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But Life Is Changing

Volume Two

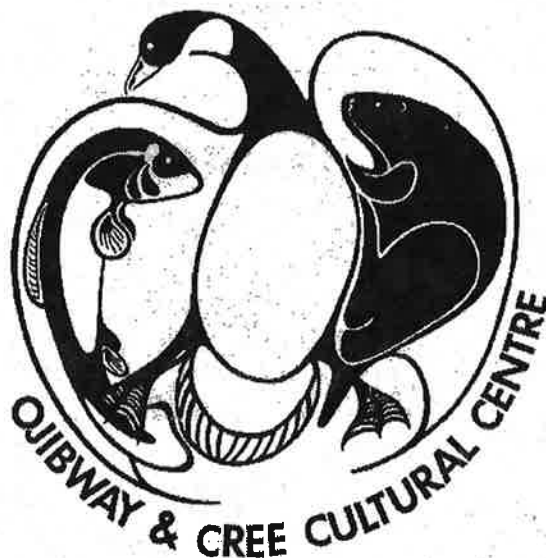


Father Lavoie, OMI

Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre

But Life Is Changing

Volume Two



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Preface

The five stories that follow were told in Cree by the elders of the Omushkegowuk area. These stories, gathered from 1977 to 1993, were taken from a collection of audio tapes housed at the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre in Timmins, Ontario. The recording of these tapes took place under different conditions and purposes that ranged from an informal interview situation for personal information to a formal interview setting for issues on the environment. These tapes were transcribed from the original Cree into syllabics and later translated into English by Anastasia Weesk and J.P. Jacasum. The text was edited by Anastasia Weesk (Cree) and Jim Hollander (English) to make it readable, while attempting to preserve the feeling and meaning of the original spoken Cree.

The Cree elders told two types of stories: (1) *aataloohkaana* or sacred stories about legendary, supernatural, and mythological events; and (2) *tipaachimoowina* or stories about local history and real or apparently real events. All the stories in this collection are categorized as *tipaachimoowina*. These stories provide accounts of personal experiences and remembrances of the elders. They deal with a lifestyle and a world view that are vastly different from that of today. Although there is no traditional term for these stories, they could be called *kaakaskimeewaawina* or advice texts. Advice from the Cree elders is something that we can all use nowadays.

These texts were gathered to provide authentic reading material for Cree speakers in their own language, to supply a primary source of Cree word and sentence structures, to provide examples of Cree literature for English speakers, and to portray a changing Cree way of life.

Acknowledgements

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Bert Morrison for his initial project conceptualization

Hannah Sutherland for her encouragement and promotion

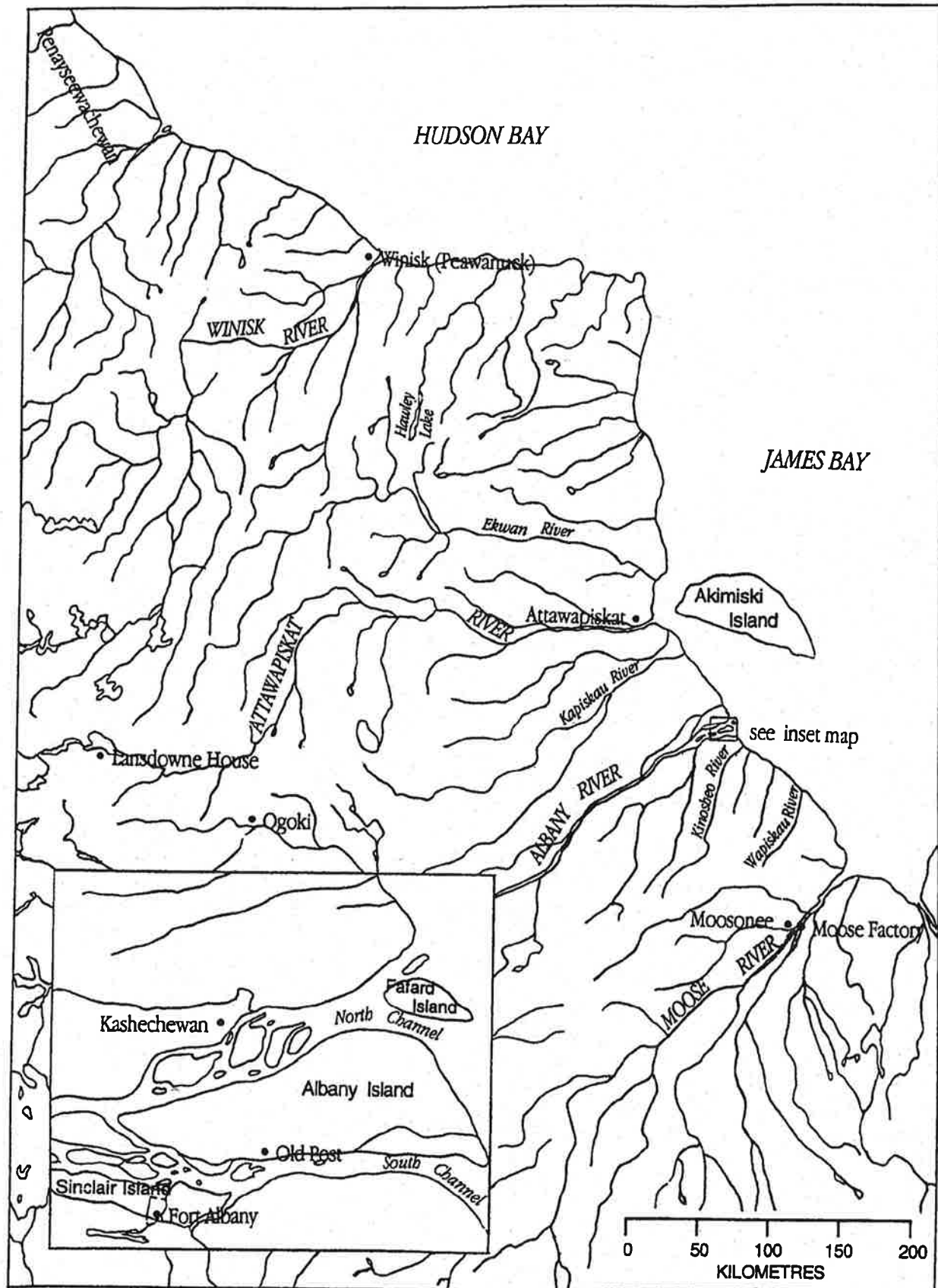
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Traditional Omushkegowuk (Cree) Territory



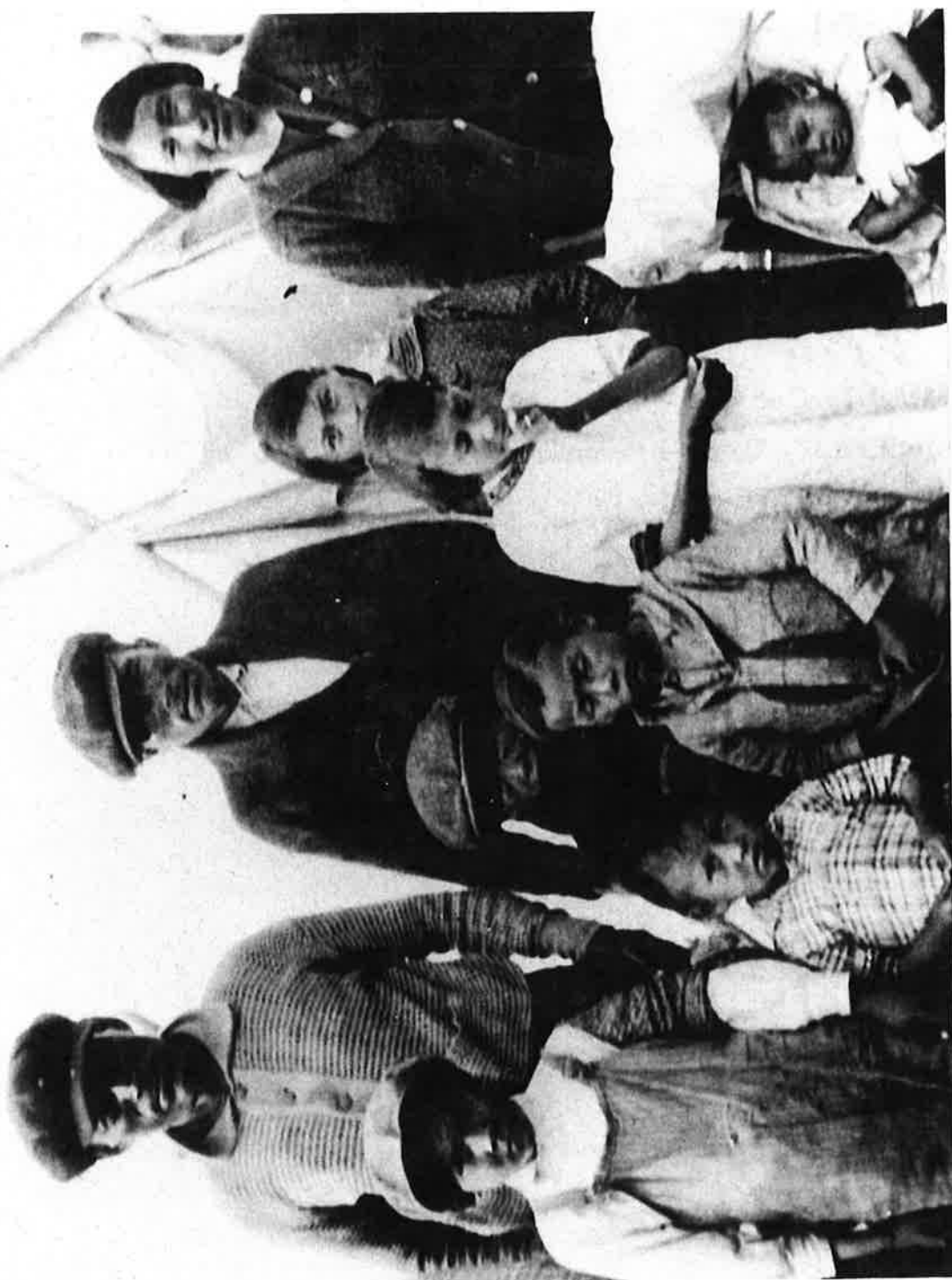
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1 What we learned in the past is disappearing.

—told by Alex Goodwin

Date of Birth: May 27, 1937

Place of Birth: Old Post

Present Address: Moosonee

Name of Spouse: Edna

Maiden Name: Lazarus

Number of Children: 8

Grandchildren: 35

Great-grandchildren: 5

Number of Years Married: Still

Other Information:

Alex is a strong supporter for the preservation of the Cree culture. He has always been willing to share his knowledge about the Cree culture with those around him, particularly in the schools of the Mushkegowuk area.

There were many means of survival that people used in trying to live off the land. They took pleasure in the things they used and the way they knew how to survive. People enjoyed catching beavers by using an ice chisel. That was the only way Natives killed beavers long ago. I saw this done. I helped block off the area where beavers lived to kill them without using a trap. The only equipment the people used for this was an ice chisel.

A dog was used to search for a beaver as they chiseled through the ice. It did not take for them long to kill a beaver this way, unlike today where it takes a long time to trap a beaver. Sometimes it would take us three days at one beaver pond. By that time, we would have killed all the beavers that were present. This was one of the enjoyable tasks in the Native traditional way of living.

I have also seen people use traps and snares in killing beavers, but the elders enjoyed the chiseling method best. I liked seeing a dog who was smart enough to know where the beavers were. It did not matter how thick the ice or how deep the snow, a dog would find exactly where under the ice the beavers were. With a dog on a leash, they

would walk along the shore. Once a dog found the beaver, they would then pull him away. A dog was not allowed to bother the beaver at this time. They would search for the beaver house and chisel in that area. Once they found the beaver house, they would block the beaver house opening so that the beavers would not escape. The elders used a stick to poke around inside the beaver house until they found the beaver. They would then pull the beaver out by its tail. I guess that creature was not vicious because it never bit anybody. I never heard a beaver bite the people that were trying to catch it. They would then throw it at the dog so that the dog would fight him—not too long though. I saw these things I talked about when I was young.

Now another thing I will talk about is how a Native hunted while I was growing up. I hardly remember seeing anybody use a gun to kill a moose. In the fall, the elders snared a moose. They would set snares anywhere, not just near the moose tracks. This was one of the best methods of hunting and the most enjoyed traditional way of hunting moose. A Native knew what to do to survive. I was very glad to see how a moose was snared, and to see a moose pulling on the snare. Sometimes a gun was used in killing a moose. Snaring a moose was not done during the winter, only in the early fall when a moose was wandering around.

A person would carry a snare when he wanted to snare a rabbit, not the wire type, but the string type. This was another method a Native knew how to use traditionally to catch whatever he was seeking. He used a snare when he wanted a rabbit. He would set the snare so that the snare would spring up and the rabbit would be hung without fighting on the ground too long. I used to go with my grandfather when he went snaring for rabbits. I enjoyed pulling the sled where I kept the rabbits. Often I went snaring for rabbits with my mother too. I pulled the rabbits for her in a small toboggan.

A person killed ptarmigans without a gun. There were many ptarmigans near the Bay. Their whiteness was very noticeable among the willows. These were the ones I saw being trapped in a net. In trying to kill ptarmigans, the Natives trapped them in the same manner that children trapped birds. The trapping net was huge. An elder named Isaiah Sutherland enjoyed trapping ptarmigans. Many ptarmigans were caught this way. Once,

I helped trap ptarmigans. It did not take long. One person would go beyond the ptarmigans and chase them towards the net. These would be caught in no time at all. That was one way I saw the Natives catch ptarmigans without using a gun, although a gun was used sometimes in killing ptarmigans. I cannot talk about everything, only what I saw.

Now I will talk about another kind of partridge. A different method was used in killing a partridge known as a ruffed grouse. Towards the middle of March, people went where these partridges were, a place called dancing or mating grounds. I saw many such places. When I wanted a partridge, I went to their dancing grounds. I can only talk about exactly what I saw. I helped in killing a partridge without using a gun. They were snared in the same fashion as rabbits. Snares were set anywhere. Somebody would block off the area beyond where the partridges were. I did not see the blocked area. When setting a snare, tamarack trees were placed around the area where the grouse were. This was another good thing. Many times, I have seen people enjoying this activity. Women also participated. I always went with my mother and my late sister when they went snaring partridges. When we took the partridges off the snares, we would set them again. Other partridges would fly off and return later. We only used snares. Many partridges were caught this way, especially at their dancing grounds. A gun was also used in killing these partridges. Often I used a gun in shooting them at their dancing grounds. I would be at a place ahead of them and would shoot them as they came to dance. They did not all come at the same time. One or two would come at a time. Once, I shot fifty in a short time. There were many of these dancing grounds at Wapuskuk (Wapiskau River) where we lived.

I saw another kind of partridge, spruce grouse, being killed without a gun. This partridge lived in a hilly area. There were many of them where we lived. When hunting spruce grouse, people would go to these hilly areas. People would only take what they needed. Unlike today, children hunt for no reason or kill anything just for the sake of killing something. This did not happen long ago. People were very careful not to waste food. Somehow they always managed to catch something. Natives caught these partridges by snaring them. They would tie a snare at the end of a long stick. Then

people used to put a sticky substance on the snare so that the snare would form a circle without going limp. That sticky substance is found on poplar buds. This substance is only found on the buds of poplar trees. They would catch many of these partridges in this manner. Sometimes a gun was also used.

Because of poverty, many things were not available. That is why people used these hunting methods. I saw so much poverty that people could not afford to buy anything from the store, unlike today where we dig in our pockets when we want something from the store. This did not happen long ago. That is why people did not use guns when hunting. My father was careful not to waste gun powder. They had pellets and empty shells. These were the only things a person had while he lived off the land.

There were many things a Native enjoyed. I will talk about caribou. I really enjoyed seeing caribou being hunted. I was present once when they were trying to kill a herd of caribou. There must have been twenty in the herd. There were many of us. I was helping then. I must have been eighteen. We spotted the herd standing around not being aware of our presence. At least they did not scatter around. Usually when a caribou senses the presence of others, they would scatter around.

Two people went behind the caribou and chased them towards us. We lined up on one side unlike the way young people line up opposite each other today. It is very dangerous to do this because one could get hurt in the cross fire. The best method is to form one line. It took a long time to chase the caribou towards the waiting party. If people were down wind from the caribou, they created smoke by burning tree moss. Sometimes it took an hour and half before the caribou would move. The caribou would then be shot once they were in a firing range from the waiting party.

Often, I have seen moose and caribou being hunted. Many times I went with my cousin Willie Stephen who is still alive. He was good at hunting animals, and he hunted moose often. When he tracked down a moose, he always managed to catch it. Willie had no problems chasing a moose even when he wore snowshoes.

It did not take long before he caught up with the moose, sometimes only in two hours. That is the way my cousin was. He was one of the best hunters.

People were happy in the spring time when they were expecting the return of the birds that left us in the fall. When the birds migrated in the fall, women elders sang, bidding these birds farewell as they flew by. They said we hope to see you again. I saw this being done. I did that too because I was told to bid them farewell. They told me maybe I will not see them again. That is what we did. We waited in joyful anticipation for the return of the birds who had left. We were joyous when they did return. Of course, we were happy because once they left us, and now they were returning to where we lived. It is their destiny not to leave us permanently.

There is another thing that the Natives were careful about. I will talk a little bit about the way my father hunted as he was teaching me how to hunt. I can only talk about the way he taught me. Snow geese or wavies were never scared away from their feeding grounds. I never saw them frightened. My father took me hunting with him because he wanted to teach me. This was before I handled a gun. He went around far from where the Snow geese were so that the Snow geese would not see him. We walked in a dense area trying to get south of them. People always went on the south side of these geese. They would sit within hearing distance of the Snow geese. He told me that these birds flew around, and that he shot them when they flew southward. This kind of hunting was done during the day.

Snow geese fly inland to feed. They spend the whole day wherever they were feeding. They were never hunted inland where they eat. In the morning, people would watch where the Snow geese flew inland. Again, they would watch them when they flew back to the Bay in the evening towards sundown. That is where the Natives spent their time—at the Bay. That is where they hunted Snow geese before they flew back inland. We were always at the spot where they were. We left at early dawn trying to catch them before they flew back inland.

As the dawn approached, you could see dark lines silhouetted against the sky as you looked towards the Bay. Snow geese were on their way inland. That is when I enjoyed myself when I started to handle a gun. There is nothing inland that the Snow geese were afraid of. You could remain standing as they flew towards you. There was no need for crouching. That is how brave they were in an area where they were not afraid. My father would hunt there for a while. He took just what he needed. Then we would leave. Snow geese do not abandon an area they prefer. They cannot be chased away or frightened from it. They returned to that area after a person left. That is the way hunting was done when I was growing up.

When we left in a canoe to go hunting, my father was very mindful of not disturbing the animals needlessly. Of course, he was doing this to teach me properly, and I wanted to do what he taught me. When we docked at a creek when we were hunting, he would not pitch his tent where it would be visible. He pitched it among the willows where the animals would not see it. My father would tie a screen with wire meshing at the end of his stove pipe, so that the sparks would not escape and the animals would not see his fire. When we made camp near Snow geese, he would whisper. It seemed that he did not want to disturb them. What he did with the moose, he did the same with the Snow geese. He whispered. He did things quietly. That is how careful the elders were long ago. It is only today that things are done improperly. This is what I want to be taught to the younger generation, the things a person did when he wanted to kill something.

Spring was a joyous time for a Native. He prepared everything. He knew that the Canada geese were returning to the people. That is how he taught me. Unlike today, when a person hears a Canada goose, he takes off just like that. That did not happen long ago. He prepared his equipment before the arrival of the Canada geese.

The Canada goose also enjoyed its life. It was glad when it reached the place where people lived. Canada geese can spot the area where people call from. They come right down to where people are. That is just the way its destiny was. It was a pleasant event.

There used to be wooden barrels where people kept their food. They would bury these barrels in the ground once they were filled with salted geese. They could be kept all summer. Some people opened them in August.

There were many things a Native used while he lived off the land. There were many things he received from the Great Spirit, things he could use while he lived on the land. These are the things I will mention.

The things he used while he lived on the land were very good. The food he ate was good. The things he used when he was sick were good. There was hardly any sickness while I was growing up. There were many things that made him healthy; things known as medicine. When a person had a cough, he would make medicine from the land.

Whenever there was a sickness, I remember cedar being used in the homes. Cedar would be boiled steady so that the steam would create an aroma that was beneficial. This medicine was effective in many ways. This medicine from the cedar was one of the best. I did not see the tree itself used as medicine, only the branches. I have seen this medicine used on a person who is coughing from a cold. After it was boiled, cedar water was applied to the chest and sides, while it was still hot, resulting in the person coughing up phlegm.

This cedar medicine was also used as a drink. If a person had an upset stomach due to indigestion, the cedar would be boiled. He would then drink the liquid from the first boiling. Only a person who has a stomach problem would drink this solution. The cedar solution a person drinks when he has a cough is different from the solution used for stomach problems. This cough remedy was made by boiling cedar more than once. First, the cedar was boiled. Then the liquid from the first boiling was thrown away. The same cedar was then boiled again in fresh water. Then it could be used as a cough remedy. A person who has a stomach problem does not drink this cough remedy. Cedar was also used in the dwellings. It was used as an air freshener or it could be used as a floor covering in the same way that balsam fir was used as a floor covering.

The surrounding area where a person lived was also kept clean. A hole was dug in the ground where human waste was thrown. Used baby moss was also placed in this hole. In those days there were no cloth diapers. Only moss was used when a baby was in the diaper stage. This was the best. Babies never developed diaper rash. Once the hole was full, it was covered. Eventually grass would grow on that spot and one could never tell the difference. There was no stench. These discarded items never created an odor once they were buried in the hole.

The wigwam where people lived was very large. Sometimes four families would live in it. There were some big enough for one or two families. The size of the wigwam varied according to the size of the family. When we lived at Wapuskuk, we made one large wigwam for all of us. I never saw a stove used in these wigwams. They made fire on the ground inside the wigwam.

When I was young, I saw a wigwam being made. They would put clay between the logs so that the cold would not come in. There was an opening at the top, but the cold could not come in from there. There were two kinds of wood used. Poplar trees were burnt mostly because they did not create sparks. Birch wood was also used. This wood was put in the fire at bed time because it burnt slower and longer. The wigwam would be warm all night.

Life was very enjoyable long ago. In the morning as they were getting up, people would sing and pray because they were honouring a new day. This was one of the beliefs they honoured. It made them very happy to see another day. This was the lesson I was taught. They would also pray at the end of the day before going to bed. When the fire was dying out, my grandfather made fire wood kindling. He said that he would use it in the morning if he were lucky enough to see another day. What I am saying is very important.

I am not finished talking about the things that made a person strong. I am talking about medicine. Willow bark shavings were used when someone cut his finger and could not stop the excessive bleeding. The bleeding eventually stopped when these shavings were

used. After the initial use of the willow bark, maybe one day, tamarack was used. The bark of the tamarack sapling was cut into two or three inch pieces. These pieces were boiled. Sometimes they were used unboiled. When I was growing up, these tamarack pieces were treated differently. The tamarack was boiled. After it was boiled, the bark was scraped, just the bark, not the sapwood. It is the sapwood that would be used which was also known as the coat. The elders long ago called it by a strange name. The sapwood is like a coat, a skin, just like our skin covering. That is what was used. The white matter, the sapwood is scraped off and crushed into a fine pulp. Next, it was mixed with grease. Then this mixture was applied to a wound. That is where the tamarack was applied. It is a very effective medicine. You can feel it work. It has a suction power that prevents the wound from being infected. The healing process starts from the underneath. That is how effective the tamarack is.

In the same way cedar was effective in its use, so was the tamarack. The tamarack was used in many different ways. A toboggan was made from it because it was sturdy like a birch. It was also used in making snow shoes and goose decoys. I have also seen it used for goose decoys used in the spring time. The tamarack tree was meant to be used for many things.

That tree was very important. It had its purpose in life. That is what the elder said. The tree you see standing there is alive just like the way we are alive. Look at some dead trees. Leaves cannot grow on them. It just goes dry. These new tamarack trees are alive. They also have clothing just like the way we do. They have skin. Those are the things Natives used wisely long ago. The birch tree was also used in making toboggans and snowshoes. That tree also had its many uses. It kept people warm. A Native used everything that grows on this earth. He used willows and grass. It's almost impossible to mention all the things he used while he lived on the land. There were many things that were beneficial in every way.

What we, the elders, learned in the past is disappearing. As far as family life is concerned, we all have family lives. It is our duty to look after our family life, to keep at least some teachings that the Great Spirit has given us in our family lives. The Great Spirit set the rules to be followed in family life so that our life on earth would not be meaningless. We must try to use these things that the Creator has given us to make our family life happier. All of us must always have joy in our family life. We must love each other. We know that we all come from the same place. All of us must show our friends these things so that we may all have family unity in our lives.

Family life is very complex. We know what we agreed to when we decided to run our own lives. We know that when a person decides to run his own life, he takes it on himself to govern himself. He agreed to carry on whatever the servant of God has asked him. He agreed on the most important thing. When you start having children, you look after your family life. You make your children happy through how you live your family life so they will know how to carry on their family life. We are all required to have family happiness, to live a decent quiet life on this earth, to be happy to be with our children. All parents have ways to make our children happy. I have seen many games in the past that were used to share happiness with the children so in turn they would do likewise. Games were in existence for a long time.

The Great Book says that when you agree to marry, you agree to marry that man who is from the Great Spirit and that woman who is also from the Great Spirit. The Great Spirit said that we have already agreed to marry Him, and the Great Spirit has told us to remain married until death. You would only separate through death. It is best to keep the Great Spirit's wishes on how He wants us to live our lives. I know the way life is today is very hard. We are all required in our lives to love others, to be friends with each other. Every one of us on this earth comes from the same one life.

In the fall people who were leaving the community for the whole winter, gathered for merriment through dancing. This was done because they expected to be gone for the entire winter and return only in the early spring. They made a gathering place where they could all have fun before leaving. It was a fun time of the year. These were the

things that made their lives strong long ago. Love for other people made them strong. That was the reason they gathered to have fun. The Great Spirit was always included in the event. Many different dances were held, but there was no drinking.

They did the rabbit dance and the shawl dance. These were the names of those dances. There was also a duck dance. This was most enjoyed dance. Then there was the step dance. The elders danced differently. There were four men and four women. They ended their dance in two different ways. Once they finished dancing, they lined up again for another dance where they turned round and round as they danced. In one of the dances only four elder men danced. I mentioned five different ways of dancing.

When a person was leaving his people and the community, he would shake hands with everybody. People would stand on the river bank waving to the people who were leaving. These people would be gone all winter.

There were games that people enjoyed in the winter time as well. Everything was done including praying. Praying was the most important activity. In the early spring, when the person who had been gone for winter returned, people went down to the dock and offered him bannock or tea broth. Often I went with my mother when she greeted the people who were arriving and offered them bannock and tea. I carried the teapot. People used to be so happy to see each other again that they danced and hugged each other. That was the way life was long ago.

I had an uncle named John Wynne. He came down the river on a raft. This was when we were living in Kashechewan. When you look up the river, you could see him and hear him sing as he came around the bend. The song was known as travelling song. He would finish the song as he arrived where we lived. He knew exactly how the song went. That is how my uncle carried his happiness. John loved singing. All the people who are here, those of us who are older, must have heard him sing.

These are the things that made a person happy and strong. The way people loved each other in the old days really made their lives strong. I will talk about the Great Spirit's

gifts before I finish talking. The people long ago knew the meaning of the Great Spirit's favours. They knew that the Great Spirit granted favours asked. Many times, I heard prayers in the evening asking the Great Spirit for grace, and again in the morning.

We have a story of a certain prophet. I am only repeating this story. There is this certain servant of the Great Spirit who did as requested. He did whatever the Great Spirit wanted him to do. He worked as His servant for a long time. This person I am talking about was a minister. The community where he did his preaching was near a river. During one break up, the community he was in flooded. The house he was in was also flooded. A big vehicle arrived at his place so he could take everything he wanted so he could take them to a dry spot. He did not get into that vehicle. Still, he asked the Great Spirit for help. When the Great Spirit saw him standing on something high because there was a flood in his house, a big boat arrived at his house, but he did not get in it. As his house went under the water he asked the Great Spirit to send help. When the Great Spirit saw him standing in the water with only the stove pipe showing, a helicopter arrived at his place. He did not get into the helicopter. With his arms outstretched, he asked the Great Spirit for help. There the minister drowned. After he died and went to heaven, he said he wanted to see the Great Spirit. There he met the Great Spirit. He asked the Great Spirit why He did not help him when he asked for His help. The Great Spirit answered saying I gave you everything you asked. I sent the biggest vehicle so that you can take your things when I wanted to take you to dry land. When I saw your house under the water, I sent a big boat so that you could take your stuff when I wanted to take you away from there. When I saw you standing in the water with only your stove pipe showing, I sent a helicopter because I wanted to take you to a dry spot. I gave you all these, but all these you refused.

That is why I say, my friends, we behave as if we are blind. We, too, have all these things, but we do not recognize what the Great Spirit has given us. Whatever we ask, He gives us, just like the person in the story. Now I am finished doing what I was asked to do.

—recorded December 17, 1993



PATRICK LAVOIE, OMI

2 That is how harsh life was during hard times.

—told by Nancy Patrick

| | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Date of Birth: August 8, 1905 | | |
| Place of Birth: Attawapiskat | | |
| Present Address: Heaven | | |
| Name of Spouse: Michael Patrick | | Maiden Name: Wabano |
| Number of Children: 10 | Grandchildren: 9 | Great-grandchildren: 15 |
| Number of Years Married: 54 | Her husband died on December 8, 1984 | |
| Date of Death: May 15, 1998 | Burial Place: Peawanuck | |
| Other Information: | | |
| Nancy went to a residential school run by the Grey Nuns. This school was located half way between Fort Albany and Kashechewan at a place called Old Post. She went there for three years. | | |

There was an old man named Wape David who came from Attawapiskat. He came to live in Winisk because he had married a woman from Winisk. His first wife must have come from Attawapiskat. People were poor in those days. Airplanes did not come to Winisk then. At that time, the Indian Agent was the only one who came to Winisk in an airplane coming from the west. The Department of Indian Affairs was the only one using an airplane then. The old man lived in the bush, up the Winisk River, at the place we called the reserve. It was quite far, at least 150 miles (240 km) up the river. This was where people lived during the winter.

One autumn, the old man did not want to return to the reserve. Instead, he went towards the Bay instead, to a place called Trout Lake (Hawley Lake), not the Trout Lake that is in the northwest region. That is where he lived with his son, not his biological son but his stepson. Because they were worried that their food supply was getting low, they decided to return to Winisk just before Christmas. People never used to live in the village during the winter. Everybody would live in the bush hunting and trapping, but almost everyone would return to spend Christmas in the village. They also came for the

Christian celebrations. The old man wanted to return for the same reason which is why they decided to leave. They were also running short of food. People who lived by the Bay cannot depend on fish for their survival. All they had were a few of the waxies that they had killed in the fall. They did not kill that many waxies, because they did not have enough ammunition. They travelled with their children. I do not know how many there were. His stepson had maybe five children. The old man himself had one child. His other child was in the residential school. He had two children with his second wife.

They travelled two days without having anything to eat. They were almost near the village when his stepson told him that the family could not travel any further. The stepson told them to remain there and he alone would go to the village to get some food. It was warm that morning. It felt as if the snow was going to melt. I remember that time because we were also travelling from the bush. According to the old man, after his stepson had left, the women decided to move on thinking they could reach the village although they were told to remain where they were.

They travelled along the coast where the water seeps through the ice when the tide comes in. In the Winisk area, the trees are inland, not like here where the trees are near. When one stands on the high tide mark, one can barely see the trees, that is how far the shore is. They travelled on the high tide mark thinking they would travel faster. While they were travelling, a menacing north wind picked up. We were travelling on the river at the same time. When this fierce wind was upon us, we could barely breathe against it. We could hear the north wind approaching; it sounded like a rushing water current. The snow from the squall blinded us. It was also very cold. According to the old man, they immediately tried to go ashore. He said the younger woman was the first one to collapse. Not wanting to leave her there, they all huddled together because there was nothing that could be done. The old man said he placed snowshoes up right and then covered them with canvas to make a shelter. The children and the two women hid under that covering. Some died in that shelter as night was approaching.

When the young man who had gone to the village to get food returned, he found the campsite abandoned. The village was not that far away. It was almost morning when he reached the village. He told the people what had happened. He told them he saw tracks leading in the opposite direction. That morning, dog teams belonging to the priest and the Hudson's Bay Company left on a search and rescue mission. A missionary brother left with the search party. He was the one who found them. Two women and two children had died. The old man and three other children were barely alive. The old man was frost bitten all over his face. The three children were not frost bitten at all. The village priest said that they did not perish in the cold because it was not time for them to die. When they found the old man, he was barely alive. The old man stayed in the village for one night until an airplane arrived from Sioux Lookout.

Once the old man was inside, liquid started to ooze from his frost bitten face. He died in Winnipeg. His body was not returned to the village because that was not a common practice then. The children that had died were brought to the church. We all went to the church. When they brought the bodies, it was such a piteous sight. Their frozen bodies resembled animals whose limbs are twisted. When they put down the bodies, a distinct thud was heard.

That is how harsh life was during hard times. One of the children who had survived died of an illness. The other two are still alive. One lives in Attawapiskat, and the other lives in Ogoki. When the coffins were made, only two coffins were made. One coffin was wider than the other. That was where the mother was buried with her children on either side of her. The other woman was buried alone.

We had hard time while we were in the storm. When the storm arrived, we made a shelter. The storm only lasted about four hours, but it was very cold. By the morning, the storm had died down. Everybody talked about that wind. That is the only time that I have ever heard that people died in such a storm.

—recorded January 12, 1984

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National Archives of Canada C 20851

3 They always survived from the land.

—told by Raphael Wabano

| | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Date of Birth: July 26, 1905 | | |
| Place of Birth: Attawapiskat | | |
| Present Address: Heaven | | |
| Name of Spouse: Margaret | | Maiden Name: Kioke |
| Number of Children: 9 | Grandchildren: 24 | Great-grandchildren: 57 |
| Number of Years Married: | | |
| Date of Death: May 9, 1995 | | Burial Place: Moosonee |
| Other Information: | | |
| Once when Raphael came home from working at Two Bay Enterprizes, he said that the white fellow he worked with called him by a nice sounding name—Napolean. Sometimes he used to receive letters addressed to Napoleon. His family used to say that they could not believe he was really called Napoleon. | | |

The first thing I will talk about is the issue that is being discussed, the question on the environment. The discussion of living in the bush is still going on today. While the environmental issue is being discussed, it is also time to talk about the past.

Part of it is already known, but there is a great deal that is still unknown because not everybody has been asked about the life they experienced in the past. That is why I decided to talk about my experiences and what I saw happening long ago, the kind of life that the old generation experienced. They always survived from the land.

There are things in the wilderness they used to survive, for example, the wild food they ate before store bought food was available and even before the arrival of the Whiteman. Somehow, they managed to survive. Although I heard people talk about their past, I cannot talk about the past before my time. There was always something that could be obtained from the land for survival.

Later, even after the arrival of the Whiteman, there was not much that was available as far as survival was concerned. The goods that came from the Whiteman were scarce. Survival using the Whiteman's supplies was very small. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) was the first one to arrive then. Kashechewan was the first place where store bought goods were available for Natives to use while living off the land. Later, the Hudson's Bay Company opened another post in Winisk. Those were the two places. In Winisk, a Native was put in charge of goods used as a means of survival. Things like guns were essentials to the Natives while living in the bush. Everything was available such as nets, snares, and all those other things that were necessary to live in the wilderness. That was the first time those things were available.

For a long time, there was a shortage of supplies in the community, although there was a Hudson's Bay Company store. As far as I can remember the things that you see in the store, things like food, were unavailable for some time. Flour, sugar, shortening, tea, rolled oats, and beans were the first store bought foods that were attainable. Canned foods and other supplies were not available for the longest time. There was no milk. When we finally had milk, we had the sweet and thick kind (Borden's). Later, powdered milk was used that came in small aluminum barrels. Eventually, liquid milk, such as the kind we have today, arrived.

It seems only recently that canned goods were available. When people went into the bush to live off the land, all they had was flour, tea, sugar, shortening, and rolled oats. These supplies were all they took to supplement their subsistence from the land. That is the way life was, although there two companies by this time. There was not that much at first. It seemed that life was such a hardship because they never quit trying to survive. They forever depended on the land for their survival.

In those days, people used to live far away from the community. Sometimes, they even lived far away from each other. They would live far into the land. The Winisk and Attawapiskat rivers flow into two lakes, and those lakes are far inland. The people who left from the Bay lived not too far from these lakes.

That is how far people went in trying to survive. They did not return to the community during the winter, only in the early spring.

When the people ran out of the supplies that they took with them, they took whatever they could from the land. That is how the older generation lived. Not having store bought food did not matter to them as long as they could obtain fish and other animals such as caribou or rabbits. Life seemed harsh because they never stopped struggling for their survival.

Women also hunted. They netted, fished, set snares, and maintained their homes by cutting firewood. Life did not happen the way it is today where modern women cannot do anything for themselves. As far as I can remember women provided for themselves. I saw women of long ago work just like men. Women were eager to hunt, just like the men. When they were young, they trapped and shot animals. That is the way women were long ago.

Today, a person cannot use a needle to sew for herself. Some of them cannot even sew. At least that is what I noticed these days. I do not know why a woman's work has ceased. Their parents had taught them these things or had seen their parents do these things. They do not even know to follow their examples. Some of them do not know how to care for their children. That is how much their work is lacking. That is what I see happening.

I keep thinking about this. I keep wondering why the people of today are not like the people of the past. That is why people in those days survived. They could do any kind of work they wanted to perform, even the women. The people took care of their children. They looked after their children, unlike today, where they gave up their children. This did not happen in the past. Married couples did not leave each other either.

There were many hunting areas and fishing spots that people depended on for their survival. There is a good fishing spot where many different kinds of fish could be caught. That is why people are talking about the way things are happening, the way land

development is going, and the way white people are destroying the land that the Natives once survived from. These issues are being discussed because the life of a Native is on the land. The land should be preserved for him because his survival depends on it. These issues are being discussed because there is life on the land. That is the reason I am talking about these essential means of survival used long ago, these things that are now being discussed in this environmental study.

I never had the chance to talk about this issue. I never had the chance to attend a meeting since this environmental study began. It is the first chance I have to talk a little bit about the things I have seen. It is necessary for everybody to talk about the things they have experienced. I had hoped to be present at a meeting when the past was being explored and discussed. Many times I have heard of meetings being held where this study was being discussed by government environmentalists.

I mentioned these things because I, too, lived in the bush during that time. People always lived off the land. Store bought food was not used that much when one was living in the bush. The only time a person could get additional store bought food was to go and get it from the community. People never had enough store bought food while they lived in the wilderness. Only those things that were necessary such as guns, ropes, snares, and nets did he make sure to last for one winter, or at least not to run short.

As for the other stuff, such as the Whiteman's food, it did not bother them to run short on those things. They always managed to get food from the land. Although they enjoyed smoking, it did not matter to them when they ran out of tobacco. At times the old men used feel miserable when the tobacco supply was getting low. They felt like an ailing person. When my father ran out of his tobacco, I gave him my tobacco rations. I kept tobacco longer than anybody.

Before my father died, we helped each other. We did things together to survive. Everybody who had a young person was in a similar situation. An elder got help from his children once they were old enough to do things such as hunting.

After my father died, I supported many people, that is, our elders, my wife's mother and my mother. I took care of those elders and I also took care of my wife's widowed sister. These were the three elders I took care of, on my own accord, to try to support them at least for a while. I found out then that I was fortunate. I did not have a hard time in supporting them. I had good fortune by looking after those elders. It was my responsibility to look after them. I always managed to catch something through hunting or trapping to help me support them. That is why I thought I was indeed fortunate for what happened once I was supporting myself.

My wife's brothers were living then. We helped each other to help those in need. We helped ourselves by helping other people go to the community to get additional supplies. It took a long time to go to the community. Sometimes we made an open camp without tents five times before we reached the community. The return trip took at least ten days especially when we were carrying supplies.

Eventually the Hudson's Bay Company established a post in the wilderness, because the Natives were living too far away. Eventually, the Whiteman's food was available in the bush where a Native was put in charge. Posts were established at Ogoki, Landsdowne House, and Winisk. Natives could not go to the community every time they required something. Native people who lived far inland benefited from such a venture that was meant to make their lives a little bit easier.

There was much game available. I hardly knew food to be scarce then; any kind of food was used for survival. There were many places where people hunted. Sometimes it happened that a person died because of starvation or being frozen to death. So often I have heard or have seen this happen.

I guess there is hardly anybody nowadays who is living off the land. I do not know what is happening. It seems to me that nobody is in the bush to live from the land. I do not know anybody who is living in the bush today. It seems that living off the land has completely stopped.

Although I was still physically fit, I quit living in the bush after we started having children due to their illness. We always brought them to this hospital, the one across the river (Moose Factory). That is the reason I came here. I moved here so that I would know what they are doing. I finally quit the bush life because I was staying here too long. There was also the availability of employment. My children also started to work.

I worked until it was time for me to retire. I worked until I was eligible for senior citizen allowance. I worked two years beyond the required retirement age. Although I was receiving senior assistance, my senior citizen cheque was small while I was working. After I quit working, I received the full senior citizen amount. I also used my unemployment insurance benefit.

—recorded January 11, 1984

[illegible]

63



Father Lavoie, OMI

4 **We were very poor.**

—told by Juliette Sutherland

| | | |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Date of Birth: December 25, 1932 | | |
| Place of Birth: Hawley Lake | | |
| Present Address: Cochrane | | |
| Name of Spouse: Ernest | | Maiden Name: Koostachin |
| Number of Children: 9 | Grandchildren: 23+ | Great-grandchildren: 5+ |
| Number of Years Married: 49 | | |
| Other Information: | | |
| Juliette was raised in the Winisk area. She went to school at Old Post for about 7 years. | | |

I want to say a few words. I can only talk about what I remember and what I saw when I was young.

We were very poor while I was living with my parents. I remember there were thirteen of us in the family. As far as I can remember we were very poor. I did not live in a house, only in a wigwam or in a tent. It would be more precise to say that I lived in moss covered conical shelter. The shelter was covered with moss. There was no canvas. That is all there was. Logs were placed side by side and covered with moss. In the winter, the shelter would be covered with snow that made it warmer. At the top there was an opening that served as a window. There was a cloth covering at the entrance. There was no wood for a door as we know it.

My father killed seals, our main means of survival. He would hang dry the seal blubber to preserve it for future use. That is what we would eat during the winter. Only the fat, not the meat, was used. My mother cut up the fat when she wanted to feed us. She would cook fish and partridge in the fat. She would use the fat for frying. That is what she did. There were also wabies.

I remember she would preserve the waxies. My father also used to seine for fish. Children helped in seining. I helped my father with his seine. We caught many fish that way. These fish would last the whole winter for us and for the dogs.

A trap was set on a pole, but not too high. White owls were caught in this wooden trap. There are different species of owls. Snow owls were the ones caught with this trap. These owls were our food. That is what was done. Looking for Snow owls and other owls was like going shopping. Other people must know what I am talking about. These owls were our food. You would never go to a store to buy food. Although my father went to a store, he would buy flour, tea and maybe lard, but he never bought sugar.

You would never see anybody bring in bread, meat or chicken, only seals. You would use the seal fat in your tea, or sometimes you would eat the cracklings. These were also eaten. My mother thinking she was feeding us, would put seal blubber cracklings in a cup. Otters were also used as food. My father killed otters. To him, it was just like killing caribou. We ate otters.

I never ate a marten. It can be eaten. Many people say they have eaten a marten. The people who have eaten marten, say it tastes just like rabbit. There were also foxes. The foxes that my father killed were most important to our survival. When they became capable of hunting, all my siblings killed them too.

As for the food assistance, or people receiving food assistance, I never saw that. I was in school in 1941. There was no such assistance. Until 1938, there was nothing.

Nothing, I mean food assistance. It was not available then. It was said that many people starved in the past. From what I remember of the past, many people died because they had nothing to live on. There were no rabbits or beavers, and no caribou. A person would starve to death trying to obtain something to eat. Because he had nothing to live on, he would eat whatever he could find including weasels and squirrels. That was the kind of food the people had in the past.

I cannot say too much about the past. The past was worse prior to my recollection. I keep telling the children I am looking after that I never used any of the food they are eating. I never had sugar. Flour and tea were available whenever the boat arrived. A boat that would come by the Bay was the only thing that was used. An airplane was not used. When we went to school, we did not use an airplane. We were taken to the school in a boat. We did not go home. We stayed there. The only time we could return home was if someone came by way of the Ekwan River to take us home.

Nowadays, it is a great disaster for a child when something runs out. He becomes very distressed. If there is no milk or sugar that child could not be bothered with anything, such is his distress. He thinks these things were always available.

In 1938, I saw the people of one family starve to death. We were not living very far away. They did not have any thing to eat while they were travelling. They did whatever they could to feed their dogs. These people froze along the way. Five of them froze to death on their return because they had collapsed due to hunger. I knew these people. Those that did not freeze to death are still living today. At least two of them are still alive. All the adults froze to death because they could not go on due to hunger. One woman had a child she was carrying in a tikinagun. That child died because the mother could not produce milk due to a lack of food.

Supplies were very scarce at the store. No store bought food was available for a person to live on or take along on a trip. That was not done yet. A person could only survive by hunting for his own food.

Today, it is not like that at all. Things are very different. Today's generation does not know what it was like. They think life was easy. Young people today have it so easy. Everything was given to them. That is all I have to say on what I remembered.

When a person cut himself with an ax or when he was sick, he did look for a doctor. There was nothing that could be done for a person who had a sickness that was not visible on his body. When a person cut himself with an ax, leaves were used.

Anything was used even willows. Even tea leaves, Labrador tea, were applied to the wound so that it would heal. I know this because it happened to me. I cut myself with an ax many times. When we were living far in the bush, I applied beaver scrotum on my infected finger. We lived about 80 miles (130 km) from Winisk. I cut my finger when I missed the wood I was chopping. There was nothing that could be done because we lived so far away. We used leaves at first, but pus started to form on my finger. The beaver scrotum broke the pus on my finger. My finger was so infected.

No one could go to the community because dogs were used then. It was not like using a snowmobile. It was very difficult for a person to get to the community in a hurry when something happened. When there was an infection, they used anything including tree gum. They would get gum from the tree and heat it. The heated gum would then be applied to the infected area to break the pus. There were no medicines taken internally like the ones we have today. The only thing people drank as medicine was Labrador tea. Sometimes a wound cleansing liquid was made from tamarack or tree cones. Some people still use these things when they want to heal themselves. These are things I saw my mother do when someone hurt themselves.

When a child got burned on a stove, meat was applied on the burned area. Any meat such as partridge meat was wrapped around the burn. That was the way it was done. Meat was applied to the affected area. Any kind of meat that is available be it seal, moose or caribou meat, that is what was applied. A child does not get sore. The meat cools the infected area so there is no soreness. That is what my mother did when a child got burned on his finger or wherever.

Long ago, the elders selected a mate for their children. A person could not select a mate of his choice. They would tell a person who they would marry. There was no choice in that matter.

That was not done to me. It was after my mother died that I married. When we were living, together as a family nobody went on his own. We lived together for along time. I was the first one to go on my own. Nobody selected a husband for me. Some people decided who to marry for themselves, but often, the relationship did not last. People would say he or she should not have married that person. It did happen where mates were selected for others, but that did not happen to us. I guess it's because we no longer had a mother. That is what I know about that. We were never told who to marry.

—recorded July, 1997

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Father Lavoie, OMI

5 Our youths are losing their language and their culture.

—told by Micheal Patrick

| | | |
|---|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Date of Birth: February 24, 1904 | | |
| Place of Birth: Winisk | | |
| Present Address: Heaven | | |
| Name of Spouse: Nancy | | Maiden Name: Wabano |
| Number of Children: 10 | Grandchildren: 9 | Great-grandchildren: 15 |
| Number of Years Married: 54 | | His wife died on May 15, 1998 |
| Date of Death: December 8, 1984 | | Burial Place: Moosonee |
| Other Information: | | |
| Micheal's Indian family name was Shekapwetum. The missionaries gave him the name Patrick because they couldn't pronounce it or spell it. This was done to many families in the North. | | |

I will talk what life was like in the north, long ago, when I was living in the bush. Up north, we never heard about the things you see today. There were no policies, social assistance, and medicine from the Whiteman. Looking back on my childhood, while growing up, it was very important to have an understanding of the teachings regarding survival. These teachings, preparing the youth for the future, were not only given to the male youth, but also to the young women as well. They were advised so that they would understand what life will be like and what to do to survive. These youths were told not to be lazy, but to try to help themselves in every way. The males, especially, were taught in a certain way so that they would understand exactly what to do to survive. No one ever hurried when speaking to the youth. People made sure that the youth understood what was being taught.

Now I will say something about the Native language. When teaching, it is very important to understand precisely what a person meant. Many things have happened since my childhood. It is not enough just to be able to speak a language. Where will a person get information about what the weather will be, what the water level of the river will be,

how thick the ice on the river will be, or how much snowfall will be expected? All these different things, as part of preparing us for life, were taught when I was young.

Although there were two different languages up north, Ojibway and Cree, before the English language came along, we understood each other. The people from the Bay would travel inland and live with the Ojibways. Today's youth does not even understand their own language. Even the Cree people of today, living along the Bay, do not understand the people from the inland area. That is the way language is today. When I made my living from the bush, I heard and understood people who spoke Ojibway. Still today, I understand and speak a little Ojibway. I speak enough for them to know that we are from the same culture. I am able to answer when a youth asks me questions: about the way life was on the Bay, and about the behaviour of animals that live on the Bay such as walrus, polar bears, seals or whales, and waterfowl. I use their language to explain the things they want to know and if I speak it slowly, they understand everything I say.

Another thing, it has been 25 years now since they first introduced the school education system to our area. Other communities, south of us, have had this system since the arrival of the Whiteman. Since that first year, 25 years ago, people who once made their living from the bush, are staying in the education system longer and longer. They are staying even up to the point where they leave their communities to further their schooling. Because of this, they are losing their language. Some cannot talk to their parents anymore and they do not even understand their parents when they are told something. The things they learn in the other culture are blocking the teachings of their parents. They will not survive in their culture because they were not taught about their own culture in the Whiteman's education system. Only if they know about their own culture or use what they learned in the school system will they be able to survive.

It happens sometimes, up north, that people who go south for an education and then return have no use for what they have learned. This is true when it comes to making a living from the land. There is no financial help for them if they cannot find employment.

If their parents are still living, these people are looked after by them. This is what education does to the people and to the language. People lose their culture.

A long time ago, when the Whiteman started living here the Hudson's Bay Company managers lived with the Natives long enough to learn how to speak in the Native language. They did not use all the words we used in the language. They spoke broken Cree, yet we understood what they were trying to say because we have the language.

Something else is happening regarding today's youth and the education system. These youths are losing their language and their culture. When they want to speak Cree, they speak broken Cree, but they are still understood by their parents. In the schools, they are not taught in their language. Even where I am from, up north, you hear children speaking English and these children are gradually losing their language completely. When they talk to each other, they sound just like the Whiteman. Everywhere I go there are Native children that I do not understand. They are my people, yet I do not understand them because they are speaking English.

Another thing I want to talk about is the people who try to help their fellow Native people. The translators and the people who do research on what life was like long ago. These people want to find out how we made our living. Today's youth does not understand most of these things because everything is adopted from the Whiteman and accepted. Take for instance drinking where there is nothing mentioned anywhere, for anyone to know beforehand, about the effects of alcohol. There are also other things that bring ill effect on the youth that are never mentioned.

I will talk about these people, a little bit. Native people who are working for other Native people must understand what they are told by the elders. They must understand what a person is talking about, and translate it correctly into the English language and transcribe it into the Cree language exactly. In research on culture, they must know about the things a person is talking about to understand what they are being told. As for other services for the people in the north, they need money to get services and information regarding welfare assistance and medication for hospitalization when

needed. We say that our children should be educated in these fields, but I have a concern about language in this matter. We know that the youths are losing their language. How then do we educate the youth in these fields, yet have them keep their language intact? Sometimes it happens that a young person does not understand who he is translating for or the things that he is told. People should make sure that a person fluently understands Cree before he is asked to translate. These are the things we should be concerned about.

Now I will talk about culture. Out west, the people speak the same Cree language that we speak. In Ontario, from the Manitoba border right up to Churchill, there are the Ojibways. The Ojibways settled in this area a long time ago, when the people wandered from place to place, for trapping or hunting, because another tribe was after them. They lived with the Crees because of this tribe. After a few years, the Ojibways moved inland and settled there permanently. I learned this from the elders. Some Crees moved to this area with the Ojibways.

One individual, the type that travels all over the country, told me a long time ago, 20 years ago, that the Cree we speak is also spoken all over western Canada. I did not know that the people spoke Cree in that area. I thought that people living in this area were the only Cree speakers. When I went out west five years ago, I spoke with Cree speakers. Because they were speaking the same language, I felt right at home.

My father was born in the north. His father and his father-in-law's sons were from a place called Penayseewachewan. My father moved south to Old Post. Because he is from Penayseewachewan, he speaks a different dialect, but he never spoke his dialect when he was living in Winisk. He spoke the dialect of the people from Winisk. That is how language changes. People moved and settled in different places for survival reasons. People needed supplies like matches or gun powder and in those days people had to travel far to get them. That is why, today, people are scattered all over the place.

A long time ago, when people used bows and arrows to hunt, and spears to catch fish, everything was different. Everyone was always healthy. The water and the land were

clean, and because the water and the land were clean, the fish and the fowl were healthy. Everything went well before the arrival of the people from other cultures, but now, everything is changing. The water is just like poison; we cannot even drink it anymore. The animals who feed in the muskeg are no longer healthy. Everything is changing. Even the snow that we melted for drinking is no longer clean; you can see that the snow is not clean. These are some things that I wanted to mention. The Whiteman seems to be everywhere. It seems they are always on the rivers canoeing and flying in the air. This is how life is today.

It was not allowed for someone to marry a cousin because they were considered a close relation. This is what we learned from the priest. They talked a lot about family relations. The priest said only from the fourth generation on that relatives could marry each other. They said that if two people whose parents are siblings were to marry, the children they may have would have physical problems. That is what was considered.

Now I will repeat a story someone told. A long time ago, when people first started using guns, there was this old man who owned a gun. One day, he told this story:

One day I went hunting by the Bay, where the short shrubs grow and there are small hills with trees and tall grass. Beyond the small hills were a few ponds. I saw two geese standing in the first pond. I crawled towards them, but I could not get up to shoot them. So, I shot them while lying down. My shot was very close to the ground. I killed both of them with one shot. I saw my pellets splash into the pond. I got up to go and get my geese. A few feet on the way, I came across two dead rabbits. I guess they were sitting right in my line of fire and I got them with my one shot. When I arrived at the pond where the geese were, I noticed four dead fish floating on the water. I guess I got them with my one shot when the pellets fell into the water.

This story is one that people laugh at every time they hear it. How true it is, we do not know, but just the idea of getting so much with one shot is funny.

First, I want to talk about what this earth looked like when God made all the things that grow on the earth. People lived on this earth unrestricted. God created this earth for people on. He also made the other elements such as the four directions: south, west, north, and east. I will talk about those later.

I will talk about important things first. Living on land was different before the arrival of the European survival methods that Natives are following nowadays. The waters of the lakes and rivers were clean for people to drink, and birds depended on the water. The plants that grew from the earth were clean. All these were good for the animals including the fish.

When a person contemplated survival, he began to think of what to do when he kills caribou or moose. Although he kills many caribou, he does not waste anything. Every part of the caribou was used. Whenever he killed caribou or moose, nothing was wasted. Even the bones were boiled to make broth for drinking. If he had much meat, he would dry it and make jerky or pemmican that could be kept for a long time. From the hide, he would make mittens, moccasins, or babiche. People were advised not to waste food that they were fortunate to have. They knew to take care of everything created for them. People knew that they did not own these things, but that these things were placed on this earth for their survival.

The same thing was done when many fish were caught, or when they purposely caught many fish for the winter. These fish would be dried or smoked and made into pemmican or fish oil. People stored food for the coming winter or for the trapping season. Planning was of great importance.

In preparation for the winter, people got their equipment ready such as snowshoes, sleds, and other equipment, so that nothing hindered their trapping. This way whatever they needed would be on hand until the arrival of the spring hunt. Just before spring,

they would get their deadfall traps ready or make a wooden shovel that they would use to clear the snow from where they would place their deadfall traps. These things were always readily available. The traps used for otters or beavers could be used for two years if they were maintained properly. The only traps that were available long ago were the deadfall traps. At first, a bow was used for hunting, but later a gun was used. There were no matches. A stone was used to make a fire. When struck, it created sparks. The flint, as it was called, came from a rock. There is such a rock 15 miles (24 km) up the Winisk River. That was where they found the flint to make a fire. That rock can be found anywhere. They kept their fire in a shelf mushroom taken from a birch tree. When the container made from a mushroom was dry, burning embers could be kept in it.

The living area was also kept clean. Nothing was thrown into the water, especially things like bones and broth or anything that would make the waters oily. This was done so the animals could remain in a clean area. People used to be mindful of everything because they never forgot that God created everything. They knew there was a natural law that they were given long ago. They never misused the things they were fortunate enough to have. People used them properly.

There were lakes where fishing could be done by angling or by setting nets. Some of these lakes where gill netting was done in deep water occurred in calm weather. These many lakes were long which was suitable for fishing. Fishing was not done in the same spot. In the winter, fishing was done through the ice. Fish behave differently in the winter. They go to different areas. Fish like sturgeon, white fish, pike, suckers, and trout spawn in different areas. People knew the different habits of these fish. Also, different fish spawn in different areas towards the fall.

Sturgeon spawn during late spring around June 20. After spawning in shallow waters, they swim to the deeper water of bigger rivers. Fish swim to different areas. Natives have to know these behavior patterns because their livelihood depends on it.

It is the same with trapping. People would stay in a certain area during the fall. They knew when it was time to move to a new location. Otters, mink, and other animals also

have different habits. They go deeper into the ground during the cold season. Natives knew about this. These animals surfaced in the early spring, as it gets warmer. That is why traps were set early at spots where the animals would likely surface when the rivers started to run.

Native people also knew where to hunt fowl. People who lived by the Bay knew where to hunt wavies and Canada geese in the spring time. They knew where these birds would feed during the fall. People were mindful of these birds so that they would not scare them off. They did not go into an area where these birds were feeding. For a while, they would hunt them from the south side. When these geese were ready to migrate, the people went to their feeding grounds. That would be the last time they hunted geese. The people knew all of these things. People knew when to hunt caribou, moose, fowl, and fish. Natives planned their hunting for survival, but now it is different. Methods of survival are changing.

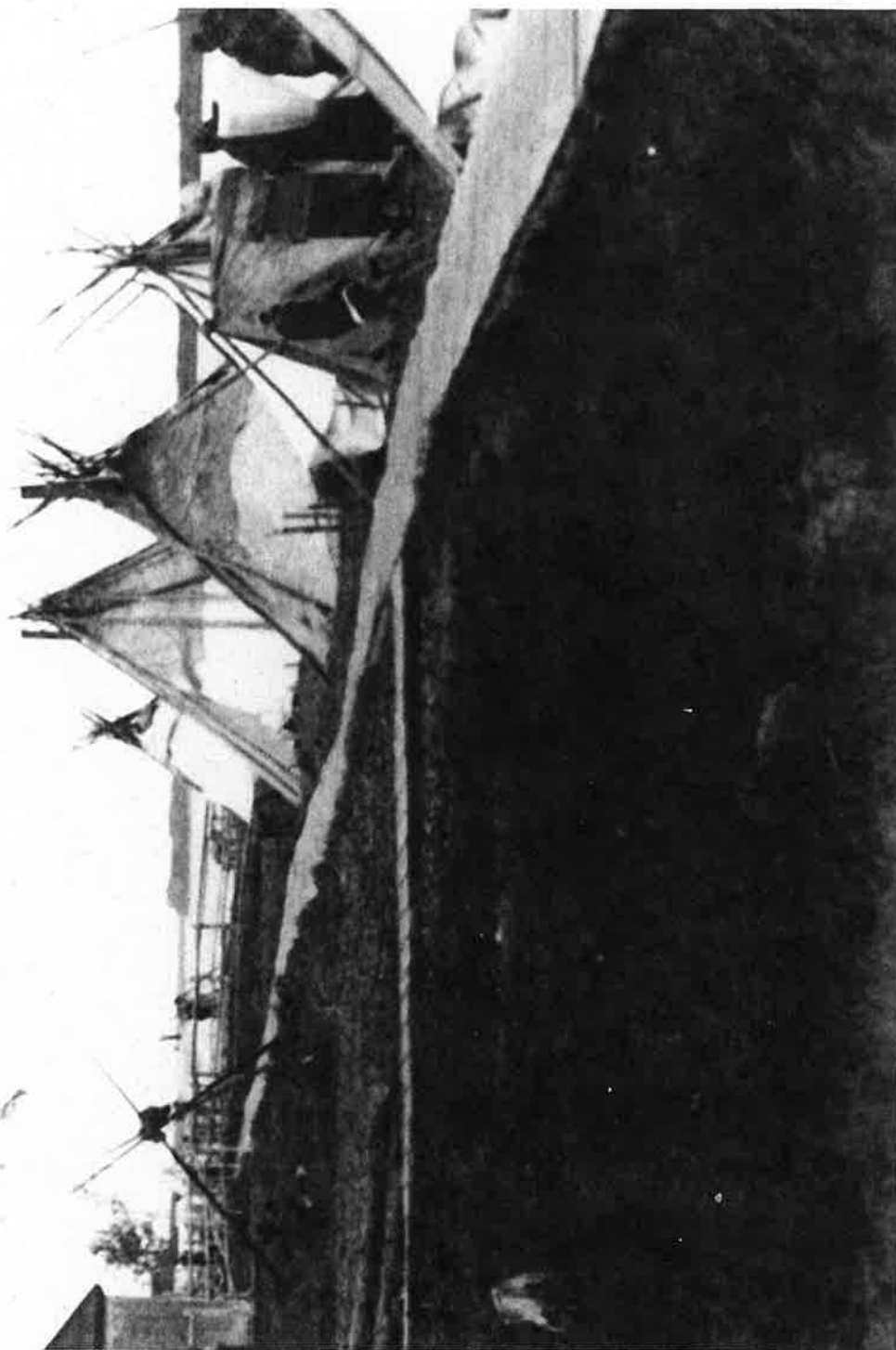
Now I will talk about the directions: east, west, north, and south. The west wind faces the east wind. The north wind faces the south wind. All these winds are important. The east is important because it brings another day that we are given. The west is important because that is where the sun sets. The warmth comes from the south and it also brings the geese that flew south before the cold season. The Natives respected the north wind because when it was warm and the snow was soft, they could not travel. That is why they needed the north wind. Sometimes it would happen for a week that the ground would be very hard which makes it easier to travel. They knew all these things that happened on the land.

Today, all the things made for man, are being ruined. In northern areas, the water and grasses that the birds depend on are polluted. The birds that are feeding in those areas look as if they are ready to die.

The Native way of life is changing drastically. Natives are constantly reminded that the good land they depended on is gradually being ruined. Their survival skills came from the land. They were advised about what to do to survive. A young person was cautioned not to misuse a gun.

A person was instructed, once he knew the location of caribou, moose, or any other animal that uses its smell sense, to hunt them downwind. He learned everything from nature. By studying the sky, the northern lights, and the stars, he knew what kind of weather tomorrow would bring. They forever watched for signs of the kind of day they would have. Take for example, the people who lived by the Bay, they waited for a calm day or wind blowing from the sea so that they could go where they wanted to go. When a person is hunting for birds, he has to know how strong the wind is. To hunt waterfowl on a calm day is not good hunting. That is the importance of the winds. That is all I have to say for now.

—recorded January 18, 1983



National Archives of Canada PA 103464 Old Post in the 1940s

The stories contained in this collection provide accounts of personal experiences and remembrances of the Cree elders of the Omushkegowuk area. They deal with a lifestyle and a world view that are vastly different from that of today. These stories are important records of the elders' way of life.

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