

Title: 0007-Our Voices-Storytelling and Shamanism
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Date Recorded:
Transcriber: Doug Hamm
Date Transcribed:
Language: English
Culture: Cree (Omushkego)
Transcript: Proof

The Story of Kichimitaw

...listening to my grandparents, to the Elders I have listened to. And this is one time in the past, not long—I think it was after the European have arrived. I think some of us; we have already acquired “fire stick”—the gun. [laughs] *Fire stick!* We already have the gun. So, fire sticks were very powerful for Native people. They really depend on it, they enjoyed it. It was much better than the bow and arrow.

So anyway, some of our Omushkego people, they used to have it, and some of them master it; some of them did not master it. But they they enjoy using the gun, because it is much, much reliable than a bow and arrow, shoot a bit farther. So anyway, this one time, in time period of Omushkego story. We the Omushkego we used to be bothered by the tribes, some other tribes. I’m not going to say where they come from [laughs], but they came from somewhere. Sometimes our tribe says they were from across the bay, in our James Bay. They used to say they were Inuit people, a long time ago. So they, they were always, always on the lookout during the summer season, because they always hit during the summer season. So they always prepared, the Omushkego people, they always try to camp in the open space where they can see a distance.

So there’s a particular place out there between James Bay and Hudson’s Bay where this all took place. It’s a flat land, lots of little small lakes that’s shallow, with only sand, because there was there was a retreating bay at one time, there’s lots of little banks and sand; it’s a good place, there’s no trees.

So anyway, it was one time that some of the tribes striked the village that was existing. And they really, they really surprised the community, I mean the little village. Who live only the Omushkego people. And this tribe, when the men and hunters were gone during the day they strike in the afternoon and destroy the people; kill women, Elders, and children. And this young man who have dreamed a long time before that happened, which he has required the training and has succeeded to have the the powers that he can use in case, when the time come. He was only about fifteen, so when he saw this happening he was scared and he didn’t know what to do to try to save himself, and he see everybody else is killed. They were camping close to the lake, a small lake, not really a small but it’s shallow and it has overhanging bank, like the moss hanging over the water. He had an idea to jump there and then go under, to hide. He did that. During this chaotic period when everybody screaming and jumping and yelling and all that stuff.

And he jump into the lake and then go under, that's where he stick his head in there, under—that's how he breathe.

And while everything was going on, there was some body's fall into the river, into the lake—and some of the parts of humans as they so cruelly kill each other. And then soon he has, he was in mostly bloody water, and he just stick his head out and, he prayed to this power that he had acquired, for his safety—to be able to escape. So finally, the chaotic situation ceased, there was no more yelling and killing; there was just mourning and all that stuff, getting dark. So the boy decided to to try to get out. So he decided to, decided to summon his power, the one that he had dream about, how to escape. And it was almost sunset when he finally tried it out, but there was still people there, there was still a little bit of commotion around, and he didn't want to get out and just run away, so he just got out of the water. And he got out, he jump out, and he begin to run *on top* of water; run across the lake until he hit the beach, and no one can catch him because he run on top of the water.

So he managed to run without stopping to go give the warning to his hunters who were out on their way home so they can prepare for those killings that was taken place. So he did manage to warn them and they were ready and they were prepared, they were able to defend what is remained of the community, and most of the temporary community. So the boy saved some life because of his, the power that he had acquired. That is one of the story that I always like to *be* [laughs], to listen, there was the boy was able to do something that could not be done ordinary, to be able to run on top of the water. It's quite a thing! But anyway, and also to have the, be able to warn the others so there would be no further killing.

So in a way, he uses his power to spare some of the relatives and the village Elders who were killed. So that's one short version [laughs] of the kind of a story you wanted to hear. So it is, it is very romantic, it is very *dramatic* I mean. It really—when it's spoken in my language it's really—it hits hard. But in English it's kind of lost that dramatic feeling.

And then there is another one, if I may keep on the same subject. That is sometimes it's very, it's sometimes it's very simple—sometimes it's not as powerful as that one. This one, it happens recently. This relates to the same thing, but it is, it is the *mind* that does that. It's not because the guy is magical—it has faith, the faith, the belief is strong that it can be done. And it has to do with healing.

There was a man who was sick. He had family and his children, and he lived on the on the

river. And he couldn't walk. He had what they call arthritis. He couldn't walk, his knees couldn't support. He had *pain*. And he wanted to get well, but he couldn't because there was no medicine. There was no medicine that could cure that kind of disease. There was a man in the area; there was a man who was known to be a very simple man, that he was known to have a some kind of healing powers. Something that is very small he would use, and able to cure a person, as long as you believe in him.

So one day the man who got a sick knee, and he was there just crawling around, and he hear this person coming down the river; he went down, crawled down to meet him. And, and the guy who come down, I forget his name.....Ehapanday, but I keep forgetting his name. ...Saagat, that was his name! Saagat. Saagat arrived with his wife, and he saw this man crawling towards, to the shore, towards the community, so he had pity on him.

And he says: "It's so pitiful to see you not be able to walk." And he says: "Do you wish to get well? Do you hope some day to get up and walk again?"

And so the guy says to the Omushkego: "Yes, yes. I'd sure do anything to get well. But there is not much I can do."

So the man says: "I will give you something, something to do. But you will have to believe me."

So he went to the, he went to where the man used to sit to have a lunch and make tea, and cook. It was a large tree. He took a stick, this size. And he drive it into the standing straight, drive it there with an axe. It was strong enough for a man to hang on to.

So he tell this Omushkego, he says: "You lift yourself this thing. Lift yourself. Every day. And you do it every day, until I see you again."

So the Omushkego say: "Yes, I shall do that."

He did that, every day, pain in his knee. Lift himself out of there. And by February, he was able to stand up from there, like this. And by June, he was able just to be able to get up and stand, and walk around, just by believing the man. By the month of August, he was able to walk very freely without any assistance. And his knee went back to the normal legs, he was able to walk. So he was healed, which it was impossible to heal disease, by believing this guy, who told him what to do.

So that's just believing is another sort of a mind can heal, when you believe. That is another story that is really very, it is recently happened. So that's another kind, and there is other kinds. And many others.

And there is another, there is another thing that the people used to do. They used to have a game. These are our Omushkego people again. And there is this, there is particular place now is still existing at the mouth of James Bay, it is called Ekwon River. And that's where the most of the Omushkegos used to congregate in the spring after the ice breakup. And they used to unit themselves through their meeting through the whole lots of, there were lots sometime. So they used to create a temporary village that was so long, the teepees were so thick, at one end you cannot see right through and go to each place you look, if you stand in the middle. It's on the shore of the James Bay; it's all fine beach—sand and all that stuff. And this is where they used to play; this is where they used to compete each of the different games they have. And so they were enjoying very much, they enjoyed also they married, the lovers get married, and also they plan to get married in the fall. They plan some activities—*competing games* is what I'm getting at.

They played the competitive games with each other. Different kind; a young man, physical physical competition you know, like short runs and carrying heavy load, or jumping, skipping—anything at all. Some kind of a tug-of-war they had amongst the women, and everything.

And then there were *mitew*, you know, those shaman powers. They compete each other who's going to be most fantastic. And everybody did everything, everybody did everything that cannot be done physically—you know—impossible. So they they show off amongst each other, they said this is what they can do. They can make the stone come up, like that. And it would hang there for a little while, until they think it should drop. And then they can break the stick, a stick like that. Hold it like that, without—just holding it like this. And it would just crack, just by looking at it.

And also they also have a game they call a race, racing across the creek. There was a creek; there was a creek there, about twenty-five feet wide, and it was pretty shallow. They could walk, or run across, but they don't do that.

They have this long stick, and they used to call, like an old pool stick, and one guy, who was really, really strong—a young man—he says: “What you do is nothing!” He says: “I'll show you!”

So he take this long stick and put it in water; he step on it, and he just skim across the water and come back again. [laughs] So he was the winner, and he win. He was the most winner of that kind of a competitive game. And this is what they call *mitew* competition. It means shamans competing, you know, not fighting—just competing what they can do.

So all that, they say, it's a mind—they use the mind to do what they want to do. So that is the kind of story that you wanted to hear, right? [laughs] So that's only a quick ones; there are others that are much more dramatic than that, but they are long. They are very long. There are some stories that are important besides just that one. So it's sort of—doesn't make sense much if you just go just one section.

So, that's, that's the part that people used to, our Elders used to entertain us most as a kid, because of those things, those kinds of stories. They're very powerful and also they're very entertaining, unbelievable stories.

Now, having said that, now we're going to talk about what is the shaman power is. What can be done. What is it exactly can they do? Right now I'm not, I'm not telling you a legend; I'm telling you a true story. It's supposed to be true, true, that amongst the Omushkego people. And this was a long time ago before the European came. It happens a little while, a while back. I think the last shaman that we ever have openly was 1930, that had practiced the power in front of people, and he died—he passed away after that, not long.

And this one happened in York Factory. York Factory happens there about that same time, the last shaman that was there.

So anyway, before that time there were lots of them, there were lots of that stuff. But in each requires training and fasting and preparation till you can acquire that such power. So these guys what they do is, they usually competing. It always happened that it is always someone that compete the one that is much better. For some reason they find a small reason to compete each other, these these people what they called *mitewak*. These were bad situation because it is not the recommended. So one time, once in a life, once during that life, it happens that they were, there was a *mitew* that was not too good; you

know he was taking advantage of his power to other people, intimidating and really, really bad person. So he was a *kichi-mitew*, he was a powerful guy. Everybody fear him and doesn't like him. And he always get in the way; he always do something to be insulted, to be offended, so he will have a chance to, you know, to apply his power to a person. Even to *kill* a person. Just an excuse to kill.

So one day there was a game, this temporary village again along one of the lakes that we have. And the young, the young people were playing games; I don't know what they call that game...it's something like a—it sounds similar to the Mohawk's play, you know that they, they throw the ball with the stick. That kind of thing they have. And it requires physical strength and speed, and everything. It requires the young people to play; not the people who can't move.

But *kichi-mitew* was not a young man; he was an old man. He was not the kind who can move around fast. And one night, one evening when the young people were playing, and the people watching, watching this game, the *kichi-mitew* came out on purpose all dressed up, you know—really dressed up, the best he can well dress. He didn't wear a sort of tie or anything, no [laughs], but he wore the, what they said the most highly prized was the otter skin, the bluest otter skin that has a shiny white inside. And that's what he wore as a jacket, and also the legging, and all beaded and everything. He also have a braid here, a braid in the back. *Really, really...*

And he came to try the game. And the people said: "Oh, there comes that *kichi-mitew*, and that's all he wanted an excuse to get insulted. We should stay away." They tell the young people, "Be careful with him! Don't go near him!"

And there was this young guy, you know, who was raised by his uncle—had lost a mother and everything—somehow he had been trained the shaman powers without knowledge; nobody knows that; he was just a young boy. So he was in the game—he was old enough to play the game. And the other young people didn't want to come close to the shaman, and to allow him to grab this ball or whatever it is they played. But the young man, he didn't give a thing about this guy, you know. He just pushed him out of the way and grabbed the ball, and he didn't care much about him!

And all the people say: "You shouldn't do that! Don't do that!" You know, don't do that to the *mitew*!

He says: "To hell with him!" [laughs] "I want the game! I want to play!"

So he played and the shaman always get in there, get in front of him; he just push him off, and throw him and [laughs]. And everybody start to get scared! Everybody but the Elders start to walk away, they say: "That guy's finished! That's the end of that young man!"

But still, the shaman didn't give up. *He wanted more*. He wanted some more insulting to, you know, to qualify to get mad. And the boy just didn't like him! Didn't like the Old Man, he didn't care much about him. And when he was running with this ball, *he* came again right in front, and he grabbed the ball and throw it into the water, this old guy!

And the young man really curse, and he says: "What's the idea to throw the ball there?" You know the goal the goals on this side, but the creek was there.

So he chased after the ball and the Old Man gets it away, and he grab the ball first and step on it, and he stand there. And the young man get in there, and he grab on with those braids and he just dunk him in and he just, "Bring me the ball!" [laughs]

And the Old Man was dunked like this into the water [laughs]. And everybody just screamed, you know...that's the end of the little boy! That's all he needs to be killed.

And the boy just lift him up, he says: "Where's the ball?"

"[gurgling coughing noises]" [laughs]

And then he says: "Get me the ball!" [laughs]

Finally he let him go, and the Old Man was just soaked and everything was dripping all over, the best clothes and everything. And he sort of heft himself out of the bank, and the little boy bring out the ball and went to play! But by this the little one were so scared that they all step aside of the game field.

And the little boy says: "Come on! Play! Come with me!"

Everybody just won't go. And the Old Man just walked by, and he says—how did he say? They speak, they speak for him as if he was speaking the Oji-Cree language. So he says, "Tepuesapego Matcheapenoncheesh. Kaginiskatapawanadasskiquayana" It mean, "It is truly a bad boy who has soak my new outfit!" That's what he saying. He walks by.

And that's an indication that he is mad; an indication that he is going to *kill* the boy for insulting him in front of people. So he went home, and the little boy was sure that he's going to die tonight, tonight he's going to get killed by him. So the boy went home, and everything was all over the village said the young boy have insulted the greatest *mitew*. That's all he needed to kill him. Everybody's sure the boy's going to die!

He went home, not even thinking of it. Not showing any fear. Went back to his home, and his uncle telled him, he says: "Why do you want to die now?" [laughs] You know, because he knows he's going to get killed!

He says: "No, no!" He says, the young boy, "I am not going to bother you. You know, I'm not going to bother you even if I—something happen to me. I'll take care of myself!"

So the uncle couldn't say anything. He just pitied the young man. So he went to bed; the young boy went to bed. And everybody else went to bed.

In the middle of the night, towards the after midnight, the boy wake up everybody screaming with pain, and everything. He's just doubled up in pain, in his chest and all that. He was really suffering. The uncle make a fire and try to comfort him, couldn't.

So he says: "Don't bother!" He says: "Don't light a fire! Just let me—just let me be!"

So the uncle didn't want to make a fire because there's nothing he can do, you know. He just expected the boy to just do in and die.

So finally, for a long period of time, the young boy begin to stop having screaming with pain. And he stop. There were more noise. Everybody think he has died. Nobody wants to get up because they know the boy's there. And the morning come, the uncle get up, look at the boy. He lays there in his bed all right, all covered. And he watch him. Is he breathing? He went to check, and the boy's still breathing!

So slowly, he touch him. He says: "My son! Are you okay?"

And the boy says: "What's the matter with you? I was asleep here! Don't bother me!" [laughs]

The boy was okay! And the uncle was so surprised. How come? How come this young boy can survive, after all? So that moment, the sun, the daylight was coming. And the *mitew* camp was still standing there, everybody saw it. And they know by then the boy didn't die last night.

They said: "No no, he's just waiting; just playing games" Anyway they didn't hear that story goes on, that the boy had had a painful experience last night, he could have died—but he didn't die.

So after that, you know, when the sun rises, all of a sudden he could see the *mitew* teepee, there it was full of activity. He was moving, as if he was in a hurry to leave. They never saw him do that before. And he was actually rushing his helpers around, and get this stuff into the canoe, and took off. As if he's running away. And everybody's wondered, what is he scared of?

So he left to the next bend of the river, as he was never did before; he was always cared for and he had his servants and respect. And he was paddling for his life.

He says: "Come on!" He says: "*Kinegouk!*" *Kinegouk* means '*Harder!* *Harder!*' And he was rushing away for something; didn't see!

And then all of a sudden he break his paddle and he fell face down inside his boat. And the two servants they said: "What happened! What happened!" He even broke the cross piece of this boat, that's how powerful he doubled over inside his boat.

And when they tried to look at him left they said, and then came out, and he's dead! The man dead all of a sudden! So the servants, they know that something kill him, this guy! Something kill him! What kill him?

So they're so fearful to him, before he heard they said: "Well, it serves him right, let's get rid of the guy!"

They beach the boat and just drag it up onto the shore, and set the fire, and said: "to hell with this guy. Good riddance!" So they went back.

That's the end of this *kichi-mitew*, the big, powerful *mitew*. They went back, and they want to know why, who did? So they said it was the little boy who did. In the morning when he woke up, they found just a little something that looks like a bag, from the animal, and in it sticks all kinds of porcupine quills.

And he says: "This is what I got for me! That's the Old Man who send it to me, to kill me!"

That morning before the *mitews* died, and he had asked his mother:

"Could you give me a few needles?" His uncle, Andy.

So he says: "What are you going to do with the needles?"

He says: "Just give them to me; I'm just going to borrow them."

So he asked Andy again to give him the needles, he stick the few in the middle, and he says: "I shall send this his, it is his property, the old guy."

And that's what they find; the same thing the Old Man had sent to the boy to kill him, added to it is the needles. And that's what killed him. And that's the power of mind of the young boy who kill the powerful shaman.

[laughs] That's the end of the story. So that was the entertainment, about our stories in that, in that way.

So we asked our Elders, "Why do you tell us this? Why does it happen? Why is it? Why does it happen like that?"

There again, the same explanation: It's the person that has exalted, who is really higher powered sometime in amongst the people, is the lowest; he is less important than the orphaned little boy who has much more power than him. The explanation of the story is *do not over-judge*; do not be so certain that you are the best of everyone. So he lost out in front of people, and the person that was lowly, considered lowly person, the orphaned little boy, was the one that beat the powerful shaman. It's just a lesson that you always have to watch not to overdo, not to over-exercise when you think you are better than a person, because you could be put down very easily. It's a lesson, but it makes it so exciting to listen to. That's all it does. Just study that, the simple one.

Okay? We got lots of them, got a lot of those kind of stories. And they all teaching us, trying to tell us to be good. That is very exciting for us.

Okay! Thank you for listening. I think that's about all I can do for tonight, before you fall asleep.

Thank you. Thank you.

[Applause]

Thanks very much for coming everyone, and I hope to see you again sometime soon.