

The "I" of the Owl

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One of my first memories of school is of a report I did on the Snowy Owl. I remember teaching myself everything about the snowy owl through the books I could find in the school and public library. I wanted to know why the owl was so wise as depicted in children's stories. As I had been blind in one eye since birth I was fascinated with the owl's ability to rotate its head so it could see all around. I recall to this day what the eight year old me learned about the wise owl.

Growing up there wasn't much emphasis on education in my family. My childhood was sometimes very difficult and my parents had many struggles. My grandmother had attended a residential school and was glad to finish high school and never speak of it again. No one in my family had attended college or university. It was my Métis grandfather who saw my interest in academics and constantly encouraged me to continue education after high school. He was illiterate and saw the many opportunities that education could bring. Towards the end of his life, he was completely blind so I would take him for walks and tell him what I saw. He would comment that my one eye could see enough for two people.

Despite the obstacles I faced, I went to university and in my fourth year, discovered academic research while in an honours program. I had rediscovered that same joy in research as had the eight year old me, studying the owl. Six years later I graduated from the University of British Columbia with a Ph.D. Having earned almost \$100,000 in scholarships I had no student debt. It was my proudest moment in life to that point. I now had something that no one could ever take away from me.

Post-secondary education freed me from a life that I didn't want. It gave me the opportunity to start a new life. The years of study and hard work solidified a better life for me and ensured better lives for my children.

Over the last two decades, at times of stress in my life I have thrown myself into researching something new. The skills and knowledge I gain at these times have greatly enriched my life and encourage me to keep me moving forward.

My quest to become like the wise owl still inspires me. The transformative power of education in my life is best represented by this soapstone carving of the single eye of an owl, "*The 'I' of the Owl*". Like me, it started out shapeless, rough and rocky, but was transformed by the hard work of my own hands. Soapstone, mined in Quebec for over a century has been used by Aboriginal carvers for generations. Sadly, my grandfather wasn't alive to see me even begin post-secondary education. But, I know how proud he would have been and his legacy in me will forever be etched in stone.