

MUSHKEGOWUK FIRST NATIONS



**Community and
Life Experiences Volume 2 (North)**



Fort Albany First Nation

JOHN PAUL JACASUM



**Ojibway and Cree
Cultural Centre**

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and Life Experiences Volume 2 (North)**



JOHN PAUL JACASUM

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Preface

The purpose of this book is to highlight the past and present life experiences of elders and youth in the **northern** most Mushkegowuk communities. This book identifies the aspirations of these communities and reserves as described by the participants. Information found in this book may then be used by these communities and reserves for the future development of cultural, educational, social, and economic activities. This information may also be used to promote greater understandings between the Mushkegowuk and surrounding non-Native communities.

Information on life experiences and aspirations was gathered through audio-taped interviews collected from five elders and one youth of the Attawapiskat, Fort Albany, and Kashechewan First Nations of the Mushkegowuk Council.

These interviews were developed around three general statements given to the participants:

- (1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past.
 - (2) Describe your life in your community today.
- and (3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

Following these interviews, community information was researched from a variety of sources. This information was used to complement the collected elders and youth stories and frame their words in context.

The opinions expressed in this book are those of the participants interviewed and not of the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre or the Chiefs and Councils of the Mushkegowuk First Nations.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following people and organizations who made this book possible. The elders and youth of the Mushkegowuk First Nations who participated by contributing their personal stories and sharing their individual and collective hopes and dreams.

Second, the support of the Chiefs and Councils of the Mushkegowuk First Nations, who provided their support and commitment for this book, and in making their communities a better place to live.

Third, the staff of the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre, particularly Diane Riopel who provided administrative support and took the community photographs, Bertha Metat who co-edited the Cree manuscript, Kathy Perreault who researched the community profiles, and Jim Hollander who co-edited the English manuscript and prepared the maps.

And, last but by no means least, Archives Canada, the Archives of Ontario, and the Archives of Manitoba (HBCA) for permission to publish their photographs.

To all those who worked and contributed to this book a sincere *meegwetch*.

1

Introduction

The Mushkegowuk Council is the senior representative for seven First Nations in the western James Bay and Hudson Bay. These include Attawapiskat, New Post, Kashechewan, Fort Albany, Moose Cree, Chapleau Cree, and Missanabie Cree.

The Mushkegowuk Council can trace its origins back to the late 1970s. At that time the Chiefs of the James Bay communities formed what is known as the James Bay Tribal Council to work together addressing common concerns. In the early 80s, the organization was renamed Mushkego Cree Council. In 1984, the Council became federally incorporated and shortly thereafter, during an assembly in Kashechewan, it was again renamed Mushkegowuk Council.

The Mushkegowuk Council is governed by a board of seven directors. These members include a chief or councillor from each First Nation, plus the chair of the council. Their goal is to ensure the member First Nations work together to met the needs and aspirations of their citizens.

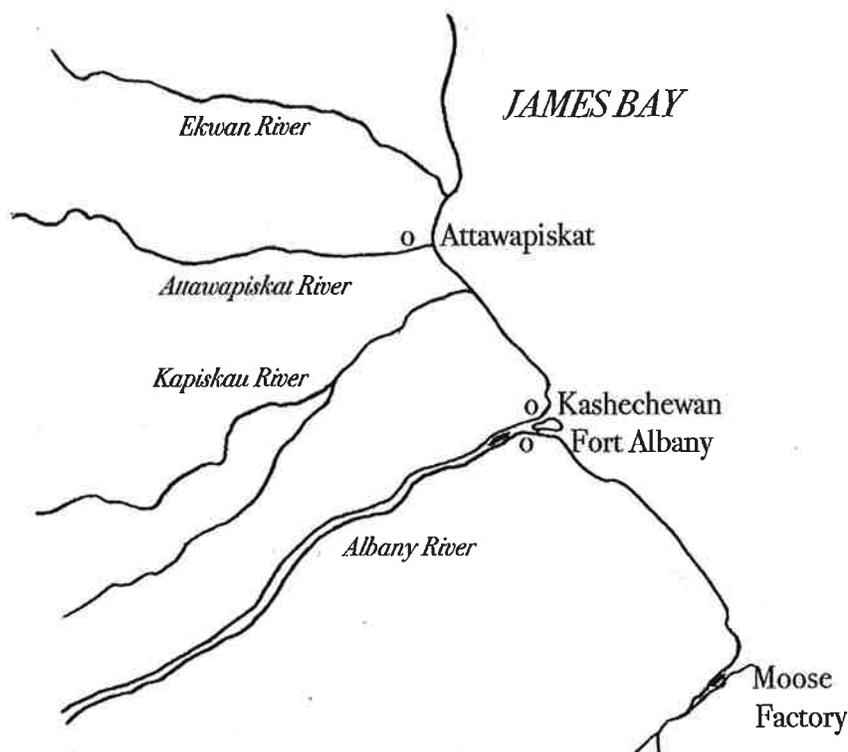
We have a general mandate to carry out the collective will of our members in exercising self-government through: promoting self reliance and local control, providing for our members in such areas as health, education, fire protection and community advisory services, and enhancing their unique cultures, traditions and languages.

The Mushkegowuk Council is accountable to its members through the directors and through an annual assembly of chiefs, councillors, elders, women and youth delegates.

Mushkegowuk can mean two different things. One refers to the Mushkego. The people who lived there were very strong and powerful and that is the reason we are given the name Mushkegowuk. Our grandfathers unloaded the Hudson Bay Company ships when they came in. The word Mushkegowuk is [also] a reflection of our traditional religion, where we used powerful spirits to protect ourselves. It is said that there are two kinds of Polar Bears, the greatest Polar Bear was used for spiritual help in our traditional religion.

So these are the reasons why our elders have chosen the name Mushkegowuk Council for our organization. When we are talking about the people we say Omushkego, and our territory is called Mushkegowuk Aski.

— from *Mushkegowuk Council: A Brief Overview*



Northern Mushkegowuk Council First Nation Communities

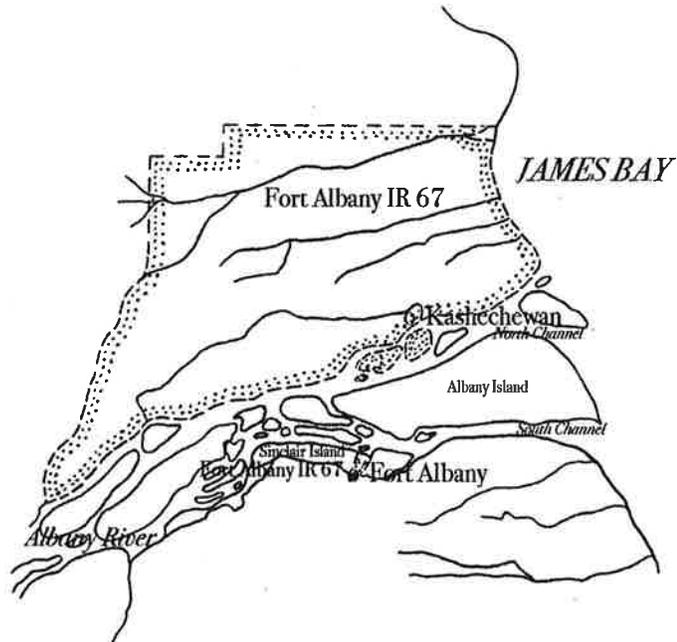
For more information on the past life experiences of elders in the **northern** Mushkegowuk communities (e.g., Attawapiskat, Kashechewan, Fort Albany, and Moose Factory), the following materials may be useful: Jacasum, J.P. (2000). *Omushkegowuk Women's Traditional Practices Project: Restoring the Balance*. Timmins, ON: Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre or Jacasum, J.P. (2002). *Omushkegowuk Men's Traditional Practices Project: Restoring the Balance*. Timmins, ON: Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre.

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Fort Albany First Nation

P.O. Box 1
Fort Albany, ON
POL 1H0

The Fort Albany First Nation is located on Fort Albany Indian Reserve 67 approximately 440 kilometres north of Timmins, Ontario. This reserve was set aside as part of the James Bay Treaty (Treaty #9) made in 1905. The Fort Albany Indian Reserve 67 is about 36,345 hectares (approximately 140 square miles) in size. In the late 1950s, Old Fort Albany was abandoned and the band split into two groups: with some people moving to Kashechewan and others moving to present day Fort Albany. The community of Fort Albany lies on an extension of Fort Albany Indian Reserve 67 on Sinclair Island that is 1,036 hectares (approximately 4 square miles) in size. Fort Albany is on the south channel of Albany River approximately 10 kilometres south of Kashechewan.



Population: 1,053 registered band members with 646 people living on-reserve (NAN, 2002)

Languages: Cree and English

Schedule of Reserves—Treaty No. 9—1905

Fort Albany

In the Northwest Territories, beginning at the point where the North river flows out of the main stream of the Albany, thence north on the west side of the North river a distance of ten miles and of sufficient depth to give an area of one hundred and forty square miles.

from *The James Bay Treaty (Treaty No. 9)*, 1964, p. 12

In its early history, Fort Albany had different Cree, English, or French names depending on who occupied the area.

Post: Albany

1674 founded known as Chichewan

1679 trading had begun

1683 named in honour of his Royal Highness, Governor of HBC, James Duke of York & Albany

1686 captured by the French and renamed Fort Ste. Anne

1688 fort established on Bayley's Island to retake fort

1693 recovered from the French by James Knight

1695 captured by the French

1696 retaken by the English

—from *Canada II The Owners of Eden*, p. 106 and *Post Mark J3*

The Cree name for Fort Albany is *Mundo Peetabeck*. This name is derived from the Cree words *muntomina* for the black currants that grow in that area and *peetabeck* for the shallow body of water or lagoon around which they are found.

Helen Spence (Roderique)



(recorded November 14,
2004)

Community or reserve life in the past

*1) Describe your life
in your community or
reserve in the past.*

Biographic Information

Name: Helen M. Spence (Roderique)
Date of Birth: August 30, 1933
Place of Birth: Albany River
Present Address: Fort Albany, Ontario
Name of Spouse: John Roderique
Number of Children: 7
Grandchildren: 21
Great-grandchildren: 0
Number of Years Married: Separated 1982
Education: St. Anne's Residential School 5
Years
Interests/Hobbies: Sewing, Cooking

The first time I became aware I was alive on earth was when we were living at a place called Pagwa. That was where I first knew I was alive. I don't know how old I was at that time, maybe three or four, but I knew it was called Pagwa. Do you ever hear about it?

Yes.

That's where we were. We were living at my grandmother Limping Mary's home. We had come from my father's trapping grounds, I mean. That's where my father used to go in the winter. They never stayed in the community. Every autumn we would go to the bush. In the past, they stayed a short time in the community, only for a spiritual retreat. Do you know what a spiritual retreat is?

Yes.

That's the one. That was the only reason people stayed here. Then we would go back to the bush. During the summer we would go stay at my father's trapping grounds. Sometimes we would camp along the way while my father fished and snared rabbits. I don't remember living in the community. We would just leave for the bush. He was looking for food to feed us, as there was nothing here. We used to stay in the bush all year round. My father used to make an *askikan* where we stayed all winter. As it began to become warm we would move out of there and move into a wigwam. An *askikan* was only used in the winter and a wigwam was used in the summer. That was what I remembered.

Was it because it was so cold during the winter that they couldn't live in a tent all the time?

Yes, it used to be so cold then. There used to be so much snow I used to think. But now there's not that much snow anymore. Maybe that's why they lived in an *askikan* because of that. I don't remember ever living in a tent, only in a wigwam. It was a wigwam. He used to make that. That was before I went to residential school. I was seven years old when they put me in school. I was small. Right after that my parents left for the bush. I didn't see them for a whole year. They stayed in the bush where my father was trapping and came back in the springtime. That was when I saw them again. Fortunately, my grandmother lived here. So I used to visit her on Sundays when I was in school. But we didn't visit all at once. The boys would visit the next Sunday and we, the girls, would not. We took turns visiting every other Sunday. Only when our parents came back in the springtime were we able to go home. The first time I was there I almost died. I got sick. They said I almost died there. That's what this woman who was working at the hospital at that time told me. You almost died, she told me. She was relating the time I was in the hospital when I saw her while I was working in Timmins. The reason why I got sick was because I was so grief-stricken about not seeing my parents. That's what the nurse, who was a nun, at the time said. I knew I was dying because I could only swallow one small spoon of soup. When I swallowed I felt my heart would stop. I was at the point of death. I slowly got better. I was so weak. My grief almost killed me because I was too young when they placed me at the school. Finally, I was well enough to be discharged from the hospital and go back to school. But even though I was out of the hospital, the nurse kept an eye on my health. At every recess, we used to go and have soup. All the kids who were weak had to go and have soup so we would get stronger. Some kids died from TB, tuberculosis, when I was there. My grief was the only reason I got sick.

What was the name of the place where you were born?

It was called *Abamut* where my father was trapping. That was my father's trapping grounds. It's called *Kommanan* (?). I don't really know where it's located, but that's what they used to call it. It's on the map you'll see it. Maybe it's a comb, that's how I understood it when they say *Kommanan* (?).

Is it called Mammamattawa?

The place I was born is called Mammamattawa, but not exactly there. There was a company, the Hudson's Bay [Company]. Down the river a bit a creek and that's where we lived, mother said, when I was born in a wigwam. It was the month of August. My mother almost died when I was born. My grandfather was the one who delivered me. His name was John Spence, my father's dad. My grandfather was by himself then, but my grandmother was able to see me. She was in the hospital that time, my father's

mother. They said her heart killed her. She was huge. She wasn't able to lie down properly. She could only sit up in bed using a lot of pillows. She couldn't lie down because of her heart condition. That's how she died sitting up my mother said. That was why my grandfather was there to deliver me. My grandfather was the midwife. Something went wrong, they probably almost made a grave mistake. Almost. You know the thing that comes out last after a baby is born? That didn't come out. My grandfather used to tell us what happened. He left by canoe at that moment, leaving my mother lying on her back just like that. Good thing the store was not too far from where I was born. The manager was there and he gave my grandfather some medicine after he told him what was happening. Those managers used to have medicines that they could give to trappers if one got sick. He was given some liquid medicine for my mother to drink. When he came back, my mother drank that medicine and the thing came out. That's what happened to my mother. There was almost a tragedy. After that she was okay.

Did your grandfather take care of her then?

[He took care of her] just by what the manager gave him and the directions he gave him.

Did he use any natural medicinal herbs?

No.

No?

He went to see the manager. They had medicine wherever they were. They had medicine to give to people who got sick.

Was there a woman there to help a woman while in the bush when she's ready to go into labor?

Yes. People used to help each other, the women I mean. Two families would stay in one place. Sometimes there would be several families. My mother used to deliver babies too, when she was living with my uncle's wife, Daniel's grandmother. Do you know her?

Yes.

That was his wife that *Kaychinow* (?). My mother delivered that baby. They helped each other if the women were there. There was no woman when my grandfather had to deliver me.

What did you do after you went to school?

I started working after I went to school. I was in school for five years. That was as far as it went. There were no grades yet when we went to school. There were only two classrooms, one they called the small one for the younger ones. The other was the big one for the older ones. I stayed in the small one. The nuns were the ones who taught us. The nuns spoke to us in French, but they also spoke in Cree. They must have learned Cree sometime back there, if they could speak Cree. They spoke both languages. Over time, I learned French and Cree because one of nuns taught us the Cree. Her name was Sister Jane. She was the one who taught us Cree. That was how we were able to learn how to write in Cree. She was very good in speaking and writing Cree. That's how I learned she was a good teacher. She used to cut out pictures from a catalogue; I think it was Eaton's. That was the first one I saw. She used to cut those out and hang them on the wall. She used to name each one: ladle, cup, spoon, and all that. That's how I learned Cree by being taught. Not much French was taught; just a little. The French book was small and not very thick. We went through it. They taught us numbers too and the Bible. We were to read it through and memorize it. That's what we used to do when we learned how to read Cree. They had us read the Bible and try to memorize one paragraph at a time. I would read one paragraph several times. Then the priest, Father Lavoie would come and test us or the teacher would test us if the priest was not there. Father Lavoie would come every day and taught us from the Bible. That's how they taught us.

Did you use any of the traditional medicines people used when someone got sick in the bush?

I only saw a little of it, just those from willow branches. They used to scrape them and apply that to their wounds if someone cut themselves. That's what they applied as a poultice to the wound as well as cattails. They grow where there is water. Do you see them?

Yes.

They used to keep them all through the winter. They applied that when someone cuts themselves. Those were very effective, those cattails. Look at this. I cut myself and there were lots growing nearby where I cut myself. I applied those to my cut and bandaged it. It was bandaged for a while and it never got inflamed. They were there and when it started to heal they came out by themselves. It was always bandaged up and it never hurt during that time, only the first time it was sore.

Did you think your finger was a twig and cut it?

We were setting snares and I was cutting out the branches of a stick when I cut myself. Good thing cattails were growing near by the railroad tracks. I rushed over there since I knew how my parents used them and that's what I did too.

Did you live in this community all the time?

Yes. I grew up here. I worked. I did various kinds of work here. I worked on the girls' side and on the boys' side making and sewing their clothes. We sewed all their clothes. I did all kinds of jobs. I worked at the Rectory and in the kitchen. I worked in the kitchen for a long time. With the nuns talking, I learned what everything was called in French. I also understood the nun when she spoke to me in French. When she said, "sit here," in French, I understood what she meant. I can still understand a French person speaking. But I'm forgetting it because I don't hear it too often.

Did you trap or hunt?

I did a little bit, not really. I did remember one time being in the bush. It was after school, I think I had one child already, my daughter. I was trapping; I tried those things and I snared rabbits. I also snared weasels and squirrels. They used to have some financial worth back then. They used to give me those squirrel and weasel pelts to buy things for myself. Things were not too expensive back then. I bought materials to make myself a parka, a dress, socks, and a hat. All that material was from those squirrel and weasel pelts.

Who taught you how to sew?

My mother taught me all the things I know. At first I couldn't do it, but after a while I got the hang of it. I would undo something I was sewing several times when it didn't turn out right. My mother would say "again, again, again." After a while I sewed better. I didn't really prepare moose hides although I did only once. But I was always working at the Mission. When I was able to work I worked all the time after that, in the summer too. The first time we worked we did all kinds of jobs. We cleaned up outside helping the brother. We would take out the nails from the scaffolds after they were done using them around the outside of the buildings they were working on. Also we worked where they prepared gravel, you know, when they separated the smaller grains from the bigger ones. The bigger ones went to another pile only the smaller grains of sand were taken to make cement. That's what we did. We used to carry that up to the top of the big school. All the women used to work there, all kinds of people worked there.

We could hardly lift those pails of cement, even when it was a small one. We worked like men back in those days when they were building the school. Just like an ant carrying sand that's what we looked like taking it up to the top. We each carried a heavy pail to the top. We did this until the school was finished. There were a lot of us. I didn't see any machinery only people, maybe just that cement mixer. That was the only machinery I saw operating. There was no other equipment used: only that mixer. I used to see men using shovels shoveling sand into the mixer. It's incredible that the school was constructed without the help of any other machinery. There was nothing used except hands to build that school from start to finish. A lot of people worked there.

Community or reserve life today

2) Describe your life in your community or reserve today.

It's still the same. I live alone since we got a separation agreement. So now I'm living by myself. Even though I'm seventy-one years old, I still work to support myself. I do various jobs, sometimes I get requests to do some work and I'd go travel to another community. The other place I worked was at (Grand Council) Treaty Nine. I worked there for nine years. I assisted in the Cree language department. I would proofread what they had written. I proofread and checked so it was right. Of course [I did this] because I already knew my Cree, right? That's what I did. Sometimes I interpreted for people who required assistance and went with them wherever it was they wanted to go. It wasn't much but I used to go and interpret for them. One time I interpreted in court for some young offenders. That was while I was working at Treaty Nine. For nine years I assisted my brother Greg in translating. I used to do some typing. I did that too while working there. I only worked there for nine years. After that I returned home. Before I worked there at Treaty Nine, I worked at a hotel: the big one that is over there. The one they call the big one. The one when you go towards Sudbury just past Timmins Square, you know the one?

Ramada?

Yes. That's the one. I worked there in the kitchen doing the dishes. I did all kinds of work. I worked in Cochrane too. I worked in a restaurant for a bit too. I'm always working. I also taught Cree to children assisting my cousin *Mayneeshish*, Annabella. Her name is Annabella Solomon. I was her assistant for a while at the school. I forgot the year I was her assistant before the school burned down. I did all kinds of odd jobs at the school. I did sewing also. After my schooling, I had six children by then when I was working. I worked all the time. I worked at the hospital. I worked there for a long time. I worked at the new hospital for a long time too.



James Bay General Hospital – Fort Albany Wing

Did you do surgery?

Almost. What's that called when you help the nurses?

Nurses' Aide?

Yes. It's nurses' aide what we were doing there. I worked for a number of years. I worked in the kitchen too. I worked in the school's kitchen too: the one that burned down. I worked there for a long time. Also recently, when they were putting in water pipes, no, it was before when they were making the dyke I worked in the kitchen. Again, when they were putting in water pipes, I cooked their meals. Also I was a cook while they were building this present school. I cooked for those white people. But now, I don't work. They used to do shift work cooking. At first there was an older man cooking alone and then I helped him, but that old man went home all of a sudden. Then there was this woman from Winnipeg who replaced him. I helped her too. I stopped cooking there when they completed their work. After that, they called me to assist in the school. Even now, I am still helping at the school. I was always working. I was never at a loss to do something.

Community or reserve life in the future

3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

I don't know what it will be like in the future. I don't even know what my life will be like in the future.

What do you think of the programs they have here in this community?

They are so slow. It takes too long to get things done here only because of lack of funds. There is no money is what they say all the time in this community. Only when there is money can they do anything. Without money nothing gets done. Nothing. There were no materials available for use too. The crew that came to do some work here they brought their own equipment and materials to build this. They used the barge. After they finished they took everything back with them. Without any money nothing gets going or done. The barge that used to bring materials doesn't come here anymore. That's why there is no housing construction they say because they can't transport the materials. How that's happening I don't know. Maybe it's because we are isolated, eh? That's the situation here, nothing can be started and everything is so expensive here. We who are living here are barely surviving. It's getting more expensive since the airplane is only bringing in the supplies. It's a miracle we are surviving when things are so expensive here. Probably it's because people are hunting wild game. That's why we are still alive. That's why we haven't starved yet things being expensive the way they are.

Do people come here looking for minerals that are in the earth?

I've never known anybody to come and look around here. There was only that one time when those who came here went up the river looking for mineral rocks. I heard they came here. Some went with them to help them look for rocks. But for someone to come and look for minerals in the earth I don't know about that.

What do you think about our language? Do you think it's getting weaker?

Yes, I think it's getting weaker. It's disappearing. That's all I hear all the time even a little child speaking in English from birth. That's the prominent language; children speaking English all of the time. Even when we try to teach them Cree they are not interested. They don't really want to learn it. That's just what they want to speak.

What do you think can be done to keep our language so it won't become extinct?

I don't know how. Here's what I think; [we should] have the same number of teachers as those who are teaching in English because there are so few of them. There are only two here. It would be great if there were more, that's what I think. There are too few and there are many that go and see those two. The students only see them for a few minutes. I experienced that too. We went to see them only for a few minutes not even for half an hour. How can they learn Cree in just a few minutes? Going in there one by one for just a few minutes each. They can't learn anything if they just go see those two for a few minutes. I did that too. They won't be able to learn anything.

Are there only two that teach Cree ...

Yes, there are only two.

So there's more of those ... ?

There are more of those white people who teach in English. It would be good to have more of that kind. The time spent with them is too short. Too short. Sometimes they go in there for only twenty minutes. That's what I tell my brother Greg, the time spent with them is too short.

I want to thank you for telling me your story also.

John Sutherland



(recorded November 15,
2004)

Community or reserve life in the past

*1) Describe your life
in your community or
reserve in the past.*

Biographic Information

Name: John Sutherland
Date of Birth: February xx, 1924
Place of Birth: Attawapiskat, Ontario
Present Address: Fort Albany, Ontario
Name of Spouse: Mary Carpenter
Number of Children: 0
Grandchildren: 7 adopted
Great-grandchildren: 0
Number of Years Married: 45
Education: St. Anne's Residential School 3
Years

Yes. I can't really talk about the time when I was too young. I can only [talk] about those things I remember. I can only answer the questions about the things I can recall from when I went to school. But before that time I can't really tell you anything I didn't really know anything that far back. We were poor. I never saw my father when I was born. I was born three months after my father died. His name was Peter Sutherland. That's what my mother told me. I was born three months after he died. That's what they told me when I was young. I was born in Attawapiskat, they say. My mother raised me by herself after she was widowed in Attawapiskat. That's what happened to us. She raised us up to the time I was mature enough. One of my brothers helped us all the time when we came here. His name was Xavier. He was the one who helped us when we were young. I should say when he was young. He was the one who always helped us. His name was Xavier Sutherland, maybe you know him. You must know some people. That's the one I mean, Xavier. That's where we lived and we were very poor. I never knew to have had plenty. We were very poor before my brother was really able to get anything while supporting us. That's how we were. He was the one who helped us once he was able to find work. That's what he did. That was after we came this way to Fort Albany. I'm not sure exactly when my mother came here. It was here in Fort Albany that I started to remember things. I went to school here at the old one. It was the time the French were in charge of the school when I was there. When I went to school I knew some things. I was maybe ten years old when I first went in or sometime before I was ten when the priest taught us. People were already living in this community. It was just starting to be built. My mother was here when I went to school. Not all the French had moved from the old post to the school when I went to school. I was there at the old post for one year. When this community was being built I was two years at the school. That was as far as I went for schooling. I didn't learn anything else except Cree and numbers. That's all I learned at the school and that's the only time I spent there. That's about the only thing I experienced there. Although I was doing a little bit of work by

that time and trying to remember the way things were done. Sometimes I was in the bush and at other times I stayed in the community during. When I was young, I would be invited by my relatives to go with them in the bush. The main person that helped support us especially during that time was my uncle Jimmy Sutherland, my father's brother. He used to take us in the bush. That was my life during that time. But there's more that happened when I was trying support myself. Sometimes I worked in the community and sometimes I would go in the bush with other relatives when they asked me. That was the time when they started to build Fort Albany. I started working too. My brother Xavier was working already. Once he was able to work he was a big help to us. That's how it was in our lives. I don't know what else to say except we had a good life. All of my life I lived in this community. I never lived anywhere else. This is the only community I've lived in up to the present time. When I was older and getting work experience I went south. I was probably [there] for about three years. I was there because they were recruiting young men during World War II when they were at war with Germany. They were enlisting young men into the army at that time. I was a young man by then. At first they sent letters to the young men. The paper was white and after that there were two pages of the letter. They wrote to me three times and the last one they wrote had three pages. That was the reason I went to Moosonee. I received that letter when I was here. That's how I got to stay there for a while when they were recruiting young men. I left from here in Fort Albany. We traveled by a barge owned by the French. I was traveling with another young man. That person is still living here. At that time I didn't know what was happening with him, but we were there together. When I arrived there in Moosonee, I went to see the doctor. After I saw him he told me to wait and that's all he said. So I was there during that time and that's how I ended down in Moosonee. I worked all over there trying to support myself while I was in Moosonee because I couldn't get away from there. Then the war ended. Maybe I would have had to go to Toronto since they told me to wait. That's how it was when I was a young man. After that I found work here in the community. Sometimes I would go trapping with my brothers. Sometimes I would stay longer out on the land doing whatever was done like trapping. Sometimes I would be employed and lived in the community. I never stayed in one place for long. I was either out on the land trapping or working in the community. That's what we did, my brothers and I. That's the story about that, but it's not everything. If I told you everything there would be too much. Only mentioned those things that were important. I've been living here and now [that I] am old this is where people know me. As I started to get more experience, I did a variety of jobs. When the school was still here I worked there too. I also worked at the barge out near the bay when they used to come. They used to hire me. I worked there for eight summers. They only required workers during the summer. I'm only

pinpointing a few instances or it would too long if I told everything. That's my story. In my elder years I find things different when I think about it. Especially thinking back about how it was then and now as I am speaking there is a big difference. The way children and teenagers grew back then and now, it's a lot different. That's what I notice about that. When I look at the young people who are educated now and the young people who were the same age back then, there's a big difference. Those people I'm talking about long ago are all gone. Only a few are still alive. That's what I can recall about myself. I'm saying what I think. A lot of changes have happened since that time. About eighty years ago and before that, the people did fairly well, but since fifty years ago and up to the present time something is happening. That's what I notice and that's it for that.

Who taught you the skills to support yourself?

It was my brother and my uncle, Jimmy Sutherland, who taught us. My brother was always there to help us and he taught me things too. That's the only one I can name who taught me while I was young – my uncle. I learned from my brothers too and I started to apply the things I was taught to just about everything. I was then able to do things myself. There was this other person, an elder that told me just recently how to do one thing, but that person is gone now. Yes, I was taught a lot. I have retained the things I was taught [from] all of them and I still have those teachings. Even now I've kept the teachings I received from my elders. That's how it's been with me since that time up to now.

Do you know what the area was called where you said you and your brother were trapping?

It was at Kapiskau. That's where we were living when we traveled back and forth while I was working here in Fort Albany too. That's where we lived right at the area where the river branches off. That's where my brothers trapped all the way up to the Horned Owl River. That's where I went with my brothers from time to time and sometimes my brother-in-law would me ask me to go with him trapping up this main river. I would stay there for while. All these people I'm talking about have passed away now. The people I went trapping with are all gone. That's where I used to get mink too.

Did you use the current traps when you were trapping?

Yes, they were using the current traps.

So wooden traps were not used anymore?

I never used wooden traps. I can't talk about them but I know how they're used. They knew how to use them but they were not using the wooden traps by that time. What I heard was that wooden traps were used for otter and all the other animals but I never saw it. My brothers knew about them but I never saw them using wooden traps. Metal traps that first came were used at the time that I'm talking about and those were the ones I was using too.



Simeon and Joe at Kapiskau, 1942

Archives of Manitoba HBCA Photographs 1983/12/116

While you were out in the bush did you use anything from nature for medicinal purposes?

No. I never used any of those medicines they talked about. But there was one time when my brother Xavier got sick while we were in the bush. This was before when there was anything available to help anyone. He was sick, very sick. During this time he became sick. I don't know what it was or maybe it was on his back. He got worse until he wasn't able to get up. Maybe it was out of desperation. But even though there was a little bit of medicine it was not effective. He was the same. Maybe out of desperation

because my brother wasn't able to get up at all, my mother started talking about poplar ... bark. My sister was with us that time and she's still living here. Maybe you know that poplar ... bark, the buds that appear in the summertime. "Gather those," she said. There were some elders there who also trapping. So that's what we did as my sister was cutting down the poplar trees. We gathered lots of those buds. You probably know those poplar buds. My mother boiled them until they softened. She boiled a lot and after that she crushed them into a liquid paste. She added a little bit of grease, any kind, so he won't get dry she said. Then she applied a thick paste to a cloth and then put another cloth on top. The paste wasn't applied directly to his skin. So she wrapped it around his back where he had the pain. By this time my brother was hardly able to walk. He got the chills. What my mother did was on her own initiative. Then the other elders started to help her. So my brother was bandaged up with that. Up to that time nobody could get a decent night's rest because he was in so much pain. He couldn't sleep at night. After some time being bandaged with that poplar bud paste, my mother asked his son, "How you feeling now." "I'm hot, I feel hot," he replied. Because of using those buds he was hot. By that time he wasn't sleeping at all, but after being bandaged with that he was able to sleep all night. The next morning he was talking. He said, "I feel a lot better than I did before," to his mother. I feel a lot better he says. Then she repeated the process with the bud paste. I feel better he said after each time it was changed. He got better using that and the pain was completely gone. Gradually he got up. I don't mean in a couple of days but after three days he started getting around. That's all that was used, those buds and nothing else except for that little bit of grease. He recovered using those buds. That's the only occasion that I know of when something from nature was used. That's the only thing from my own experience is what I'm saying. That's all I know. This is what happened to my brother. I don't what would have happened if my mother hadn't been desperate. That is all I can answer to your question.

Did you experience a lack of food while you were in the bush or was there starvation?

It happened all the time. Everyone experienced that as far as I know and I did see the hardships of living at that time. This was probably about sixty or seventy years ago that I'm relating. That's what happened during those times of adverse living conditions. Only when one is optimistic can anyone survive back then. I experienced that because I remember crying when my mother and I went hungry but we were not starving. [It was] probably because I was young and unhappy and just wanted to eat something. But during those times my brothers always provided for us. I'm relating from what I know in regards to your question. That's what we went through during that time but not starvation. At the time I was helping we did not experience that, dying of starvation,

where we were living. While I was helping at the time and where we were living nobody died for lack of food. There were times of uncertainty but we would have food to eat all the time. That's what happened to us.

Community or reserve life today

2) Describe your life in your community or reserve today.

At the present time it's like this. Ever since it can be seen that there is something to sustain life, that's when people like the seniors began to change. They've changed a lot. It's changed a lot from way it was back then. The seniors are in good health. It's only when a person gets sick that they die off. They had that in them [that it was] their time to die and that is the reason they got sick and died. That's what I personally know. But it's not satisfactory for the things intended for and to say that it will be enough. That's the way a senior is. The seniors are like that and they still want more and more of something. That's the way it is for all seniors. They want more even though one is hardly able to move around anymore. That's the way seniors think. That's the way I think and that's why I say that. I'm still doing things if I want something. That's my story. What little I know of that it's my story. These are a few things I'm telling you.

Do the programs that are here in this community like health centre, hospital, or police services help you?

Are saying for me personally? I'm not using those yet. They are not helping me, I think, probably because I'm not feeling sick in any way. Maybe that's why I'm that way. I don't require those services to assist me yet. I'm still able to get around unlike some people I know that get those services. There are workers who are supporting them. I'm not there yet but it will happen. Sometimes the nurses' aide comes to see me but not all the time. I would say they've come to see me only ever since I've been living where I am now. Three times they came to see me. That's what they do for me. Maybe it's not time for me yet to get that support. But I am getting old. That's the answer to the question you asked me.

Are you surviving on the assistance that you're getting every month like the old age pension cheque? Are you surviving by getting that?

Yes, it is helping me since I got that. Since I received that I've been able to purchase things. I have the means to acquire some things. What you're talking about is helping me though sometimes I think it's not enough. I'm not satisfied. I travel to go get the things I need that are most needful. It takes longer since I got that assistance to buy things. That's what I'm doing. But I still purchase the things I need that the store manager lets me buy. I use those things that he lets me buy. That's the way it is for me.

That's what is happening. The same thing is probably happening to those who are receiving that: not being enough. Of course there are many of them. It's just not enough. It's the same with the others. I'm not the only one who's experiencing that. I get asked to give of what I'm getting. My relatives ask me too. That's the way it happens as I'm telling you.

Community or reserve life in the future

3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

Yes. I could say I'm at the point of dying. It is true. That's all I can tell you. As for my opinion in observing life, I will speak my mind on a few things. It's too hard now; it's not going too well. You probably know what I'm talking about. Everything that has happened from way back is happening now no matter if they try to hold it back from what I'm hearing when they talk. It's still happening from what I know personally and from what I think I see. It's happening for sure, even though there's a lot of talk. Still it comes through all the time, I think, the future events. But I will not see it. I will not see what's coming. That things you and I know will happen. Maybe you know. That's what I think when I hear them talk about it. It never seems to be right. There are difficulties even when things being discussed. Nothing gets going no matter how much they talk. Nothing gets going even though they say this will happen. It is too hard and it will get harder. It's money that's in control. Money has power. That's how things will happen and only those with money will be powerful, I think. Not if nobody has any financial means will anything get accomplished. Money is the only thing that's powerful of all the things on this earth. But sometimes when something else is implemented it can be accomplished. That's what I think on that. That's my own opinion not what I heard said. Even though I've listened to what they're saying. I'm just saying what I think. Maybe, it will happen eventually, from what I hear. That's what I think; it will not happen right away, but slowly it will happen even though there's talk. ... The reason I'm saying that is we have been told. It was foretold long ago. Now it's coming to pass what was predicted. That's why it's happening. What has been told to us since we've been living on this earth is not a lie and that is why I think that. It was foretold and now it's come to life. That thing has been at work from a long time and will accelerate until it is fulfilled. That's the kind of thing I'm referring to. That's what I think. We've arrived. We're seen lots now. We have arrived there and it will not stop even though there's talk. The time is now. We are now in the midst of what we were told would happen. That is what I think. What I'm telling I see it now. I know. There is absolutely nothing anybody in this whole world can do. They can't do anything. There is one person that I heard; I call him a prophet. I see coming to pass what that person said. It was one of the teachers. He was here. He taught me. And that's what he was saying and

I'm seeing all the things he had said would happen. These things you see here they didn't exist when he told me that. He had said they would be. There will be great things to come that are not here he had said. That's what will happen to those who make these things he had said. Now for sure I see these things like this one and also other things that he had named. That person was teaching us and that's what he had said. Then he had said these would be hard times. That's what he said. Those manufacturers they will do all kinds of things until they run out of ideas. They won't be able to make anything. Then the thing predicted will arrive; tribulations will have arrived he had said. That's what he had said and I'm seeing a lot of the things come to pass on what he had said. I've seen a lot since I went to school. That's what I'm telling you.

What do you think about our language? Do you think it's getting weak?

That's what I'm telling you. That's what I'm saying. It's disappearing. It will be gone I'm sure. I'm convinced of that, even though it's spoken it will disappear eventually. I say that because the people living now, that's all they do. My grandchild[ren] don't understand me when I talk to them. They don't understand me. All they speak is that language (English). Not at all. That's why I say that it progresses rapidly when the white man teaches his language, his culture. That's what I think. That's what I notice it's the white man's fault. That's my opinion. I'm still doing what he wants done. That's what I think. That's what that person had said when he told us these things. That is why I'm saying that because I see it come to pass at my age. I see a lot of it and it will increase. That's why I say that because they can't use our language where it is important. That's why I think that. Our language is not used where it would be most useful. It is the white man's language that is used all the time – the prominent white man. There's no chance of using our language there. That's what I learned. These are my own words I'm repeating [not] anybody else's words. What I'm saying is my own opinion from listening to what is being said. That's what I think.

Did you ever hear your mother talk about the treaty that was signed in 1906?

No. No, I never heard my late mother talk about what you said. But there was this old man who told me a little about witnessing that. He heard them. He was at the age of being able to understand. That's what he told me while I was traveling with this old man. He was just telling me these old stories. He said he saw those white men that came here the first time. Those people that came and bothered the people in this area. I mean this area where we are. This is what he said about that. It went fast. He was very quick. He spoke quickly. He didn't even really wait for people to discuss at least a little about it, he said. No. He said that's what he had said when he told them what their intentions were. He didn't talk too long. He didn't mention their names. But there was

no one to interpret, he said, only one of those French Brothers interpreted in Cree when they were talking. This is what the old man said and that's all he said. I'm saying exactly what he told me. He continued. When this person appointed a chief he said to him, you are given authority. But I don't have authority, he said. But I was told to do that, he said, to give authority to somebody. So that is why I'm giving you this authority because you have that right, he told him. This is what the old man told me who heard this. I was old enough to understand what they were saying he told me. That's what he told the chief. You are in authority, he told him, the king and you. That's what he told him, he said. You are in absolute authority in your land. I guess he means this land that he gave. This is where you have authority he told him, he said. Therefore if you have something to say I will [bring] your words to where the king is. This is what he said to the chief, he says. You have absolute authority in your land. You can do whatever you want. This is what he told the chief, he says. This is what the old man related to me from what he heard when they gave the land. That's all he said. I'm not exactly sure. This is what this old man said when this same man came back. I guess he must have been an Indian agent. When the agent came back the following summer, the old man was always there during the summer. He lived here while he was alive and that is why he always heard that agent talking. This is what he said to the chief when he came back on treaty days. He says he would always talk to the people after he gave them something. He asked the chief [the following:] Did you go to your land? did you live there yet? Have you set foot on your land? The chief answered, no, the old man said. Not yet, said the chief. Then the agent told the chief that he should go there soon. That is all the agent said, he says. The next summer he came, I guess it's the same agent, he asked the same thing. This old man must have been there every time by the sound of it. Did you go see your land? He asked the chief again. No, the chief answered. Three times he asked him, he says, and every time he said no. This is what the old man told me about what he heard. He was relating that story to me. That is all about that. I'm just telling only few things that I had heard from the old man. He's gone now. Personally I don't know what was said exactly only from the old man told me about what the agent said. That's my story.

Annabella Solomon



(recorded November 15,
2004)

Community or reserve life in the past

*1) Describe your life
in your community or
reserve in the past.*

Yes...

Biographic Information

Name: Annabella Mary Solomon
Date of Birth: January 27, 1934
Place of Birth: Kapiskau River
Present Address: Fort Albany, Ontario
Former Name: Sutherland
Name of Spouse: Gilbert Solomon
Number of Children: 9
Grandchildren: 28
Great-grandchildren: 3
Number of Years Married: 48
Education: St. Anne's Residential School 9
Years
Interests/Hobbies: Working

Describe where you were born, the name of your birthplace, and what it looked like.

Yes, my name is Annabella Solomon, but before I got married I was a Sutherland. I live here in Fort Albany, but I was born in the bush in winter on January 27, 1934. It is probably about a hundred miles straight from here up the Kapiskau River. The place I was born is called *Kanapachagoshewak*. That's what they called that creek where it branches off. The river's bank is high and it slopes down. There are a lot of nests hollowed out by swallows. That's why it's called the Sloping Bank and the creek was called *Kanapachagoshewak* because of the holes made by these birds. That's my version of that one. That's where I was born; it was my grandfather's traditional land. My father lived probably about forty miles down the river and that was his trapping grounds. It was on my grandfather's traditional land where I was born. There was no doctor. My grandmother was the midwife when I was born. That's where my mother spent the winter. The people would come here after they did their trapping. They were in the bush for ten months and they spent two months here in Fort Albany. They arrived here at the end of May and spent the months of June and July here. On August 20 they left for the bush again. That's what we did too when I was young. We were in the bush the whole year before we entered the residential school. After that, our parents placed us in the school to learn and that's where we stayed. The nuns used to teach us. There were only two classrooms: one they called the big one and the other the small one. There were not that many children – only those from Attawapiskat. We stayed at the school for ten months. We went in the month of September and we left for home in June. We didn't learn English while we were there. We only learned Cree from a book. What they taught mostly was from the teacher's manual for religious

teachings. That's what we learned: Cree and sewing. Some sewed and some did knitting. Others did beading. The boys also did some crafts. That was what we learned while at the school. After I finished school, in 1950 -51, we went in the bush. In 1952, my father passed away. We were by ourselves: my mother and all my brothers. They were all small at the time when my father died in the bush. It was thirty-five miles up from the mouth of the Kapiskau River. That's where my father passed away in the autumn. He died on November 3. The river was called *Kapaykwatahotek* and there was another river near called *Katawawaniwak*. It was between those two rivers where my father died. That's where we were living and we were the only ones there. I left with my sister running on foot along the river to go tell the people the news of my father dying. It was thirty-five miles to the mouth of the river. It was two when we arrived there. When we told them my father was dying, they said they would go there tomorrow. But we told them no that we would go back right away. They told us to wait. It was getting colder. So we went by boat with two men who wanted to go. There already was ice floating as we traveled up the river. The motor never stopped along the way but when we got there my father had already died. We could hear my mother crying as she came down the riverbank, saying, "He's gone. Your father's gone." That was what my life was like, our life, my brothers and myself. They were all young and there was another who wasn't born yet. My father died on November 3. The next morning they took all of us by boat along with my father's body down to the Albany River where the Hudson's Bay Company was. A Native person was the manager there. They brought all of us there, my brothers and our mother, and we waited. It took a while before they could take the body to the cemetery. It wasn't until November 27 that we went to the cemetery to bury my father because the river wasn't frozen. The ice floated for quite some time. After that we stayed there at the old settlement. On January 8, dog sleds arrived to take us to our home. We had a house here already in Fort Albany that my father had made. That's where they brought us. It was the first [time] ... that autumn when our father did not let us go to school that year; not even one [of us]. Maybe that's why it happened because he would die. So all of us would be there. That was when we came here to Fort Albany. The dog sleds made two trips because there were too many of us. Two men came that time. When we arrived here at the house that [my] father made, some of my brothers went to school. On January 20, my sister was born. [She was] the one whose father [she] did not see. She was born on January 23 and her father died on November 3. That was what our life was like there. Our mother raised us herself. After that my brothers went to school. I stayed with my mother helping her with everything while my brothers went to school. They all continued on to high school. That was their education. They never had time to learn the bush life. At the time they were small, but today they are alive except for two of my siblings who have died since

that time. I said that they all went on to high school, except for me. I got married in 1956 when I was no longer helping my mother. I got married on January 28 or maybe after that. I forgot which day exactly. After that my husband and I left for the bush and [we] stayed there all the time trapping. He had a trapping ground. The river is called *Otahonanish* branching off from the Kapiskau River. There were lots of people trapping in that area. Everyone had a trapping ground. That's where my husband trapped. He trapped beaver, mink, and otter. I was always helping him trap before our children went to school. Then they closed the school as a residential school. I would say [it was] about six years after my oldest daughter started school. ... Then the children went to school every day from their homes. I had to stay here to look after them and couldn't go with my husband when he went trapping. He went trapping and I stayed behind to look after my children here in Fort Albany. They continued to go to school and then went on to high school. That was our life. I would work too whenever they asked, at the school, in the kitchen, or for sewing. I didn't accept any permanent jobs while my children were still too young. My youngest started school in 1972 and in 1973 I started working. I've been working ever since then teaching Cree. I taught different things to the children: stories about the way our people lived in the past, their quests for survival, or what kind of animals there were. [I taught them] all these kinds of teachings on trapping and moose hunting, what activities were done in the fall, during late fall, during winter, during spring, and during the summer. I taught them all those things in Cree. That was my life. In 2003, I quit working, but went back to work again in 2004 for a short while. But now I'm retired. That's my life, my own life. Now about this present life, what do you want to know?

When you were telling me about the past did they come and spend some time here in Fort Albany during the summer?

Yes.

What did the people do when all of them were here? Did they used to play sports?

People did different things while they stayed here for the summer. Some of them worked here during the summer. Almost all of them worked in the summer for a while when they were here in Fort Albany. I also saw them play different kinds of games. There was the game where they kicked a ball around. I don't know what it's called in English, football, maybe, and a game called baseball. That's what they used to do. They used to play other games as well. It depended on what was happening. The women did that too. They did different kinds of activities. That's what they used to do in the summer for recreation. They also observed their religion while they were here during the summers. There was one they observed called a spiritual retreat. It lasted for one

week. That's what they did. They taught their children everything about the Catholic teachings, e.g., for a child, what teachings they should be introduced to. The people observed these [teachings] such as first communion, confession, and confirmation. They taught their children all these things while they were here in the summer. The other activities they did during the summer were snaring, setting nets, fishing, and berry picking. There used to be all kinds of berries at the end of August. That's what they did. They learned all those things about berry picking. Their parents would pick berries as they taught. The children [would be] eating berries while their mothers made bannock. That's how the parents taught their children. As I was saying there was no welfare. Nothing. That's why their parents taught these things so they will learn how to survive including berry picking and making bannock. There was no welfare. Nothing. I didn't get welfare when my husband was trapping. I should say, not even once did we receive welfare. It was then that I started working in 1973. I think it was in 1960 when welfare was available. That's when people got assistance. But back then no one got social assistance. However, single elders and those women who lost their spouses did receive assistance but [they were given] only those [things] that could be bought in bulk such as flour, lard, sugar, salt, salt pork, and oats. That's what they received as assistance. I don't know [what] it was called, was it rationing?

Yes.

It was probably called rationing. That's how they were supported. They also assisted those who had disabilities. Like for instance my grandfather, he only had one leg. He also received rations and some of the others who were in that category. That's how it was. That's what I know about that. In the fall the people would start to leave and go back. There were two ways of living when we left. Some were living near the bay and others went up the main river. Those who lived near the bay would go and travel up the other rivers that were in the north. The Kapiskau River was one of them. A great many people lived up that river. That's how that one was. For those that lived near the bay, they existed on waveys. They killed foxes and muskrats. They probably killed a few mink. That's how those [people] lived. Now for those who lived inland up the river, their food was moose. They killed moose in the fall and smoked the meat. They would prepare the fat. There was no welfare. They had to prepare and preserve the food in order to survive. We would prepare moose meat by smoking and rendering the fat to [make it] last longer. That's what they did. [People] who lived near the bay preserved waveys by salting, smoking, and rendering the fat from them. That's what Native life was like. I taught the children by telling them these stories. I didn't have a bed back then. We lived in a wigwam and in a tent in the fall. In the winter we lived in a moss covered shelter (*askikan*). They would make a big one in the winter. That's how I

taught them by telling them. We used to take our blankets outside and hang them to air [out]. In the morning we took them out and took them in again when it was bedtime. That's what we did back then. They used to smell fresh. If it were raining there would be another tent set up where the blankets would be hung there during the day. We kept our place tidy and clean. When it's Friday or Saturday we would change the flooring and put down new boughs. It's just like mopping the floor and that's what we did, too, while living in a wigwam. We would make firewood on Fridays for nobody used to work on Sundays. We would stock up on firewood or water. That's the way it was and it was the same for those people living in the community. That's what they taught their children; no one worked on Sundays. But life has changed a lot now. Children don't bring in wood at home. They don't get water, ice, or snow. How children lived back then is so different now. Children have an education. They have a whole lot of education from which they can succeed in everything. There's lot of education. There is high school and the other higher ones are available. That's how life is now. I'm stopping for now.



Fort Albany Camp, S2487, Archives of Ontario

I know that the people had a rough life traveling by foot when they wanted to go somewhere. Do you remember when motors were used like ski-doo's or boat motors?

When those motors were around, I was still very young. They only used paddles back then. Leaving the community by boat is what I'll talk on a little bit. We traveled out on

the bay. When we were traveling north and the winds were favorable and coming from the east we would use sails. We would use sails and would arrive there at Kapiskau River. Then we would travel up the river the same way. We used a long pole when we traveled up the river. The other thing we did was use a long rope to tow the boat up along the river. We would keep this rope, called a ... It looked thin, but was very strong and that's what was used to tow the boat when we traveled up the river and at the rapids. It was easier when done that way. That's what was done when we traveled by boat. Then came the motors used for boats. My father was alive when those came around. He died in 1952, I would say, those motors were around five years prior. We were using a motor then. That's what we would use when we traveled on the bay. Now about ski-doo's, the first time they came was only recently. I would say about 1959. There was no ski-doo when I got married in 1956. I think it was 1957 that my husband bought a ski-doo. That was the first time we had a ski-doo and that's what he used when he went in the bush. I also used a ski-doo when I went with him in the bush. But they were not that big, the ones we had back then. They were good looking, but were efficient when going in the bush; the first ones that came. They didn't come in different styles. There are ski-doo's made for speed, but those are not good for use in the bush, only those small ones are good. That's what it was like with ski-doo's.

Community or reserve life today

2) Describe your life in your community or reserve today.

At the present time, after I retired from work, I live in a house. The first house we had was over there where they're all together. That was where our very first house was. I have many children who are not able to get housing. Not all of them have a house. That's what we gave to one of them – our own home. There was one house, I will say, owned by a minister, a log house. This minister gave that log house to my daughter. She then asked us to live there even though we had a house already. But there was no running water in that. They have not put water in since that time. It so happened that my husband went to the hospital for surgery and the doctor said that he couldn't live in a house with no running water. I had asked for this building since it was empty and big. They used to keep women here and I asked the chief for a house. I told him we needed one with running water and that the doctor had told me my husband should be in a house equipped with running water. So they gave us one of these rooms for him to live in. That's how we got to live in this building. But they gave me a small house, one of those called trailers, because I was teaching. That's where I lived, but as it happened one of my daughters got to stay in that trailer because she had no house. That's who lived there. When I stopped working and because we still had no running water at our old house, I asked the man in charge of housing if we could live in this big building

with my husband, so we could live together. At that time it was a nursing home, but it was not qualified as a nursing home. That's what the building inspector had said, the one who checks what the requirements for a nursing home should have. It wasn't good enough he said when he came. Different people live here. There are six families living here, seven including us. This is where we are living now in this building.

Are the various programs they have in the community beneficial to you? Like for instance, the health centre that is there?

Yes.



Fort Albany Health Centre

And these programs that are available like the police and the others that are there, do they benefit you?

Yes, the health centre is helpful. The nurses who work there come for a visit. But they visit those who are diabetic more often. That's what we have too; both of us have diabetes. The nurse comes once a week sometimes. There are also those that went to school to assist those who are unable to do things for themselves. One of them comes once a week to clean my house. They do help us. There are different workers. There is the police service. There are different programs; yes, they are there. There is everything here in Fort Albany. There is the school and there's a high school. There is the hospital and there is a church. There is the health [centre] where they work. There

are many who work there in different kinds of work. There is a program for children too. The workers are there.

Community or reserve life in the future

3) Describe what life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

As for my life, only my descendents will exist. At this age I won't be living this life for very long. But we have advised our children numerous times for their good. They have an education, they have teachings, and they had high school and higher education. If they apply these well and rightly it would be good if they could use them to help their community. However, there are many things that distract. Many. But there are many programs that are implemented. Many of them are being used, for instance, the Drug and Alcohol Program, all those things. However not everyone can get a job. There's a lack of work. There are not enough jobs for everyone to work. That's how it is in this community, even though there are many things being run in this community. For example, what I mentioned before [such as] gathering firewood, putting it inside, getting water, getting ice, and getting snow. These don't exist anymore. That's all they do when they're at home watching what they call television. It seems they watch too much television. That's how they learn a lot of things. Even though one has education they're still learning. They are learning while watching television. That's what I notice. But we don't have everything here yet in Fort Albany, which would be good for the children. Like take for instance, a sports arena, we don't have a big one where they could learn hockey. Where they could learn basketball, although they learned basketball at school. They had that at school. What have you not found that I should have said in answer to the questions you asked me concerning what the future will be like?

You mentioned that you had diabetes.

Yes.

It was not like that in the past, right?

I never heard of diabetes being mentioned. I was diabetic in 1982, but before that I've never known anything I ate to bother me or [make me] feel ill. But after that I'm aware of the symptoms of diabetes. I've never known my grandfather to refer to a disease as diabetes. The only disease I knew of was when people got sick in their bodies; they called it an infection in their lungs. What is it called in English?

TB (tuberculosis).

Yes.

What do you think causes that? Why are people diabetic?

I don't know, maybe because the food is different.

Maybe that didn't happen because of the wild game that was eaten.

Yes, that was the only thing that was eaten, wild game.

You were talking about TB.

Yes. That's what ailed the people back then. My grandmother used to talk about TB. The reason it existed, in my opinion, is probably, when they got chilled while sweating as they traveled by foot. That's how they got it, I think, tuberculosis. But tuberculosis was infectious.

Yes.

It was infectious. Up to the years when I was a young woman I knew there were still [those] who had tuberculosis and were in the Moose Factory hospital when they first built it. In 1950, probably a little after that, it went away.

Did you ever know if there was ever a lack of food in the wild? Or if there was starvation?

For us, that I know of personally, in our family, there were times when there were no moose or no rabbit. It happened. But [for] someone to starve in our family I'm not aware of it. I never experienced that. Even though they couldn't find moose, there was other smaller game. We would eat partridge. We would track partridge in the woods, wood partridge. That's when we would have something to eat or rabbit. Even [when] there was no rabbit, we would get fish with a net or by fishing. That's how that was. The most common drink was tea broth. This is what the Native used long ago. I guess, when they started to have flour they learned how to make tea broth. So while we were growing up that's what we used. Sometimes there was no abundance of wild game. Beaver was eaten too and muskrat. That's what it was like with smaller game when moose was not available. I, myself, did not experience starvation. I did hear about people starving. But I can't talk about that. I can only talk about what I know first hand.

Can you say that again?

I will repeat when I was said there was no welfare. The manager who bought our pelts used to help us. He used to give us credit to live by for the summer and then he gave us credit again when we left for the bush. He would come and pay his credit. I'm only talking about my own life. That's how my husband was and my father. That's how the manager treated him. If he got anything he would just pay off all his debt. It was the same with my husband. When he trapped he would pay off his debt in three payments a

year. In December, in March, and at the end of May, that's when he paid them off. Then he would be given credit to buy while he was here and then again when we left. That's how it was when there was no welfare. We would always buy a supply of flour, sugar, lard, oats, and laundry and facial soap. We would take some medicine as well. We used to have medicine on hand too, for headaches and the one called castor oil. The other was called a painkiller. It was good. Those are the three medicines we used to have all the time. That's how it was for that when we lived back then.

Did you use those medicines from nature, too?

Yes, I used them, like for instance those called cones, but only the spruce cones, not the pine ones. I used to boil these but I threw away the water from the first two pots that were boiled and kept the third one. The liquid was good and I used a cloth to strain it for keeping. I would put it in an empty medicine bottle. That's where I would keep that medicinal liquid. When my child had scabies or when somebody had a toothache that's what I used. The cones could be chewed too. There are even better ones – the green ones. That's what I used that cone liquid for, and I also drank a little bit of that liquid for coughing. That's how we used that. Some people used cedar, however I didn't use that. But I saw the cedar liquid used for colds. Some people are still using that cedar liquid today. The other ones used also were cattails. They used the ones that grew along marshy places. That's where they grew. They also grew near the bay and there were lots of those cattails. They used those and I also saw my grandmother use them when someone gets a cut. At that time Vaseline was available and she would apply a little of that with the cattails. She would first put pressure on the cut and then apply the cattail mixture after, not directly, She used to keep mosquito netting and that's what she used. That's how cattails were used. Then there's the other called Labrador tea, used to make tea. It's good for making tea in the bush. Not only in the bush, but they are still using it here. Labrador tea is still being used. That's what they used for making tea in the bush back then. This Labrador tea is good for coughing and is used as a poultice. My sister got burned on her heel with hot water when she tipped the pot over and her burn got blistered. My mother crushed Labrador tea leaves, put the thing I called Vaseline, and mixed that in too. She then applied that to the burn, but she put a piece of mosquito netting on it first. They applied that to her burn. And you don't undo it too soon. Then when the poultice would move freely that's when it's removed. It looked very good. There was now new skin. The poultice is left for a long time when Labrador tea leaves are used. The name Labrador tea means forever maybe because they're always good. That's how that is.

Did you ever use anything from animals for medicinal purposes?

Yes. But we did not personally use them. We heard about the liquid they used from the skunk's anal scent glands. My grandmother used to tell stories about TB and that's what they would use back then she said. They were bandaged up with this applied. But my mother said first it had to be prepared. The bandages stayed on for a long time, she said. When they burped it smelled like skunk's scent. Now he's healed she said. That's what she would say. I don't know anything about this skunk's anal scent glands liquid or how to use anything from animals.

When your husband was trapping, did he use traps made of wood? Or did he just use metal traps?

Not that I know of. Not that I know of, but he did say something about a wooden trap. I didn't see him use them because he went by himself. I never heard him say he had made a wooden trap. He only used metal traps. He also used beaver snare wire. That's what he used.

When you had your children, were you in the bush at the time, or were you here?

The maternity ward was open for women of our age and we went in several times. I would say it was in 1950 that it was first opened for women to deliver their babies in the hospital, but not before that. For us women at that time, we went in all the time to have our babies.

Was your mother past her childbearing years?

That was her last one.

From what you know ...

Yes, my youngest sibling was born at home and that was the last one for my mother.

What do you think about our language now? Do you think it's getting weak?

Eh?

Is it getting weak ...

That's what I think [about] my language in my own life. We never stopped using our language and our children, even though they went to high school, still speak Cree all the time. Only some of my grandchildren speak Cree. I think it's getting weak. It's going down. That's what I noticed at school, too. The children were having difficulties. You had to repeat something over and over again. They would forget even though they

were trying hard to learn. They loved learning songs. They would sing at concerts and they were really good at it.

What can be done, in your opinion, to keep our language strong so it won't become extinct?

Changes would have to be made in education. Changes have to be made to it. They just talk about it. It's all talk. They haven't done anything. There should be Cree teachers teaching in Cree at least from K-5, to grades one, two, and three. There are quite a number of them and that's where it could start by teaching in Cree. Later on they could learn the rest in English and to translate into Cree all the material that has to be learned. On the education side maybe that's how it should be. As for the parents, if they talk to their children in Cree then the children would speak Cree.

I am now finished with the questions I wanted to ask you and I want thank you for telling your story.

There are many [things] I could have mentioned.

Have you ever prepared wild game in the different ways it's done?

What I would use to kill wild game, is that what you mean?

So that the meat won't spoil.

Yes. Yes, we prepared them. For moose we would smoke it until it's all dried and then it would be ground. They called it pemmican. They used to make pemmican from moose meat. It's ground. Do you know about moose pemmican?

Yes.

That's the one and with moose fat mixed in so it won't spoil during storage. You can cook that pemmican. You make oatmeal with that. With moose pemmican, you can make stew with it by adding oatmeal, boil the dried meat, or eat it like that for lunch while on the trail, trapping, or while doing other activities. You bring that dried moose meat with you. That's what they did for moose. For waveys that are killed in the fall, they were salted. People would salt them. A wooden barrel was used for salting. They rendered the fat from them or smoked the waveys. They would fry grease from waveys to make tallow. These they would keep throughout the winter. That's how it was done. They prepared fish too. They also made fish pemmican. The people did all kinds of things when they got food. They never threw away any food. People preserved their food well long ago. They respected the food that sustained them. In the springtime, it was the same with the animals you skinned, otter and beaver, you just didn't throw

their carcasses anywhere. You ate the beaver. Otter was also consumed. Even today you don't throw them just anywhere. We, ourselves, never threw the carcasses of otters just anywhere. They were put in bags and dumped into the deepest part of a lake. That's how the people did it long ago. They didn't throw their leftover food just anywhere. But life is different now, I think, very different. That's my story about that.

Did you ever make gill nets?

Yes. We made gill nets. My grandmother used to make gill nets. I used to help her. As the net grew long she would then attach a finishing line or gill net floaters. Gill net floaters were long in the summer. You don't make these often you just kept the ones you made as well as the gill net sinkers. Gill net stone sinkers used in the summer were long. My grandmother used to say, just pick the black ones not the white ones. That's what she would say. The white ones are sound reflectors. That's what they taught us so white stones would not be used, only the black ones. That's how my grandmother used to teach us about the gill net. It was also used in the fall. In the winter, a net was set under the ice. Holes were made in a line and a pole was inserted and pushed under the ice with a rope tied to it that was attached to the gill net. Then it was pulled along underneath those holes and secured at the other end. Gill net floaters were square and short. They were burned so they won't freeze to the ice. That's why it was done that way. Gill net sinkers were used too. Gill net floaters that were used for setting gill nets in the winter are short. That's my story about that.

Where did you use those animal pelts like moose hide or rabbit fur?

Moose, yes. When a moose was killed in the fall, they prepared the hide right away. The hair was scraped and then we would make mostly babiche. Then we would cut thinner strips for the webbing. Holes were made on the snowshoe frame and a very thin rawhide string was laced through and along the inside frame in the front and end frames from which the webbing was laced. This very thin rawhide strip was called the lanyard. The babiche for the center section was taken from moose leg parts of the rawhide. That's where they take the babiche from those parts and for the lanyard. That's what we would use that for. After that we would cure the moose hide and make moccasins and mitts from that during late autumn. During the months of November and December the season was called late autumn before the real winter sets in. It was during late autumn that these things were prepared for snowshoes. As for the toboggan, it was made in the bush where people used it. In making a toboggan, tamarack or birch was used. That's the way my husband made a toboggan. That's my story for that.

Did you use any parts from rabbits?

Yes. For myself when I was on my own and married we didn't really kill that many rabbits – just a few. But my mother when she was raising us used to make lots of rabbit snares. She used to kill lots of rabbits to make a rabbit skin blanket. That's what she did. When she killed rabbits she would skin them and make strips right away. Then she would twist the strips so the inside part sticks together and thus make strings of rabbit skin and hang them outside to dry. After that she would make a rabbit skin blanket. She would use about fifty for a small blanket for us. But for a large one she used about fifty-five strips. She killed lots of rabbits so we never went hungry when we had rabbits. You never get tired of eating rabbit. One never gets tired of it. They always want to eat it. Rabbit can be cooked different ways. You can make dumplings with it or roast it. There are different ways to cook rabbits.

Were you taught to do this?

Yes. I used to watch my mother but she didn't guide my hands or say what she was doing. We observed her. She worked and we copied her. That's how it was when I was on my own. My husband cut the babiche and I held the rawhide. He also laced the webbing on snowshoes the way we saw it done. I used to undo a snowshoe to see how it's done then I would say, I see now. That's what I did. That's what I saw.

Did you ever make toys taken from animals or from nature?

We made bows and arrows from trees or goose bones from the wings. It was called a peashooter. Dirt was put at one end and at the other end a stick was pushed inside which pushes out the dirt at the other end. It used to be noisy at home when the children played and at the same time we were teaching them how to hunt. There was the game called the buzzer. It goes like this "wooh wooh." We made these ones out of bones. There were no caribou around here only in the north and there were hardly anywhere we were in the bush. There were none.

Are they still not around?

I think they are killing them now. That's what I hear.

Where did they more numerous?

They came from inland [areas]. They were where it's barren: the mushkeg and tundra.

Do you think there is something in the earth when people come looking?

Yes.

Do you think there is something here like diamonds or oil?

Those that come looking around think there is something, but they don't talk about it yet. That's what they think when they find something peculiar.

I'm finished with the questions I asked you.

The things that I related to you were the most important things to us. It's the same thing when our father was teaching us things when we went with him while he was alive when we were young. He taught us the directions where to go like the north wind and west wind. That's what he taught us.

Did you use the ...

The stars?

Stars ...

Yes, he taught us about the stars, the North Star, the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper; pointers they're called. He taught us those and how the Aurora Borealis looks like when it will be warm and when it will be cold. He taught us all those things and how the animals change in the winter and in the summer.

Thank you very much for sharing your story.

Yes, that's it.

Talk about the behavior of animals.

Yes.

Or what they do?

Yes.

Is that how it's known what the weather will be like?

Yes, [they tell us] what will happen like for instance the rabbit, when it's fur turns white early they say it will be an early winter and when it's fur turns to the summer color they say it will be an early summer. It's the same thing with the things in the sky especially from those Dippers that's how it's known. If they're right above us and it's the beginning of January, they say there will be an early summer. If they're not visible, but only later then they say there will be a late summer. All those things that are in the sky or the Aurora Borealis when it is red it will be warm. Or the one that's all light green, it will be cold they say. All those things, that's what they said. Also when the sun comes up and the sky is red and then disappears quickly it will be bad weather. Or when it's

sunset and the sky is red really dark red, it will be warm. Or when the sun's rays point straight up and long, then it will be a cold month. Or when there's an arch on both sides of the sun it will be cold. There will be a cold wind they used to say. That's how they knew how it would be like. They would say that's how the weather will be like. Or when they say the land on the horizon is lifting and is clearly visible there will be bad weather.

Do you think the time when it's supposed to be cold is changing?

Yes, yes.

Is it changing ...

It is changing with the three-month moon cycle, right? The timing is off; where it's supposed to be a full moon it's cold. Where it's supposed to warm up the moon is gone. It is cold. The pattern has shifted. Everything is changed.

Do you think it's not that cold?

I don't think it's cold myself, the way it was long ago. It was so cold then. I used to think it was so cold when we carried our packs while outside on the trail or when traveling. The winds were cold, but it was cold. It was cold when we were inside the house too. But now it is so different. Now it gets warmer early or there are warm spells. That's how it is now. That is all I'm going to say now.

Thank you, thank you for telling your story.

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Marius Spence



(recorded November
14, 2004)

Community or reserve life in the past

*1) Describe your life
in your community
or reserve in the past.*

Yes.

*For instance describe where you were born
and what your life was like as you were growing up.*

Yes.

... up to this day. Ready?

Greetings to all who are listening. I'm Marius Spence; I'm speaking from Fort Albany. I was born, I'm not sure exactly where, at Kapiskau or at the old settlement. It was called the old settlement. In the true Cree language it was called the mouth of river. But the white man changed it to Fort Albany. That's what he called it. And this lagoon, it was called *Mundo Peetabeck*. That's what it was called because of the black currants (*muntomina*) that were growing in abundance in the area. That's why it's called *Mundo Peetabeck*. From what I know that's what it was called in the past. I'm not really sure exactly where I was born. I was born on November 18, 18 ... 19 ... 88, I don't know. My mother raised me until I was older. When I was old enough to do things that's when she started teaching me to do things, things that I should be doing. I would just do them just outside the door, like, getting snow or bringing wood inside. Or she would teach me something else to do. Or when she went to cut off branches, I would haul them for her to change the flooring. That's where I first learned. My mother put me in a residential school when I was able to dress myself properly. I was there for one year, here in Fort Albany. Then my father went out inland to what is called Mammamattawa till he reached Pagwa. That's where my father lived in that area. Then my father put me in a school called MacIntosh past Sioux Lookout. This is right after we arrived there in the fall. I was there for two years. That was all the time I was there at the school. I could not go any further in my schooling. That's how far you went to school. You could only go for just three years in the past. It wasn't like it is today where parents put their children in school when they

Biographic Information

Name: Marius Spence
Date of Birth: November 18, 1918
Place of Birth: Kapiskau River
Present Address: Fort Albany, Ontario
Name of Spouse: Mary Bernadette Poonae
(deceased October 21, 1999)
Number of Children: 5
Grandchildren: 2
Great-grandchildren: 1
Number of Years Married: 49
Education: St. Anne's Residential School? 3
Years, Sioux Lookout 2 Years
Interests/Hobbies: Traditional Lifestyle

can't even dress themselves properly. It wasn't like that in the past like it is today. That's what I know from back then and telling you. But during the time I was at the school we always had Native food. We ate fish, rabbits, moose, caribou, or deer. That's what we ate at the school where I was. The school they called MacIntosh. In this area of James Bay, they had waveys, ducks, and geese. That's what we ate. We also had fish when I went to school here. This was when food in the stores was scarce. After that I started to really learn about Native cultural activities until I was well able to live out on the land on my own and support myself for one day or up to one week. That's how learning the bush life was like. It was only by learning what my parents taught me about everything that things would go well during my lifetime. I did my best making things I needed like snowshoes, a toboggan, babiche, a small netting line, or mending what was torn. That's what I learned: how to do the netting on snowshoes and the whole process of doing things. That's what I did with my life. For the big game that I hunted, I learned how to kill moose or the deer. I learned all those kinds of things. Also for trapping I learned all the skills that I needed to trap those animals to sell and buy supplies for my survival; those that they used to buy long ago. That's how it was. Not until I was able to do all things by myself did I leave my parents to live on my own. I did not live by my mother's handouts or my father's. I didn't do that to always ask for things. I finally put into practice what I learned. I did things well and left them to go south to find employment. I went south to find employment in the white man's world. That's how it was. ... I worked at two mills. That's what my life was like. At Moose River I worked at the mill for two summers. That's what I did so my parents could rest from taking care of me. That was the reason why I did that, but I used to come back home after I finished work in the fall. It was now my turn to take care of them after they've cared for me while raising me. I provided for them during those times. After that I started to work here at the mission learning all kinds of skills in housing construction. That's how my life was like. While I was working at the mission, two men walked in unexpectedly. One of the men I slightly recognized but not the other one, they were large. It was the Company's big boss coming to see me. He came to talk to me about working for him here at the store and I accepted his offer. I worked at the store on the other reserve too. I worked there for two summers managing that store by myself even though I had [no] prior training. [I had no problems] as long as I followed the directions and the regulations they gave me for that store. The most important one was to have respect for the people that were there. I also came to work here on this side of the river. I think I worked here for three summers. When the boss came again during the summer, he sent me to work inland. There was a store inland. That's where he sent me to work and I was there for six years. That was when my wife was still alive. My children were here at the school when they were being looked after. That's how it was. I fulfilled what was required of me while at that store inland. That was the time the people were living traditionally. They trapped all the time so

they could provide for the things they needed to survive. That was my work. When the company left the area that was when I stopped working. From every location where he was established at the beginning he left that area and was replaced by this present company. That was when I quit being a store manager. That's how my life was like. That was when I started to go in the bush. That's what I did. I went trapping. I took it up again. I was going from Ghost River to Moosonee to sell our pelts carrying whatever supplies we needed that wasn't very much. Many years we lived in Moosonee during the winter. Twice a year we would travel to Moosonee leaving from Ghost River in a straight course and we would be right on target where the community was. However we didn't use anything that would help us travel in a straight course. We only looked at the sun as it rose in the morning and also at the landscape. That's all we did. We didn't look at anything else to lead us in a straight course not like the white man's way of holding a compass. We didn't do that. We only looked at the landscape and at the stars to guide us straight. That's the way it was. We used those things that are up there that our forefathers used. That's what we also used. I still use those today. Yesterday I observed the sunset and today's weather is evident. Everybody knows that the sunny sides of the houses are dripping. That's what it showed yesterday for today's weather to be sunny and warm, things like that. By observing everything that is in the sky we have always been able to discern. There are many of us that still use the teachings of our ancestors by looking at the sky, by looking at the moon, the sun, and the other things that are up there that our forefathers used. What the moon looks like at the beginning of the month reveals how the weather will be. That's the one that foretells how the weather will be and what will happen ahead of time: whether it will cold or warm like today. That's my story about the old tales. But during the time of my story there was no hospital in the James Bay area. However the Roman Catholic Mission had medicine and the missionary kept some medicine. Also the Hudson Bay manager kept a medicine chest. When I was managing the store inland I also kept a chest of medicine that I could administer if anyone got sick. But nobody got sick at that time. People were healthy as they lived their traditional life. Of course, it's because everything they needed they got from the land. The animals ate what's from the land and that's why the people were healthy. There are numerous things that we used to treat ourselves with that was known as traditional medicine. There are lots of those medicines. It doesn't matter what ails a person or if he cuts himself it will heal him. It will stop the blood and will heal quickly. Everything. That's my story and when someone has pinkeye there is a remedy for that too. There is a certain kind of bough a person who has pinkeye can use. That's all I can say about those things that are in the bush. Native traditional medicines are very important. I almost never go to the hospital when I'm feeling ill or if I have a serious cold. I get the medicine from the bush. Everything is there in the bush that our ancestors used. That's the reason why they said when they were teaching us that we should respect the

land and the things we see on it. Not to cut down trees for no reason so the sap won't run and dry out and become dead wood. That's what they forbid us to do. Trees have moisture and when the sap runs and dries then it dies. That's what they taught, not to destroy the trees. Only when a tree is needed is it cut down, that's [what] they told us. They also cautioned us to be careful with fire so we don't burn the land but to respect and protect it and to put out our fires where we made camp. That's what they taught. They taught everything they learned from their experience. There was an elder who would speak to the young men and there was a woman who would speak to the young women. That's how training was, Native traditional teaching that is. Now there are hardly any of those teachings, but there are some. But not as the teachings used to be, now they are fragmented and are not very strong. Half of it is gone. Half of it is dead. It is the same with living off the land half of it is gone. Now there's hardly anyone who wants to live off the land like we did back then. ... The land was significant which God made. Everything was put to use. For instance when we think about it, like this summer there's a lot more game that was born, moose, newborn caribou, fish, birds, and every animal that was born. That's the awesome power of our Creator. He gave us new food to use in the future which is obvious when one ponders on it. That is why our grandfathers admonished us to respect what we killed and not waste anything we have so graciously received. But to store it properly for future use that was how they taught in the past. Or not to kill too much but only to make sure it would last till next time. That nothing be wasted by anyone of what was received. That's what they taught us back then. They also taught Cree syllabics. They taught until we were able to read it. That is why we are able to read and write very well because they taught us. That's about it on that teaching, but they taught us more on praying in the morning and at night. That's what they taught us. It is amazing. I have five children and none of those times did my wife go to the hospital. All five children were born in the bush. That's how it was in the past not like it is now. Things went well when one knew what to do about the delivery process. I saw a lot of that when my own children were born in the bush. My wife was never in the hospital when she had our children. Many times I saw our grandfathers' or our parents' abilities to care for one another. I'll tell you a story. There was a young man. He was young when I saw him that time. He shot his hand right in the middle. He was carrying his 30 30 rifle and it went off. The hole in his hand was the same size as the pellet but it wasn't that big. It is this young man that my grandfather treated. He cleaned out all the bone fractures inside young man's hand. After that he treated the young man's hand. At the time my grandfather was treating him he was a young man. When I saw him again his hair was white. That's how smart they were in treating one another back then. They only used those natural medicines that the Creator gave us specifically the traditional medicines. The same thing happened to my father. He was shot accidentally during a moose hunt in the fall. He got shot right through his thigh and the

back of his thigh was ripped. This happened while we were in the bush. No helicopter came. No air ambulance came. Only they themselves treated him using those things that you see out there on the land. Those things that close wounds. He didn't go to the hospital until he was on his feet. That's how it was. I was very young when he got shot and they treated him with only those natural medicines that helped close the wound until it was all healed. They also used medicine that would drain bad blood. That's how it was. He was in a tent while they treated [him]; he was not in a hospital. That's what we are losing, especially those natural healing medicines that Native people who are skilled should use when something serious happens. One time I was in the bush and I saw a man who had really damaged his leg. A tree fell on his leg and [it] was broken. So I carried him a little way and laid him down. By the looks of it I thought he would die right there. As for this man the same things were used to treat him but he himself cut off his leg using a knife. His leg was barely hanging. After that they treated him with natural medicines that helped closed the part where it was cut off. And this man lived for a long time till he had white hair. That's how it was back then from what I saw. It's amazing sometimes how the people back then were very resourceful in using different things to treat themselves. There are also those things that can be used if someone is grieving, feeling depressed, or lonely. There are natural medicines out there that can be used to alleviate these feelings. If I have that kind of medicine on hand I would give it to him who was grieving, feeling depressed, or lonely. But first I would tell him to pray that it will help him. That's what I see even to this day. I used those medicines myself that's why I'm saying that. Sometimes I prepare that myself when I'm feeling depressed so that it will help me and cleanse me. That's all I can say from what I know about those things.

Where was your wife from?

My wife was from Attawapiskat. Her proper name was Mary Bernadette Poonae. She was from Attawapiskat. Both her brothers went in World War I. The First World War was in 1914, but I didn't see her brothers. They died shortly after they came back from the war.

Where did you marry your wife?

What community you mean?

No. Where were you when you married her?

I was in Moosonee. We started dating right away. But there were laws from our grandfathers from long ago that young people shouldn't go too long dating but as long as they both agreed, accepted to be together, and to love one another then that was it. It was not permitted to date too long but to get married shortly after. When they're sure that they loved each other, before they married, they first had to announce that they would be

getting married soon. That was where we got married in Moosonee. We didn't date too long. We followed that ancient teaching of our grandfathers to marry if they desire to do so long as they agreed, accepted each other, and were sure of their love for each other. That's how it was back then.

Where did you go after that?

After we got married, I was finished working when I said I was working. The railroad was closed then but would be opened later. It would be opened later and then there would be many people working. I finally came home. I came by boat, the one that used to travel on the bay. I got on that boat and got off right here. Then I would go up river to where I was trapping. The two of us went there. We were never apprehensive about anything with just the two of us traveling up the river, or living in the bush all by ourselves in the fall, or just the two of us living in the bush all through the winter. We never worried. We never lacked anything; we lived by faith and hope that things will go well for us in the bush. We never got anxious with just the two of us in the bush. That's how my life was like back then. We didn't have anything like what they called music, nothing like that. We did well. It went well when one went to live out on the land and manage his life. It's easy to say that to run your own life. Life was very easy before we had our children. That's my story about that.

When you were in the bush during the winter, when people would come and stay in the community for a while, and then after leave for the bush, did you do that too?

That's what we did in the past. Everybody did that. We gathered here to socialize, to have meetings, and to visit one another. That's were they called a meeting where people would talk about what happened while they were in the bush and the things that went well. They would talk about how well everything went for them that year while they were in the bush. That was the only time there was what was called a gathering when people came together once in the summer to socialize. I remember back then I used to see people from Ogoki when they arrived from up the river. That's when the people came together – some of them anyway. There were others from Mammamattawa and some were from Pagwa traveling down the river. That was a gathering when everybody came once every year. Then they would return home after the gathering and go back to their life in the bush and prepare where they would live for the winter like making a house, a lean-to, a log cabin, or other activities that were done in the bush. [They would] kill a moose first while it was autumn when a moose has fat. [They would] try to kill a moose and make grease, animal grease, like the way wavey grease was prepared. That's the way moose grease was prepared too. Everything was used nothing was thrown away. Even the bones were boiled and the fat was taken to make grease. That's what they did when they left early right after the gathering. That's how it was back then.

During the time they came together during that summer, what did they do, did they play sports or did they have feasts?

That's what they did as far as I can remember. They feasted while they had meetings. After that there was this big clearing where the ground was level and that's where everyone played sports [like] soccer where they kick the ball competing to win—that kind of sport. There were many on each side. There were many who were competing. We were not allowed to go where they played saying we might get hurt. This is what they would do. They would do different kinds of sports. One was a stick they used that was about two to three feet long. Two people would sit opposite each other and pull that stick until one of them wins. That's how it was. There was another one where you draw sticks and whoever picks the longer one gets to chase the others. Then there was this other game, a Native game to see who would run the fastest. Someone would stand a long way off marking the return point but go behind his back first so no one turns back too early. There was this other one that I saw called the orange. An orange is placed on a spoon and they would run with it. The one whose orange didn't fall was the winner. Some would drop their orange and some finished if they knew how to keep the orange from falling. This was to see who was a fast runner. That's what they did. All kinds of things were done. These are all traditional games I'm talking about and that is what they did. They also played checkers. There were four on each side competing [to see] who would win. I saw that too. That's how it was. I don't know about the ones called millionaire games. There was this chasing game where one does the chasing and tags another person and that person would then be on his side. That's how the traditional games were. I think those games are now non-existent the ones I used to see played back then. There were people who came from different areas during those times. I used to see those people called the Chinese. They used to jump in and participate in this game. They were not working and they were not living there. I guess they were tourists. That's what it was like back then as I saw it. Then the community would be empty around September. It would be completely empty. That's how it was back then. It was time to go back and make preparations where they would live in the bush during the winter. That's the way it was.

Community or reserve life today

2) Describe your life in your community or reserve today.

At the present my life is much different. I can feel the difference. That's how my life is living here. The living is so different. It's not like how life was in the past. It's not like that. There are worries. There's uneasiness or other things that are in the community that are not satisfactory. That's why I think this community is different now. Even though I'm comfortable living in a house and that it is clean, I find it strange. It's not like when I was living in bush where bush life was so peaceful. Back then when the people would gather

here it was peaceful during that time too. And now, it's like life is so different. It's dangerous, worrisome, that's how it is now That's how life is like as I see and experience it personally.



Fort Albany

What do you think of the various programs they have now in your community? Do you think they are helpful to you?

At the present time, although the programs are available they are not helpful to me. It's because I didn't get an education. All I know is my culture, but to do something that comes here and is from a different culture that I am unable to do. But when I'm doing something that is from my culture then that helps me a little like Native education or demonstrations or the other things that I do. I'm certain the things that run in this community and [are] from another culture are not helpful for me. I am unable to work with that. That's my opinion on that if you are able.

Community or reserve life in the future

3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

The way it is today and in the past is different, that's what I saw, like when my father went to war there was nothing and with the treaty nothing came of it, nothing at all. All I've seen in the past is Native people sustaining themselves traditionally. That's how it was in the past and now things will change. Things were not like that as they are now. There will be more difficulties in the community as well as out there on the land. I'm certain that things

will change in the Native community. Presently now, as I see and know it, it is very different and it is different too in the wilderness. What's the cause? It is the law. There are too many laws from another culture speaking to Natives and it is the same within the Native community or what is called the reserve. It is because they are not knowledgeable about the Native culture is what I see in my opinion.

What do you think about our language? Do you think it's weakening because the young people are not speaking it? What do you think can be done to keep our language so it will not diminish?

That's what I'm sure of when I travel to other Native communities and in Ojibway communities. I hear people of all ages still speak their Native tongue. But if they can't find the words to what they want to say they would just say it in English. That's what I notice in those areas, but here in the James Bay area there are more people who still speak their language. That's what I'm finding out here where I live. The young people both men and women speak to me in Cree. If a young man doesn't know how to say a word in Cree he would say it in English and I'd know what he meant. The Cree language here is not altogether gone. There are many that still speak the language, their Cree language that is. There is an extensive loss of our language from the way it was spoken back then when Native communities were first formed. That's the same with the people living across the river. There are many that still speak their language. I mean that reserve across the river (Kashechewan). But there are some people who don't know how to say some words in Cree and are able to say them in English. That's when they understand what they are trying to say. I suppose it's the same everywhere, but I saw it more so in the south when someone would speak to me in English. That's how it is. The Native language is almost non-existent with the people who come from the south, although they can still speak a little in their language. The people from the Mushkegowuk area still speak their language, but sometimes they don't say it right and that's when they say it in English instead. That's what I notice about the language. The young people talk to the elders here. This morning they talked to me when I was walking on the road. They were saying, "Are you doing well?" That's what they said. They can only speak the short words. It's not that the language is all gone in the north where there are not many white people. That's what I notice in this area.

What can be done to keep our language from disappearing?

At the moment parents who are raising their small children are speaking to them in English. Those who talk to them in English, but are able to speak to them in Cree should be encouraged to at least use short words. They should also make Native books where they are. One side would be in the Native language and the other side would be in English. The

other thing that would be effective is to teach the Native language. When the young people come together teach them the language. It doesn't work at the school [because] the classes [are] too short. It would be better to do it where they would have more time and to produce a Native curriculum where the young people can learn the language about things that they are concerned with. I think that's the only way it would work. There should be a circle of different sizes just for the young people. Then they would know their language better so our language would not disappear. To respect the language our Creator gave us and to keep the culture he gave us that would be the only way to keep our language. The best way would be to hope that he would restore our language. That's another way I look at it.

Where I work in Timmins at the Ojibway & Cree Cultural Center ...

Yes...

... and at the center, what could they do to enhance services concerning Native culture?

That was something that we talked about when we came that way. We've done this from way back, but we used to do it at the Treaty Office. That's where we would teach the names of all things. I used to accompany an elder from each community like Winisk, Attawapiskat, Kashechewan, Albany, and Moosonee. That's what we did when we were teaching everything in the Native culture, the language, and the traditional activities back then. That's what I think should be done where you work and do what I did. I also talked on the subject that women should breastfeed their children as God intended for them. That was what we talked about, but it is different now. The outlook is changed for a child to be breastfed and to be healthy because those that are of age are beginning to take drugs. That's what is going on with the young people living now. That's the reason a child shouldn't be nursed at his mother's breast. There were other things we talked about. Things have changed. A lot of them use drugs and they consume other stuff too. They think they are helping themselves. A child could have health problems nursing at his mother's breast. We tried to get the white women to accept breastfeeding. I guess it was difficult back then before anyone can get the necessities. Sometimes a person would come to our home with a glass jar or bottle asking for milk for their child. But people were poor back then. There was no money and no one was working either. That's the reason why we set it down for mothers to breastfeed their children. But it will not work now because a lot of them use drugs when they think they are feeling sick. I see a lot of them that take drugs who are not well. That's how it is with that.

When you were living in bush did you know what the places were called? Do you know what they called that area?

Only what they christened the place, that's how I knew it as. [They named places by] what the main river looks like, or if there is a big rock, or what they called a rapid. Whatever they called those places is all I knew them by. It's the same in the wilderness. What our grandfathers named the land is how we used them. The names our grandfathers used are what we called them too, like the big mount it is only some little islands on the river. The names that our grandfathers used, we used those too. They named the rivers: Fishing Creek, *Seseginagow*, Ghost River, *Chemahagan*, Ochistinowi River, Fort Hope, *Nagagamisis*, *Keschitawesis*, and Rapid. They called the areas different names. They called them in their own language and people started to call them by those names. It's the same with the animals they named and also those in the water. The fish and all their various names, that's what they're still called. We kept the names our grandfathers gave them. Whatever they were called first that's the names they're called up to this day.

Is there anything else you would like to say before I close this?

...

It doesn't matter if you have nothing else to say.

There is this one thing I want to say. That's what I think I'm doing as I sit here and talk about things of the past. Through writing I talk about different kinds of things like the moon, the stars, and the sun. I wrote about or the ice breakup and how it looks like and the various kinds of things our grandfathers used. [I wrote about] what the sky is telling us and what the sun is telling you or the moon. The moon is talking to you what the weather will be like on that day or if there will be an early summer. Different things like that. That's what I'm doing. I made many writings already telling about these things. I will talk about one thing. There is this one tree that our Creator blessed. The branches of this tree are very thick. It's tall. It grows again after it becomes dry, the one with the branches. It grows again and that's the one the Creator blessed. Every kind of animal goes under its branches when it's a hot day. The birds and other big animals go under it to keep cool. That's my story about that tree. This tree was blessed by our Creator [and that] is the reason why this tree is good for medicinal purposes. That's why that tree is good because the Creator blessed that tall tree I'm talking about. Those are my last words to you and I hope that you will accept this tree and think about it that our Creator blessed. Although he blessed everything it was this tall tree with the big branches that he blessed so that the animals can be saved through it too. I'm finished now.

Thank you for your story Marius.

Yes, I thank you. Good-bye.

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 P^oP^oΔLJ^oΔbΓ^od^o b P ΔC^oε^o x ·b^oσ^o b ΔC^oρ^oε^oε^o; ε^oΓ^o, ·Δ^o>^o, J^o, ΔN^o,
 ·Δ^o·Δ^oρ^oε^o ∇^o·b^oσ^o b ΔC^oρ^oε^oε^o ρ^oU^o ·Δ^oε ε^oρ^oL^o·b^oΓ^o b P P^oP^oΔLJ^o x L^oΔ^oρ^oε^o b
 Δ^oρ^obU^oP^o<^o x Δ^oU^o L^ob ·Δ^oε ρ^oΓ^o V ΔU^oρ; ·∇^o·Δ^o, J^oJ^o<^o ρ^o·C^o Λd^o σ^o·b^o ·b^oσ^o b
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 Δα Γ⁰Π¹·x Δα Lb Γ⁰Π¹ b P Γ·αPL' b ▷Γ ΛLΠP¹ ∇·bα Lb ·∇Γ
 Γ·σS¹ ∇ P³d³bσ·Δ¹·x P³d³σ³ Δ³C ∇ ▷S³Cσ·Δ¹·x ∇·bσ ·∇Γ Γ·σS¹ Δα
 Γ⁰Π¹ ∇ P Γ·αPL' b ▷Γ ΛLΠP¹ b P·σ·Δ⁰d¹·x Δα Γ⁰Π¹ b Π<ΓΓ¹·x
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 P Γ·αPC⁰ b Δ·U¹·x σd¹ Lb Γ⁰Π·b P Γ·αP¹·x b P·σ·Δ⁰d¹·x b Λ·9P¹
 Δ·ΔL³·x Δ³C ∇Γ ΛLΠP¹ σ⁰C ·Δα·Δ⁰·x ∇·bσ ∇ P³C¹·x

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Mary Sutherland



(recorded November 14, 2004)

Community or reserve life in the past

1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past.

My name is Mary Sutherland, I came from Attawapiskat. I was born and grew up in Attawapiskat.

I was four years old when my mother died. She died from measles. There was measles in Attawapiskat. I only know one younger sibling, [there were] just the two of us living. There were two who had died when they were young. There were the two of us, my young sibling [and me]. His name is Joseph Wheesk. Our grandmother looked after us, my father's late mother. They were the ones who looked after us. My grandfather Alex Wheesk and Sophie Wheesk looked after us.

I don't remember exactly how old I was. But I was young when I was in residential school. That is where I was most of the time though I went home for the summer. A lay brother used to drive a sloop, picking up children who would go to school for the winter. In the fall, towards the end of August, they used to pick up children from here and there.

I had never heard them pick up, by force, children who were not permitted to go. There were many children who were not permitted to go to school. I know some of them. I used to play with those who never went to school. But I never heard of someone sent forcibly [saying] you will get nothing or you will be given [something]. I don't know ever hearing those kinds of things happening. Elders (adults) were free to do what they wanted with their children, to let them go. [That is] what I heard when I was young, I never heard anyone have their children forcibly removed from them. What I hear is that we were forcibly removed from home. Nobody was forced. I personally do not believe that happened because I have never known that to happen.

Biographic Information

Name: Mary Edna Sutherland
 Date of Birth: February 26, 1937
 Place of Birth: Attawapiskat, Ontario
 Present Address: Fort Albany, Ontario
 Former Name: Weesk
 Name of Spouse: Gregory Sutherland
 Number of Children: 9
 Grandchildren: 40
 Great-grandchildren: 2
 Number of Years Married: 46
 Education: St. Anne's Residential School 14 Years
 Interests/Hobbies: Cooking, Knitting

It is only recently that those things are heard, basically because they're being listened to. Money is the one that is doing the "killing" maybe, at least that is what I think. Things did not go well for me at school, at times. It happens where there was a crowd, where people lived together. People cannot be treated the same as others. That's just the way it goes where there is a crowd, where living together happens. I can't call it another name just to give it a bad name.

I never heard parents, whose children had died in school, I never heard them to say, he (she) was murdered. I never heard that being said. Nowadays, there are a lot of things being said. I don't know some of those things that are being said. My grandpa and my grandma, I never heard them. One of my uncles died when he was little, when he was young. He died here in school. He was nine years old. My aunts talk about one of their young siblings who had died when he was in school.

My little uncle may have had tuberculosis. A nun operated on him. The nun who used to operate on people was trying to help when they were sick with something. It seemed that she was able to help people. But it was said that my uncle died. I never heard my grandpa and grandma to talk about it, or say anything bad about it, for them to say that he was murdered or to blame someone. While I was in school I never heard such a thing, blaming someone.

There were many parents who came to get their children, to fetch them when it was time to visit or for them to visit home. For every parent I knew here and the ones in Albany, I was never aware of any them to get mad at the caregivers. I never knew that sort of thing to happen.

I am surprised at what I hear these days, always slanderous stories. Always blaming. I guess it was meant to happen, to be in residential school. I guess nothing would have been learned if there was no schooling. At least that is what I think when I think about it. That is where we learned about our Savior. We were taught much and to pray. I am thankful to my father. I used to be so sad when he sent [me] back. He used to urge me to return to school when it was time to gather the children. He was the one who always put me in school. He would refuse me when I suggested that I stay home for one year at our home. I used to tell him. Go to school anyway, go back, he used to tell me. I used to be so sad. Also during the summer holidays when I went home for awhile, I was sent to church every day. My young sibling and I never missed going to church because we were told to go. I guess my father wished for us to know about religious matters, just so we don't learn only materialistic matters. When I think about him I would thank him

even though at times I used to be mad for being made to get up early in the morning. But I never answered back at him. I would just silently be mad. I used to think how come he is not going to church. I would be the only one he sent to church. I used to be mad because of that. But I never criticized him.



Fort Albany Catholic Church

People, however old they were, respected their parents. I never heard my relatives ... people, although grown up would address them as papa or mama. What is heard is love and respect. Thou shall honor your parents says the Holy Scripture. Nowadays, I hear people calling their father and mother "old man" and "old lady." I find it shocking when I hear that. I have never heard people, although adults, whose parents are alive to call them "old man" or "old lady." They would say "mama" just like a young child. That's how adults used to address their mothers and their fathers. They would say papa and mama. Now I hear them say ... I usually tell some of the sensible ones when I hear them call their parents "old man" or "old lady." Do not address your father that way I would say to them. Respect them. I tell them to call them papa or mama. Okay, they would say. They would thank me for telling them that.

Today, it seems that children do not respect their parents. But again the Bible says that a person's own children will betray them. I guess these things have come to pass, these troubles that are happening in the world. Our Savior did say that these would come to pass.

That is all I can say for that about the education I received here. I did learn lots.

I [was] also taught English in the classroom right in the learning room. But when we were outside, the nuns who supervised us used to speak to us in Cree. The priests also spoke to us in Cree. But when we were in the classroom, when they taught us English, they spoke in English. That is what happened when I was in school. One of the people I went to school with, who lives here, says the same thing. But I hear many people say they did not learn English. I, myself, did not see that. When we were in the classroom, we were spoken to in English so that we would know what was being taught to us. But when we were outside, the teachers spoke to us in our language. They used to get laughed at for using the wrongs words when trying to speak in Cree. Take for example; the Bishop used *neepaskasoo* when he wanted to tell some to *neepaskoo* when trying to speak in Cree even though he spoke in Cree many times. When he spoke outside, he did not speak in English, only in the classroom. We used to laugh at him when he told someone to *neepaskasoo* when he wanted to tell him to *neepaskoo*.

That is what happened to me. I am not too familiar with sewing. I did not learn that. However, I did learn cooking. One of the nuns taught me well. The nun who taught how to make *anakanow* (bread or cake) and steam pudding died not too long ago. I remember everything. I kept everything she taught me. I learned how to cook by watching the one who became my *neeseekoos*, my husband's mother (mother-in-law), by copying her cooking methods. I eventually made up my own recipes. That's how I learned how to cook. My cooking is well liked. I taught myself. I used to think how it would taste if I added this or that: the different seasonings that are used to flavour foods.

All my husband did was trap. That's all he did all his life and hunt. That is what he still does. He is still trying the same thing even though he is getting old. He can't seem to quit. He wants to be in the bush. Right now he is in the bush working on logs. He is sawing logs. He must have piled the logs. Now he is sawing those, and he's not back yet. He cannot quit the things he used to do long ago. He's only happy if he does the things he used to do. He can't quit yet. That is all I have to say for that.

What I said about his trapping, after I got married, that it was the first time I ever went in the bush. When he went trapping in the fall, when we left by canoe, everything was strange to me because that was the first time I was in the bush. When he started killing something, he started to teach me the things I needed to skin animals and stretch the pelts. I immediately tried to do the things he taught me. That was the first time I ever

saw anyone stretching a pelt and skinning. He only taught me once. This is what you do he said as he finished skinning a beaver. I started doing all those things. He only showed me once. That is all I have to say on that. He taught me everything. I started to like being in the bush. When my children were young, we always stayed in the bush.

Long ago people used to leave by canoe in the fall and be gone all winter. They would return in early spring. They did not come home during Christmas. Before my children attended school, we would arrive in June after being gone the whole winter. Many people did that. That is all I have to say on what we did.

I am finished with that one.

Did you see people use medicine from the bush?

My husband did that when the elders told him what to do. When I was in the bush, I used to be so sick with a cold and coughing. Even though it is very clean out there. I used to cough so much when we were in the bush. He used to go and get willows. He used to strip those willows or cedar or the other one called balsam, the sticky tree. He would boil those. Then he used to tell me to drink it. I used to feel so good after that. I did not have an itchy throat at all. When he made medicine liquid, I used to think the balsam used to help me a lot, the sticky tree. It was like holding me. I guess it was the pine tar that had that effect. After that I used to have a good sleep, after drinking the solution, drinking the hot balsam solution and the one called cedar. That is what I used to see him do when he [made a] medicine solution.

Another time, I barely remember, I used to watch my late grandmother, the one who took care of me after my mother died. One of my uncles had a lot of pus on his neck; he was very swollen, very sick. I saw my grandmother, near the water shore, digging up something that looked like big white roots where we used to live by the bay. She wrapped those in a cloth and pounded them. She would put that on my uncle's throat. In the morning, when my grandmother undid the bandage where my uncle had pus, where he was swollen on his throat, there was pus stuck on the bandage. That's how my grandmother used that. I saw her. I barely remember. When I saw her do that, it was like a dream. I started remembering those things as people talked about the medicines they used to make. I remember once seeing my late grandmother healing her son when that happened to him. The swelling went down. There was a clean wound after the all the pus disappeared. That is all I know about medicine and the time that I saw her and what my husband did.

When you were in the bush, did you have your children in the bush?

No. Some were born here in this hospital and in Moose Factory. One was born in Timmins. I was sent away once when I had hard time giving birth to one of my children. Again, I had two in Hearst while we were living in Constance Lake. My husband was trapping then. The MNR (Ministry of Natural Resources) had wanted people to trap over there. I guess there must have been many beavers over there, somewhere in the Hearst area.

That's when we left to go and live in Constance Lake. My children were young when we left. Prior to this, we lived in Elliot Lake. My husband learned carpentry and English. My husband never went to school. When he was young, he lived with his parents teaching him the bush life. He wanted to learn some things, which is why we left to go and live over there. We must have lived in Elliot Lake for about two years. Then we came back here. We didn't even stay here one year. We went to live in Constance Lake where he trapped on this river where the MNR wanted people to trap. That's where we lived, in Constance Lake. We lived there fourteen years. That's where my children grew up in Constance Lake. Some of them were still young when we moved back here.

When we arrived here, I thought things had changed drastically. The friendliness was gone, the visitations. None of that was evident when we arrived here. People did not bother to visit each other in the way it used to be before we left. People used to go from house to house visiting each other after they finished their chores. When our husband left to go trapping, we did our own woodcutting. They would gather logs, and we sawed and split the wood. Our children would help by taking the wood indoors. That's what we used to do.

Nowadays, we do not see the married women to do that. We, on the other hand, did everything ourselves. Even pregnant women did not take it easy. She did whatever she had to do even though she was like that. Nobody hurt themselves even though they worked hard. I guess steady work made some one healthy even though pregnant. For those of us women who lived in the community, we did not leave when our children were going to school. Only the men left. That's the way we were, the women that are of the same age.

Now, that is not evident anymore. Now there is nobody to be seen working outside the way it used to be. It's only the men who are working. Our children used to help us cutting wood when we lived in Calstock. They would work in the morning. After bringing in the wood, then they would play. That how we involved the children. They

would also shovel after snowfall. They learned to work when they were young. They weren't lazy to do anything when they were encouraged to work. That's what happened long ago for us who lived at that time.

Did you prepare food long ago, like the different ways animals are smoked?

I used to see people do that. I used to do that too. While at Kapiskau, before going up the river, a lot of snow geese were killed. Those were the ones that were taken to be eaten while going up the Kapiskau River ... We didn't really pluck those to be prepared mainly because the MNR used to send white people to come and hunt at Kapiskau. We, the women that were there, used to pluck for the white people. I used to see them do that, when I was young, drying, smoking, and putting away the animals to be eaten during the winter. Those birds were eaten long ago. I saw my grandmother and my aunts smoking them outside and putting them away so they can eat them during the winter. I didn't do that much, putting food away, because there was a lot of food where we were going. Moose would be killed during trapping.

When you were in the bush, where did you stay? Did you only use a tent?

Sometimes in the winter, an *askikan* was used. During the winter we stayed in an *askikan*. A lot of people made *askikans* to be used as homes. Those things are very warm. Water in pails never froze when living in an *askikan*. But in the springtime, when it was warm, that's when people lived in tents. When it was time for geese, that's when people lived in tents and in the fall. In the beginning of the winter, that's when people used *askikans*.

We didn't stay in an *askikan* too much. A dwelling made of wooden walls and a tent roof was constructed, with the walls a bit higher. They were warm as long as there was enough fire. A wooden walled tent roof dwelling does not get cold. While we lived in the bush, we lived in a wooden wall dwelling with a tent roof.

Long ago, were tents different or did they look like the ones we have today?

It seems to me they were a bit different. I thought they were big. To me they used to look so large when I visited people who were arriving when I was young. I guess they made them themselves. They must have made them big when they sewed those tents, using canvas for the tents they made were big.

Why is it that tents were not lived in during winter?

I guess it must have been cold. I guess tents could have been lived in during winter. They were also bothersome when it was snowing. Snow would make the tents sag.

People used to hit very hard on the tents to shake off the snow so that the snow doesn't melt thus preventing leakage from melted snow when a fire was made. People also lived in tents while they were trapping in the bush. That is what I saw.

Do you remember your mother having babies while living in the bush?

I do not remember [that] at all. I guess I wasn't really aware of anything. I guess I was just like any other kid too busy playing. For instance, I did not know exactly when my mother died. I don't know if I was even aware that my mother was gone when I was told. I guess we were all sick in bed in the tent when my mother died. My father was also sick in bed and us, the children. I remember clearly I still sick when I was taken over to grandmother's place. Not too long after that, I heard my father crying when they carried him over in a blanket. That's when my mother had taken her last breath. That's what I remember happened. My mother, I really did not remember her, what she looked like. I guess I wasn't mature enough for me to remember anything. I didn't really know her.

You do not remember the name of the place where you lived?

I really don't know. I remember they used a place, *pisqawsquayuk* (a stand of trees) near Attawapiskat, where my father lived with the woman he married long after my mother died. From what I remember, my late father and me didn't live too far from that place. When we lived in the bush that winter, we lived in a tent. That's all I know.

Community or reserve life today

2) Describe your life in your community or reserve today.

I live here. Ever since I became *keeshayahow* I look after my grandchildren. After I raised my children and when my children start having children, I inherited the raising of my grandchildren. The ones I looked after reached adulthood while in my care. I used to look after my grandchildren, when they were younger, while my children were busy. Currently, I am looking after my youngest child's children. These are the ones I am still looking after. Now, I stay here. I cannot go in the bush during goose season. I cannot go in the bush when other people go spring hunting. I used to go to the bush during hunting or spring camping. But now, I can't go because I am too busy looking after them because they have to go to school and we can't take them with them because of school.

We used to take them with us before they went to go to school. We used to take [them] with us when we went hunting in the mushkeg. We had our wooden framed tent over there and that's where we used to go. When we lived in the mushkeg, I used to smoke

meat sometimes, just a little bit not much. I just used to do plucking. My husband used to come home to put them, the ones I plucked, in the freezer. I didn't do heat curing that much. I heat cured twenty-one once. We do not eat much of the heat-cured geese because they are too hard. We used to smoke cured geese when we wanted to ... so they tasted different. That's what we used to think. We didn't always want to bring home just the uncooked ones. We would be asked for the heat cured ones. I used to make them until we had none. [It was] the same with the smoke cured ones. We hardly ate the ones I used to make. We would only eat the ones we used to pluck. That's what we used to do. But I cannot do it, staying here, taking care of my grandchildren while they go to school.

We used to go away by canoe for moose hunting during the fall. But I cannot do that even though I would like to go in the bush by canoe and go moose hunting. That's the way it is for many people. One cannot go in the bush nowadays. It is because of the school that it cannot be done what was done long ago.

Are there services in town that help you?

What services?

There are different services that are available in town like health services or police services. For sure, health services anyway, one is treated at the local hospital. That's where one goes to get medical care to that hospital that is standing over here. The health services down the river way are useless. The nurses there give needles to the children. That's the kind of work they do over there. As for the police services, I think they are inadequate. It seems sometimes that there is no response from them when they are called. That is what I am not pleased with. Sometimes they seem to think that it is not their job to look for my grandchildren when I ask them to look for them in the evening, towards nighttime. It seems like they want to make it sound like it is not their job. They seem like they don't really care to look for children. I think the white cops do every kind of work. They do the friendly help when they are asked for help. That is what the police in Constance Lake did for us when we lived there. They gave us whatever help we asked from them. [It's] the same thing with the OPP in Hearst. That's the way it was when the white cops were here. Our call for help and our hope for them to help us were never in vain. They never arrived late. And now, ever since Native cops are here, it's not the same. I don't know what is happening. It's been said the same is happening in every reserve. Native cops, who are serving their own people, their fellow Natives, are less effective than white cops. Whenever I used to call the OPP for help, they always helped me. But now it seems so inadequate ever since the Native cops took over. They don't

seem to really care to help with anything it seems. I don't know what is wrong with them. I guess that's just the way a Native person [is], to be reluctant to do anything. I guess that's why things don't go well in a town because that's just the way a Native person is. He doesn't really care for anything. That is all I have to say about the police.

Community or reserve life in the future

3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

I wonder what is going to happen. Sometimes I wonder what is going to happen to the youth if they don't see their elders. The elders are the only ones who are giving counsel. I don't know what is going to happen once they all pass on. I think the youth will be very lost, basically because there are many problems in the world today. When I think about it, the world is not going to get any better. That's my own thinking. The world had seen it's good times. We have seen the good times. Now it is the time for troubles. I don't see that the future generation is getting better. That's what the Bible says. The things Jesus talked about. Those things are happening now. Those things that were mentioned like the earthquakes, storms, famine, aggression, and fighting. Those are the things our Savior talked about. He had said that my Word will not pass. Those things are here now. I don't think the world will get better, at least not much better. No. That is what I think. That is what I think when I think about it.

What do you think our language is like?

It is disappearing. The Cree language is being spoken less and less. It is also good to teach it to the children so that they can survive. Nowadays, there are only white man's jobs like mining for instance. It is also good for them to understand their language.

That is what we do to these (children). I do not speak strictly English to my grandchildren. Their grandfather speaks to them in Cree. When they do not understand him that is when I tell them. I tell them what their grandfather is saying. I tell them that is what your grandfather is saying when he talks to you. Sometimes it seems that they understand him. When they don't understand him, they make faces when they look at me. That is when I tell them what he is saying to them. Now they are beginning to understand. They are beginning to understand more when their grandfather talks to them. He tells them to behave when they leave for school and learn hard. They are told not to be lazy and to listen to the teacher. They thank him and say o.k., o.k. They seem to understand him. When they do not understand him, they make faces when they look at me.

I think there is no other way except for the language to disappear. Whenever they speak, the youth seem to want to speak more so in English.

What do you think should be done to maintain the language so it doesn't disappear?

I guess the only thing that can be done is to speak to them in Cree. I tell them, that is what I am saying. They must know the two languages. I think that they may not be able to speak it anymore even though they understand it. By using the language when speaking now, even though they understand, will cause the language to disappear. That is what I think. I think the English language will eventually prevail. That's only my thoughts. When I think about it I have different views.

How did you meet your husband?

Where I was working while I was in school. He was working during the construction of the school made of cement. That is where he worked. That is where we met. He was working there. I was already working at that time too. The nuns used my services in the kitchen and at the hospital doing some cleaning and all other jobs. I also used to work at the priest's house. I used to do different jobs because I was no longer learning in school. However, I did not receive any wages. I was hired for free. That is where we met.

Did you come paddle in from the bay?

That's about the only time, I said, I came by boat when they were picking up children. But my father, after I got married, when he wanted to work when there was work here, he came paddling from over here. He did not have a motor. He arrived here by paddling a canoe looking for a job. I guess many people did the same. They paddled coming over here. Some of them who came looking for a job stayed over here. That is why their children remained here for good. Those who came here paddled over here. There were not that many people who used motors to go somewhere, though some had motorized vessels to come here.

The same thing [happened in] Moosonee when I was living here. My father paddled one time when he went to Moosonee. He was looking for a job. I was still in school when he went to Moosonee looking for a job. Then he paddled home again when they went home. My younger sibling must have gone once with him to Moosonee. My father must have worked somewhere on the rail tracks. I think there used to be lumber work done there. Once I was on the train I saw my father standing along the train tracks. When the train stopped along the train tracks I saw him standing when I was on the train. I saw him where he was working.

Do you remember when people started living on this land where the town is now?

This is where people used to live where I live now here in ... People were living here then. But the place where my aunts and uncles used to live is not there anymore. It caught on fire while they were in school. That school building caught on fire long ago. While my father's family members were in school that the building caught on fire. When I started to live in the school, this is where the people lived then; I did not know the place across (Old Post). I did not see the one across where people used to live.



Fort Albany Old Post, PA 103464, Archives Canada

You mean where Kashechewan is now?

Yes. I did not see that one and those before me; they probably did not see it either. They only saw this town that is here now. I used to hear my husband's parents ... long ago in the past people used to live there. I used to hear elders talk about the old town, those who went to school in the old town. My husband's mother, his parents used to talk about it. That is all I know about that.

Do you have anything else to say, something I did not ask you, anything?

I don't know what else to say. Only that. I don't know what else from the past I could talk about.

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∇·bσ ΔC·Δα, ΓαλLΠP·Δσ` ΔU9, ΔdP·ΔbΓd` ΔΠ ΔC Δε° λd ΔJ
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Willy Metat



(recorded November 16,
2004)

Community or reserve life in the past

1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past.

Ah ...

Biographic Information

Name: Willy Metat

Date of Birth: December 31, 1984

Place of Birth: Moose Factory, Ontario

Present Address: Fort Albany, Ontario

Education: Grade 11

Interests/Hobbies: Making Music, Writing and
Producing Music, Hip Hop

Of course, you can start by saying where you were born there.

Oh yeah, I was born in Moose Factory on December 31, 1984. After that I think I first lived in Moose Factory where mom raised me for a bit there and then in Moosonee where my mom raised me. After a while I came back to my dad's [place] in Fort Albany, which is here. Then I went to school here for one year until after a while my brother and I got sent out by ... what's that thing called again ... when they take your children away?

Is it children's aid?

Yeah, children's aid, that's it. We went to a children's aid home for a while and that's pretty much about that. I went to my mom's house. It wasn't bad there; it wasn't good either. We weren't a rich family and I pretty much left. We had problems there, too, my brother Tony and I. We started running away from there because I remember sometimes my mom wasn't really a good mom. Just happens sometimes. After a couple of times of running away, the children's aid took us away this time again and put us in foster parents' homes. That's where I started losing how to speak my Cree language. I was in foster homes for two years before I actually went back to my mom's to see her for a bit. Then I went back to Albany, where I normally grew up. This is where I grew up and it wasn't that hard growing up. I guess since you live down here you get used to it. Some people say it's a bad place to grow up because it's isolated. There's not really much to do around here. Well it's true on that side. After I finished school, I started going to high school, which I started to mess up. That's when I used to skip a lot during class and during the weekends I'd always party which really messed up my life because, well, I didn't really mess it up just distorted it enough. I should have finished graduating right now, but all that partying just got in my way. Then I finally noticed that after a while I was sick of it. I had to change it some way because I used to drink every weekend, but I have changed around now. I don't see drinking as a party thing

anymore. I see drinking more like a social thing now. Which is why I really noticed how bad I drank until I actually thought about it. So I didn't do it. Right now, this is my first year since I stopped drinking because I have to look like a role model now. I started my rap group with my friends. There are six of us. There is Timmy Sutherland, Rex Napaysweet, Josh Metat, my brother, Jacob Loone, and Jonathan Spence, my cousin. Yeah, this is the first actual year I haven't really missed over ten classes. I mean no school. Right now I'm doing pretty good. That's pretty much all of it.



Peetabeck Academy

I'll talk about your group Wolf Pack, but some things I want to ask is when you were growing up in the past, when did you start speaking your language? Did you speak it all the time?

No.

What about before?

Yeah, that was the first thing I remembered speaking because that's all we ever spoke as my grandpa always spoke Cree. My dad always spoke Cree. I don't really know about my mom. I guess she started speaking Cree ever since she moved down to North Bay. That's the language she picked up I guess. But the first language I ever remember speaking is Cree because my family speaks Cree. It's pretty good.

Did you ever do anything traditional? Did you do any hunting or fishing?

Yes, I did a lot of hunting in those days before I went to Timmins. I used to go hunting with my dad all the time up in the muskeg. This was during the spring break. I always went up there with him, to put up cabins, and to set up a blind. In the mornings we'd go out and stay there for about four or six hours or sometimes less and just wait for the geese to come. That would be the best time when we shot the first goose because that's when you know we're finally going to have geese. It was good to know.

Do you know what that place was called where you and your dad went?

I know it was muskeg, but I can't really remember the area. It was called *Kamoshotin*, because when people talk on the radio, they always refer people by areas. Where we used to stay was *Kamoshotin* and some other people had other areas they stayed in. That's how they know who was talking on the radio.

When you were hunting during the spring, is that when you would camp out there for a while or ...

Yes. Yes, sometimes we would go up for a month straight and only come back whenever we ran out of supplies like food or matches which we normally use. Because with lighters you can't really rely on them as they freeze up sometimes. We usually slept there for a month and by the time we got back there would be no trail for us to come back on because the snow had already melted. So we would have to call up a chopper to come and get us, which is not bad because it's fun riding in a chopper.

How did you feel the first time you killed your first goose?

I saw the look on his face. I was proud because I was using a .410, which I thought was pretty good at the time because it wasn't that harsh. It wasn't that cheap like a pellet gun you know. So when I first killed it I just looked at my dad and I sort of bowed my head or something like that and he just laughed. That was a pretty good kill at the time.

So do you still hunt?

I haven't ever since I came back from Timmins. I've thought of it, but I don't know, I had other stuff to do. But when spring comes up I'm going to go with them this time for sure because I haven't really done this for a long time. I think I'm losing my culture because I don't really do traditional stuff anymore. So it's gone. Like I said I'm going to be a role model and by that I got to stick to my culture. So kids can do the same thing with their life and see what I'm doing and appreciate that.

Did you ever get involved with drugs while you were growing up?

Yeah. I remember getting involved with weed, which is really the only drug I've ever done besides Tylenol. Weed wasn't bad but it's not good. I've seen some people just mess up their heads and don't really speak properly, think right, or act right. So I saw them and I even saw myself in the future. I told myself I don't want to be like that. So one day I quit that, but it wasn't easy for me to quit it because I was addicted to it at the time, which was bad. That's when I knew I had to do something about it as well. I had a feeling about it, the thought of me growing up like that, but still I didn't want to. I couldn't stop it. It was kind of hard to quit smoking up but I did it. It took me about two months actually to stop smoking completely.

That time when you were having parties, I guess you must have partied a little bit with alcohol?

Yes.

I mean did you take anything heavy like hard stuff?

[I drank] just beer because I didn't really have that much money growing up in Timmins either or going to school there. I would probably get twenty bucks a month, which I thought wasn't bad till I came down here and got welfare. Five bucks a week to me there wasn't bad because I could have a drink or do something fun or do something with my friends like go out for coffee or something. But as I was saying, every week I would drink or whenever somebody offered me a drink I wouldn't say no. I'd just say, "Yah, sure, let's go party." That's when I'd start doing stupid stuff like getting in trouble with the law. I'm still doing probation right now because of that. It's not good.

Were there any activities for you or other youth in Timmins?

None that I know of, but during the weekend for a while there, the Native Friendship Centre had a Native youth dance every weekend. We'd party and I guess there were too many people getting drunk over there and bringing alcohol to the dance which they didn't like. So they shut that down after a while because of the alcohol abuse. People were fighting each other outside the Centre. I guess they didn't like that.

Who decided for you to come up there?

Who decided?

Yes.

Actually, I decided that because I would have still gone to school, but I wasn't going to a normal high school anymore. I was just going to PACE. There are not that many

people in there. It is a high school for adults that I went to. I didn't really find it good there because there weren't that many people I could socialize with. So I just quit school for a bit, which wasn't really good. I decided to put everything together; bring my act together. So I thought the best way to do that would be to come back to the reserve because you know how much booze costs. One mickey costs like eighty bucks around here and I thought that was a great way for me to try to cut down.

Did you have a good relationship with your siblings and your parents there?

Actually, I had a good relationship with my parents and my siblings, yeah. But it's just sometimes with my mom I would argue with her for just about nothing, but it wasn't good as well. I still argue with her. It's just sometimes I can't agree with the stuff she says. My sister knows that too. She's had a rough life herself too, rougher than mine I guess. Did you ever hear about the stuff that was going on in the residential school? I'm guessing that's where it seems like she got off track and doing other stuff instead of what she should have been doing. She got married at an early age; I think it was seventeen she told me. She had her first baby when she was fifteen. I'm guessing she didn't really have a perfect life as well. I guess that's why she complains a lot and, I don't know, she takes it out on me and I pull back. I don't think she actually takes it out on me and she sometimes doesn't want to. I don't really know how to put this together but she doesn't want to take my shit, you know. If I don't do something right she'll throw a fit. If I don't agree, if I thought that there's a reasonable explanation for what I did, I would just talk back to her, which wasn't good at the time. Yes, that's pretty much about it.

Did you get along well with the other people in the community?

Actually I did. Like I said when I was trying to stop drinking [when] I came down here. I still wanted to drink which wasn't good. I guess that's how I got to know people, my friends, again since I left for like four years. I was to stay in Timmins. I moved down from Timmins to Calstock and moved again to North Bay and back again. During all those times I would just party. So when I came back one of first things I got from my welfare check was a mickey and I thought that wasn't good.

That time when you were out on the land with your dad, did your grandparents or your dad ever show you anything about the traditional plants that they used long time ago like for medicinal purposes?

Actually no. I don't think they showed me anything about [that] or I probably wasn't paying attention.

Community or reserve life today

2) Describe your life in your community or reserve today.

Well, it's actually doing good because now I'm actually doing something that will help me stay out of doing stuff I shouldn't be doing like, you know, beer or alcohol. By doing that I'm also making a good name for Fort Albany, which is that rap thing or hip hop. Ever since I'm doing that I've found out that every time I feel like drinking I also feel that I should go over to the studio and make some music. So if I had a choice for drinking I'm going to the studio and if my choices weren't the studio I wouldn't be doing stuff today where I'm getting paid to do what I love, like, going out of town to perform for other people and getting involved with the youth. My friends have been a good support to me because they all have been helping me with staying away from alcohol as well. Two of my friends don't drink at all, well, one doesn't really drink all the time, but two of them don't. Which is pretty good.

Who started that group?

Timmy and Josh. Well, at first Josh was just writing up lyrics by himself and after a while he came back to Albany. He was in Timmins at the same time I was. He came back to Albany and he started doing some stuff with Rex, like, going to his friend's house and putting down some tracks and then rapping to those tracks. Then after a while Timmy came up with this idea that they should start a small studio together: Josh and Timmy. Timmy's nickname was Rex at the time and Josh was still Jam. So we called it Rapper Jam Productions. That's pretty much how it started and it just started escalating from there.

Do you get out of the community and perform in other communities?

Huh?

Do you go out to other communities to perform?

Yes, actually I was. During the summer here I went to Moose Factory to perform because they called us up. They heard one of our songs. I don't know how it got down there in Moose Factory, but they heard it. They said that that song was always being played at every dance. It's like, they liked that song and what it was called. So they called us down and that was the first time we've ever been called to perform out of town. That was good because our first two shows were just like, normal, putting down two songs and just a couple of freestyles. ... We had put down five songs. At the end of the night we got an interview with *Wawatay* that had a good picture of us with that Wolf Pack sign in the back of all six of us, which I thought was pretty cool. How we got front-page coverage, I think, was through that Wolf Pack symbol because if it wasn't

for that we probably wouldn't have gotten it and probably wouldn't have been called out for other shows. Pretty good.

Community or reserve life in the future

3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

I say that, since the Diamond Mine Project is happening in Attawapiskat, some people here are going to start training for anything that has to do with mining. They'll probably apply for those jobs down in Attawapiskat. I know that people here would be getting jobs and actually more people would be employed instead of unemployed. [They would be] looking for the same jobs to see if there are jobs available like down here. They don't have any long-term employment down here just short term [employment] like whenever they have a small project like making a dyke. It's not really good for the community. I don't know.



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Do they have anything for you to do for the youth?

Actually, yes, ... they have a youth center. But people don't normally go there. Ever since I've been on the youth council there, we're trying to get people doing stuff. [Something] coming to the youth center is the Internet with at least three internet access computers because you know how youth like going on chat lines or something like that. [We would like to] get a small pool hall going on as well. But in order to get

that kind of stuff we're going to need a bigger building. We used to have a bigger building at St. Anne's School till it burned down. It burned down back in 2002. I think it was. I'm not sure. I wasn't here at the time, but yes, they had a youth center there that had a pool hall and Internet. So it was pretty good and there's television and they could buy chips and pop there. That's the kind of youth center I'm trying to look for because lots of people used to hang out there. If we can get that kind of thing going for the youth, then the youth would stop resorting to other stuff to pass the time like doing drugs and other stuff like that. If we can get the youth's attention we can get them out of doing stuff they're not supposed to be doing like breaking the law, doing drugs, and things like that.

What's your perspective on the language?

Language? I say people are really losing their language ever since residential schools. That's when people have really been losing their language because you know when they went to residential schools they weren't allowed to speak their language. They would always get punished if they spoke their language or get caught speaking it. At one point they banned traditional ceremonies and rituals around, I forget what year it was. But I think the government banned it for a while. Anybody who got [caught] doing their ceremonies or rituals would be would be sentenced up to six months in jail so people starting doing that behind the government's back. That wasn't enough to actually keep our culture and language because we lost a whole bunch of ceremonies, stories, rituals, and songs out of that. Another thing that's making us lose our language is the media. When people watch television there is not enough [of it] in the Cree languages. Well, there used to be *Wawatay*. I don't know what happened to that now. APTN is an aboriginal language [station] but they don't really speak aboriginal languages.

Did you ever attend any pow wows?

Yes. I've been to [a pow wow], I think there was one during the summer here. I went to a youth gathering and at the same time there was a pow wow. Also at the same time there was a Creefest going on in Cochrane. The pow wows were good. I got pulled out to dance with the people during the pow wow when they were dancing and I was like, yeah I might as well. It seems kind of fun and it's also good. That was the last time I joined a pow wow during the summer.

Well, is there anything you would like to talk about, I mean from your perspective, on how you see things?

... on the way I see things around ... what's going on ... what's happening?

Like for people, for the people to know how you feel, you know.
How I feel ... uh ...

How do you think about the services they have here in the community?
in the community ...

... the different kind of services they have here like health or police services and that.

Well, I don't really know much about that. I don't pay too much attention to that stuff. But as for the youth, I've been thinking that they need a better place because they don't have any place to hang out around here except in front of Kenny's and other stores like the Northern Store. That's where they are. They usually steal stuff since there's a whole bunch of them over there sometimes.

I don't have anything else to ask you. Thank you for letting me interview you.

3

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The purpose of this book is to highlight the past and present life experiences of elders and youth in the northern Mushkegowuk community of Fort Albany. In addition, this book identifies the aspirations of these communities and reserves as described by the participants.

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