

[What kind of Ancestor do you hope to be?

Thinking of our roles as early childhood educators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, despite the many challenges and struggles, how can we connect to our ancestors for knowledge and hope? What will we offer our communities to draw upon in their challenging times as we look to the future?

The AECEO Truth and Reconciliation Guiding Committee Elder Brenda Mason has inspired this conversation to share our stories and reflections about how you/we represent these stories in our lives and ECE practice—connected to ancestral knowledge while supporting young children and families. We would like to share our reflections, and we welcome others who are reading this to share as well. We want to start with Elder Brenda's story.



*"As I walk into my office each morning and sit in my chair, my eyes land on the Eagle feather that was gifted to me to hold. I smile in greeting, and I am touched. Today, I am moved to reflect on *who I am, what I am, where do I come from, where has my journey taken me, and where is it leading me today?**

I thought of my Anishinaabe name, and the feeling came over me to dig deeper into how I walk and live my Anishinaabe name. What does it mean, what connection does it bring to me and what do I bring? How did this spirit name influence my life? As I was exploring how my Anishinaabe name has influenced my life and where it has taken me, I realized not only the influence it has but I started thinking about the wording of my Anishinaabe name: Imprint hanging Standing Women. The word I focused on was 'Imprint'.

Imprint made me think about our Ancestors and stories about how they left their footprints for us Indigenous People. Footprints that was full of life teachings and those teachings came alive within us when we listened. All these teachings gave guidance on our life journey. Our traditional way of life was never lost. The teachings, stories and our way of life as Indigenous people were hidden until it was time to come alive and that occurred in many ways. Many of the teachings came alive in our blood and hearts. We thought and believed we didn't know, but the teachings were within us all along. So, I am thinking what kind of imprints am I leaving? What kind of imprints do I want to leave for those

that are coming behind me? I am thinking about the youth and children. What imprints am I leaving when I have been with people in a gathering?

It is with hope that I leave imprints of kindness, humility, love, and honesty. It is my hope that I am demonstrating the Seven Grandfather Teachings while being honest when I feel sad, angry, or displeased. It is with hope that I model how I address the difficult emotions with respect and finding a way to let go and continue to live a good life. It is with hope that I am demonstrating Mino-bimaadiziwin (living a good life) as my mom and dad had shown us in the way they lived their lives. I too want to leave imprints that provide guidance to be kind, respectful, honest, humble, brave to take risks, brave to be who we are, strength, demonstrating wisdom, and to love.

I realized I will never stop growing and all that I am is within. Many things that happened in my life woke me up to know what I needed was inside me all along. And it is with hope that I leave this a little bit of an imprint for those that are coming behind me. Meegwetch and I am grateful Creator."

~ Elder Brenda Mason

The Truth and Reconciliation Guiding Committee would like to encourage reflection on Elder Brenda Mason's important questions:

What kind of imprints am I leaving? What kind of footprints do I want to leave for those that are coming behind me? What imprints am I leaving when I have been with people in a gathering?

Please send your reflections to info@aeceo.ca, and they will be included in the next issue of eceLINK.