typical St. Henri home in early 1900s



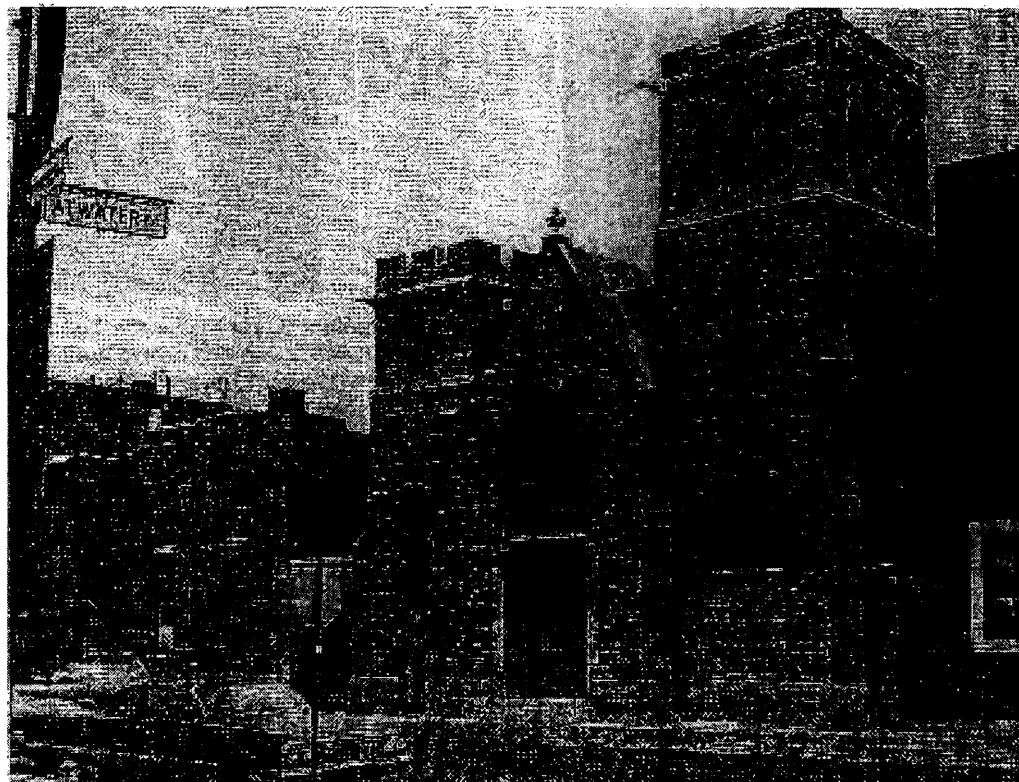
Appendix P – The Elks Organization



The 1948 Cap & Gown or Education Department of Beaver Temple No. 578. L.B.P.O.E. of Montreal (The Elks).

Sitting (left to right) Theresa Cooper, vice-president; Addie Harrison, escort; Rose Harper, trustee; Rev. A. Markham, vice-president; Bertha Wade, treasurer; Beatrice Barton, president; Fleurette Brown; Standing (left to right): A Blackman; Janet Winslow; Maurice Mandes; Elaine Cooper, secretary; Rev. A. Jordan; Ruth Irving, doorkeeper; C. Judd; Alice Wilson.

Appendix Q – Union United Church



Appendix R – United Negro Improvement Association



The property of the U.N.I.A., Montreal Division, is located at the corner of St. James and Georges Vanier (formerly Fulford) Streets. It was purchased in 1943. Liberty Hall is located at 710 Georges Vanier St. Among the outstanding personalities to speak in this Hall are Marcus Garvey himself as well as Dr. Kwame Nkrumah who was a guest on his first visit to Canada as head of Ghana. This was in July 1958, 16 months after his country gained its independence from Britain. Many exceptional performers such as Oscar Peterson and Percy Rodrigues got their start at Liberty Hall.

Appendix S – UNIA Weekly newspaper – *The Negro World*

The Negro World, the weekly UNIA newspaper published in New York City and read by Black people throughout the world, carried news about UNIA divisions organized in various countries.

The Negro World, October 27, 1923
Montreal, Canada

Sunday October 14, our meeting was presided over by our Lady President Mrs. Julian. The religious part of the program was conducted in the usual way. In opening the public meeting, the front page of *The Negro World* was read by Trustee James Song, "One Fleeting Hour," was sung by Mrs. Marshall, the juncture, the Lady President, who has just returned home after a visit to the Toronto and Detroit Divisions, gave us an interesting talk as to the doings of these divisions visited. Mentioning the hearty reception given her.

Mr. Trott, the Chairman of the Building Fund, asked for all outstanding books to be handed in. After this request was complied with, we were proud to find that our Building Fund is surely making great strides. Our determined effort and motto is "Own your own hall in 1929."

The Negro World, February 14, 1925

SYDNEY, N.S.

The Sydney division of the U.N.I.A. held a mass meeting was called to order by the president, Bro. James Hoyte. The ode "From Greenland's Icy Mountains" was sung by the audience followed by prayer by the chaplain. Bro. O Seale was chairman for the evening.

The following program, was rendered: Address by the president, Bro. James Hoyte, "Redemption of Africa"; anthem by the choir; recitation by Master Selving Eitten; quartette, by Mr. Philip and others; recitation by little Miss Madelene Hooper; recitation by Miss Miriam Weeks; anthem by the U.N.I.A. choir, "Glory to God" accompanied by Mr. Charles Pilgrim; recitation by Luveston Herber, son.

The Negro World, March 21, 1925.

SYDNEY, new S.W.

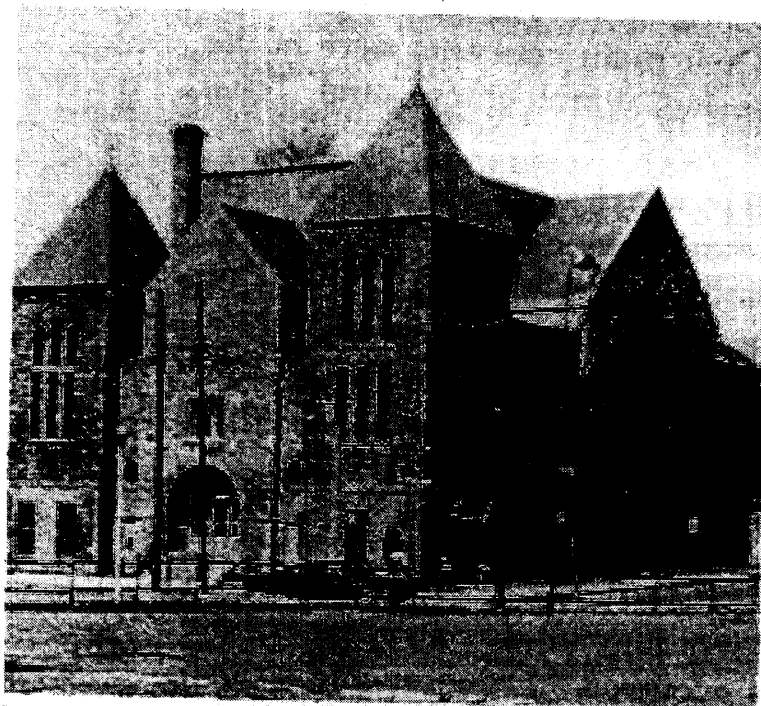
The Sydney Division of the U.N.I.A. held a large public mass meeting at Liberty Hall on Sunday, March 1, at 8:30 p.m. The meeting opened in the usual manner with prayer and song service led by the Chaplain, James Gray, after which the president, Honorable James Hoyte, took the chair and outlined in an interesting and eloquent manner the purpose of the meeting. The president then introduced Dr. Caller who delivered a lengthy and eloquent address on the life and work of Mr. Garvey.

Other speakers were Reverend Bishop Stanley Trotman who outlined the aims and objects of the association; Mr. A. Gunn, attorney-at-law, a white friend; Mr. Foreman Waye, a labour member of the provincial house of Nova Scotia spoke in an enthusiastic and encouraging manner of the work of the organization; Honorable William Fitzgerald, former Mayor of Sydney, spoke in sympathetic terms of the humiliation of Mr. Garvey and urged the members not to become discouraged. While the program being rendered, Mr. Gunn offered a resolution that a telegram be sent to President Coolidge asking executive clemency for Mr. O. Seales, who acted as master of ceremonies, the meeting closed with the singing of the National Anthem.

Another successful mass meeting was held at 8:30 p.m. The speakers at the evening meeting were, Reverend I. Bishop Trotman, Mr. Frank Williams, Mr. Sidney Bynoe and Mr. Percy Blackman.

OSCAR SEALE, Reporter.

Appendix T – Negro Community Centre (NCC) founded in 1927

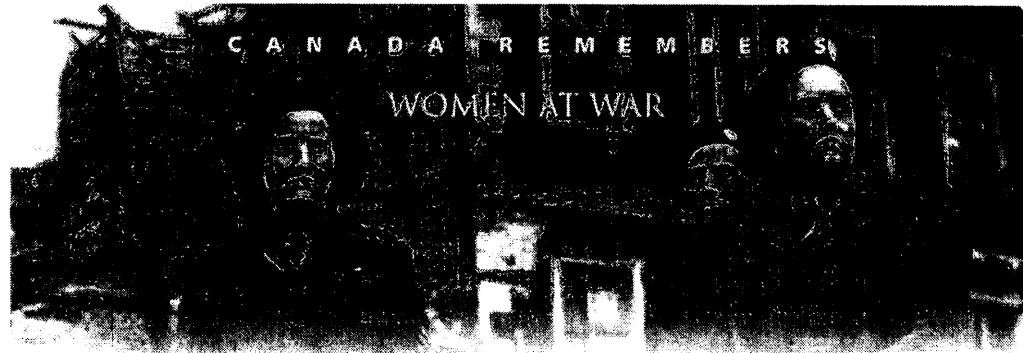


The Montreal Negro Community Centre was founded in the fall of 1927 in Union Church in order to "alleviate social and economic conditions among Negroes in Montreal". Among the founders were Rev. Charles Este, Ms Clara De Shield, Mr Golden Darby, Mr. D.P. Sykes and Mrs. M.L. Morris. The centre occupied this building in July, 1955.

Appendix U – Rosie the Riveter



Appendix V – Women and Work during World War II



INTRODUCTION

During the Second World War, the role of women in Canadian society changed dramatically. Canada needed women to pitch in and support the war effort from their homes, to work at jobs that were traditionally held by men, and to serve in the military. Canadian women enthusiastically embraced their new roles and responsibilities and helped contribute to the success of Canada's 'Victory Campaign'.

ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES FOR VICTORY!

During the war, many women took a wide variety of civilian jobs that had once been filled by men. Canada had its own version of 'Rosie the Riveter', the symbolic working woman who laboured in factories to help the war effort. Women worked shoulder-to-shoulder with men in factories, on airfields and on farms. They built parts for ships and aircraft and manufactured ammunition. They drove buses, taxis and streetcars. This level of female participation in the workplace was a first for Canada - thousands of Canadian women proving they had the skills, strength and ability to do the work that men did.

- Out of a total Canadian population of 11 million people, only about 600,000 Canadian women held permanent jobs when the war started. During the war, their numbers doubled to 1,200,000.
- At the peak of wartime employment in 1943-44, 439,000 women worked in the service sector, 373,000 in manufacturing and 4,000 in construction.
- Women's smaller physical size and manual dexterity helped them develop a great reputation for fine precision work in electronics, optics, and instrument assembly.

- With their sons overseas, many farm women had to take on extra work. One Alberta mother of nine sons - all of them either in the army or away working in factories - drove the tractor, plowed the fields, put up hay and hauled grain to elevators, along with tending her garden, raising chickens, pigs and turkeys and canning hundreds of jars of fruits and vegetables.
- Women who worked with lumberjacks and loggers during the war were called "lumberjills."
- Canada's Elsie Gregory McGill was the first woman in the world to graduate as an aeronautical engineer. She worked for Fairchild Aircraft Limited during the war. In 1940, her team's design and production methods were turning out more than 100 Hurricane combat aircraft per month.

KEEPING THE HOME FIRES BURNING

During the war, women extended their charitable work to the war effort. They knit socks, scarves and mitts and prepared parcels for Canadians overseas, gathered materials for scrap collection drives, and helped people displaced by the war by providing clothes and setting up refugee centres. To deal with wartime shortages, women became experts at doing more with less. They made their own clothes (sometimes even using an old parachute to make a wedding dress) and planted "Victory gardens" to supply much-needed fruits and vegetables to their families and communities. In short, women - acting in the traditional role of homemakers - gave, saved and made do.

- As part of the war effort, many commodities in Canada were 'rationed' (a limit placed on the amount that could be used). Weekly rations of food included 1 1/3 ounces of tea, 5 1/3 ounces of coffee,

Photo: Members of the original C.I.A.C. (Canadian Industrial Artists) in their factory, 12 June 1943, (Hamm, Germany, National Archives of Canada, 102279)

Appendix W – Daisy Sweeney playing the organ

Mrs. Sweeney, apart from being an accomplished performer in her own right, is one of the outstanding music teachers in this county. Her graduates include her brother, Oscar Peterson and Trevor Payne.



Appendix X – Recipient of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award

Recipient of the
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
Achievement Award, 1995



Dr. Daisy Peterson-Sweeney

Appendix Y – Gospel Concert honouring Daisy Peterson Sweeney (September 18, 2005)

GOSPEL!

CONCERTS GRATUITS

Les concerts

Russell Delegation Choir
 Isabelle Demers, organisatrice
 Dimanche, 7 août à 18 h
 Église des Saints-Anges de Lachine
 1485 Boulevard Saint-Jacques
 Lachine (Québec) J7R 1R9

Chantres Musiciens
 Chorale du Conservatoire de Musique Moderne (CEMM)
 Dimanche, 4 septembre à 18 h
 Église Protestante Unitaire du Québec (EPUQ)
 1100, rue Saint-Jacques
 Montréal, Québec H3C 2G4

People's Gospel Choir of Montreal
 Dimanche, 21 août à 18 h
 Église St-Jacques de Lachine
 1485, boulevard Saint-Jacques
 Lachine (Québec) J7R 1R9

Union Church Gospel Choir
 People's Gospel Choir
 dimanche, 18 septembre à 18 h
 Église St-Jacques de Lachine
 1485, boulevard Saint-Jacques

www.canal-lachine.com

Les partenaires de :

Canada Québec Montréal

Logos des partenaires : S, M, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z, AA, AB, AC, AD, AE, AF, AG, AH, AI, AJ, AK, AL, AM, AN, AO, AP, AQ, AR, AS, AT, AU, AV, AW, AX, AY, AZ, BA, BB, BC, BD, BE, BF, BG, BH, BI, BJ, BK, BL, BM, BN, BO, BP, BQ, BR, BS, BT, BU, BV, BW, BX, BY, BZ, CA, CB, CC, CD, CE, CF, CG, CH, CI, CJ, CK, CL, CM, CN, CO, CP, CQ, CR, CS, CT, CU, CV, CW, CX, CY, CZ, DA, DB, DC, DD, DE, DF, DG, DH, DI, DJ, DK, DL, DM, DN, DO, DP, DQ, DR, DS, DT, DU, DV, DW, DX, DY, DZ, EA, EB, EC, ED, EE, EF, EG, EH, EI, EJ, EK, EL, EM, EN, EO, EP, EQ, ER, ES, ET, EU, EV, EW, EX, EY, EZ, FA, FB, FC, FD, FE, FF, FG, FH, FI, FJ, FK, FL, FM, FN, FO, FP, FQ, FR, FS, FT, FU, FV, FW, FX, FY, FZ, GA, GB, GC, GD, GE, GF, GG, GH, GI, GJ, GK, GL, GM, GN, GO, GP, GQ, GR, GS, GT, GU, GV, GW, GX, GY, GZ, HA, HB, HC, HD, HE, HF, HG, HH, HI, HJ, HK, HL, HM, HN, HO, HP, HQ, HR, HS, HT, HU, HV, HW, HX, HY, HZ, IA, IB, IC, ID, IE, IF, IG, IH, II, IJ, IK, IL, IM, IN, IO, IP, IQ, IR, IS, IT, IU, IV, IW, IX, IY, IZ, JA, JB, JC, JD, JE, JF, JG, JH, JI, JJ, JK, JL, JM, JN, JO, JP, JQ, JR, JS, JT, JU, JV, JW, JX, JY, JZ, KA, KB, KC, KD, KE, KF, KG, KH, KI, KJ, KK, KL, KM, KN, KO, KP, KQ, KR, KS, KT, KU, KV, KW, KX, KY, KZ, LA, LB, LC, LD, LE, LF, LG, LH, LI, LJ, LK, LL, LM, LN, LO, LP, LQ, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, LW, LX, LY, LZ, MA, MB, MC, MD, ME, MF, MG, MH, MI, MJ, MK, ML, MM, MN, MO, MP, MQ, MR, MS, MT, MU, MV, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NB, NC, ND, NE, NF, NG, NH, NI, NJ, NK, NL, NM, NN, NO, NP, NQ, NR, NS, NT, NU, NV, NW, NX, NY, NZ, OA, OB, OC, OD, OE, OF, OG, OH, OI, OJ, OK, OL, OM, ON, OO, OP, OQ, OR, OS, OT, OU, OV, OW, OX, OY, OZ, PA, PB, PC, PD, PE, PF, PG, PH, PI, PJ, PK, PL, PM, PN, PO, PP, PQ, PR, PS, PT, PU, PV, PW, PX, PY, PZ, QA, QB, QC, QD, QE, QF, QG, QH, QI, QJ, QK, QL, QM, QN, QO, QP, QQ, QR, QS, QT, QU, QV, QW, QX, QY, QZ, RA, RB, RC, RD, RE, RF, RG, RH, RI, RJ, RK, RL, RM, RN, RO, RP, RQ, RR, RS, RT, RU, RV, RW, RX, RY, RZ, SA, SB, SC, SD, SE, SF, SG, SH, SI, SJ, SK, SL, SM, SN, SO, SP, SQ, SR, SS, ST, SU, SV, SW, SX, SY, SZ, TA, TB, TC, TD, TE, TF, TG, TH, TI, TJ, TK, TL, TM, TN, TO, TP, TQ, TR, TS, TT, TU, TV, TW, TX, TY, TZ, UA, UB, UC, UD, UE, UF, UG, UH, UI, UJ, UK, UL, UM, UN, UO, UP, UQ, UR, US, UT, UU, UV, UW, UX, UY, UZ, VA, VB, VC, VD, VE, VF, VG, VH, VI, VJ, VK, VL, VM, VN, VO, VP, VQ, VR, VS, VT, VU, VV, VW, VX, VY, VZ, WA, WB, WC, WD, WE, WF, WG, WH, WI, WJ, WK, WL, WM, WN, WO, WP, WQ, WR, WS, WT, WU, WV, WW, WX, WY, WZ, XA, XB, XC, XD, XE, XF, XG, XH, XI, XJ, XK, XL, XM, XN, XO, XP, XQ, XR, XS, XT, XU, XV, XW, XX, XY, XZ, YA, YB, YC, YD, YE, YF, YG, YH, YI, YJ, YK, YL, YM, YN, YO, YP, YQ, YR, YS, YT, YU, YV, YW, YX, YY, YZ, ZA, ZB, ZC, ZD, ZE, ZF, ZG, ZH, ZI, ZJ, ZK, ZL, ZM, ZN, ZO, ZP, ZQ, ZR, ZS, ZT, ZU, ZV, ZW, ZX, ZY, ZZ.

Appendix Z – Daisy Sweeney at the Gospel Concert (September 18, 2005)

