MUSHKEGOWUK FIRST NATIONS

Community and Life Experiences Volume 3 (North)



Kashechewan Nursing Station

JOHN PAUL JACASUM



Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre

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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, Celine Sutherland who co-editied the Cree manuscript, Kathy Perreault who researched the community profiles, and Jim Hollander who co-edited the English manuscript and prepared the maps.

Finally, to all those who worked and contributed to this book a sincere meegwetch.

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 Mushkegwouk 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.

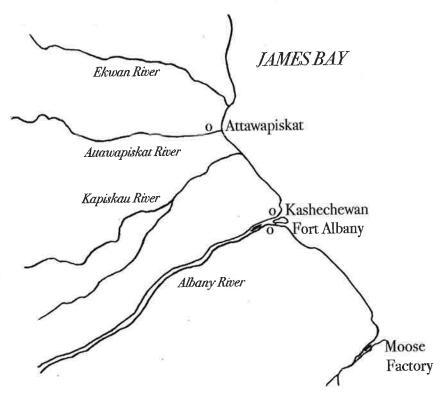
We have a general mandate to carry out the collective will of our members in exercising self-government through: promoting self reliance and local control, providing for our members in such areas as health, education, fire protection and community advisory services, and enhancing their unique cultures,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



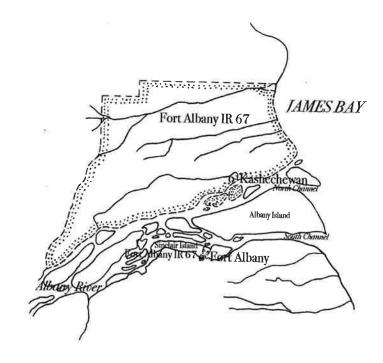
Northern Mushkegowuk Council First Nation Communities

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.

Kashechewan First Nation

13B Riverside Drive P.O. Box 240 Kashechewan, ON POL 1S0

The Kashechewan First Nation is located on Fort Albany Indian Reserve 67 approximately 450 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 Fort Albany and others moving to present day Kashechewan. The community of Kashechewan is located on the north channel of the Albany River approximately 10 kilometres north of Fort Albany.

Population: 2,954 registered band members with 1,814 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

Angus Stephen



(recorded November 17, 2004)

Community or reserve life in the past

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

Biographic Information

Name: Angus Stephen

Date of Birth: October 7, 1919 Place of Birth: Albany River

Present Address: Kashechewan, Ontario Name of Spouse: Mary Jane Sackaney

Number of Children: 13 Grandchildren: 44 Great-grandchildren: 36 Number of Years Married: 52

Education: None

I will talk a little about what it was like in my lifetime. Once when we left for the spring camp, the only supplies we took were 25 pounds of flour, 10 pounds of sugar, and one pound of tea and salt. That was all we took. We were in the bush a long time. At the end of about two weeks, we started running out of everything. For about one month, we drank tea made of evergreen leaves. Even after the spring arrival of the Canada geese, we could not kill any. When a person went hunting for geese, he did not kill any. When most of the men went out hunting for geese, only one person got one goose. That is what we ate and there were many of us. I think there were fifteen of us, even though one person left. The person who left did not take any supplies. His name was Isaiah Sutherland. All he took were supplies for his immediate needs. That was all he took. It was the same with this man; he never really tried to hunt. He just stayed at home. We were there for a long time. All we had was that one goose for that day. The goose we ate was the only food we ate that month.

We left by boat to come downriver after the ice was gone [from] where we had camped. Parts of the river were still blocked by ice so we only went halfway down the river. We had drifted right behind the slowly moving ice. Towards evening, we set up camp. After the camp was set up, some men went goose hunting. Again only one hunter got one goose, which we all shared. Just one goose, which is all we ate that night. We left in the morning. The ice was moving again and we drifted behind it. When we got near the bay, we again had to camp for the night because the rest of the way was still blocked by ice. That night we had nothing to eat.

We made tea from evergreen leaves. After we had our tea, my brother climbed a tree to look for Snow geese out towards the bay. He said he saw the movement of shadows of birds in the distance. When morning came, the men took the boat and went to where my brother thought he saw the birds. After a while, we heard gunshots every now and

then. We did not eat anything that morning; we only had a drink. It was almost noon when we heard the hunters returning. They were bringing geese for us to eat. They had killed about sixty that morning. We feasted and drank goose broth. We waited for about two days at this place for the ice to clear from the river before we moved on.

We went all the way to the bay by boat. When we reached the bay, we walked on the jammed ice and pulled our boat along. All the rivers were clear of ice so we just paddled across the one we came to along the way. It was all right on the ice where we walked. The ice was dry. We spent the night close to one river where we went on the following day. The current was swift and the ice was piled high on the riverbanks. There were times when we almost capsized when ice blocks fell into the river. The current was very swift and we arrived at the community that night. I don't know why we were in such a rush to get to the community. There was nothing there. We would not be able to buy anything from the store since we had nothing. However, we did have some store bought food by trading the geese we had with people in the community.

This was about the time my grandfather died from starvation. I don't know the year this happened. We had heard two gunshots being fired when we were at Pike River. We all assumed it was the old man reaching the mouth of the river for the return trip to the community. His nickname was (unintelligible). We all said it was the old man leaving. We had been in the community two days when we heard news that this family had starved. There were, maybe, three young men in that group. The mother, however, died from illness. She had the flu. Five of them survived. We found about them when they were brought back to the community. The old man's brother brought his body back. It was not a good sight to look at these surviving children. There was just skin hanging on their bodies.

They had one dog. They are the dog when they knew they were going to die from starvation. This was what starvation looked like. This was my first encounter with starvation. We did not fair that badly. At least we had something to eat once in a while. These children's providers starved to death.

Instead of [getting] better, things were bad with the introduction of treaty money. There was a doctor named (unintelligible) who was also the Indian Agent. The manager of the store at that time was not able to provide supplies the family needed when they left because they already owed at the store. Higher management of the store had told the store manager not to give them any more credit. The store manager, Mr. Carlton, not knowing what to do, talked to the doctor who was also the Indian Agent. The

Indian Agent said not to give [them] anything. He was told that it was because they were lazy that they could not pay their bills. The store manager got this answer when he asked for help about what to do.

Things did not get better. In fact, things got worse as treaty money came into effect. The Indian Agent arrived and with the arrival of the Indian Agent, things got bad for the store manager's staff. The Indian Agent upon his arrival told the people to paint a pole, which he had brought, red. When painted, the pole was to be taken to the old man's house and staked outside his door. This red pole would mark him as liar. This came from the doctor who was also the Indian Agent. The store manager's staff did not do as they were told. But there was one store worker who went and staked the pole outside the old man's house. After this was done, the treaty money was handed out. No one said anything about this action against the old man. I guess everyone was afraid of the Indian Agent, who people thought, was the one in control.

Three of the starving children, who were brought back to the community, were sent to a school with the arrival of the first scow of the year. The other two went to live with [their] relatives. The three who were sent to school never returned. One of the three, a young man, never returned to the community. When he finished his schooling, he found a job far from the community. He found a job in the United States. That was where he went. He did return once and he said he would never again go back to his Indian culture. He went back shortly promising to return the following summer. He kept his promise and returned the following summer. But he did not stay long. I think he stayed for about three hours and then left saying he didn't like the community. It was too muddy.

The part I told you about us not having enough to eat, most of my life was like that. There was always a shortage of everything. There was hardly anything to eat. When there were animals to hunt, we did not face starvation. The time I said [when] we did not have any food; there were no animals of any kind. There were no partridge, rabbits, or fish. We set our gill nets hoping to get fish, but nothing. We went through hard times when there were no animals. When there were animals, life was easy.

Those who survived starvation ended up living in Moosonee. One time when I was out trapping, I decided to head that way by river. Because I knew the area, I decided to go by way of Pike River. I knew where the river was so I headed that way. There was a lake in that area and this was where I spent the trapping season. I did not go further north. I decided to return from here to go and sell my pelts. I had beaver and otter pelts to sell.

We stayed in Moosonee for about four days. The water had gone down quiet a bit by then. The water was not that deep at the mouth of the river where there was a fork. It was because of this that I decided to go by way of Pike River. On the way down to Moosonee, I collected most of my traps. My partner wanted to know why I going this way. I told him this would be the easiest way to go. I told him we would go downriver on Pike [River] out to the bay and travel the rest of the way to Moosonee in the bay.

Before heading towards Moosonee, we went to Fort Albany to get fuel. We had an outboard motor by then. We had a five and a half horsepower motor. After we bought our fuel, we headed for Moosonee. It took only one day to get there. We left early that morning and reached Moosonee around 9 o'clock that night on June 13. The selling of pelts was almost closed for the season when we got to Moosonee. I worked hard trying to get all my beaver and otter pelts ready on time. My partner did not care to trap otter. When I asked him why he did not go for otter, he said they were too long and [that it] would take a long time to skin [them].

As we were coming down the river, we came to the place where the family, who died of starvation, was buried. I did not stop at the place where the burial ground was. There were those who did not have a burial place and they were buried on the riverbank. We stopped at this place. I was trapping with Harry Rickard at that time. He stood there for a long time and looked at the graves. There were two of them on the edge of the river where the ice stops during ice break up. They were in good condition. The ice had not reached that high. I still wonder sometimes, he said, at what my father said one time. When the white man arrived, he had told the people, standing there with his hands in his pocket, that people would not die from starvation anymore. And here are these people, he said looking at the graves, who died from starvation. As I said, one of them was buried at the burial ground. Two of them were buried at the riverbank because the man who buried them could not take the last two bodies to the burial ground. The bodies were decomposing and he could not stand the stench. There were too many maggots on the corpses. We [went] to Fort Albany again. From there, we returned to Moosonee. That is all I will say about this.

Life in the bush was easy during my time. This was because I knew the area upriver. That was the only reason I was able to do what I did. One day my partner told me that he, at times, felt that he was in the dark. I laughed at this remark and told [him] that it was daytime. He said he did not know the area and that was why he felt as if he was in the dark. He was a good man and always went hunting for geese whenever I asked him to. But one day, when I asked him to go and hunt geese, he said he was afraid to go.

He said he might get lost. So, I told him to stay at the camp and I went instead. That is all about this part.

Sometimes I think about the wonderment people have when they hear about the past. The reason I talk about these things is that I hope the people will see what Indian Affairs did to the people. Many white men talk about how Indians are looked after. It was not that way. I was born in 1919 and since I was a young man, I have always worked. I worked in the community of Moosonee. I worked at the warehouse. I never had welfare. I have always worked. Because I always worked, life was good. I bought whatever I wanted. At that time, Indian Affairs was at the island, but he never did anything. He was just there. Even when people went to see him for assistance, they were refused. The only answer they got when they asked for something was no. The day came when I had to go and see him. I forget this man's name. This was another man, not the doctor, who was also an Indian Agent.

The time came for me to go and see him. I had heard of his refusal to help people. Bill wanted to know why I was there. I told him I was there to see the Indian Agent. Bill said he would let him know I was there but he did not know if that would be any good. As he came out to where I was, he immediately asked why I was there. I told him I was there to see if I could borrow from him since he did not give anything. I told him I was talking about welfare. He told me they did not lend money at that office. At this remark, I asked him if the government had released the assistance that he promised the people. He looked at Bill and asked what he should do. Bill told him that I already asked what I wanted. He told me that the assistance I mentioned was now available. So, I asked him if I could have it.

He told me there were two different amounts of assistance. One was marked number one and the other one was marked number two. He asked me which of the two I wanted. I told him I would take number one. I told him that it should be enough before I found another job. I told him if there was anything left over, I would use it to buy supplies when I go on my spring hunting and trapping. He looked at Bill again when I said this. He asked Bill what he should do. Bill told him that he had already asked me which one I wanted and that I had already said what I would do with the assistance. Then he told Bill to prepare it. I received the assistance I asked for.

I went to the store that afternoon. The clerk looked at the voucher. He said I would be doing a lot of buying. The voucher said there was no limit on what I could buy. He said I could buy a new boat and a new outboard motor if I wanted to. I told him I didn't want

to buy a new outboard motor. I bought a lot that day. I bought enough supplies to last the whole spring. Everything went well for me. After that, I met two men who went to see him and were refused assistance. This is the end of my story telling. I am finished now.

I know how everything was where I trapped and hunted. When I was old enough to hunt and trap, I got my own trap line. I had to pay \$25.00 a year for it. I paid this amount for five years. There were four of us working the trap line: my stepfather, my two brothers, and me. One spring when I was out for a walk on the land, I had to go for number two. I went to a group of bushes and did my business. As I squatted there, I noticed a pond a short distance away. When I was finished with my business, I went to check out the pond. As I looked at the pond, I noticed something bubbling up from the bottom. As it bubbled up, I noticed it looked like oil. There were three other ponds, so I went to check the other ones. But there was not as much of the oily stuff as the one I first looked at. I think it was oil.

I never heard of any trappers in that area mention this. I mentioned this to the Ministry of Natural Resources worker (then known as Lands and Forests). He didn't even try to help me look into this matter. He wanted to know if I thought I was the first person to see this. I told him yes, that I thought so. He told me it was not so. He told me William Goodwin was the first person to see this. I told him that William Goodwin was my grandfather. I was following his footsteps in his way of life when I came across this. That is how I answered him.

The river where I saw this pond is close to a river that goes to a hill. This area is the same. There are ponds that are not frozen over in the wintertime. However, I did not really check this out. I do know that muskrats go in that pond. At the first pond, I saw that otters would not go in it or mink even though they were all over that area. I saw their tracks and that is how I knew. There is another river close to our trap line and in this river, gold was found. I did not see this myself but I know gold was seen there even though I was not told about it. I saw a man holding a piece of it but he would not tell me the exact location. That is how it was with me.

I saw some things that make money. The things that they are working on at Attawapiskat, this thing they call a diamond [mine], maybe that was the thing I saw a long time ago. There is a lot of that stuff upriver from this community. One time I was pulling my canoe along the shore when I noticed a shining object in a rock in the river. I picked it up. The rock was big but not so big that I could not pick it up. The shining stuff was attached into the rock.

Another time when I was out hunting partridge, I was on a white flat rock when I noticed something black. It looked just like soot. I saw [that black] thing when I went ashore for a break. My stepfather told me it was coal. He told me that was how coal looked. I did not know anything about coal. He told me to get out of the boat and go up the hill to see what was on the other side. So, I went up the hill. ...

It was just like the bubbles in boiling water. There were about eight different places like this. There was grass growing around the area where this coal was. My stepfather told me it was coal when I mentioned it to him. I don't know if anyone else saw this. I don't know. I never heard of anyone talking about it. I saw gold. I saw things where a person can get lots of money. But none of the things I saw ever did anything for me.

Many times, I went without food for five days at a time. [It was] the same when I went upriver. Many times, I did not have any food to take with me. The only time I could eat was if I killed something. I went without food yet there was money all around. All these resources will be worked on. They will work on them after we are dead I guess, after my family is dead. There is only one brother of mine left alive. There are just the two of us left. He was here today. It's been a while since he came over. He has a vehicle. That is how he gets around. That is all for this part. I just finished the rest of my story that I started a while back. There are other things I could talk about but I can't right now.

The Native language is disappearing. It is almost gone here in this community. Many children do not understand the Native language. Even the older kids, the youth, do not understand the language. It seems as if the language is dying. It is disappearing. I believe it will be gone in five years. I don't know why it is happening. I think it is because we have English teachers. When this school was built, they said the only English speaker would be the principal. They said those who graduated from Grade 8 and Grade 12 would be the future teachers, but that is not happening. None of those who graduated are teaching. Elderly people who never had a proper education are the ones who are working in the school. That is why the English language is so strong. That is how I know things to be.

My grandchildren who are here do not understand the language, not even a little bit. They used to understand it at one time. They were fluent. Now they do not understand. They tell me that they do not understand. I think all children are like that, the youth included. One time a youth came with us to our spring camp. When I talked to him in Cree, he just stared at me. I asked him if he understood and he said no. Now, this youth has probably lost it all. The Native language is getting very weak. I don't know what others think about those whose children are going to school. I don't know what they think.



Francine J. Wesley Secondary School

I used all the things that were used long ago [such as] medicine, eating, and drinking tea made from evergreen leaves. I also used the things people of long ago used for medicine when someone cut himself or herself with an axe. I used all of those. They are good.

One time when I was out spring hunting, my brother, the one who recently passed on, arrived at the camp. I heard him yell as he was chopping wood. I came here to hunt he said. He had cut himself with an axe on his leg. It was a big cut, about two inches. His son was just standing there looking at the blood squirting out. I ran over and pressed on the cut. I told the son to run and get some cattails. I told him to bring the firm ones. He did and when he got back, I broke open the cattails and put them in the open cut. First, I put some fat on the cut. I told him he would be fine and that there would be no infection or pain. I told him he would be able to hunt. I told him to [keep them on the wound] until it healed. The cattails would fall off as the wound healed. That was how it used to be done. When we returned to the community, the nurse heard he had cut himself with the axe and she wanted to check the wound. She did not do anything when she saw the wound. She said it was healing well.

Cattails were good for cuts as well as the red willow. It's the same when someone feels like vomiting and can't. A drink was made of a certain shrub and this made a person vomit. One time my grandfather was walking and he was carrying his gun on his

shoulder as he walked. He tripped and fell forward on the ice. Two of his fingers were badly cut from the gun. He used cattails for his cut. It did not take long for his hand to heal.

These are still good medicines, but a person should take care. If a person used these traditional medicines, it might be possible that they will not be given the white man's medicines. That is what I think might happen. A person might be told that they're the one who rejected their own medicine and might end up paying for the medicine they need. I think this could happen since no one forced us to stop using these medicines. That is what I think.

My leg hurts. I went to Timmins twice to see a bone specialist. He told me the cartilage in my knee was gone. He gave me two choices: a needle on the knee or an operation. He wanted to know what I would do. I told him I would take the needle. He wanted to know why I made such a choice and I told him I was in too much pain from complications due to my last operation. He told me that if this is what I wanted then that is what they would do. So, they gave me the needle. It feels better. I'm not in pain and I am able to get around. One time when I went to the hospital for my needle, he told me the medicine I was using was not paid for anymore. He told [me that] the government said it was too expensive. I told him it was the government who promised to look after the people so long as the sun shall shine. He said he would pay for all medication and now he does not want to pay. Look at Canada now, I told him. He's filling it with all kinds of people, Russians, Italians, and Germans. I worked with all these people. That is how I know. I know Lands and Forest does not hire these people because, I guess, he does not want to pay much.

That was one thing used for medication. The other thing was cedar. One time, one of my children was really ill. The nurse could not do anything for him. There was a rasping in his chest. In the morning, I left to go and look for cedar, the right kind of cedar, not just any kind. It took me all day to find what I wanted. When I got home, I chopped up the cedar and boiled it. While it was boiling, I made a bag out of plastic where I would put the cedar. While the cedar was still hot, we put it in the bag and rolled it up in piece of cloth. I put the cedar on his chest while it was still hot, but not so hot as to burn him. It was not long before he started vomiting the slimy stuff from his chest. He had this bag on for a while. Soon after, he got better and never had that illness again. I had healed him with that medicine.

I used all those things that I talked about. But a person has to know those things. It is the same with the inside part of a log. I used that one time when I cut my foot. I rubbed the inside part of the log on my cut. This helped with the healing. But I cannot do anything about my leg now. The government does not pay for the medicine anymore because it is too expensive. He is not paying for it even though he is making a lot of money from the land he took from my grandfather. I never saw my grandfather get a cheque. The one they call old age pension. But he was given a voucher to use at the store. My grandfather said at the time that he had no use for it. Had he been younger he would have benefited from it. It was not even a cheque, just a piece of paper. That is what happened in the past. The part of the past I remember.

There are things that the leaders could do. There is a lot that is not right. Nothing is done at the chief's level. Whenever something needs to be done, it is always the same remark — there is no money. When I received my cheque, I had to support my children with that cheque. I was given assistance for them. It was the same with my wife; it took a long time for her to get her cheque. My wife is blind and much of the time I have to help her with things. There are times when I feed her myself so that she will eat well. The doctors cannot do anything for her eyesight. She is diabetic. That is how she lost her eyesight. She gives herself insulin shots. The medication they gave was too strong. That is why she is the way she is today. But she was never compensated for it.



Kashechewan Nursing Station

That is all I will say for now. I only told a little bit.

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Dorothy Friday



(recorded November 18, 2004)

Community or reserve life in the past

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

Biographic Information

Name: Dorothy Elsie Friday Place of Birth: Old Post

Present Address: Kashechewan, Ontario

Former Name: Stevens (Stephen) Name of Spouse: Alfred Friday

Number of Children: 6 Grandchildren: 20+ Great-grandchildren: 10 Number of Years Married: 24

Education: 3 Years

I grew up in the bush, not in town. I grew up in the bush when people used to live in the bush. Since early childhood, the only thing I was taught was the work that needed to be done when living in the bush. It was not until I was nine years old that I was enrolled in school at Moosonee or Moose Factory. When I returned to the community at age thirteen I was not sent back to school. I don't know why I was kept home. I never did find out.

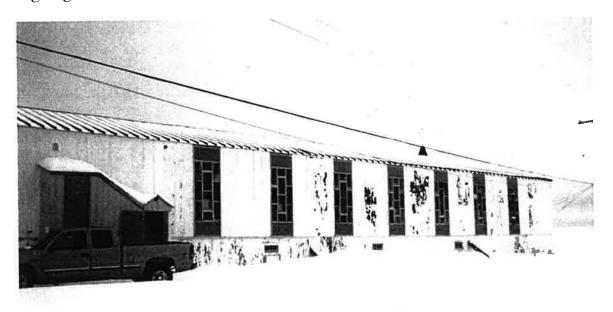
The only thing with me is that I've always been here. We would leave the community in the fall and live in the bush the whole winter. This was when I was still living with my parents. While living there, we would trap, snare, fish with hooks, and fish with nets. That is how my parents taught [me] while I was living with them. I always did what I was taught, even while living here. I did not stop.

I used to go everywhere with my older sister, taking our canoe to set our traps and our fish nets. This we did until freeze-up. We were the only ones to do this. I don't know of any other women who did what we did. There were three of us women in the family. The two others were my older sisters. One of them has passed on. The three of us used to go on foot to set our traps and snares up river from here. We also used to cut down trees for fire wood. We would later take our sleds to go and get fire wood.

The three of us never stopped working. The time came when our older sister couldn't go with us. She couldn't go because of her failing health. As she got older, she had to go for knee surgery. The same thing was done to the other sister. She also had knee surgery and she is now again in good health. I, too, was supposed to have knee surgery but I have not heard from anyone yet. I had agreed to have the operation when they told me about it. At that time, last fall, they had told me to wait one year. It has now been one year and nothing has been done yet.

We had one brother who could not speak but he was good at doing everything. He was also good at calling different birds. I don't know how he was able to do this because we always thought he was deaf. He didn't hear us when we talked to him. We always had to sign when we talked to him. He used to laugh at our sign language. This was one way he was audible, when he laughed, even though he could not speak.

I was thirteen when we had just arrived from across the river when my father told me to go and work at the church. It was a Saturday and he wanted me to go and sweep the floor of the church: to generally clean up the place. That is what he taught me to do. He had told me to keep doing this until I was not able to. And that is what I did. Even today, I still go there. I also sit in with the Church Committee at their sewing bee even though I cannot sew anymore. It's my hands that give me a problem. I cannot feel the needle when I hold it. But I still go, so long as I say an opening prayer when something is going on. That is how I am needed.



St.Paul's Anglican Church

Another thing I did, as I got older was to look after a critically ill person, a person who does not have long to live. These people would be in their own homes. I sat with many people who were about to die. I still do this today even though my health is not good. I do not stop. I was also involved with many children. I was a mid-wife. As a mid-wife, I must have delivered at least thirty babies. All the babies I delivered were healthy. I know of only two of the babies I delivered who died in their youth. This is what I did in my lifetime.

I have never refused when someone comes to me for help or to look after his or her sick. Not too long ago a person came to my house to tell me that I was needed elsewhere. It was in the middle of the night and even though I had been sleeping, I got up and got dressed. Phone calls where made for a vehicle to take me to where I was needed. That is how I go about. I cannot walk long or go far. I can only walk a short distance; [sometimes] just walking to the hospital tires me out. That is how bad my leg is. This is why I am not able to do the things I used to do; otherwise, I would still be working outside. I keep telling my children that if not for my bad legs, I would still be cutting my own firewood. I still make my own kindling but a lot of times I keep missing the wood I'm chopping. Because of this, I don't use an axe too often. I'm afraid I might cut myself because I can't see too well. When I look at things, they seem further than they actually are or I see two things where there is actually only one thing. Nothing has been done for me yet even though I was told about the things that they wanted to do to help me be better. But it doesn't bother me. Whatever my fate is will happen. Whatever happens to me I will accept.

[It's] the same with my father, I took care of him when he was dying and my mother too. I also held one of my children as he was dying. Nothing happened to me, I did not panic. What was happening to me was my fate. I was in the hospital across the river when I lost my baby. I was alone at the time. I did the same when my husband was dying. I alone took care of him until he died. I was alone at the house except for two of my children. That is how it was. That is what happened in my life. I was taught not to bother other people. I was not to bother anyone who came to the house whenever anything happened. I was taught to look after things myself. [It is] the same with my own children, I was told not to bother them. I was told that they would know to come to the house if they wanted to. And that is what I did when he (her husband) got sick. He was sick for a long time. He was in bed for one or is it two months. And my children say they didn't know he was sick whenever they came over. I don't know how they could not know. They often saw me take him to the hospital. They knew whenever he was sent out (to another hospital). He never got better during the whole time I took care of him.

Today, I think everything is going well with my life. There is nothing to keep me indoors. What I mean is, I could never do anything outside while I was looking after my husband. While he was sick, I never left the house. I stayed in the house with him. I did not want to leave him alone in the house. Even though he is gone, that feeling is still with me. I cannot stay out too long. Whenever I go somewhere, I hurry back thinking he is waiting for me. When I get home, I realize he's gone. It's just a habit, I guess, after so many years hurrying home to him. That is what happens especially

when you've looked after someone for a long time. It stays with you for a long time. This happens because that person was the only reason you were there. I was not like that when I lost my parents. The pain of loss was not as bad, even though I missed my mother everyday. I missed my mother because I felt sorry for my father. That is why I missed her so much. After my father passed on, it did not hurt so much knowing that they are together where they went. That is how it was with me.

I ended up teaching people how to do things for themselves. I say the same thing when I talk to young people. Today, I don't do anything. There is someone who gets my water for me (she has no indoor plumbing). People take really good care of me. I will say it's about six years since I've been looked after. They also bring in my firewood. That is what is being done for me since the Elder's program started.

My parents taught me the things I do in my life including the things I will need to do in my future. They taught me everything. [They taught me] what to do and how to be when my children pass on and what to [do] and how to [be] if I my husband should die before me. They told me how everything is going to be. I have always kept and remembered those teachings. Maybe that is why people think I am strong. The way I am did not come from me; I got it from my parents. When I think about them, it's as if they are right here talking to me.

One time we were out at our spring camp and my father and I had to come to the community because I had a really bad toothache. We went straight to the community of Albany to see about my toothache. My tooth had to be extracted. We went back to our camp after that. We did not overnight in the community. I used to be able to keep-up when walking in my younger years. I used to go with my father whenever there was something to do. That is why I know how to do things. [It was] the same with my older sister, who is here. We were taught what to do. We were taught to be friendly to everyone. We were taught not to think of anyone as a stranger. Whenever we see someone, we act as if we've known them for a long time. That is what we were taught. We were told that only if we show love for our neighbor would we be loved back. And that is what we did. I passed on my parent's teachings to my children. But when I tell them to go to church when the bell rings, they don't go. There are to many things that are distracting them. I do not let this bother me so long as I do what I believe. There have also been many times people have asked me to tell of the past. I tell them what I know and what I have been told. They seem satisfied when I am done talking with them.

The only place I remember spending time is at Pike River, upriver, at the tree line. My father also mentioned about us living at Pike Lake. Other times we camped at Naycheteesee (unknown English name). We would go to this place when we could not spend time at Pike River because of expected high water at springtime when there is lots of snow in the winter. There used to be water everywhere, and that is why we went to the other place where there are not that many rivers. At this place, we would clean and put our geese in salt to preserve them. That is how our life was. We never spent spring in the community. It was only when my youngest son started [going to] school that I spent time in the community. There were many things we couldn't do because of children going to school. In those days, when it was time to return to the bush, it was not allowed to take your children with you. I don't know why this was done but I stayed home, in the community, with the children. During this time, my husband used to go to the trap line with other people. But we used to go, as a family, to our spring camp. That is how it was with us.

In the fall, before school started, we would go to the bush with our children. We would go before the geese migrated south for the winter. During this time, the geese were fat and [it was] good hunting for them. We used to make smoked geese all the time. We would smoke cook our geese. This is what we did every time we had meat. We never kept our meat raw because there was no way to keep it from spoiling. We cooked whatever we had and stored it away for future use. This is how we preserved whatever food we had. In the wintertime, we would leave our food outside to freeze. We used to leave it on a high platform to keep it out of reach of the dogs. As for food, we preserved it in salt. We would pack it in wooden barrels and bury the barrel in the ground to keep it cool. The earth stays cool for a long time at the start of summer. That is why barrels were kept this way. This cannot be done in the fall, so the barrels are instead kept in a dugout in the ground. It was not buried like it was done in the summertime. That is what I know and that is what I saw being done.

It was not until 1940 that I saw people using outboard motors and ski-doos. Only a few people had them. In those days, people did not go crazy over new things. But over on the other side of the river (Fort Albany), I used to see people riding around in them. The reason why not too many people had these was that the price of pelts was low. On the other hand, things were not expensive then. A 12 horsepower ski-doo was only \$800.00. My father did buy a 12 horsepower ski-doo. This was after I got married. I must have had three children by then. He also bought an outboard motor after he received his old age pension. It was only after he received his old age pension that he started buying things.

In the old days, dogs were our motors. I had a two-dog sled, sometimes three, to go and get our firewood. They used to go fast pulling the sled. Not too long ago, when we were at our spring camp at Pike River, my sister and I returned to the community. At that time, this woman's husband, James was still alive. The men did not want to come because they were hunting geese. Our father was in the community because he had refused to go to the spring camp. At that time our older brother was at a hospital in Toronto and my father did not want to go anywhere because of this. He said that if our brother returned while we were away, he would not have a place to stay. As it turned out, he did not return until that summer. He had an operation. In those days, a person who got an operation was kept in the hospital for a long time. Not like today where it seems a person spends only one night in the hospital after an operation. Today, people do not stay long in the hospital for anything.

After I got married, my husband and I lived in a tent most of the time. My father had a house. There used to be many tents, including teepees, on the riverbank where we lived. ... At that time, there were only about ten houses: the store manager's house, for one, and the store. There was another store manager's house and a store up river from the community called the opposition (Revellion Freres). The other houses were the minister's house, the church, and a schoolhouse where we went to school on Sundays. There was a time when children went to school during the day in the summertime. This did not happen in the wintertime, only in the summer. I guess it was thought to be a good time for school since everyone was in the community. Hardly anyone stayed in the community during the winter. They stayed for about two months and then it was time to return to make a living from the land and set fish nets. That is what happened. People did not stay in town for long as they do today.

I used to see doctors arrive by boat during summer. English men used to arrive by boat. Sometimes they were ten boats and sometimes there were five. There was one doctor in the group. That was all I saw people doing. The only other thing I saw was the arrival of a plane and the arrival of a bishop. He would leave after he did what he came for. That is all I saw people do. There used to be games in the summertime either on the first of June or on the first of July. That is what people used to do long ago. They would have races. They would also race with packsacks on. I used to see the elders join in. This get together for games had been a long time event at the same time every summer.

My grandfather, at the time, was still very active. His nickname was *Ojibow* but his real name was Richard Solomon. This was mother's father. When the race started, they

were told to make a turn by running around a group of birch [trees] in the distance. Instead of turning for the race home, he kept running and disappeared into some bushes. A short while after we saw him peek around the bushes. "Where are my partners? I thought they wanted to run," he said, laughing as he returned to the starting point. He had run to the bushes to make everyone laugh.

The elders of long ago loved to dance. Nothing ever distracted [them from] their dances. They did not use anything to have fun at their dances. They enjoyed dancing so much that at times they danced until morning. They really enjoyed dancing and the never used anything to distract from their fun. That is how things were long ago. I used to see my grandfather dance. I saw only one of my grandfathers in good health. I also knew the other grandfather but I don't remember seeing him in good health. He had a bad leg. This was my father's father. The one who was in good health was my mother's father. He was in good health when my grandfather died. He had dressed up that morning to go and get firewood with his sled. He just fell over after saying his prayers. Just as he was about to leave that morning, his wife told him that he not yet said his prayers. He came back in and said his prayers. When he finished his prayers, he just fell over and died. He would have died alone somewhere had he not stayed to do something he forgot. That is one-thing the elders of long ago never forgot to do, [that is] to say prayers in the morning and again at bedtime. The same goes for Sundays. We used to say prayers three times a day on Sundays. That is what we used to do even when we were in the bush. People find this hard to believe but that is how it was with my father. He was involved in the church for a long time. Almost up to the day he died. He must have retired from the church only three years before he died.

I tell my children not to use a gun on a Sunday. I tell them that they are not short of anything to eat. When they were living with me when we were in the bush, I used to tell them that even though we were away from the community, we were not to use a gun on a Sunday. I don't know what they do when they are in the bush when I am not with them. I don't know what they do. It seems today that everyone wants to do what everyone else is doing. They don't think of the things they were taught. I tell them that if they follow my teachings, they will think they hear me talking to them even after I am gone. I tell them only by listening will they find strength when someone they know dies. I tell them that many times I was also told this. I tell them that if they don't follow what they are told, they will have nothing to give them strength when they need it. I tell them that this is what I was told many times. That is why sometimes I think about the things I was told in my past. I tell them I now see the things that I was told about.

Dogs were very important in the old days and they were well looked after. We used to feed our dogs three times a day, just small bits of left over food such as snacks during the day. At nighttime, however, they were fed freshly made porridge. People used to say this would help keep them warm during the night. I looked after my dogs the same way when we had our own sled dogs. I followed the way things were done. The dogs were just like owning a powered motor, so long as they were well fed.

For example, when I mentioned the time my sister and I returned to the community, we each had our own dog sled. She had four dogs pulling her sled and I had three. Those dogs were big. When we were near a grove of trees at the point where the trail goes up the riverbank, we saw a vehicle pass by at a distance. [It was] Anderson's vehicle. He was known as Anderson. My sister's dog took a leap and went past me even though I was in the lead. Just hang on, hang on, she yelled as she swept by me. She called to me not to let go of my sled. So, I just sat on my sled and hung on as they kept running. They were fast. It was not long before we were at the place were we saw the vehicle go by. That is how important dogs were. They were well taken care of. The dogs were looked after much like how you looked after your outboard motor when you wanted to use it. It takes as much work to use a motorized vehicle, looking for fuel when you want to use it. But, at least with dogs, one did not have to look far for something to feed them. Teepees were made for them in the winter to shield them from the wind. That is what we did with our dogs.

Today, there are many worries in life, to many things get children in trouble. That is why I don't sleep well at night worrying about my grandchildren, wondering if they're still alive. When they were small, all I had to do was call my children to ask if their children were indoors for the night. They used to tell me that they were all in bed. Knowing this, then I would sleep. Today, children are not like that. Children today are very strong willed. They don't want to listen. They just do what they want. They are not like the children of a few years back who listened to their grandmothers. Many times my grandmother also talked to me and I always did what she told me even though at times I was mischievous. I did not do anything wrong, I was just being a kid but I watched myself not to overdo things when playing.

Children's problems today stem from things, such as drinking, drugs, and gas sniffing. These things are easily accessible in the community today. Even though they are told about these things, they do not listen. I don't know what the result would be if those users were all brought together for counseling at least for one month: to be counseled by people who are knowledgeable about those things, and to explain to the

children the dangers when using these things. It is not enough to speak to just one child. It is very easy for a child to follow the actions of friends. That is what I think should be done when I think about children. I know how children are because I have many grandchildren. They come to me to talk about their children and the problems they're having. That is how I know about them.

I raised at least four of my own grandchildren. This boy, I took care of since he was a baby. He is now twenty-seven years old. [It is] the same with the girl who just left a while ago and her older sister as well. Those are the children I looked after. I let the older sister go back to her parents when she was fifteen years old. So many times, I regret doing that. I thought she would behave if her father took care of her. I was wrong. I think she would have been better off had she stayed with me. I talked to her about the consequences if one does not do what they are told and where they will end up if they don't listen. I told them that they really have to be careful in everything they do. They say life is hard. This I heard from people who have now passed on. When they talked about things in life that is where I got my understanding of life.

One time when we left for the bush, we took along with us an elderly woman named Laura. She was to be my nurse. Our camp was way inland of *Cheekenak* River where Simon's spring camp used to be. I stayed at this place after I got married. I stayed there for a while. I went back to Pike River, to the bay, after I had my children. We went back to Pike River when my children were old enough to trap. Their grandfather gave them a trap line in this area. That is why we lived there. The Friday family was too large and there was not enough land for everyone. So, we remained at Pike River. I did not have any problems when I had my baby while we were in the bush. It was not until he was a year old that I lost him. We were still in the bush and he had measles. That is how he died.

We never experienced starvation. We did not run out of food items. We were careful with our store bought food supplies so we would not run out when we were away from the community. We were really careful with them so we would always have something to feed our children. We also ate wild meat. We were seldom short of wild meat. When we left for the bush in the fall, we would take a bag of flour, sugar, lard, and tea. These supplies would last until we returned at Christmas time. We returned to town for Christmas church services. We would leave again after New Years and return once more in the spring at Easter. That is what was done when we lived in the bush.

About medicine from the bush, I can talk about only some of them. I can talk about only what I heard about them. For instance, cedar, what you call that in English, is brownish green and the needles are flat. These are called *masakeesk* (cedar). The needles ooze a sticky green stuff. This sticky stuff is mixed with lard. This substance was called an oily chest rub. It was smeared on the chest when someone had a cold. Something like the way we use Vicks chest rub. This was used when a child had a cold. Children seldom had a cold while we were in the bush. I only knew of them to have a cold when we were in the community. Adults would drink a liquid made of cedar.

One time in the spring, when everything was starting thaw out, we were out in the bush when my older brother got seriously ill. We had gone up river for something and when we returned I brought back some cedar. I boiled what I brought. After the cedar boiled for a while, I wrapped it in a piece of material and used it as a compress on my brother's bad knee. Sure enough, it wasn't long before he was much better. This does help.

There is another thing we get from the pine tree that was used especially if someone cuts himself with an axe. It's the gum from the pine tree. The pine tree oozes with this thick sticky stuff called gum. This we would collect by scraping it off and putting it in small pans or little round tin cans. When someone cuts himself, this sticky gum would be smeared on the wound. It did not take long for the wound to heal. The plant called Labrador tea or forever greens was also used the same way.

One time, when we were out in the bush, my sister's son had a case of impetigo. She fried some of these plants (forever greens) in oil. When it cooled, she rubbed her son with the oil all over his infections. It wasn't long before his skin cleared. To my belief, the most important medicine was taken from the spleen of a skunk. Once there was a child who had a hard time breathing. He took great gulps of air in trying to breathe. We all thought he was going to die. My mother used to keep this liquid from the skunk spleen in a jar. She put a few drops in water, stirred it, and then soaked a cloth in it that she put on the child's chest. After a few days, the child got better. He is still in good health today. Sometimes he is heard talking on the Wawatay radio, Eli Solomon is whom I am talking about.

I did the same thing one time when we were at our spring camp at Pike River. There were three tents in all and everyone in those tents was sick. My oldest son and me were the only ones who were not sick. I worked constantly to keep the fires going in all three tents. One day, I was tending to my sick husband when I was told about a skunk I had

left at my trap. I told him I would go and get the skunk. I told him, Baptiste our son, would look after the fires. When I left, I told my son to look after the sick people and make sure that the fire didn't go out. Then I left to go and get the skunk for medicine. When I reached my trap, the skunk carcass was still hanging where I left it. So, I took it home. Everyone was so sick that they could hardly move. They had what we call the flu. I worked on the skunk. I kept flipping it over on the stove thawing it out. I squeezed out the liquid from the spleen and put it in three small bottles. I hung a bottle in the doorway of each tent. I guess the smell filled up their tents because it was not too long before they started sitting up. This is very important. I personally consider this the most important of all medicines. I used it myself many times. Many times, I saw my mother for dizziness. She would put a drop on a piece of bread and eat that bread. Many times, I saw her do this.

In the fall, we would collect the berries known as cranberries. They would be kept in a pail and left outside covered so the sun wouldn't shine on it. The pail was left outside so it would remain cool. We used to make jam from these berries. They must have helped in some way because people used to say when they ate the jam it would sooth their sore throats. There are other berries known as red berries. These berries have the [same] effect. These berries grow in the swamp where the tamarack grows. Jam was also made from these berries. The berries we collected used to last the year. We would make jam whenever we craved for something sweet.

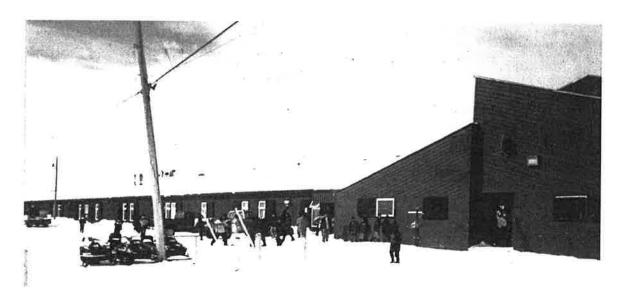
I heard something about people in the old days making home brew. I heard people doing this long ago. They would use it only to celebrate the New Year. I used to hear about their drinking the stuff they made. They used to call this pine needle drink. They did not over do it when they drank this stuff. They used to say they drank just enough to make them feel good. My father used to say that he never knew of them to be drunk or act drunk.

One time, he was talking about an uncle who had a hilarious incident. They used to say that the uncle almost overdid his merriment. He must have drunk that home brew on New Year's Eve. I guess the brew did not agree with his stomach. He says the uncle had a bad case of diarrhea. He said he really made a mess on himself and it was during a dance. He asked his wife to take him home because he made a mess in his pants. His wife told him to take himself home and that what happened was his own fault. He then left the building. They say they never saw him walk home as fast as he did that night. That is the one time I heard my father talk about something that happened.

About the other things, such as conjuring or shamanism, I never heard my father talk about them or tell stories about it. At bedtime whenever we asked him to tell us a story about it he would refuse. He would tell us that he didn't want to talk about things like that. He would tell us that he didn't want to lie. That is how he would answer whenever we asked him to talk about conjuring. He would tell us that people who told stories about this were telling lies. I wonder about the people we hear talking about this, especially Silas, when he keeps saying that his grandmother told him about the things he is talking about. My father never mentioned anything and Silas's grandmother is my father's sister.

As for language, it seems to be getting weak since English teaching came along. English is the only language that children today seem to want to use. I would be completely lost where my grandchildren are concerned if not for my little knowledge of English. I had to laugh one time when my granddaughter, Leo's daughter, came to see me. She came with two other children, my great grandchildren. They started telling stories. I had a good laugh with them. Then they asked me why I never go to the spring camp with them. How can I go with you with my bad leg, I asked them. My leg is bad and that is why I cannot go along, I told them. Why don't you go on the helicopter she asked? People go on the helicopter to go places, she told me. This little granddaughter of mine is really good with English. That is the only language she uses when she talks. I speak in Cree to them. Very seldom do I use English when I talk to them. They understand when I talk to them in Cree. I think their using English is just a habit because that is the language used when teaching them. It's the same with the youngest that called here a while ago. She speaks in English. She has just started school. That is the one big change in the Native language. Children today do not speak proper Cree.

There are teachers who teach them Cree during school. But the Cree lessons are too short. The time is too short to teach something. There is not enough time. The teacher is not given time to teach the language. I used to have only twenty minutes, sometimes fifteen minutes, when I was teaching the Cree language. What can you teach when at times it seems you're just peeking into a classroom? Another problem is the language teachers themselves, they don't teach right. Today, language teachers have their own classroom in the school. The students come to them. When I was teaching, I had to go to their classrooms. We were always walking around. Another thing is that Native language teachers today are well paid. When I was teaching we were paid \$200.00 every two weeks. I used to think I was earning a lot of money. And now, they are not happy even though they are paid well. I don't know why they want so much money for something they do.



St. Andrew's School

I also taught my grandchildren. I took them with me when I did things. I used to take the older brother, my son's son, when I went and got my firewood with my dogsled. This was when they were small, when they were about ten years old. This one time, we were out cutting down trees for firewood and I was carrying a rather heavy log down the riverbank. It kept pulling me along because of the weight. I turned around to look at him and told him it would be different story had I been younger. He just looked at me with a smile. When his father came over later that day, he said his son told him what I said about being younger. He told me that he told his son that I was speaking the truth. He told him that many times I alone went and cut down trees for firewood. It's true what he said. I was the one who used to get firewood. There was never anyone to help me. [It was] the same with chopping firewood outside the house; I used to chop my own wood.

There are many stories that I could tell you. I just skimmed over a few things. I skipped quite a few details in my stories. I did this because we do not have much time.

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Levius Reuben



(recorded November 16, 2004)

Community or reserve life in the past

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

Biographic Information

Name: Levius Reuben

Date of Birth: September 10, 1921 Place of Birth: Kashechewan (Old Post) Present Address: Kashechewan, Ontario Name of Spouse: Caroline Sheshawabick

Number of Children: 9 Grandchildren: 50 Great-grandchildren: 30 Number of Years Married: 30

Education: None

I was born in this town in 1931. I was also baptized in this town. I think I remember things from 1938. This is when I was old enough to know things. Life was hard because there was not much to use. I do not know how we survived when we were children. My mother passed away around 1935. There was no welfare and there was no work. I do not know how my father provided for us because there was no work and we always lived in the bush. People were poor long ago.

As I got older, I went to school for a while — not even one year. After my mother passed away, we moved to Albany when people moved from the old post. We lived there and I went to the school, which burned down, for about eight months. The following summer my father moved to Moose Factory in search of work. Life got a bit easier living in Moosonee because there was work. After that, we moved to [a place] where there was a sawmill. I worked at this sawmill. This was around 1940 and the owner of the sawmill was a man named Peter Jackson. This man went broke and another company bought the sawmill. This company was around for a while, but soon after the sawmill shut down. Some time after it was shut down it burned down. This is when I went to work at the railway. I worked at the railway for a long time.

After that, I worked in the bush, where they were logging. I ended up in Timmins logging at a sawmill. When I finished here, I went to work at the railway as an extra gang. When the work at the railway was finished, I went to work at the dam. This dam at the railway tracks was called Otter Rapids. I don't really remember the things I did, the work I did. When the work was completed at the dam, I left Moose River and came to Moosonee. I found work in Moosonee when they were building the Air Base. I worked there for two years after the completion of the Air Base.

In 1967, when this town was declared a reservation, I returned here to Kashachewan. I returned after working at different places. When I got here I found work with housing construction. Around this time, the school was built. I worked there also. When the construction of the school was finished, I retired. Now, I don't work because I am getting old. That is the only reason I stopped working. I cannot do much because at times I don't feel well because of old age. That is why I cannot do anything today.

Since the time I returned, life has greatly changed. Things seem to get better since social assistance. Even though things seem to be better, there are things that will get in the way. Since the availability of money, people buy liquor and other things. The young people smoke and use drugs. Things are different from the way they used to be. I never knew of the things that are happening today. I saw alcohol. I used to drink but I quit a long time ago because the doctor told me it was no good for me. I also quit smoking. I don't do the things I used to do. Everything is different now. Everything that is destroying our life comes from the white man. That is why things are going wrong today. The white man brought everything that is destroying our young people in the way they act and even in the loss of their lives. It destroys in everyway.

I do not want to talk too much about life at this time. I don't want to talk just about anything. I would like to talk about how it with me. It would be all right to talk about how life was like long ago and about the misfortunes of people. I do not want to talk about the other things. I will talk only about things that happened to me like not remembering ever buying things to eat. I don't remember ever doing this up to the time I left this town in 1939.

I don't know how we survived before leaving here. That is all I know of what I said from the time I was young up to this day. That is all I remember from the time I left to the time I returned in 1967. At that time, everything was different. But there are other things that destroy even though there is money now. That is why things are not going well today. That is all I will say about that. There is nothing else to say. That is all I can say.

I used to trap. I spent maybe five years in the bush after I got married. We were about seventy miles upriver from here. There was very little pay for animal pelts. However, this little pay did help. My wife's grandfather passed away soon after. We stayed in the bush for only one year after he died. I stayed in the bush with his son, David, for one year after he died. After that, I stopped because it was too far considering we had children by then. The other reason was that there was no house in the bush. We lived in

a tent. We used to move from place to place which is why we did not have a house. I did not like doing this because of my children. I used to keep the fire going all night because it was cold. That is why I stopped trapping. That is what happened with my trapping.

I used to like eating beaver. I seldom threw away beaver meat. We ate almost everything when we lived in the bush. We ate moose meat and caribou meat, but my favourite was roasted beaver meat. We used to build a big fire outside and string the beaver over the fire to slow roast it. The beaver was our main diet.

We used to set our traps early after break up. There used to be an abundance of beavers in those days just like the times when there were many muskrats. We used to get from fifty up to hundred beavers in a day when we shot at them. After the old man died, I used to go trapping with my brother. Beavers weren't around that long. They seemed to disappear as the water got warmer. There were many beavers when I was there in 1950, 1951, 1952, and up to 1954.

The first known existence of moose was in 1940. There were many of them in the old days. When I was living at Moose River, we used to shoot a moose from the other side of the bridge. When the sawmill became busy, moose seemed to move away from that area. I worked at Moose River Crossing for about fifteen years from 1940 to 1958. There was lots of work. There was logging and the sawmill. In the springtime, we used to hunt geese out in the muskeg for about two weeks. There were many of them flying through. That is how long we hunted geese when we were at Moose River Crossing.

My wife's father taught me everything I know. He taught me how to trap, how to hunt moose, how to hunt caribou, and how to make and lace snowshoes. The old man taught me everything. His health wasn't good and that was how he died.

I learned how to make the medicine I used from the old man. He taught me how to make medicine to drink. After the old man died, I got sick and went to see a doctor. I told him about bush medicine and he told me if I wanted them to work, I would have to use them at the same time. That is what I did. I used both of them at the same time.

There are certain types of trees that are used for medicine. He used to scrape the bark from this tree and boil the bark. The water was gummy. He would get rid of this gummy stuff. He would keep changing the water until it was clear. This clear water ... was what he used to drink for any ailment he had. It was good for everything.

It is also good for treating a toothache as well as for a cold. He also used Labrador tea and a certain kind of shrub. The shrub is somewhat pinkish in color with berries on it. It's not high bush cranberries, not choke berries, the berries were different. From this shrub, he used to make medicine.

[He also used] bark. He used to dry the wood first and once it was dry, he would scrape it. From this he would make medicine for someone who caught a chill or any other ailment. They say this is good but I cannot remember the name. I did not know that I would be asked to talk about these [things]. Also, I was not that old when the old man was teaching me these things and the things that the people used to do long ago.

We stayed at the old man's trapping area on an adjacent piece of land that [belonged to] the old man's brother and his family. Even though they were close by, we did not live with them. I never heard them talk about what people did long ago. I never heard them talk about medicine. When beavers became abundant, people were asked where they could trap. Once they choose an area, they had to pay a license. This would be their trap line and no one else could trap there. That is how it was long ago. I never heard the old man talk about medicine made from animal parts.

We used all kinds of berries: raspberries, high bush berries, and choke berries. There were different kinds and there were lots of them where we used to stay. The most abundant ones were the red berries that grew in the muskeg. These we would use to make jam. That is how it was.

Then the time came for me to stop trapping because I now had children. I went to work at a logging camp after leaving my wife in town. I did not take her with me. When the sawmill shut down, I decided to look for another job. They used to run the mills during the winter and during the time they shut down, that was when I used to work at logging camps.

As for starvation, it did happen but I was just a child when this happened. At that time, there were two companies and there were not that many people. There must have been just four families. It was spring and we did not have anything. My uncle had a rifle that he was going to pawn for the supplies we needed.

When they returned they would pool their money to get it back. In the spring, my uncle invited me to go with him to the store. As we entered the store, I noticed a man standing there. This man's name was William. The translator and the Opposition store

manager were also there. Everyone else in the community had left. Being young, I went outside to play. Soon the man, William, came out from the store. When I went back in my uncle was buying the supplies we needed.

When we got home, my uncle told my father about the man we saw at the store. How the man left with his children and he that didn't have anything. My uncle told him how he heard the man ask the manager to give him credit for supplies. He said the manager replied, "Go outside, go get your wife and your children and take a walk by the river bank. There are lots of dog feces down there. All of you, eat your fill, and then when you're full, leave."

My father was not happy when he heard about this man leaving with his family with no supplies. That summer, two days after we returned, a man was seen walking downriver towards the community shooting his gun as he walked. This was sign that something was wrong. Some people went to meet him. This was the man who had left with no supplies. His family had starved. I knew his three sons.

A hearing was set up for this incident with the doctor from Moose Factory presiding. There was no Indian Agent to look after the people in those days. It was the doctor who looked after the people. After this incident, \$50.00 was given to each family every fall for supplies. At this hearing, the man who said his family had starved was branded a liar. The chief signed a letter stating that the family died from illness. The church graveyard over there had a fence around it. At the gate was a sign for everyone to read which said, "William the liar." People were not happy with this ending where the doctor said they died from illness and not from starvation. I saw this and that is what happened.

Today, everything is well because people get assistance. There is talk about someone who came to meet with our grandfathers. This man told our grandfathers that land and supplies would be given to them if they signed an agreement. They signed and this is why these things started happening. My father said he was fifteen and he was there at the signing of this agreement. He thinks this man's family would still be alive had they not signed the agreement. Today, everything is good for everyone. Still, there are things that make wrong things happen.

People were religious. There were no houses in the old days except for the store manager's house. The people used to live in tents when we gathered in the community. In the evenings, people could be heard saying their evening prayers. After sunset, in

those days, no one was seen outside. There were not that many people in those days. I don't know how they came to be so many of them today. When I left here to go and work elsewhere I knew everyone. When I returned 1967, I was shocked at the number of people. Most of them I did not know. That is how it was.

I was also taught how to predict the weather. Look at the sun, it shows that good weather is coming. See the way it is up there that is what the old man taught me. He also taught me how to use the stars for directions when traveling at night. But there is one thing I never knew. When I used to travel to a different area while trapping, I used to get lost. I could never tell where I was. One day, the old man's son and I were out walking and I told him about this. He told me to look at the trees. He told me to look which way they were bowing. He said they always bowed towards the east. From there, you know the directions. Some people say plants do the same thing, bowing towards the east. Some people even use the grass for directions. When you know what to look for, you will not get lost.

Language, too, has changed a lot. Young people today speak English. It is the same with my grandchildren. I have a grandchild who is only a baby and he seems to understand when he hears English. When I ask my grandchildren something in Cree, they do not understand. They just laugh. When I ask them if they understand, they say no. They don't understand Cree because they are hearing another language as they grow up. This happened to when I left in 1939. I knew my months in Cree, but living in Moosonee, I never heard the name of the months in Cree, only in English. Over time, I forgot the names and when I returned I had to learn them again. [It is] the same with the culture, the young people are forgetting it.

It is possible not to loose the language if we did something about it. Look at me; I never went to school as a child. No one taught me how to read and write. I taught myself. But I never learned how to read and write in English. I have a child who wants to learn how to read and write in Cree. He approached me to teach him. I told him that he did not need me. I gave a Cree hymn book where there is a page on syllabics. I showed him the sounds and how to make words with them. I told him to teach himself. Not too long ago, he came in here with a letter written in Cree. He asked me to read it. I read it out loud so he could hear me. It was good. It was well done. I asked him who wrote it and he said he did. I told him that is what I meant of him not needing me to teach him. I told him now he knew how to read and write.

I have two grandchildren who are in high school. I talk to them every day about life and culture and how they should not loose their language. I tell them to learn to read and write in Cree like their uncle did. I tell them how easy it is to learn. There are people in the school who teach Cree to the young children. But the children can't seem to learn. The reason is that the child is too young. They should wait until he is a little older and he should be given what he needs to learn and teach himself. If this were done then the language would not be lost. What they are being taught is also good. It's good that they speak English so they can converse with the white man in his language.



Hishkoonikun Education Authority

That is what I think when I hear how we should keep the language. The language we have was given to us to use. We should use it. Now I will tell you something. The Prime Minister, Mr. Mulroney, talked about the use of just one language in Canada: English. This was not possible because people in Canada already had their languages. I don't know where the problem is in regards to our language. But I can say that it is good that we all have our own languages here in Canada.

As for storage and preservation of food in the old days, people used to dry meat. The same was done with beaver meat. Beaver or moose meat would be layered and put by the fire to dry. The old man who taught me used another method. He would still layer the meat but instead of drying it completely he would just smoke it a little and then store it. He would make a shallow hole in the ground, and then lay down a flooring of

moss. On this moss he layered the meat, then covered it with moss, and followed this with another layer of meat and moss. He would do this until all the meat was put away. He would leave holes here and there for air to go through. Then he would cover [everything] up with moss and put heavy sticks on top so the animals wouldn't get to it. When it was time to return to the community, he would return for it. He would give this to the people in the community. He never sold the food. That is what he did and that is what he taught me.

When we lived in the bush, he never stayed in one place. We moved from place to place. He used a tent when traveling. When it was time to make camp in the evening, he would clear the area where he was to pitch up his tent. In this clearing, he would put a flooring of fresh boughs. He then would set up the tent. In the wintertime, he would dig a shallow area on the ground the size of the tent, put a flooring of fresh boughs, and set up the tent. If he were to stay a while, he would cover the tent with snow. This kept the dwelling warm. He would stay here until it was time to move on. That is what the old man used to do.

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Esther Wesley



(recorded November 16, 2004)

Community or reserve life in the past

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

Biographic Information

Name: Esther Winnifred Wesley Place of Birth: Kashechewan (Old Post)

Present Address: Kashechewan, Ontario Former Name: Steven (Stephen)

Name of Spouse: James Wesely (deceased)

Number of Children: 8 Grandchildren: 10 Great-grandchildren: 13 Number of Years Married: 30

Education: None

I have no idea what I will say about myself. I can start from the time we used to spend freeze up away from the community. I used to go with my husband and set traps. It was not too long before our children came with us. One time when we were out trapping, we met up with other people and we spent time with them. I used to go with my grandson, Silas. When we were ready to move to our spring camp I had my own sled with one dog. When it was time to go, my dog would not get up. Even though I hit him, he refused to get up. So, I hit him on the head. Then I left pulling my sled. The others had already gone ahead. I soon caught up to them where they had made a fire to rest. My husband came to meet me. "Where's your dog?" he asked. "I hit him on the head because he refused to get up," I told him. My children laughed when they heard what I did to my dog that angered me. When we settled where we were going to spend the spring thaw, I did not go when they went to set traps. It was too tiring for me to keep up with them especially when pulling a sled. I did not want to go with them.

All we used to do was move from place to place. My niece and nephew used to travel with us. My niece's name was Marie Rose Wesley and I used to travel with her. She used to laugh at me for killing my dog. "You sure showed him," she used to laugh. We had settled for the spring thaw near Ghost River. We used to hear strange noises when we were there. Marie Rose used to tell me that she was scared. I told her not to listen for noises. I used to tell her that it was all imagined. We soon found out that the noises we heard were a premonition of someone [about] to die. Our premonition was met when they returned from the community with the news of someone's death.

I used to set traps when I went with my husband. I use to get many martens this way. I also used to set traps and snares for beavers. I used to do this at a beaver house. I also used to help my husband set beaver traps. I had a good laugh one time when we were setting a beaver trap. Suddenly, a beaver jumped out of his house and my husband

grabbed the beaver and tried to pull him all the way out. At the same time, my husband was hitting the beaver that was trying to bite him. "Gosh, does he ever have sharp teeth," he said.

I also used things that are found in the bush to make medicine like shrubs. I also used to boil Labrador tea for drinking when I had a cold. We used shrubs as gauze when we cut our fingers. I used cattails on my husband's wound when he accidentally shot his hand. I used the cattails to stop the bleeding. I put them on the open wound and wrapped his hand. Then we left for the community. I used the same thing when one of my children accidentally chopped off his brother's finger with an axe. We again had to return to the community with the child. We did not spend a long time at the community before returning to the bush. That is what happened with me.

We used dogs to pull our sleds when travelling. I used to have two dogs for my sled. We used to travel far. We would travel all day and make camp only at sunset. I don't know the names of all the places we camped. I don't know the name of the place of our last campsite. The island where we started from was called Owl Island. The place where used to stay was called the place of the red shrubs. I don't remember the names of the creeks where we used to stay even though my husband used to name them. After we made camp, I used to set my rabbit snares because we did not have anything readily available to eat.

I used to make a blanket from rabbit fur for the children. I used to make long blankets. They used to go all the way down to their legs. Rabbits used to be numerous. After we checked our traps, I used to hang rabbit furs on a pole. I used to make a blanket from about a hundred furs. I also used to make pants from them. These pants used to be very warm when worn while travelling on very cold days. I also used to make hats from rabbit fur. My mother used to teach me how to make these things. [It was] the same with snowshoes. I used to lace snowshoes. I was also taught how to make babish for the lacing. I made practically everything. I also taught myself how to make things.

We used to go far in our canoes. We did not have an outboard motor. There were no motors then. We just used paddles to travel upriver. My husband used to pull the canoe upstream by a rope. He would tie a rope to the canoe and pull it along from the shore. I used to steer the canoe as he pulled it along. Looking at me you would think I was propelled along by a motor. He would do this when the current was too strong for paddling. When camping during travelling we would just pitch up a tent. Once we reached [a place] where we would stay for a while we would set up a teepee made from logs and we would cover it with mud. This made it a very warm place to live.

When snowshoes were made, I would lace them. I would make the mesh like footing and lace up the part where you put your foot to hold on to them. I used to prepare the moosehide from which I would make the babish for the lacing. That is what I used to do. I used to do everything. I also used to tan moosehides. There used to be many of them hanging outside so they would freeze dry. That is what I used to do. There were times also when I was left alone with the children at the camp when my husband went to the community. He would be gone a week whenever he went to the community. One time when I was left alone at the camp, a moose came by. There was nothing I could do. The children were afraid of the moose so I started banging to scare it away. It did run away. My husband laughed when I told him what I did.

I used to tan many moosehides. This past spring I tanned a moosehide someone gave me. I used to shave the hair off. Very seldom am I given a moosehide now. When we used to stay at our spring camp, the others could not shave the hair off their animal hides so I used to shave caribou hides for them. I also did beadwork. I used to make beaded mitts, which I would sell. This is what I did.

When we lived in the bush, I used to make jerky. I used to smoke moose meat. I also used to make pemmican from jerky. I used to store it in a bag for use later. That is what I used to do. I never saw starvation. We had lots of food. We use to build a platform where we would keep our food so the dogs wouldn't get to it. We gave food to many people who came by. That is what we used to do. We always gave food to people for free. We never were paid for it. Today, no one can give me moose meat for free. My social security check is a good amount but almost all of it is spend on food for the children I am looking after. It costs a lot to look after children.

My mother-in-law Babi was a mid-wife and was there when I gave birth. She used to come with us when we went to the bush. Her husband was Moses Wesley. She delivered my oldest daughter. Someone else delivered my grandchild when we were in the bush.

I also used to set my gill nets when we were in the bush. I used to get different kinds of fish like pike, white suckers, and red suckers. Those were the three kinds [of fish we caught]. We also used to smoke them. I used to string them and then smoke them. They used to be delicious when prepared this way. We also used to get sturgeon.

Trout, too, used to be big. They were almost the same size as sturgeon. The children used to love eating this fish.

I also used to cut firewood. I used to cut a big pile. I used to carry wood over my shoulder to bring it home. One time I accidentally cut my foot with my axe. I used to get firewood all the time. It's only this year that I haven't gone out to cut firewood. I can not do it anymore. Firewood is now just given to me.

Community or reserve life today

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

Today, my life is difficult because I have to look after children that are apprehended by these people. I have three of them. I get no assistance looking after them. I alone feed those children. I do let them know that I do not have enough to feed these children. That is how people treat me. They don't treat me well. There are times when I don't have enough to feed them. Douglas is supposed to be back soon. These are his children that were apprehended. Sometimes I find it very hard cutting wood and cooking for them. Sometimes I am very tired. I have just enough to buy food from my monthly cheque. But I do not have enough for my bills. There are times when I am almost in the hole. I find it very strange that these people apprehend children. They seem to do this a lot. It has now been three years since these children were apprehended from their home.

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 will become of this town. There are very strange things happening in this town. There is always drinking. I think these things stem from smoking drugs. It was because of his drinking that my son's children were apprehended. He does not listen even though I tell him that he should be listening to me. I tell him that he will never get his children back if he doesn't listen. Sometimes I am so very tired from looking after them.

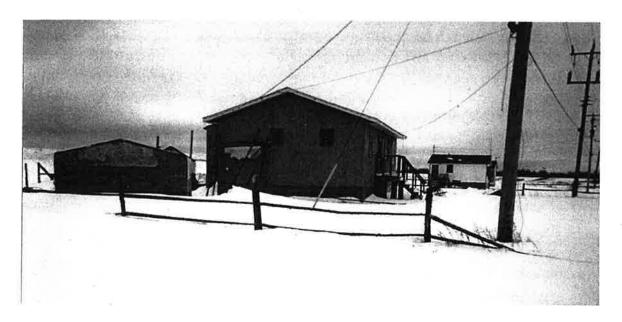
Now, about the Native language, I think it is disappearing. English is spoken most of the time. These children do not really want to be taught the Cree language. They tell me I am lying when I tell them how to say something in Cree. They don't believe me when I tell them things. I did not learn English. I was never allowed to go to school.

... Wild food is my favourite. I am not too keen on eating white man's food. I prefer eating moose meat and geese. Sometimes I am given moose meat. [It is] the same with berries. I used to pick berries: low bush cranberries. I also used to pick goose berries and high bush cranberries. I still have some high bush cranberries and low bush cranberries. I eat those when I want something sweet. I cannot eat sweets because I

have high blood pressure. There used to be lots of low bush cranberries at Pike River. Also, there were some up river where we had our spring camp.

When we were in the bush, we used to return to the community around Christmas. We returned to come and celebrate the season. There used to be dancing. Then after New Year, we would return to the bush. I used to love dancing. Even today, I dance on New Year's Day. I dance into the house where I deliver my Christmas presents. People laugh at me. They tell me it's time for me to dance again.

It has now been almost ten years since I have been living here in the community for good. We returned from the bush because the children were old enough to go to school. We have never returned. That is all I will say for now.



Kashechewan House and Shed

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William Reuben



(recorded November 16, 2004)

Community or reserve life in the past

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

Biographic Information

Name: William Walter Reuben Date of Birth: September 18, 1916

Place of Birth: Old Post

Present Address: Kashechewan, Ontario

Name of Spouse: Ellen Blueboy

Number of Children: 5 Grandchildren: 14 Great-grandchildren: 1 Number of Years Married: 42

Education: 8 Years

This is how my growing up years were while my father brought me up. He used live upriver from here, further upriver at a place called *Keeshaymatawak* (Albany Forks). He used to spend all winter there. He used to return only in late spring. One time when he was returning to his hunting camp, I was born on the way, at a place called *Mecheshkaneshish*. There is a peninsula before *Mecheshkaneshish* and this is where I was born. My father again spent the whole year there with his brother. For the whole year, I was not baptized. I assume I was baptized that following summer at the time my father returned from spending the winter up river. I was just a child that summer.

My teen-age years were spent here in this community called Kashechewan. This is where I grew up. My grandfather used to say that this is our land and this land is where the community is today. Of course, he would say that because this is where he grew up. This was his land from way back. This is where I grew up in the land we call ours, this area we all share.

This is where I became a young man and where I had to hunt for myself because I was now at the age where I had to. This is where we used to stay during the winter, at the place where we are now. A little house was built where we used to stay during the winter. When I was around fifteen years old, in the summertime, we used to go to Moosonee by canoe. We would do this just to go somewhere by canoe. Sometimes there would be six canoes in all. I used to spend the whole summer in Moosonee, for no special reason, with this one man. This is what I did in my younger years.

Then as I got much older, during one of our summer group boat excursions to Moosonee, we heard that there was employment to be had up river where the big bridge (Moose River Crossing) was. There is a big bridge (Moose river Crossing) that spans the Moosonee River. It is about fifty miles away. My stepfather, David Martin,

mentioned going up there by canoe. Because I was of the age to work, we decided to go with him and see if we could find work. There was talk about construction of a sawmill. The boss of the mill was Peter Johnson. So, we left for the mill. It took two nights before we reached the big bridge (Moose River Crossing). This is where I got a job. I did many odd jobs during the construction of the sawmill. It was a big sawmill. There must have been twelve men working inside the mill. That is where I worked after I left this place where I grew up. We didn't want to leave this new place because this is where we could work. So we stayed. I worked at this saw mill for eighteen years. I never thought of quitting.

At the place I am talking about, we worked ten hours a day. We were making twenty cents an hour. In all, everyone who worked there, the French and the English, earned two dollars a day, two dollars a day. This was in 1943 and at that time, everything was inexpensive. I was there the summer of 1943 until the summer of 1950. In 1967, I had to stop working there due to the closure of the sawmill. They had to shut down the sawmill because of a shortage of trees. Because of this, the bosses decided to shut down the sawmill. But there was another sawmill where I was wanted to work. This was another company. The previous company [owner], Peter Johnson, went broke and sold his sawmill. This other company had two other sawmills. There was one close to the town they call Cochrane. This sawmill was called McHennow. This company had another sawmill in Timmins. This one was known as the Company Limited. There were three companies.

When the sawmill at the bridge (Moose River Crossing) shut down, I was called to work at this other mill. After a while, I had a really nice job. The reason why I got such a nice job was because I did everything that I was told. I did not bother with anything. That is why my job was nice. Even though my job was nice, there was some danger involved. The equipment known as a sled in Cree is what I stood on. I made the different sized lumber. I did all kinds of jobs. Sometimes the trees were really big. At this job I got really good at measurement. These boards were really good. I worked at this place for seven years. Six of those seven years, I worked on top of this so-called sled. This sled just kept swinging me back and forth as I cut the logs to make boards. The person cutting boards does not do anything. He just stands there. This sled moved us about as we made the boards. For seven years, I worked at this job.

When I went to the other job, to the other company that wanted me to join them, I did the same kind of work. The sled that swings back and forth that I was talking about had no chains attached to it. The equipment was much better at this place compared to the ones at the bridge (Moose River Crossing) where I worked before. There were seventeen men working inside the sawmill. There were many things run by machinery. No one had to lift anything. Conveyors moved along many logs at one time. The outer boards cut off from the logs were called slabs. This is where I worked. This place was dangerous.

One of the mill workers told me of the time that one of the sleds came loose. The pin or clasp came out. This pin or clasp holding the sled was a thick piece of metal. This metal was called steel. The sled was controlled by this steel. The conveyor moved fast. This one time this worker told me about a break down of this sled. The sawmill was above ground level. It must have been about eight feet high. All the mechanical parts were below us, e.g., all the belts that move the parts. Some of these belts were wide and some were narrow. All of [these belts] made the conveyors move.

He told me that one time the sled broke down. It jumped the tracks and shot out the building. He said that nobody was hurt. So, I, too, had the same thing happen to me at the big bridge. I told him how the wire snapped. I told him [what happened] when we were pulling the sled back: the wires snapped. I told him that the sled shot out of the building. I told him that a wall of the building blocked it and that it did not fall all the way. I told him that we did not have a hard time taking it back inside. That is how it was with me when I was young.

After a while, this sawmill was shut down. But in this case, it was my boss's own fault. He was not an English man from here; he was one of those English people who came from far away. They used to be nicknamed the frogs. The were known as the Newfoundlanders. Our boss started drinking. One time we heard about him walking around with only one shoe on. He had lost one shoe. His drinking was his downfall, this man, our boss. His brother-in-law took over. His brother had married an English woman. Everything went wrong after that. It got so bad that the mill shut down. This is how far I will go with my story about my job at the sawmill. This is when I returned to the bridge (Moose River Crossing) where I had left my father to go and work elsewhere.

When I returned to the bridge (Moose River Crossing), I was asked to work on the railway tracks. They needed one more man. There was a Native man who was a foreman. His name was Willy Iseroff. I agreed to go and work with them. I worked at the railway tracks for a while. I worked three summers at the railway tracks. This boss told me that I would work until I was sixty-five years old. After working on the railway tracks for three summers, trouble started again. We heard of lay offs of men working

on the railway tracks. This was happening near North Bay. We heard of three men who were laid off.

The men who had worked for a long time each had a number. This number marked their seniority. We heard about a coming of a man from North Bay to Moose River Crossing to replace someone with less seniority. But there were three of them at the bridge. There was a man named Alepheus Wesley who was bumped off by this man from North Bay. This man was known as a steady man, a person who always works. So this man came to the bridge to replace those with less seniority. Alepheus did not want to leave. There was another man named George Friday. Alepheus bumped off this man. There was a big fight that time.

That is what happened. Alepheus bumped off George Wesley. George Wesley did not want to leave the bridge (Moose River Crossing). My brother-in-law was also working there at the time. His name was (unintelligible). George Wesley bumped him off when George refused to leave. My brother-in-law did not want to leave the bridge, so, me, being the one with the least number of years to work there was bumped off. At the time, I had been working on the railway tracks for only three summers. My boss said there was a lot of talk at the time. It was heard over the phone about this man who was coming to replace someone with less seniority. People heard I was bumped off. It was about this time that I was wanted to go and work at Coral Rapids. The section foremen got in touch with me. I made up my mind not to go there because someone with more seniority would take my place anyway. Because of this, I did not agree to go. I was afraid of being bumped off again. This is when I stopped working there. At this time, we returned, by canoe, to Moosonee.

We stayed in Moosonee for three years after that. I worked at a few places while in Moosonee. I also worked at the Hudson's Bay store. Three times a week I washed the floors in the evenings. As my father got older, we decided to return home. He wanted to be buried beside my mother and two of my siblings at the old Albany Post. This is where my father was buried. He died of old age one year after we returned. He was eighty-three years old. But now, I am much older than my father was.

On my last birthday, in September, I turned eighty-eight. Everyone here in Kashechewan is awed because at my age I am still able to walk where I want to go. I can still walk to places but I tire easily. When I go to the store, I get really tired out when I walk both ways. I cannot use a vehicle too often because I have an illness. I wear a pacemaker in my chest. I was given one last year so my heart will work well. I was told

my heartbeats were slow. The doctor told me that my heart was weak. That is why I was asked if they could do this to me. I had to go to Kingston in March. I had to go to Kingston three times before I was given a pacemaker even though I had previously agreed to their request. He did not tell me exactly what he was going to do but he did tell me that I would have an operation. He knew I was weak. But I still agreed.

When I was telling you about what the doctor wanted to do regarding an operation, he seemed happy that I had agreed. At his office, he filled out many sheets of paper. When he was finished with the paper work he turned around and said, "Mr. Rueben, I don't think you have long to live. I ask this of you because I think if I do this it might prolong your life." This is what the doctor told me. So that is why he does this when someone is critically ill. He thinks that this procedure might prolong their lives, I thought as I sat there. But I did get a little better after I was given a pacemaker.

I was home for only two weeks before I had to return for my operation last spring. I'll say last winter because it was in March that I had my operation, March 13. When I got there, the doctor said, "I cannot operate on you, but I will try something else. I will take good care of you." I agreed. So there I was, ready for the procedure, but they could not put me to sleep, so they just froze me instead. I did not feel anything the whole time.

So now, when you look at me walking about, I look like a very healthy person. That is why some people are awed that I still get around, especially now that I am eighty-eight years old. But I would still be able to run after a bear if I was to see one. I would run after him just to give him a good kick on the bum. That is all I can say. That is all I can tell about myself.

Being at this age, I feel I am not well looked after, especially after I moved to this house. I have lived in this house for three years now. The old house I used to live in, way at the edge of town up river, was really cold. But firewood and ice for drinking water were given to the elderly. This was done every winter. When we moved to this house, all of this stopped. I get no help of any kind. I also pay my own electricity. I receive no financial help to pay for it. I had asked for help in paying my hydro bill since I don't get any other help like the other elderly who are given firewood. I asked at the Band Office about this. I asked the finance person about this and he agreed to pay my hydro bill every month. But nothing was paid all year. My hydro bill added up to the amount of \$2,386.00. I told the Band Office about this. I even told the people who look after electricity but they could not do anything about it. A week ago, they told me it had

been paid. I don't know if they paid the whole amount, I was just told it was paid. That is how things are with me. I live the life of an elder now. I did not get any help since I moved here.



Kashechewan Band Office

I am related to the woman who used to live here. She moved in where we used to live. The exchange should really never have happened. She moved because her children running around. We used to live at the very edge of town. It used to be very quiet over there. Ever since I moved here, we seem to need everything. Around here, nobody seems to sleep at night. Close by here, there is always a card game going on, day and night. I have been here for three years and every day they play cards. There also seems to be many children around this area and they are very noisy. It's not like the old place where everything was quiet. Everything is very different here. We now get help but it seems we have to keep asking for it. That is how it is. That is all I can say about myself, about myself as an elder.

I think this will be all I will say about the things I remember. There are others one could listen to, who know about things from long ago. There is one who is still alive; his name is Matthew Stephen. He is still alive. There were more but three have passed on.

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Conredge Solomon



(recorded November 18, 2004)

Community or reserve life in the past

Biographic Information

Name: Conredge Nathan Solomon Date of Birth: December 20, 1984 Place of Birth: Moose Factory, Ontario Present Address: Kashechewan, Ontario Education: Grade 12, College (incomplete) Interests/Hobbies: Hunting, Hockey,

Volunteer Work

1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past. As far as I can remember, I did a lot. I went hunting when I was young. I learned about hunting from my late grandfather and my

late grandmother. I was also taught about the culture. I was taught to respect the things I was given by the Creator and to live a good life. Many times in the past, I saw my own blood. I have seen what disrespect can do to my life and to my family. There is not very much I can say about my past since I am not that old yet.

There many things that I was taught which I use now. My parents also taught me a lot. I remember one time as a young child going out to the bay to hunt. There was big lake and that is where I used to hunt. There were many kinds of birds in those days. It is not like that anymore.

My father taught me about life in the bush. I was old enough to learn. My grandfather was not able to get around anymore. So, my father taught me how to hunt, trap, and hunt grouse. He was the one who taught [me] about gun safety and how to set traps. He also taught me to respect things that I killed for food.

I don't remember being taught how to make medicine with things that are found in the bush. But I do remember when I was about six, my father showing me something that was used to make medicine. Maybe my late grandfather did teach me and I simply forgot about it.

I was educated in a school. I attended the only school that is in this community, St. Andrew's School. I finished Grade 8 in this school and I went down south for my high school education. It was hard living in the south, but I finished my education. I returned home to finish my Grade 12 in the high school in my community. I also went to college. I took the course for Aboriginal teachers. I did not finish the course because I came back to the community to work.

When we used to go hunting, we used tents for shelter. Tents were bought in stores by then. This is what we used and there were times when we did not have time to set up a tent. [In] times like that we used the tent as a mattress for the night. It was not bad. I did not stay long in the bush with my grandfather. I think we stayed only four days because we had to return to the community for my schooling.

I started my high school years here in the community. Then I had a talk with my father about continuing my education down south. He agreed, so I went to South Porcupine. I then went for one year in Thunder Bay. After that, I returned to the community to finish high school. I spent about four years down south for my education.

Life was different in the south. Things were done differently from the way they are done in the community. Things like houses, religion, and even drinking is different. In the city, houses are big and people can drink whenever they want to. There were no Native teachings. There are many different cultures here in Ontario and they live in the cities down south. It was hard living there but I was encouraged to finish my education.

Community or reserve life today

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

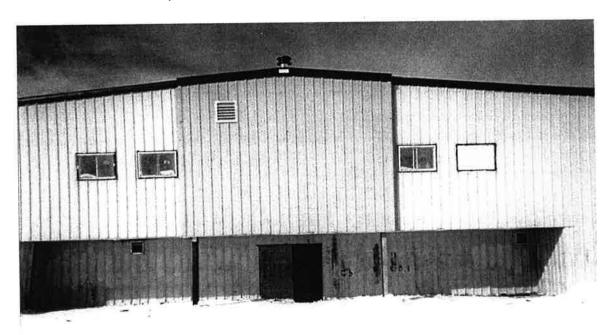
Today I have learned a lot about being a leader and about working. I am now living the teachings I got in the past. Today my community is changing. It is starting to look like the towns down south. The Native culture is still here but things like drinking and drugs are killing it. There are many things happening in this town. I say this because I live here and I see them happening.

I am starting out on the right foot. I learn from volunteering at different places. People who want to be leaders someday should do this. They should learn about different tasks by volunteering at different places. I do this because I want to increase my knowledge. As for living in the bush and trapping to make a living, that is not so common anymore. Not very many people do this anymore. There are some who still hunt moose, snare rabbits, or who spend time in the woods cutting firewood. I see them sometimes when I ride my ski-doo in the bush. The elders still teach the young people about the culture.

People go down south to further their education. When a person looks for work, it is important that they have a diploma or a certificate. This is what employers ask for and experience. The other thing employers check is your criminal record. All these things are now here. The white [man] also came along to teach us his language. I think he made a mistake when he did this.

I represent the young people where I work. There is not much for them to do in the community. There are services and programs they could use but the people who work there do [not] have the qualifications that are required. They do not have, for instance, a counseling diploma or other required papers. Because of this, they do not really know how to help the young people. There should be recreation programs for them since it was agreed that we would get free education as well as free health [care]. We do not get much money from the government anymore to be able to do what needs to be done. INAC does not have any money since they only use what they call a formula. Our town is not like down south. We depend on money given to us to do things. This is probably how it is all along the bay.

There are recreational places like the arena, but it is not well maintained. There is also a youth centre with some programs for them. There are no programs or services they could use in the evenings such as homework clubs or other things. There were plans to build a playground or a recreational field. It was started three years ago but it is not yet finished. The reason is the money that set aside for this project was used elsewhere. It should not be this way. There are some things that the youth can use.



Kashechewan Arena

Community or reserve life in the future

3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future. Many times, I think about my future and the future of this town. If things are carried out the way they should be, then things will go well in this community. When I look at my future, I dream that one day I will be a leader in this community. I dream of being the chief or the band manager. I dream of being in a position where I could speak for my people to the different governments. That is how I see myself because right now I can say that there is not a leader, there is not a boss in this town. The chief is not the boss. The chief serves the people and he does their bidding. That is what I want to be. But this will not happen if [I] use alcohol. Alcohol and drugs are not part of our tradition. I am also looking at the one hundredth anniversary of the signing of the treaty. Many things have happened in the past one hundred years in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. These are the things I would like the young people to know about.

The teachings of the elders should be passed on: the way of life or the way they used to make their own medicines. We still hear about these things on the radio. I hope that this community gets the things it needs such as housing. We are in great need of housing. In some houses there are three families living together. This leads to the breakdown of families and sickness. There is no privacy for these people and that is why we need new houses, or for the young people a place where they can gather. Not just an arena, but a place where they can do their schoolwork or just have a place to hang out in the evenings.

That is why I want to learn more, to expand my knowledge. That is why I say if you want to build up your knowledge; take advantage of the opportunities today. Do some volunteer work if you want to expand your knowledge. This will help in the future especially if you want to be a leader in your community someday.

As a child, everyone spoke to me in Cree, everyone, my parents, my siblings, my late grandfather, my late grandmother, and my grandmother who is still living. Today it is not like that. I hear many young children speaking only English. I cannot do anything about this.

There should be work done for the Native language and not just for the English language. But people say we need services regarding the English language because the children are falling behind in education standards. They say a Grade 6 student education is equivalent to a Grade 4 level in the south. That is why they insist in teaching everything in the English language.

Many times, I hear people say the young people will be the leaders of the future. The young people say they will be the leaders. I believe in this. They are starting out now to be leaders. I say this because I am now starting out to be a leader among the young people. Another thing is when I go to chief or council meetings; the topic of young people always comes up. They talk about the things they should do for the young people. The things they talk about are good points. But often times it is just talk. They don't do the things they say should be done. When they talk about young people being future leaders, it shows that they respect the young people. It shows that they believe in them, and that someday, the young people will take over where they have left off.

To the young people who will be reading this, I want to say do not stop trying to do something that is good for you. Think before doing something. Stay on the right track. Look into the future. Do not drink or do drugs. If you want to change things, you must first change your ways. You will be a role model so you have to look at yourself. Stay in school. Finish your education. Doing this, someday we will be the leaders; someday we will be speaking for our people. Think about these things. Do the right thing.

I was asked if the chief ever takes a young person to chief meetings. This is not the case for our community. There is no money to pay for the travel and accommodations for the young person to accompany the chief to a meeting. The only time this is possible is when there is a NAN chiefs meeting because NAN looks after all the expenses. There should be funding for this but there is none right now. The chiefs meetings however are aired and that is how we know what is being discussed. That is how I see things.

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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 Kashechewan. In addition, this book identifies the aspirations of these communities and reserves as described by the participants.

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