

Saulteaux Indigenous Knowledge: Elder Danny Musqua

Michael Relland

Danny Musqua is a well respected Saulteaux Elder from the Keesagoose First Nations in east central Saskatchewan. Danny is a member of the Bear Clan and has received his people's teachings from the Elders, particularly his grandfather, Thomas Musqua. Over the years Danny has relied upon these teaching and the power of the oral tradition to become a renowned storyteller and teacher. Danny has shared his knowledge throughout North America and has presented at numerous international conferences. He has worked, served as an Elder or taught courses for many organizations such as the Gabriel Dumont Institute, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina. In 1996 Danny was recognized for his wisdom and for his contributions in the field of education by the University of Saskatchewan with a honorary doctorate degree.

The following commentary is an excerpt from my thesis, "The Teachings of The Bear Clan: As Told By Saulteaux Elder Danny Musqua. "As Danny's adopted son, it has been my pleasure to learn from him over the last several years. Through our relationship I have come to respect him as a man of tremendous wisdom and insight. The text that follows is in Danny's own words. It is his voice that speaks to you. It is a voice from the past. It is the words of his ancestors. As he speaks, you cannot but be impressed with the richness of his cultural history and how it is brought to life and maintained through the power of oral tradition. These teachings are a gift Danny has received from the old ones and that he freely passes along to those that follow. His words

reflect the historical accounts of the "Anishanabe" from the Saulteaux perspective.

Danny Musqua est un Aîné saulteaux très respecté des Premières nations Keesagoose dans le centre est de la Saskatchewan. Danny est un membre du clan de l'ours et il a reçu son apprentissage de son peuple par des Aînés, en particulier son grand-père, Thomas Musqua. Au fil des années Danny a compté sur ce qu'il a appris et sur le pouvoir de la tradition orale pour devenir un célèbre conteur et éducateur. Danny a partagé ses connaissances dans toute l'Amérique du Nord et a fait des présentations à de nombreuses conférences internationales. Il a travaillé comme Aîné, fait fonction d'Aîné et a donné des cours pour de nombreux organismes comme le Gabriel Dumont Institute, le Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, l'université de la Saskatchewan et l'université de Regina. En 1996, l'université de la Saskatchewan a reconnu Danny pour sa sagesse et ses contributions dans le domaine de l'éducation en lui décernant un doctorat honorifique.

Danny's Commentary

What the old people tell us is that we came from two different areas. One group, which is my grandfather's, father's people, came from western and central Ontario, International Falls, Manitulan area, Thunder Bay area and beyond even further into the St. Lawrence. Those people arrived over here some six hundred years and beyond. They arrived here because the conflicts that arose over there between the warring nation of the Southern United States to the south. It was one country at the time. The Iroquois were very war-like people and they were the first people to conquer those areas south of the St. Lawrence and even into the northern parts. Those were the ones who actually forced us out. That was the first migration that the old people recall with any certainty in their stories. Later, there was another group of people that came in larger numbers. As the migration con-

tinued, some came because of fear, and then with the arrival of the Europeans, they came noticing the changes in their health, sicknesses, new kind of sicknesses that accompanied the arrival of the Europeans. So, because they couldn't understand how to deal with these sicknesses, they moved and they just simply ran from these sicknesses, according to these old people. This was the only way that they could deal with what they didn't understand. They just moved. That is what the old people say. So there was a continuous migration, and as the settlers came into the country, they kept moving much, much, much further west. They had talked about areas. They had talked about the Rocky Mountains, Senuitu. They talked about great rivers, great inland seas and inland rivers that were massive. They had the means to travel even before they had their horses. They had their boats. They learnt how to make their birchbark canoe totally without any string or thread of any kind, which was very easy to repair. Everything was right there along the river. So they explored these lands further from the Great Lakes to the northern parts. They kept close to the rivers and they went up these rivers. There was an abundance of food in all the river valleys all the time. So some say that they came a lot longer than six hundred years ago, but we know the migration that took place with my people in our area took place about six hundred years ago, but it was before that some of our people had come and explored the waterways.

The other area that the old people tell us that we came from was the southern Detroit area, Wisconsin and Michigan. Another group came from there. So I was talking about the second major migration. It came after the conflict between the French and the English. That conflict caused a continuous migration to come up these rivers. Once they knew the way in which to come, they kept coming. So there was a great migration moving into the prairies because there was so much conflict and war even among the tribes themselves in the east because of the fur industry. That was the major commodity of activity. The Indians got into it too. Everybody in modern history knows that. Another great migration, especially among the southern tribes, was in 1812 when the conflict took place between Canada and the United States. Many of the tribes that fought on the American side came to

the west. My grandfather's grandmother's people came from there. Our genealogy for our people we follow through our mothers to our grandmothers. We don't really follow our genealogy through our fathers like the European society. For us its more important to find out the genealogy of your family through our mothers.

Women were very powerful in those days. There were women chiefs, women leaders. *Ogimawqua* we called them, each in their own right being a chief or a sub-chief to a head-chief. We come from the Padiwami but Naconini is what we are termed by the Crees and this is what we call ourselves, Naconiniwak. So that is what we call ourselves. We don't really call ourselves Saulteaux. That is a name that was given to us by the French. They gave us that name because of Saulx Ste. Marie where the Ojibwas used to cross the river. They were great big men and because they knew where the rocks were they use to hire themselves out to pack supplies over the rapids, jumping from rock to rock. The name comes from the French word *sautaire* which means jumping. So we are Ojibwa in a sense in terms of where we came from historically, but we changed when we came to these prairies. We began to associate through our marriages with the Crees. In some places we are called the Oji-Cree, but we just call ourselves Saulteaux. We intermarried with the Crees for five hundred years, maybe more. This occurred much more so when we came to these prairies because the Crees were already here. So being a brother tribe we allied with them and we protected one another. They were protective toward us. We lived in close proximity. We intermarried with one another. So the Naconiniwak is what we want to be known as. That is what we want to be called. That is what we are. We are an offspring of both the Cree and the eastern Indians that came from Ontario, Wisconsin, Michigan and that area. The old people tell us that we are a distinct tribe to ourselves. We want to be a distinct tribe. There is only eight thousand of us. We are a very small group. Some of the old people are worried that we are going to be swallowed up by the Cree or swallowed up by the Ojibwa. We want to be who we are and who we believe we are, a child of both and to say that we are one or the other would be to profess our destruction. We don't want to be swallowed up by either one or the other. We are who we are. We

have a distinct society and a distinct language. We are unique. We have a mixture of both the Cree and the Ojibwa ceremonies different from both the Ojibwa and the Cree. They are similar but different.

At one time we were all just one big nation. As we moved further away from one another our languages began to differ, but we have common ancestry from the same nation. We call ourselves the Anishanabe. We are just human beings. We are made of the earth and spirit. Anthropologists and sociologists have just recently captured what they call the Algonquin Nation which they say is comprised of something like fifty tribes. We as a people call ourselves the Anishanabe. We have many common languages—the MicMacs, the Maliceets, the Ottawas, the Ogawas, the Patawagees, the Crees, the Winebegos, Ojibwa and the Nakawaniwak (which we are), came from there. So that's what the old people tell us, that we came from one common ancestry. The clans are part of the Anishanabe people. We set ourselves into clans under symbols of animal deities. So as to keep the nation healthy there isn't any intermarriage between members of the same clan, particularly if they are members of the same family. Sometimes intermarriage only occurred in the clan with those who were adopted into the bear clan.

Basically, there were seven major clans. It was divided into seven to reflect our spiritual teachings. All of our teachings and all of our disciplines and our virtues and our living principles of life, the skills that we get out of life, come from the teaching of seven—the seven disciplines, seven virtues, seven grandfathers, seven stages of life and seven levels of life. We decided that seven was a very important number so we use that process of seven in developing a government based upon the seven clans. We used it to more or less organize and keep order and keep the people strong and healthy. Each clan was also a government process. The Ojibwa people, the Algonquin people, the Patawami people all used the same process. Each clan would have its own chief, its own headman and its own elders to maintain the clan and the teachings of that clan were based upon the teachings of that symbol. The Bear Clan is basically warriors—the army, the policing societies—and they were most numerous because everybody was an honorary member because of the purposes of the army.

It was the military and the policing society so everybody at one time would be a part of it. But the Bear Clan is also a specific clan in itself. Those specifically from the Bear Clan are usually the ones who are the generals, who are organizers and leaders of the army, as well as the teachers. So that's how it was and the other clans I don't really don't know that much about them. The process is that we try to maintain the knowledge of our clan as specifically as we can. I would say that the three leading clans are the Crane Clan, the Eagle Clan and the Loon Clan. The bird clans are always the ones who are the chief clans. The Hoofed clans are more the medicine societies. The Turtle clans associated with all the other sub-clans and the Fish clans. They were more or less the ones that know about things like dreams. They were great philosophers. The Wolf and Bear clans, they were the army. The Weasel clans were also the ones that worked as artisans and craftspeople and there were healers, too, although there were healers in all societies. To say that I know the specifics about them is wrong, but I'm just trying to give you a little bit about what I know.

The Bear Clan was supposed to maintain all of the stories of all the clans. We were suppose to keep the stories of all the clans intact. So there, in that sense, I would say that we are a failure because I certainly don't know enough about those clans to tell you what they are, and yet we are supposed to know. The difficulty there was that the old people, the grandfathers, could only tell us, so much about our own clan because there was so much to teach about our clan alone in the brief time that they had to teach us which was during the summer months. I was just a little boy when I had most of my education from my grandfather, but I was one of those who was fortunate enough to be around those old people, but he was not the only one. It would be unfair to say that he was my only teacher. I spent most of my time with him because he took care of me. He took care of us. I spent more time with him because I was a sickly little child and maybe I was his special little one. Every grandparent tends to claim one little one for himself. In that sense he more or less took me in because I was there and I was sickly. There was another old man called Old Kewatin who came to visit him a lot of times and another old man called the Wild Man. And there was another one called Black-

bird. These old men were also there and they would speak and tell stories. All of them would tell their stories to the children that were there. It was very important that they tell their stories to the children because children have the capacity to remember things much better than adults will. They can attain information much more effectively than older people. Children really have fertile minds. A child's mind is like a garden and the grandfathers would call us their *Gitigon*, their garden, meaning that they would seed all of their information, their teachings, in the child's mind and it would grow. The children were called *gitigone*, which meant the garden where they saved their knowledge. This was the term they would use, the old people.

What is really important in my life is to live a fruitful life. I was raised up in a very large family and most of my life was based upon survival and on sharing things with one another. Mom and Dad only had enough food to give us. Dad was a very good hunter and a very good provider so that was what was wonderful about my life with my family and my brothers and sisters. The time that I spent with my brothers and sisters was always wonderful. I grew up as a sick child. I was sickly. I had epilepsy. I had TB by the time I was four or four-and-a-half years old. When I five or six years old, I got healed. My grandparents kept me at home and looked after me. I had consumption, a sickness that I had contracted from my deceased brother-in-law when I used his cup. We were deep in the forest and my father was working in a mill. He was cutting logs and hauling logs from the bush to the mill which most of the guys on the reserve would do in those days. And this is where I contracted my sickness. My grandparents came and got me from there. I used to spend a lot of time back and forth between my parents' home and my grandparents' home. Most of the time I was with my grandmother because I would get sick, epileptic, and grandmother had the time. So I was always being borrowed from one place to the other. Grandfather would come and put up a big fuss when he didn't have me so they would let me come home with him. He would turn into a big angry bear if he didn't have his baby around. That's the way I am too when I don't have my grandchildren around, especially a couple of the ones that are very close to me like my baby daughter whom I call Cynthia. She is the youngest

and the little boys are very close to me and I'm trying to raise them up. I can only allow them to be out of my sight for four or five days and then I go into a quandary and then I start huffing and puffing. I guess that's how my grandfather would have been too and I can see a very close resemblance between the way he would have spoken and the way I speak now about these kind of things. I spent a great deal of time with old people all my life because they were the first people I met and the first people with whom I had a relationship. I was always around. So I learnt a lot by just being there when they were telling their stories and I also learned how to appreciate life as thoroughly as I could because of my being sick all of the time.

I know about being sick. I know about being alone. I know about being hurt, physically. There is one thing I can tell you and that is I know what being physically sick is all about. Pain is no big stranger to me. I know about physical pain. Sickness does that, especially epilepsy and seizures. You're so helpless. It is something that I don't wish upon anybody. And having also suffered from TB, consumption, I knew pain and hurt. You know, sometimes all you could do was to hope them away and think them away. We didn't have pills or medicine for epilepsy or even any medication for tuberculosis. So my whole feeling and attitude had a lot to do with how well I would recover. I guess, how well I recovered was based upon my feelings and my faith in God—my belief that God would always be there and God is always there. My grandfather taught me that God is in all things, God is everywhere, that God is merciful, omnipotent. God knows and has a plan for everything. Every person who has been born has been given a road and a purpose on this Earth, even if its a very wicked thing that he comes to live for. Even if his body wins over his spirit. Even in that journey he is of help to other people by his misery. By his treachery other people learn how to understand what treachery is. He can serve as an example of these kind of people and so we can say don't be like that, and a lot of times treachery is a result of our own failure to know what goodness is. When we stray away from goodness, we have the companion of evil with us. Evil is always there. You can't be the companion of both. You can only be the companion of one. That's what the old people tell us. So

I learnt that and I learnt to become a very fun-loving, happy child. I had to be because I didn't have very much with which to live. My whole happiness was dependent upon being around my grandfather, my grandmother, my father, my mother, my uncles, my aunts. I spent a lot of time finding things humorous. I tried to find laughter in everything I did. Maybe that's why I survived. I always found humour in everything. I like humour. I like hearing a good story. I like hearing a good joke. I think life is far too serious a lot of times. Life is a very serious thing. It's a very serious occupation and you can end up being overly involved in the seriousness of it. You have to balance seriousness and being foolish enough to laugh at yourself and to laugh at your own failures. If you do that you will learn to be much more aware of the things that you do right and wrong. So that's what I was taught and that's how I grew up. I grew up around the sweatlodge. I grew up around the stories of the old people. I grew up in a place locked from the outside world on the reservation. We were locked from the outside world and we could only surmise and suppose what took place on the other side of the fences in the settlers' communities. We were fortunate to be living next to a couple of old Ukrainian farmers who were very friendly to my father and his brother, uncle Bill. So our relationship with these old people was very good because they were very good neighbours.

I grew up learning to live as freely and happily as I could. I loved to go walking in nature with my grandfather. I loved walking out with my father and my uncles when they went out hunting. I was never much of a hunter myself but I loved hunting small game and eating wild food. I still do. I was not too excited about killing anything, but yet I had to. I've killed my fair share of wild animals, but I've never really found it good to kill anything. Everything is so beautiful when it's alive. It, like everything else, has the right to live and a place where it must be and, if animals are here to sustain humanity, we must use them only when we need to use them. That is why I despise the whole idea of hunting for sport. I think it's a bloody waste of good animal life. I think you should only hunt when you need to. I think it is a shame what they have done to our people, keeping us away from hunting and doing the things that we were born naturally

to do, to live on the land, to be of the land.

These things I am very sorrowful for, but life goes on. We change with the tides of time. Like everything else we have to change with the things that come into our world. To have to change those things that are necessary to help us survive in the world. The world is changing. Even as we sit here the world is changing right now. Nature is changing. So everything has to adapt to fit into what nature is changing into. It is the natural instinct of man to fit into the natural world, but lately he has not done that. Instead, man has changed things in nature. The old people told us that we would have problems because of that. So I spent a lot of time in my life learning. I love to learn. I learnt to read early in life. I know I will never be alone if I have a library. If I had a thousand books I would probably stay in one place and read all the time. That's just the way I am. But one thing I know is that books are fallible. What we write today may be all wrong tomorrow. I learnt that man's knowledge is fallible. Man's knowledge is not exact. We use time to tell us how exact we are and some of the things we talk about today are totally wrong tomorrow. It could be all wrong, but that is man. We are limited beings who are taught by our successes and failures, probably more from our failures than successes. Our failures bring us to success. I was looking at a documentary on aeronautics and all the people that died, the pilots and good men, so we could break the sound barrier, but when we did we understood the beginnings of the first stage of entry into space and beyond the powers of the gravitational forces of this world. So we learn through our mistakes, and we have to learn this way because we are fallible beings. I learnt that early in life. I learnt that as a child. I learnt that from the old people and I never stopped reminding myself that I am a fallible being. Through their advice I have learned how to respect death. I'm not afraid of it. It is nonsensical for anybody to fear death because we are all going to die. The thing you have to do is prepare yourself as best you can. You know that at the point of death when death comes you're going to suffer and you're going to have to die and it's as simple as that. It's much more important that you use your suffering as a tool of understanding the inevitable. That's what I learnt early in life.

I grew up in school always wondering why people sent their children there because we were so lonely and so far removed from the things that we loved. We were so far away from the people who loved us, the people that mattered to us. I could never really understand the purpose of people wanting you to understand God in a situation that was wrong and with people that didn't have the right to be there teaching you the things that they were teaching you because they weren't your parents. It was the result of their missionary zeal. It was their attempt to try to help us understanding Jesus as they thought we should. I understand now that this was their missionary vocation to do this but I don't really rightly believe that what they were teaching was true because, in the way they were teaching us, they were totally contradicting themselves in what they were saying and what they were doing, especially in comparison to what Jesus was saying and doing. Jesus was a wonderful loving human being and I learnt that from my mother. My mother taught me about Jesus early in life. My mother taught me about Christianity. Her type of Christianity I'll never forget and I will always embrace and love her teachings as I love all the things she taught me. I will always respect the great love she had for her faith. She never even really preached to me. She was an example of those teachings and from her I learnt to watch if people did the things they said. And so I try to live that way and I try to teach my children by the things that I do because my father and grandfather before me taught me that way. They taught by doing things for me and by living the things they were saying. It is so important to me. So there is little or any effect upon me by people who do a lot of saying and do very little doing.

We have to remember that God is the essence of all life. I have to totally rely on God's message in my life every day. The message of God in my life every day is all around me right here. I learnt that as a child as I walked into the forest and heard the birds singing, or I see a rabbit in the grass, or the beauty of a coyote sunning across an open plain, or the beauty of exuberant lively fox. It is all so beautiful. There are teachings in all of these things and I know that God is magnificent and that he is great when I see all of these beautiful creatures. Creatures that are totally reliant upon God. They don't ques-

tion him. They don't put food away or sow anything. I learnt that even before I read the good book. I learnt that from the teachings of the old people. These creatures are totally at the love and mercy of God and, if you can live like them, you will truly begin to understand who God is and what God wants of you. So I try to live that way and when I didn't live that way I fell on the wayside of misery, shame and pain. It caused a lot of misery and pain to be invoked upon me by people I did not understand, and I really can't do anything about that because it was another necessary experience in my life. I didn't like what took place, but I was never raised up to hate anybody. I was raised up to love and I was surrounded by love and mercy and understanding. So I cannot hate these people who hurt me, or who hurt my character. I cannot hate the religious people who did the things that they did to me because of their good intentions. I can't really hate these people because they had good intentions, but they just did it in the wrong way. I forgive them because that is the only way to become free. If you let hate and anger stay within you, it will eat you up and it will eventually consume you. If it consumes you, you will die of it. You will kill yourself, or be killed, or you will go out there and kill someone because you can't let the teacher of death be part of you. So that's the way I've lived all of my life.

I've lived every day always conscious of the Creator's mercy that surrounds me. And every day I pray. I can't remember a day that I didn't pray. I pray every day. I pray sometimes because I have nothing else to do and if I have nothing else to do I should pray. That's important because then I am doing something good. Even if I'm not good at least I'm doing something good, I'm praying. I think we are good when we try. I don't think anybody could really say he is good until he tries, and you can't try it, you've just got to do it. So I've always done the things that I believe that I should do and being true to those things that you believe in is the most that you can do in life because we are limited beings. We are confined by all of these limits around us. We are bounded by failure every day because we are limited beings. I understand my failure. My failures are much better reminders for me to do better next time. We live to do better next time. From one hurdle to the next. From one step to the next. A hu-

man being walks up the mountain one step at a time. And that is what my grandfather, and my father, and my grandfather's father said: use all of your faculties to understand this world and to live the best you can. That is what you are here for, to fulfill your journey. To fulfill that which is given to you. He doesn't put it right there for you in an open book. You have to find it somewhere inside yourself. It's in your mind. It's in your spirit. It's right back in there somewhere. You'll find it as you do it, and as you do it, it becomes much more clearer what your destiny is. If this is my destiny then I am doing what the Creator wants me to do. Here we are sitting in this beautiful place. That's why he wants me to be here. He wants me to be happy to come here and to speak with you. And I am happy and I have fulfilled my destiny and his purpose in my life. And that is how I have lived most of my life as a young person on the reservation, loving and hating it because we were so limited in what we could do.

The government controlled everything we did and we were treated more like children. There was paternalism then. Paternalism, for what I don't know. I think sometimes paternalism was more geared to protect everybody else around us, against us, rather than us against them because we were poor and I think we still are because of the way the reservation system is set up. The Indian agents were the predators then, and our leaders today, who have been taught by the Department of Indian Affairs, are our predators now. They are doing the same things that Indian Affairs did to us. That's what the old people tell us. They say that we will go from one state to the next, but we will not be vanquished by these things and by what these people do to us. The Creator has a purpose for our people. Our purpose is to teach people how to live in this world. The purpose of the First Nations people, the purpose of the Anishanabe, is to teach people how to live in this world. To live in the beauty of this world. We are a people. We are Earth people. We are a people of the Earth and, if anybody wants to understand the beauty of this Earth, they can come and sit with me. That's what Mushum would say. Come and sit with me and love the pristine beauty of life thereon. That is what it means to be an Anishanabe.

I went to residential school for ten years. I enjoyed it and I dis-

liked it, but it was a necessary part of my journey. It was not all bad. There were many good things such as I can read and write. There were some good priests and there were some good nuns. They weren't all bad. Like everything else the bad ones made all the good ones look bad and the bad ones made it worse for all the good ones. Some of them should have never been priests. Like everyone else some of them should have been married. Why they did these things we will never know. I don't know. When I think about it in my mind, it is something I don't understand. So I continue to live by those teachings because I've learned even in that place. I learnt from some of the good priests. Just like I learnt from my grandfather, I learnt from some good priests and some good nuns. I've learnt some good things and there were some good people. There is nothing wrong with religion, my grandfather said. If it is meant for you then you should follow it and live it well. That is all you can do and if it's not for you then it's not for you. But, me, I have lived both as an Anishanabe and as a Christian. I'm a Catholic. I don't necessarily believe all of things that I was told in Catholicism because I am an avid reader and I've learnt how to find out some things about the good book myself which don't necessarily fit with the things I was told. But I don't go around saying those things are all wrong. I keep it to myself. I don't go around saying you shouldn't believe in this thing, you shouldn't believe in that thing, this is what it says in this scripture, this is what it says in that scripture. I don't do that because I have this feeling that we don't understand what it is anyway. The old people tell us that the good book says itself that you can't understand the word of God. As a Christian I would say that we can't understand the good book. He tells us right there. God tells us through his holy people that we couldn't understand his words and he said I will send you holy men and prophets to tell you what this means. Nobody can tell me that you can spend four years, seven years or even fifteen years in some monastery or some bible school somewhere and all of the sudden you can become an expert on the word of God. I think many times those people come to realize that after fifteen years of study they know as little as they did when they started about the word of God. That's because the word of God has to be lived before it can be un-

derstood. You can't talk about the word of God until you've lived it. If there is one thing that I've learned from my grandfather and the old people: do as little talking as you can, but do as much as you can. Then, once you've done it, you can talk about it because the only real truthful thing in this Earth is what you've experienced. So you should talk about your experience and you should relate your experience. That is total honesty because you're relating to something you did and not to something that someone told you to do that someone told you to talk about or that you read about in some book. That's what the old people tell us. So I live by the things that I have learned by observing what the old people do and other people do.

My mother was an avid church-goer and I went to church. I still go to church. There is nothing wrong with my going to church. I loved it because my mother impressed it upon me. The grandfathers taught me to be a good human being. They gave me all of the Christian teachings and all of the teachings in the Anishanabe way. Both are geared towards helping one become a good person. To be disciplined, to be understanding, to be loving, to be good at what it is you are to do. Anything that you are going to do you ought to be good at. So they gave you the tools, they gave you the teachings, they gave you the disciplines to do that, and they said if you want to be a good man, come and fast and sweat, and fast and meditate and pray with me. You'll be a good man. If you want to be a good priest, come and sweat and fast and pray with me and you'll be a good priest. You won't come to these lodges and lose your priesthood. You'll come out of here a better priest. You'll have everything you have. If you want to be a good Catholic then practice it well. If you're not sure of yourself then go and fast because we've got to fast. That's all we do. We fast to know who we are. We have the tools. The tools are there. The sweatlodge is only a tool. It's a prayer tool. It is very much like when you go to the church and you use the rosary or a holy picture of the holy book. The Bible is a tool. That's all it is. They made no religions of it. It's not a religion. It's all discipline. It's all systems of self-learning and self-analysis and self-development—human development. That is what the old people said that these teachings were all about. The day that they begin to make a religion of it, that will be

the day that you've lost the meaning of it all. It's only here to help you learn who you are and to help you make a better road for yourself in whatever your doing. I say to these people, okay, you want to be a better Pentecostal, come and sweat with me. It will make you a much better Pentecostal. This won't take anything away from you. It will only strengthen you and make you much more fervent in what you are doing. We never talk about religion. We never talk about faith in so far as my faith as opposed to your faith. We talk about our journey. We talk about our healing. We talk about the things we do and that's what the old people did when they talked about themselves. They didn't talk about that guy. As soon as you start talking about that guy, hey, hey, that's gossip. We don't need that. We need human growth here. We need the things that you can see and things that you can touch to help me understand what that young person over there is feeling. There are no "musts" here. The only "must" is that you must worship God. God is the only one that is due worship. Nothing else. Everything else is a tool. Everything else is a means of learning. That's all it is. Only God is due worship. And we talk about the spirits and the angelic beings. Well, it tells you in the good book that they are at work in the universe and the old people believed the same thing, but they are not due worship because they, too, are created beings. Only God is due worship, but we can ask these angelic beings to pray with us. We can ask for them to sit down, and we can ask them to help me and pray for me. You are much closer to God, my brother, so help me. We can ask them for help. We can ask them to ask God to bless us. They are like a good court worker who can go and speak to the judge for me. That's the way these spirits are. You can speak and pray to them, but you cannot worship them like an infallible or an eternal God. That's what the old people say. That's what I think.

I have no difficulty being Anishanabe. I have no difficulty because all I've ever learnt is to be a good human being, a good Anishanabe. And if I'm a good Anishanabe I can be a good Catholic. I'm not necessarily sure that if I'm a good Catholic I can be a good Anishanabe because I am bounded by all of their doctrines and dogmas and their whole idea of congregating and having numbers, and a

bigger population, or throng, or big organization. Everything's been organized for us so we don't organize it. The world is too perfect to be organized. The only real organizer and master that I really want is God in my life. That's the most. That is what the old people tell us. He is the most. He is all. He is everything. That's how I've been taught so that is how I live. I've lived all over this land. I went to the north into the Yukon. I've worked in many Indian organizations. I've raised up ten children. I'm a recovered alcoholic. I'm also a recovered parent because I was an alcoholic; I neglected my parental obligation to my family for ten years in my hard drinking times. If it wasn't for my wonderful wife I guess my poor little children would have been lost. Today I try to reconstitute myself by trying to do good things with them. Sometimes people say I am spoiling them. Well, I was spoiled when I was a child. I was spoiled good with a lot of love. I don't mind spoiling anybody with love because if anything is going to carry you, the loving and understanding that you get from your mother and father is going to carry you. If you're going to spoil someone spoil them with a lot of love. Constructive love. So when I give I give my children twenty bucks or five cents I tell them why I'm giving it to them. Because you're a good boy or because I want you to go and do this for yourself, I don't want you to go and waste it. I worked darn hard for my money. That's what my Mushum said: "I worked hard to get this thing. I worked all over the bush so I don't want you to waste it. I went over there and I got cold and I chopped trees down to give you this nickel." That's what my Dad used to say. So don't waste it. 'If you want to waste something go and get your own nickel and work and waste that, but don't waste mine because I'm giving it to you out of the goodness of my heart and because it comes from the goodness of my heart; I don't want you to waste it.' That's how Muchum would say it so that's how I treat my kids today.

I try. A lot of times we fail but I fail too. That's because we are human. We're limited beings. We succeed in spite of our failures. That's what it means to be a human being. We're not perfect. In life we are gradually elevating ourselves to that state of perfection that is going to come when we die. When we die, a door opens. Death opens a door. We have to elevate ourselves for that. The key in the end is

always what you give on this Earth. Old grandfather death will come and say it is time to go home. Yet we are always trying to make deals with him. People are lucky that know they are going to die. That's what grandfather used to say. They that don't know they are going to die we should feel sorry for them. But he who knows he is going to die is blessed with time because he knows his time has come. We only have so much time to live. So he has all of that time and he is blessed, he who knows that he is going to die, while others still aren't aware of anything about the end. That's what my old people tell us. I am sixty years old now so I'm happy. If I live another ten more years I'll be even doubly happy. I'm happy with every day I live. You have to be happy with every day you've got. That's the most you've got: twenty-four hours of beauty. Who is so blessed to live in such a place. In this world there are people starving, children dying, people who don't even have a morsel of food, people that are afraid to poke their head out because somebody is going to shoot them. We probably live in the most beautiful country in the world. The most beautiful land in the world is right here. You're blessed! I'm blessed! Thank God for letting us be a part of this beautiful place. Thank God for your bringing me here because I'm truly happy, truly at my very best. This to me is where I'm really at my happiest time. This is how I was raised up as a child. I have done my best with the children that I have. If they failed then I have not done something wrong. It is not their fault. It is not their fault if they failed for I have overlooked something and I'll have to deal with it if it ever comes. But I know what it is.

Well, like I say, I wasn't a brat. For two years I went to Saint Joe's College, then I went home and I farmed. I farmed for thirty years. Dragging and scratching with old broken-down equipment, but always making enough to eat and feed my kids. I tell my kids that, if there is one thing that I can tell you that is absolutely important, it's that you earn your bread. You earn your keep. There is no dignity in someone putting a loaf of bread on your table and giving it to you. If there is something that I would tell you is that I have always earned my bread. Even when I went out to the bush to bring an animal down, and it was cold and miserable out there, I brought it

down and put that meat on the table. That's dignity. I never want anybody to take that away from me. I never want anybody to take my dignity away from me. Right now that's one of the most important things that we can teach a child. Your land is your dignity! Your work is your dignity! Dignity is when you can buy that food, when you can work for it, and put the clothing on your back. I'm totally unhappy and grieved by what the government is doing my people. Even my own children. This welfare! Taking away all of our hunting rights. Taking away all the things that we used to live by honourably and feel dignified. If there is anything that this government is going to lose for, it will be that. This hidden genocide that they are practicing. In the world of nations they are great, but by golly God is going to judge them hard for what they are doing to us. He is going to judge the churches hard. Our people say, why are the churches in trouble? Because God judged them hard; they are being punished for what they have done to us. The next guy who is going to be punished is Mr. Government himself. The Canadian government is going to suffer hard by God's judgement for what they are doing to the First Nations people in this land. Putting them on welfare and keeping them there. Keeping them from the competitive world and not giving them the skills, and all of the sudden there are huge numbers of them and they realize, "Oh, we got to make them pay taxes because they are getting everything for nothing." It's their own dang fault. They've done that for almost one hundred years. They've fed those guys and locked them inside the reservations without skills, and they took away all of their bread wompums and their bread storages. They took away the lands over there, the hunting lands and the trapping lands. That's where they were good. They should have left them there. They would have saved millions of dollars if they would have let the people stay in their trap lines, let them keep on hunting in the forest and feeding themselves. Now they're saying, "Oh, they're costing us money." But it's their own fault. I say this to a lot of people, but they just laugh. Still, I say that Canada is under judgement. God says that I don't just judge individuals but I judge countries too. I judge Nation and Canada will be judged. They are already having their problems with the French wanting to separate. Well, I say, "Okay. We

want to use the beauty of what God gave you. God gave you this land to look after. He didn't want you to come and destroy people because of the land and because they gave you the land. They have to maintain their nationalities on those reservations; that's what the old people say." There's no reason why those reserves can't help us keep our national identity, our language and those things that God made us to be like as a nation. That's why they gave up the land—so they could maintain their national identity. But, anyway, that's the things that my grandfather, and my father especially, taught me. They said that there will come a time when we'll have the means to stand up and tell the world about our plight. There will be a time when we have enough educated people like yourself and other Indian and Metis people that are just as educated as everybody else now. There will be a time when the government will respond. There will be a time when this will happen because our numbers are getting strong. We're not getting weak. We are going to unite. We are going to unite as a people. We are going to unite, not just the tribes, but the Metis people are going to unite with us and we will come under one roof. The government is going to throw us in one big pot. They are going to succeed at doing that but it will be politically volatile. It will be volatile because the government won't accept what it has created. All of a sudden there will be people in government offices and our politicians will be sitting there on their doorstep and we'll be sitting beside them. They will create that. Pretty soon our people will start organizing and saying, "Okay, you guys, all of you phone these houses on Riverbend or up in Riverside over there or over there in Confederation." We will band together to put one guy in city office. It's coming. I'm not talking like that. It is the young people are talking like that. There saying wait we want one candidate from all of the reserves. Where all of the reserves will come under one or two constituencies. We want people in office. That's coming. The people are starting to talk. It's not me, it's our young educated people who are learning this, and when they get into those places the government will have to listen. The government will succeed in uniting us, but it will not be to their liking. That's what the old people said. Isn't life that way? We have to do things we never like, but sometimes those things that we don't like

are sometimes the best things for us. It will be the same for any nation. It is the same for the nation as it is for the individual. Nations are compelled by the things that we have to do in order to hold the common dignity of people and their need to be who they are. Who they are is important. Who they are as a people, and who they are as an individual. Hey!