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Bird: dh1
Recorder: Louis Bird
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I want to tell you one story that is many times that I have enjoyed listening to my grandparents; to the elders I have listened to. I am supposed to be a storyteller, and this is the reason I am here in Winnipeg. I have already visited the University and spoken to the students and also visited other places to tell the story. And it is the storytelling that I am interested in. It is my wish and my hope that I will, that I have been, and hope to be, hope to save the stories that have been told to us when I was young, and the stories that have been passed on to us from our fathers, our grandfathers, and their grandfathers, and so on, and so on. These stories that I have heard when I was young have been passed down to us for many generations. Some stories are very old; they call them legends. And they are a part of our education, and our culture. Our culture is part of legends. And it is easily passed on to the next generation by the use and application of legends; and our education is passed on by practical things and very little about the writing instructions.

We learn by listening in our culture; we learn and experience the subject by practicing it along with our teachers: our elders, our parents, our friends. And later on, it's repeated from us on to our children. And that has been, from the days that we cannot even count. Whether they call it time immemorial—means the time that we cannot even remember when it begins. So this is what I have tried to do. I have tried to remember the stories that has been told to us; that has been passed down to my grandparents and my parents and to me.

And why I do this? Why am I doing this? I am trying to pass this on to my children, but I cannot pass it on today because there is so many distractions; today's world, there is much...there is too much distraction from all sorts of communication in the modern world. There is television, and music, and another kind of stuff that comes to our lives today, which distracts and takes away from the importance of the old traditional handing-down knowledge to our young generation. It is now almost impossible to do that. We cannot sit down or even stand beside our children to pass on the knowledge we know—to show them by example the culture that we have passed on to us that we wish we could have passed on to them—because of the different way of living today.

Therefore, for the last twenty-five years I have come to aware and see this kind of education is going to disappear if we do not somehow record it or keep it or write it out even. So the only thing that I can do then is to go back to the elders, ask them again to tell me many things that I have heard when I was young, and then try to record them. The problem that I had then it was the elders never feel comfortable with the recording machine, with anyone that scribbles on papers in front of them. They sort of distract them; they cannot talk to you openly. So I have come to the method of listening to them

carefully, and trying to memorize what they speak about. Why do they do that? And also to listen to them telling me the legends that we have in our culture, and to tell me why the legends were used, and how they were used, and when did they start to be used, for the next generation.

And that is the reason why, I begin to think these things will go away if all of our elders begin to die. And I begin to aware of that in 1965 after by grandmother died. My grandmother died at that time; the one I have heard many times tell me the legends and many stories, even our life story. So now, why do I want to do this? What am I hoping to do by collecting stories and recording them? The only way I could record them and hold them down without losing them is to try to record them as I have heard them from the elders. The legends—not much legends—but mostly our culture education. And to try to put it in recording what actually is a Omushkegowak culture. How does it differ from the other tribes? Why is it different in that particular place? What makes it different? Why is it different than the other tribes down south? All these. And I wanted to find out that from the elders. Some elders have explained; some elders did not explain. In trying to save the stories, the only option I'd gotten, was to memorize everything that I hear, that I have heard in the past, and what I have heard up to 1965. And then begin to record everything that I remember in this machine called the recording machine.

So that is, that is we may call my project. What I did then, I began to record the stories of my grandparents, which I did not have a recording machine then, I just in my memory, I imitate them, I tell stories like they used to do, and record them. And those other elders that I have come to contact with in my young, in the beginning of my life, and up to that point in 1965, I begin to record a little by little as much as I can recall in my mind, and then record some in a very rough recording way, just to make sure not to lose them. And I begin to collect stories that way, slowly and slowly. And many years I have come to have built quite a collection of stories, and the more I collect the more I begin to see the importance of what I do.

Even too many times I get discouraged, and up to now, I have not yet given up. What I hope to accomplish is that if I can record as many stories as I can, in a different way of telling stories, and to make them alive, and to be important, and to be useful. Most of all what I hope to accomplish is to have recorded at least some of the stories that I have heard. At least to record them in my voice even though I could not put these stories from the voices of my grandfathers. So we may call them the voices of our past; the voices of our elders has been reheard by my trying to, my trying to imitate their stories has reheard the voices of our elders.

So the recording comes first; this is the only way. To record them by own voice in the tape recording and hopefully later on if there's time, if there's any way that I may be able to find some help, some of the people may take seriously and then transcribe these recordings into our language as I have spoken. Way I speak exactly the way I have heard them. In the language that I have heard them, so that they can at least be original in that sense. I hope that the originality of these recordings will be kept as they are; to be authentic, to be the real stuff. To say, "This is the first recording." We can say that. And then after transcribing our language into written language, written material, and then the written material to be kept as the first copies, and then first copies to be kept exactly the way they are. To keep them as original as they are. And that is the importance for me.

After that, whatever language they have been translated into, whether it's English, French, Germany, whatever—or even Japan, I don't care what language is the second one that it is translated into. But to be translated as it is from the written, transcribed material. To be translated as exactly what it says. And leave it at that. And from then on, after translation, there as far as I care. After that, these the material that has been translated, can be redefined to be usable in other languages, no matter what language that may be. That is as far as I will see them. If it goes to the written transcribed in our language, and then translated to a second language, I would be satisfied if I could see that accomplished. It will be done. It will be done. Hopefully now there is much more hope. That is my wish, and that is what I wish to do.

Now, the stories that I have, I hope that somehow...what I see is that if we can get somehow some people who have expertise that they can be put together, if I could be with them, this will be possible. Those people who know the European culture, the people who are good at doing things—the historians—they know how to write history, the writers of the stories. The book writers, or novel writers, or whatever they are. People who are experts in writing whatever, any kinds of material, and especially those who know how to make the history books. While they go about doing that. And they have expertise, and these are the kind of people, I believe, they will be very good. They will be very useful. They will be so important in this project that I have tried, that I have begun.

I have collected these stories into a tape recording, that is the part that is the beginning, to my opinion, that is my contribution to this. I am not yet finished. I'd like to be around when they are transcribed; I'd like to be around when they are written. And I'd like to supervise the best way to edit in the other language, so it won't lose its variation so much. I'd like to be around, sort of, keep an eye, or just to enjoy being used, that these things will be useful for the next generation to come in another form of communication—that is by another language, or by a written language, even if we don't have the original elders who have told us these stories. That is what I see. If we can put people together, like people who are experts in one field, perhaps in a European culture? There are historians, and there are anthropologists, they are people who are linguists, and some that are experts in the fields of their own, who would put together them to work and help with this project. I can see a very bright future. And we would have accomplished something that could not be accomplished without putting together experts to do this. I do not consider myself an expert but at least I have done my best.

And our of these finished products that can be put together, we can make in any form or any shape, will be very useful for the next generation, to this generation, who have been denied to access to some information, to this type of information. Like the First Nation people, who want to have their own education. Like people, the First Nation, who wants to have their education curriculum developed, they can have it from here. Part of it from here, maybe perhaps from the other field, the other tribal information. This will be directly from a Omushkegowak contribution. It will be put in the written material and it will be accessible to any other language after.

That is why, today, I have very high hope. I almost see the possibility to come the reality that I wish to accomplish, that I hope is to be done. Now, the next thing that I want yet to do is to try to emphasize yet the importance, to see more easily, to understand how important listening is. I like to put a preview sort of thing, in order to ask some help,

to be able to get perhaps most important funding to be able to pay those people who will be, or to have a material to use, or a money to be used, in order to accomplish this. And also to make people who have authority to see what is this we are getting into. Let us say, for example, the story about the First Nations spirituality—what is it like? Why is it so important in their life? In the life of the First Nation? Why was it so important a long time ago? Why should we keep it? Or should it be revived? If so, and if we come to that stage, we will have to have the very authentic material that we can go or guide us through. And much more yet to prepare to do the right thing. Not just to make believe, not to make a showcase out of the old important things of our culture. That is one thing that needs to be expressed strongly here.

So now, talking about mitewiwin. This is part of our spirituality and our culture. Mitewiwin is part of our culture a long time ago before the European came. Mitew is a person who exercises such a thing. Mitewiwin is a noun – what it is. So I will mention a few things here about mitewiwin. It is considered a spiritual part of our culture. There are places in this North America where the Native will have come to the state to use the mitewiwin. It is very similar to the religion, where people can get together and do some action in the forms of a group prayer. There are other types that are different, like the Omushkegowak in the James Bay lowland; they didn't come to that point yet. They were still using the individualistic—individual mitew has his own beliefs and practices, but still requires the audience at times. For example, when he wants to operate the shaking tents he still requires the audience around. And that was the important part of our culture.

Now, that's only touching one form of mitewiwin when I say the shaking tents is an important thing, an important part, for a Omushkego, because it's a feat, because it requires nothing material, but it requires only the covering and the sticks are always available around. That is if you are on the ground; if you are in the water, it's different. Now, to explain a little bit more about mitewiwin, I will give a brief story about this thing.

There was a man in the early years—we may say about 1900...1920 thereabout, or even 1900 between that. When the first fur traders began to operate in the James Bay lowland, they used to build the York boat in York Factory. They call them York boat. Sometimes they have a mast, one mast, and two masts. And they were open decked; they don't have no floor or anything. And the Native people were required to operate these things, to sail them on around the coast, the west coast of James Bay, because there is only two depots, they call it, where they unload the stuff from overseas. One of them was in York Factory in Hudson Bay, and the other one was within James Bay, an island called...Charlton Island? I think they call it, or whatever it is. Akaamiski, they call it in our language. There was only two places they unload these big steam ships when they came in, once they became steam ships. That was in 1900.

So anyway, in between those things, that was where the Native people were required to unload the ships and then ship the goods into the small communities, which became then the communities. Actually, they were just European settlements. So that's when those people were required to sail these boats and these York boats—at the beginning they didn't have no compass! Open decked. Open decked, and the rudder has no wheel; it's just a plain rudder, extension to the deck that you have to fight it. Dangerous material! Dangerous stuff. So this particular time his name, his nickname, was Kakitewish. Actually his real name is Sakaney. I think his name was John Sakaney.

He is not a great man—he is not a big man, but he is a great man. And he was a mitew at the same time. And we were told that he sailed these open decked York Boats, two masts, from York Factory right into the tip of James Bay. I don't think he ever lost one ship, I mean the boat. He never lost it in a wreck, I mean.

So he was found to be a very courageous person—using the stars as his navigating aid; using the waves, and able to understand the waves and where he is, and how far he is. It was very fascinating how he navigated, and what he uses. Beside being as Omushkegowak are, they are automatically, instinctively know their bearings, they know where they are more like to say... an inner compass. That's the only way I can say it. So anyway, this was fascinating about this man because he didn't really need the compass to go from one point to another. He knows exactly, he understood the salt water. He knows what happened also. When there is no stars at night, he knows how to use the waves to find out how far offshore he is, and if there's any obstacle ahead—a few miles ahead. So he knows about this thing. So that's what was so fascinating about this John Sakaney. His real name—Christian name. So that's the blending of his culture and the other culture using the white man's boat, structured boat, and using his own mitewiwin sort of originated skill and knowledge, to be able to navigate storm days, night times, regardless. And he always finds his way to where he goes. And that is important, and that is in my collection—it is there. The stories, my collection that is in there somewhere.

So the next important thing is this thing...because of this instant communication in what the high-tech world today, in communication, speed information; we tend to forget the old style of communication. How would we go back? Why would we have to relearn the language? Why do you Omushkego have to learn the language of their own ancestors? This is what I want to express. The culture of the Omushkego people, their language is the most important to keep their culture. If they, we, the Omushkegos could keep our children to use their language, it would be easier for them to understand their culture if they speak their language, because the language fits to the old culture, even though it does not have any high-tech in there. But still, the language fits to the culture. You cannot fully express or understand our culture in the past, with a different language. It would kill it. I mean, it would minimize it. It would be less important. It would be, it would be unfinished—not whole. But if you would study the language, master the language, at least speak and write it and read it, then you would be able to understand what your culture is if you were a Omushkego student. Or if you were the youngster and you hear the language more often, you know you are Omushkego. So that is why it is important.

And the language fits to the culture. And the legends that are told, in there contains the highest forms of the Omushkego language. The words fit the language. So that's why it's important to keep the language alive with our culture. The language will keep our culture alive. Or culture will hold the language. Otherwise—not one can be separated.

And that is what I am trying to make a point of now is the language itself. That's what I'm talking about; that's my point on the importance of things... Yeah, that is why this is very important: to try to keep our language and also to try to understand how to read and write. And how to write especially, and how to read so you can—these collections of stories can be written down. And it's the only way we can keep our language if we recorded them into written language, and then the young people would be

able to study the language, the reading and writing, and they would be able to actually understand the culture better when they read it...if they don't have any more storytellers. Because we don't have any more elders that can tell us our language, our culture, verbally. The oral histories will be gone. It's time that they should be put into paper. That is why we have to do this.

So the importance as I repeat myself—that is why we need to write these things in the written language; in the Omushkego language, so we will save the culture that way. So it will help all those who wants to know about their culture, and also wants to study the language or study the culture of the Omushkego's by reading and by writing. It will be much more complete; it will be very important.

And also, to go back to this again, the examples of the history, the oral history of our people: One small oral history that I want to recall is about a man who is important, in about...between 1890 and 1930, thereabouts. This was a man called Bernard in a Christian name. Bernard Gull, or Kiyask in our language. In the Omushkego language we call him Penas Kiyask. So this person was one of the Hudson Bay key men, because he was one of those guys who sailed the York Boats on the bay on the Southwest coast of Hudson Bay. Every summer he used to walk from Winisk into York Factory, which is about three hundred, maybe, miles...two hundred maybe miles to the Northwest from Winisk, and go out there in summer to work for Hudson Bay Company; unload the steamship out in the bay by York Boats, and put them into the York Factory warehouse, and after that begin to sail into the Southeast coast, to go East a little community wherever there is to put these goods to be sold to the Native people. And when he finished that he is responsible as a captain of this York Boat and beach the boat somewhere and put it in the dry land so it will be safe.

So it was a story about this man who really did his best to, to get involved for the Hudson Bay Company so he will get benefits out of it. To have the materials that he wants, like the food item process food: flour, sugar, tea and all that stuff. And he has, he has his own faults also, so one story that's his: he had wrecked maybe three York Boats and the last one he wrecked or beached, he did it on purpose for his own benefit because he wanted to, he wanted to winter trap there around the coast so he purposely beached the boat there without totally destroying the content. And it happens! So he's an extraordinary man, he makes our recent oral history exciting. But that doesn't mean offensively; we do not tell the story about him because we want to offend him or degraded him. But we just want to show you how Hudson Bay Company had influenced people—changed their style of thinking, increased their negativity in their behavior, because we, all of us, have different inner faults. Some of us are eager, or some of us are so greedy, or some of us are not. Some of us are wanting to be higher in the government and we'd do anything to get that.

Well, Penas, this Penas, this Bernard Gull, had an extreme about these things. He wanted to be, to do what the white man do, and he wanted to do things what he see them do. And he worshipped them almost. He wants to be like them. And by being that, he made a mistake. Make himself so disgraceful; almost like a big laughing stock in part.

So anyway, this is not to hurt the person's family. This is just to see the example of things that happen; so we have this oral history that is just mentioned. It is all involved in our culture: gradual changes, and watch changes and what happened; the negative changes and the positive changes that came about. And that is why we have to

have stories—we have to have—it's important to collect those stories, to teach us, to recall the past—what has happened to the people who have involved in the first contact of the Europeans and what happened to their culture. And what has happened since then.

So two people, for example, involving the mitewiwin, or spiritual connection of their culture. There is, we have talked about this guy Sakaney, who uses his mitewiwin expertise to be able to accomplish something which is new to him, where he doesn't even require the compass to find his way between nearly five hundred miles of open water, and regardless of any storm, any kind of weather. So there is a deed there, that could not be possible with just an ordinary man. So we learn something about mitewiwin, about him, so we have—I have collected stories in this manner, for us to see, to hear at least the stories that extraordinary person has accomplish by using mitewiwin, or being shamanism, being shaman. And also a person who is gifted, to navigate in the water, and also another person that we saw as a being so extreme one to the other, being so greedy or being, taking advantage of what he has, and made himself a shameful guy in the story—as Bernard Gull. But we don't aim to degrade him, or to make a laughing stock out of him. He did. He made himself a laughing stock at the time, but his deeds are much more overpowering these mistakes. So that is one, and also there are many in my collection of stories like that.

I think I have make myself a little bit clearer what I—why do I collect stories. What do I hope to accomplish and what benefit these things will be if they can be put into a written form, into written materials where they will benefit the future students of the First Nation. And will help the teachers for the First Nation, and will help the non-Native people to understand much more the history of our First Nation, and to understand more about the connection between spiritual beliefs and practices of our First Nation before they took the Christianity. That we should not blame on each other for the loss, that we should have reconciliation and try to do the best from there on. And that is all I have to say. That is why I think this project is very important. I would be so forever thankful if I ever get that help, from the people who wish to help.

Thank you.