Hello? Hello? This is Louis Bird, from Peawanuck, Ontario, Canada.

When you listen to this tape recording, you must remember to try to understand clearly what I say when I start to speak fast, because there are times I could say one word and it sounds the other. If I were, if I were to talking about a man, I am not used to using, to say “he”. Sometimes I may sound ‘she’. Or if I were to talk about the man and a female, male and female, I may say ‘he’, or ‘she’. So in writing, it may be written as ‘he/her’ or ‘she’. ‘He or her’, or ‘he or she’, whatever it is. One other thing is, when I speak about a person, it is that person I am talking about.

Now, my subjects this time is in our Omushkego language, it says “mitewiwin”, mitewiwin. In the English term, it’s “shamanism”. So, what am I doing this for? It is to try to explain basically, what is shamanism, how do one begin to be one, in the Omushkego culture. Only, only, in the James Bay and Hudson Bay, southwest coast of Hudson Bay area. Maybe the distance between six hundred miles along the shore, maybe two hundred miles within-land. These are the people who practice and establish this activity, shall we, shall we say. It actually is a spiritual part of the person. So here is a few, a few basic truth about this thing. I shall say first: before Christianity, we are talking about time, maybe 390 years ago before, before any white men came in this area.

Our Omushkegawak history is, at least, fifty percent or more is mitewiwin, shamanism. It is a part of being. It was a part of spirituality of a people, or a person. It’s a total Omushkegawak education, and total of Omushkegawak culture, which is a Omushkegawak tradition. It was not a church. It’s an individual belief and practice by individual. It can be obtained much better in certain condition. In that case, requires a isolation, and fasting, or retreat, to the wilderness. When it has achieved, when one has satisfied as much as he want to be, he is not done. He or she has to rekindle the spirit in the body. Reconditioning one’s self. That means you have to go into the wilderness again, to get in touch with the wilderness and the spiritual part of being. Depending on how much one wants, wants to get, or to achieve, what level he or she wants to achieve, that depends. If you want more, if you want more power, more mystical, more successful in life, you must condition yourself more and prepare yourself more; and also requires to start very early age.

Now, the question is: does everyone has to have shamanism? Does everybody has to be a shaman in those days? Not necessarily. But everyone must have a knowledge, or be aware of it. How to do, and how to handle it. The fact of the matter is, everybody, everybody that is born in the wilderness, is automatically gifted to be conditioned partially to be a shaman, or to have such thing. It has been said in our culture, it is very
easy for an orphan to acquire such thing, because in order for one to acquire such
development in body and spirit, he will have to condition himself as I said; he has to
condition. One has to condition himself in order to have dreams. And that’s the beginning
of being one. You must have dreams. As a young person of six year old, if it’s that, if that
okay, if the parents think it’s a, it’s gifted thing, it’s the parents who know who is gifted.
Parents recognize the children who have dreams, and once they know this person is gifted
dreamer, they hand the responsibility to their, to the Elders, or maybe their own fathers,
their own grand, their own mothers, which is child’s grandparents. So one of those, it’s
either a grandmother, or a grandfather, or also next to that is uncle or an aunt, the people
who have a knowledge of this. They all have a knowledge in those days, before, before
Christianity.

So this person is a guide, a guidance. He guides the child to develop this way.
Guides the child how to understand dreams, how to acquire dreams, how to, they guide
him to use this dream, a certain dream, to be expanded so that it can be recalled during
the dream state. It can be, it can be even willed later. The will to dream the same dream,
to continue that same dream. So that’s the beginning. The child has to do that, or anyone
who is in training. So in the Omushkego land, in the land of the Omushkegowak, there is
constant danger in the land in where the Omushkego live. The danger of not only by the
beast, or by anything, but the danger of the weather, the seasons, and also during season
some animals can be bothersome. For example, polar bears can be dangerous. Black
bears can be nuisance, and the wolf, they can be very dangerous. And some other
animals. Not all of them. When there is something happening to the animals, they begin
chaotic, and they are dangerous. And most of all, humans. Humans can be very
dangerous, especially when they are scared, because they are always on the alert; they are
always in a state of alertness. Anything that startle them can automatically kill, by any
means. So it’s very dangerous, but it is always also a complete life if one has learned
successfully. And for this reason, almost everybody has to have some knowledge of this
spiritual connection in the body. So therefore they can defend, or at least acquire some
safety measures in time of danger. That is why it was required. In living in the
wilderness, it requires.

The truth is, every animal has his own gifted defense mechanism. For example,
the skunk. The skunk doesn’t have speed. The skunk doesn’t have muscle or sharp teeth
to tear or any enemy. But he has a, a stink! [laughs] Whatever you call that, the smell.
That his defense. And he can use it; he can save himself with that. Take for example, the
porcupine. Porcupine is a slow animal and very small. Very vulnerable to the animals.
But he has a defense protection, a defense system, a protection. So he has a pines.
Porcupine. So that’s part of gifted defense for him to survive. So each animal has his
own. Some, it is believe by our ancestors, that all animals develop shamanism. So they
believe, or ancestors, that animals do have partially similar, spiritual connection. They
don’t, they don’t pray like human. They don’t do anything. But they knew that. They
have a mind. Or do they have a mind, or do they have born with instinct? That’s what
the, our ancestors quite close to understand about the animals. For example, if a person
spend thirty-five years studying animal, they will begin to understand these animals are
intelligent. Almost to the point of saying they do think, maybe it’s all just instinct, but we
don’t know that for sure.
But for the polar bears and the black bears, they are the very closest to the, to the Native way of behavior. They follow the season; they have their routine. They have their way we, they, there is a, there is a time when they are dangerous. There are times, where they are not so, powerful. But they always have that keen sense of detecting danger. A polar bear sometimes can know, will understand, will feel the enemy, which is, which is human. They will feel it before they see it. Before they hear it. Before they smell it. When they sleep, they will just simply sort of being touch waken, and that is the, that is something that is a gift in them. Most will have that. Caribous, they have much higher sense of that. And the po-, and the black bears. The wolf? I don’t know which one is more intelligent. The wolf seems to think, they socialize; they’re in pack. The caribous are in pack, the herds of caribous. So they, they usually have a leader, and the wolf have a leader.

So they have this thing what I called. In a way, they have this “shaman power”. It has been known long time ago by our, our ancestors, that they have detected such animal, and they are very hard to kill. If the caribou herd has one of those, they will be safe; they will, they will always be safe because he is the leader. He knows when there is a danger, he knows when to move, and when to run away. He is a lookout sort of person, sentry, you call him. So that kind of person. But sometimes they are two, three in the herd, if there is forty. There may be, there may be two in there. If there is ten, more than ten, there would be one. And that’s what the Native people used to try to detect first. They look at the herd, they see the trail, they know which one is the leader and they know where to find him. And they usually try to outsmart him and if that’s a first one they would kill. Once they kill the leader, the rest will be some, some kind of for momentary chaotic, and that gives them a chance to take another shot with the bow and arrow.

So this is, this is what our culture is contained. The knowledge of the wilderness. Our ancestors understand each individ-, each species. So they understand that they all gifted. And so a human is highly gifted. They know a human is highly gifted than animals. But sometimes not all people are gifted highly. Some are gifted just enough for their survival. So mitewiwin is a part, almost more than fifty percent of the makeup of the human, human person. So all they have to do expand it to the level of this, shamanism. There is a level, yes. Just like the white man education, there is a degree. You have to have a certain degree, in order to be functional. So the shamanism is also have, has a degree. One per, a person can have a very minimum, just enough for the, to be aware of danger and to understand those other things that are necessary to understand. And there are those who go higher up, so they can have a bit power over a few things. And there are those who goes to the second, and those who can, who can understand the mystics: things that are not quite explainable. And then the third level may be highest. When the shaman begin to the third level, he, he doesn’t require any material stuff. He has a, a power, a controlling power of mind. Mind over matter. He can do that.

So, I am not going to explain in detail about this stuff, but I just want to explain the basics of this, how this shamanism, shamanism is developed. And it begin, if one has to be total, a powerful one, a gifted one, usually he is well known at the early age. Perhaps maybe when he, when he or she, is five years old. And the Elders will know that. The parents will know first. And then they will be handed over to the Elders who will study the kid. When the Elders has confirmed this boy, or a girl, is really a gifted person,
they will guide him, guide her, to develop much properly, so the, so the kid would not have a chaotic mind.

Okay! That’s as far as I am going to go for the time being. So it’s the simple, the simple procedure is that when a per, when the young person is known to have a gift of, of dream, sometimes the kid will have a nightmare. A five-year old, wake up screaming or crying, and say, “Well, I see this and that”. So the parents know that. If it happens three time in the same kind of explanation, then they know this kid is having something. So they would tell the, their parents, or the kid’s grandfather. So the grandfather knew all this in those days, in the past. That was before Christianity. So the Elder will know whether this, this kid is gifted. So he is given that responsibility that he will guide this young man how far can he be developed. Is it necessary for him to develop further? So it’s an Elder who guides the young person. So he is sort of guiding him.

I’m going to make one small example. No offence, whatsoever! But to make this thing so accurately and honestly try to explain, I’m going to use this one example. We all know, we all, all of us Christian people and all that stuff for the last two thousand years, we have, we have a book. It’s called Bible. And there is two parts. There is a Old Testament, and there is a New Testament. But the Old Testament is the one that I want to mention. I am not saying shamanism is compared to these things, no. It’s similarities are there. I am not using the Church to say shamanism is equally as holy. I am not saying that. All I am saying is that there is action similar to this thing. So when the child is, is supposed to be developed spiritually, he is known by his mother and trained by his grandfather, not trained, guided by his grandfather. There is a story in the Bible about the Samuel. As Samuel’s gift was given to the Church service. And there was Eli, I think his name, the prophet that was given to guide this young man. When Samuel was small, how old he was I don’t know, he was in the Church and sleeping close to this old man, and he heard the voice which calls him.

“Samuel!”

So he wake up, and he went to see Eli. Eli, whatever the name that, that prophet was, he says, “Yes sir, here I am! Did you call me?”

And the old guy says, “No, no I didn’t call you! Go back to sleep”.

And then Samuel heard the voice again! And then he went back to see the old man; he says, “Here I am, sir! Sir!”

And the old guy says, “No, I didn’t call you!” He says, “I did not call you!” And by this time the Elder understand that there is something about this boy. So he says, “Go back to sleep, and see if you will hear that voice again. And if you hear that voice, say, ‘Here I am, Lord!’”

So Samuel went back to sleep and sure, he heard the voice again. And he answered, “Here I am, Lord!” Then he communicate with the Great Spirit, with the, with God. So this is the same kind of—same kind of situation that I am talking about. When the youngster of five years old have a dream, sometimes it’s scary. Sometimes it’s beautiful. Sometimes it’s sad. Sometimes it’s induce emotions. So when he gets this thing, a dream wake him up. And then right, right away he would run to mother, maybe hang on to mother or cry to mother or father, and the parents want to know, “What did you dream?” And the boy will, will say a few words. So the parents will got, catch that, so they sort of showed the guy back, and, the little guy, or little boy, little girl, back to sleep. Maybe days after, maybe a month after, maybe the young person will dream again
the same dream! And then the parents begin to know. Yes, this little person is contacted by something. So they tell the, their parents, which is that kid’s grandfather, grandmother. So the grandparents will know that this boy, or this girl, is actually being contacted, spiritually or, or mentally.

So they hand over this young person into the Elders. The Elders will guide. Soon as the young boy or girl dream again, if it’s the same dream that the three times, they know this young kid is gifted, is contacted by this, the mental, mental part. So they train him; they train him to dream. Even to try to dream something that he doesn’t know or if the dream that scares him in his dream, he has to dream that again to try to understand it, to try to make friend with it instead of, of a fear of it. Once he get that point of having communicate with what he is scared of, and manage to control it, he has succeeded. Only one dream. That’s only one. Sometimes he would dream of a bear, a black bear, and scared of the first time. And second time he know, he may not. And the third time when he wants to dream again, maybe the black bear will now speak to him. And then dream again and the black bear became his friend. Then he dreams again, as he get older, and the black bear became his partner, and guardian, just like his grandfather. So that’s the slow development of the one particular object, subject, I mean. If one kid dreams only a black bear. Usually that’s where a bear clan begin because of this young person, and he uses this black bears in his own way associated with it; in his, in his family became theirs, also. That is the reason they say the “clan”, “bear clan,” or something like that. Or, it, it depends on, on how great this person is. If he expand to have sons and daughters and all that, that became his clan. And then what he has was a bear, so they call that the bear clan.

Okay, that’s a quick jump. That’s not sticking to, to the[laughs] that is not sticking to the step of it. I jumped there very fast, and one, one quick example. And now, in, it is happened, not all the tribes in Canada, they are not the same. The Omushkego in this area are totally different than, than the people in prairie, or where there is no trees, or the people in the mountain region. It depends on the geographical location; depend what kinds of animals are they, what kind of a weather, what kind of a, things that is danger. If they would develop that. So the Omushkego has this; what kind of animals do they have, what kind of weather do they have, what kind of a superi, extreme season, so they have four seasons, and they develop the, nomadic life. They became nomads, they move with season. And why do they do that? Because they used animals as their food. So they meet; they have to meet the place where the animals and, and fish and, birds are. So they move with them. And some animals are dangerous, like black bear, are not, are not very, they are not playful animals. They can be dangerous. And the, and the polar bears are also the same. They have to learn to stay away from them, and, or, they have a power to make a bear, make a bear stay away from them, the human. Because the human has, has the power, the mind power, to communicate. So they also, that’s what makes them. It depends what kind of animals do they have in that region. If they have year-round polar bears, then that’s what they have mostly in their own spiritual connection. In a dream quest. Mostly they would dream polar bear. And then they would dream, maybe because of they live close by the sea, there is the seals, there is a walrus, there is a great whales that would occasionally come. So they dream those things, and then again there is many levels of dreams. They are, they are dreams that are fantastic, that where there’s no control at all. And that is, can be divided in their own power. So this is what they c, in
English I think that’s what it’s called, “dream quest”. It means to try to get something, to try to understand it, to try to get something. I think that’s what it means. If I’m wrong, I’m sorry! But maybe it’s the, it’s the wrong word to use. But I say, but I say, to try to dream, that’s exactly what the young person is to do. To try to dream as much, anything that is dangerous in the human life. So to have that, to have that, special subject, to understand in their dream. To know how to deal with it in their life. Okay. I will go only that far for this subject, because I have one that I want to, to use.

First of all, before I begin I want to explain a few things. In our, in our area, in Omushkego area, we have, we have a natural powers that we do not understand that has not been understood until recently. I mean, scientifically, because our ancestors did not deal the matter physically, scientifically. They did not break things apart to understand. They did understand the human, I mean, they did understand the animals in which they eat. They understand fish because that’s what they eat; they kill, they cut, they see the stomach and all the inside of the fish, and all its body. They understand that. And they also understand how fish swim under, because it has gills. They understand that. They understand fish cannot live in the, in the surface of the water. They need water to have the oxygen so they, at that part, that’s as far as they know. The rest of it, they didn’t know the body. They know that it has muscles, it has reflexes, it has, all these. And then they, and then they understand the animals they cut in pieces to eat; they know understand about tendons, muscles and all that stuff, and blood, the arteries and veins, and, but the nerves, the nerves they didn’t know. It’s very unusual. I have not heard one Elder to say a ‘nerve system’. They always associate the nerve system with the, with the veins. Sometimes some people say it’s a, it’s a tendons or sinews, it’s a nerve system. But they have not mentioned of that, the nerves. They didn’t explain that. So, that’s, that’s a lack of knowledge, because there’s no scientific experimentation. But they may have known, they may have known. Maybe the shaman knew but he could not explain. Because shaman is not a church, he is not a teacher, he is just a survivor, a gifted survivor. But he can guide the others.

Anyway, that’s what happened. That, that is the reason why our ancestors had the mystery in life. So they feared what they do not understand, just like anybody else. So the other mystery they never understood quite well is a nature, a “mother nature,” especially in, in the weather. They didn’t understand why the wind behaves so, furiously, and viciously, and, and all that stuff. Which kills them and fear of it. And also the most highly feared stuff in nature is thunder. Thunder and lightening is a powerful stuff that they never quite understand how it’s created. They didn’t understand it scientifically. But because they could not understand it scientifically, could not explain it, they tried to understand it in their own way. What I mean to say is, they dreamed that. That’s what I mean when a kid is dreaming, he dreams about the thunder because he is afraid of it. He dreams of that, I did dream of thunder, but I did not became a shaman, no. But those in those days, when the thunder is scary to the young person, he dreams of it until, until after he dreams and begin to understand it, it is not actually trying to kill you. It just so happen by nature. But some, some people who try to develop a shaman power, they dream willfully, wishing to dream the thunder. What they want to do is, you know, because by years before, before the white man, most of our ancestors had believed thunder is a, it’s a being. They had believed that there is actually a something which makes that noise; it’s a, it’s a being. It could be a bird, or it could be something else, but
they never actually saw. They couldn’t see. They could understand why there’s no such thing there that makes it so loud, and makes the earth shake when it sound, and where it the lightening start from? This is something that they couldn’t understand.

So they didn’t understand that scientifically, so they have to make up in their mind to satisfy that. So in a dream, what they do is they try to dream this thunder and lightening as one person. So they try to make it into being. In their dream, they try to dream as a person. Finally, they begin to able to in their dream, they being to think that there actually is a person. So they call it a thunderbird, it has to fly, it has to be a bird because it’s up there. Otherwise it would not be up there if he has no wings. So they form this, this fearsome thing, being, and this fearsome nature into being instead of, emerging stuff, and disappearing. So they want to form it into a substance in their dream, so they form it into a bird. So, what is the most logistic bird in the world, in their land? It’s eagle! It’s predator. And he’s danger, it’s feared by the rest of the, lesser bird, because he eats the others, and catch them from the air. So he’s very dangerous. They watch, they watch the nature; they watch the other birds when they are sitting or flying, when they see an eagle up there, they just simply dive into the ground and try to hide. So he is the most feared. So in order to associate this thunder into a being they call it a thunderbird, in the form of an eagle. So once they make it into a bird, a giant whatever-it-is, they begin to find it in their mind; they begin to friendly with it, and they begin to use it as a friend. Their partner. So whenever they want to use, somehow in their dream, they are able to control this thunderbird, and they can use it when they want to. Once they achieve that high, that is the highest level the shaman can do. Shaman can be very highest person on the level, the highest level of the mitewiwin, when he can control the thunder, when he can form it into a bird, a thunderbird. Okay? So, if he can have that, he can use that power, that thunder and lightening. Impossible, is it? But that’s what they do. It is done; it has been done. It is done scientifically. Our scientists are able to make electric lights. But they tame it into a useful energy. But the nature itself, it’s, it’s a, it’s uncontrolled power. It can be very dangerous and destructive. But the certain amount that the human can harness this energy makes it into a light. A light bulb! Electric motor. All these. But the shaman didn’t do, didn’t go that far. He wants to form this energy into a being, a bird. Something that he can handle here, on Earth. So that is a shortage about the shamans. They are short; they are not actually up there. Mislead, somehow. Because they didn’t use any, any substance connection to harness this power. But instead, they, they form it in their mind.

Okay. So they do the same with any other, any other nature’s power. Now. We have done with the thunder for the time being but I will come back to it on the other side. Our Omushkego have also always talked about the North. The North is a powerful stuff. The North brings the extreme cold weather; the North can bring the cold weather and thun, and, and the heavy storm, which can hold you long time, maybe three days that you cannot move, you cannot do anything because so strong wind. It can create a thunderstorm because of the wind. So they, they understand this, the North is a very powerful stuff. It can tame the thunderstorm also. When there is a thunder clouds in the south and to the west, when the cold north wind come gusting in, into the, into the land, it’s dissipate, or make thunderstorm disappear. So there is power in the north. So they know that. And all these people that have lived on the land’s surface, they have watched these all the time. They have watched that the north is after there is some power. So they
They see, when they live in the open, open country all the time, they see the stars at night. They had pinpoint the North Star. They know the North Star a long time before the white man. They have told us exactly where it is and it’s there. They know the rest of us are turning around that one star, and they says that’s where the North is. So they have called this ‘Mister North’ [laughs] as is a person, in their dream! They have dreamed this stuff. And if you can dream the North, you, it begin “Mister North,” become a person. And you have to be a friend with it. You have to be able to associate with it, to even talk to it, or to even control it. Some powerful shaman can control this, this sort of thing.

And so is the other, and so is the other four wind direction, four corners. Okay? They, they can treat the same to the east. The east is “Mister East”, or the power of East, because the sun come from there. And to the west, the West, there is a being, a “West,” “Mister West” or spiritual stuff. And then the south. They all have this. So they turn all these four corners in the world as a power, as a person. So they can control that in their mind; they think they do, anyway. What I mean to say is they can believe that and they can call on the wind, if they want to. If they want a favourable wind for their wishes, it will happen. A powerful shaman can do that. As if he can control the weather! But it is not true. [laughs] I guess it is just a, coincidence. But it seems to happen at times.

So the Elders are pretty good on that in those days, and I have seen it a little bit, when I was just a young man. Maybe it was just a coincidence. I am not a practitioner of the shaman. I study about the shaman, shamanism. Because I want to cover our history. Our Omushkego history contains shamanism more than fifty percent. That it why it is so important. But that is has been, that has been neglected for 181 years, at least. As soon as the Christianity came in here it went away; people stopped using it. And what happened when they stopped using it? They became useless. [laughs] I mean to say, they became beggars of their own land. And I am one of them. So that’s a bad part of it, but, what can be done? There is nothing you can do. It has already, it is already happened. It has happened. So I am not condemning Christianity, I am saying the same thing I as I said: I am not condemning Christianity because of that. Sometimes I think maybe it is better, because there is still existing negativity of the being a shaman. Shaman has to be isolated; he has to be himself. He doesn’t associate his knowledge with anyone. If he does that, he loses the power. If he speaks about, if he started speak about how we can do this and all that, he would lose all that. Again, we jump back into the story about the Jewish history, the Old Testament. We maybe remember the story about Samson. Samson was a gifted person they say, by God, to be a leader. And what makes him so strong? His hair! Because he has a hair, he didn’t cut his hair. He had drunk, and he was womanizer and everything, he does everything else but, the gift, it was his hair. He didn’t cut. So once they cut his hair, he did actually lost the power. So these things are similar; the stories I’m talking about the similar thing. So when the people lost their original spiritual belief and practices, they became weak. They became beggars, just like the way we are today, in Canada. That’s the way the First Nation became. Because they lost that. And because that, it’s, my belief I think the Great Spirit intended to be that way. I think Great Spirit intended to change, change to come, because the population. Because he have instructed people to, to populate, to modify. To fill the Earth, to use all what he had created. To my understanding, personally, that’s what I think. And, and the old stuff has to, has to go away.
Again, let’s jump back for another example. You can see that in, in, in science. The scientists are find out, the archaeologists, whatever you call them, or, people who dig big mud things, everything, is it archaeology? People who dig up the dinosaurs? So dinosaurs tell us that they lots of change. So the Great Spirit, guy who control all nature and everything, decided dinosaurs sort of, sort of creation has to change slowly into the what we know today. It could change also, in the future. The whole thing can change. And that depends to the Great Spirit. So that’s out of my reach. I’m not going to talk about it. I’m not going to preach, but I am just telling the history, what it was, and what has happened, and that today the shamanism that was existed five hundred years ago is not working today, because there is no room for it. In order to be a perfect shaman you have to have lots of room. And if there is five hundred shamans in the area, you need the big land, lots of land, that they can practice. But the spirituality of European is different. It is society. It is peoples’ belief, spiritual beliefs.

[Side 2]

Hello, hello again! This is Louis. I am continuing my story before my thought is, startled, and lost. Now, I was saying the spirituality of Christianity is different; it’s, it has been created for community living. It has been established for living together, so that people could have the same mind, so they can have everybody like a one mind, so they can believe one god, and practice to pray spiritually one way. So there is a, what do they call that, cohesion? There is a unit, not individual. So the Church is, that is the Church! When people begin to believe one thing, one way, and practice one way, they live better that way. They can get along, at least. They depend upon each other. They know that; they have to live together. They have to do the same in order for them to function. Otherwise if they start fighting, each individual person, each individual family, they would not function to live together. And I underst-, I guess, that is what it means to say “civilized”: knowing how to live together, and understanding few things. But our ancestors in the past before the European came, in our, in this country, they have plenty of room. And in those days, the great powerful Creator, the Spirit, the Great Spirit, have seen to it that those people will have that kind of life. When they overpopulated and so they kill each other, or if the Great Spirit doesn’t see that happen, it is the weather; it is the nature who kill the people. Sometimes it’s a disease that emerges amongst people and kills them all, sort of population control by the power of Great Spirit. And it, and it did the same thing with the animals, those past before the European came. When the animals begin to be so many, they begin to die. When the land, the trees begin to be too old, and begin to be aged and not productive anymore, there is a forest fire. As if someone is just gardening! And then when the such animals and also begin to overpopulate, for example, the beavers. When beavers get so many they block the waters in stream, and in the small creeks, which has the little lakes and headwaters, when they begin to block all these, they block the fish. They block other things which freely flow down the river. So they destroy the water. They polluted the water. They kill the trees, and the trees kills the water. And the fish die. And the fish rotten and the more pollution, by themselves. By these animals. And then, naturally, a disease emerge. Kills off the beavers. Cleans the area again. All the dams will be gone; again there is a fresh, recycling system works better.
Our ancestors have seen that. They have studied that. It happens to every kind of species. It happens to wolves when there are too many wolves; they got a disease what we know today as “rabies”. They go crazy, they, they kill each other, just die by themself. The fox, when they are too many foxes, they too have rabies. When the fox are too many, why? Why there are too many foxes? The mice! The mice came to be so plenty, and they bring along with others. When the mice became plentiful, they bring in the owls, they bring in the foxes, they bring in the martens, they bring in the weasels, they bring in many of those flesh-eating little mammals. And then, when the mice get too many, they begin to die. They even, they even destroy the land because they make so many holes. And, and the natural, the natural, the natural system begin to dysfunction. The white moss, or any moss any place they begin to full of holes, and, and that, and the nourishment of the trees begin to deteriorate, and then the mice begin to get sick. And they get sick. And the fox eat them, and the ox get sick with rabies, and they begin to, expanded with the four-legged animals. And even to the people at times. This happens long time ago. It has happened since then. And so is moose. The moose are like that. When there are too many moose in an area they eat all the nutritious part, or continuous recycling of the, the willows, and the trees; they eat, and they, they sort of wounded it. And it doesn’t bring out the same nourishment in the spring. And they begin to, to get hungry. They begin to get under-nourished. And then they go out, they go back out. They move, to other places. Then there’s no moose, for about a ten, fifty years period. And so is the caribou. All animals are like that. And that’s what the Elders have seen, that’s what they have studied by living with nature. And so is the rest of the stuff, by living in, in the wilderness, you know, they, they always exposed. They always right in the middle of the nature. All these things they understand very thoroughly about the wilderness because they are wilderness them self. So they follow these wilderness; they follow the nature. And the nature is a power, the Great Spirit power. But I don’t mean these people were holy! I’m not saying that. They were not holy. They are just like today; they break rules, the natural laws, sinful things they do, yes. But the Great Spirit I guess is so, what should I say? Is so patient. But he does not forget. We will deal with that later some other time.

And that’s as far as I’m going to go with the Great Spirit. But, it is part of the spiritual belief in our ancestors. But, they didn’t have a Church, as I said. They were more like, very close to the activity of the animals. They have to be alone. They have to be separated. They have to have space within themselves. They cannot live together, because if they live together they eat off everything in the land. You cannot bring more than five families in once place unless it has, it has the surrounding, the proper setting. If there is enough fish there, that’s a great supply of food, if there is enough fish there in that, in that place. Yes, five families can exist there. And plus, other, other food items like maybe the rabbits, maybe some partridge, and maybe beaver. So that will variate by those people and they will exist during the winter, but in summer it’s open, they can travel. But more than, more than five families its begin to strain the, the environment around it begin to strain itself; they begin to eat all. So they have to move; they have to move, circulate a little bit. They have to relocate themselves in early, early, early spring, in March. They have to move away from there and then relocate themselves in order to have a, another source of, supply of food.
So this is their system, and that’s why the people could not, didn’t want, they know that if they live together they would not begin to function unless they change the whole thing, as the European do. Unless they start with something, a commune usage, you know, for the people to use. But these people were not farmers; there’s no agricultural possibility in the area because of the short season, and they know that. They could not grow anything that they would like to keep. They cannot keep the caribous in, in the fence, because if they do that they were restricted, the movement of these animals. They cannot fence the moose, but the moose cannot live there in one place, they have to have the freedom also. They cannot fence off the fish, you know, to keep them there for their winter, no. They could live with the fish in the big, big lake, where the fish has settled themselves for the winter. Yes, they could live there. But they could not control the fish. They could catch a fish, yes. Or they migrating, they could catch them on a fish trap, and, and accumulate them and store them for the winter in preservation. Yes, they can do that.

So anyway, all this unending explanation about a total Omushkego culture. So it’s not practiced anymore. That’s why it is very important to be written down, to write all those things down that was there in the past, because they will never live like that again. It would be just like the dinosaurs; they die. This culture will die because of the, fast advancement of the human, the humanity. Because the high-tech world. Our culture is like a dinosaur age; we will not go back. We will never practice again shamanism as I have described. It’s a pity, but it is, it’s a God will, I mean the Great Spirit will, will happen. It is understood; our ancestors understand. Our Elders understand that. So that’s why most of them doesn’t, doesn’t want to talk about those things, they know it’s not going to exist anymore. Let me jump back again to the example about the Jewish people. The Jewish people once, they were, they were chosen people, they figured they were chosen and they were good for life, or for, for eternity. And they have God as their leader, their god, their only god. And they have protection from him and he directly responsible to for them. And they rejected him! No, they wanted physical being, the king, and they ask him to king, God, the Great Spirit give him the king. And the king that they receive was blessed by the God, and richest, one of the richest that they know, like Solomon. And this, the materially wishes is what they want; and they gifted, they were gifted. But they didn’t happy. It didn’t last very long because they was so proud. They think they will ask anything to God in this world, but that’s not, apparently that’s what not, that is not what the Great Spirit want. I guess the Great Spirit only borrowed the human flesh and body, not borrowed, he created the human body, for the spirit to go in there and retrieve the spirit to his world, I guess. The way it sounds.

But humans do not think that way; they wanted to have their own way. They wanted to have their own way and they wanted God to fit in the way they are, never mind what he wants. So, it’s all human sin. [laughs] Anyway, I am not a preacher, but I just want to throw that, an example what happened to our, our ancestors. Jewish people would never find Solomon again; they will never have that power again. And our ancestors will never go back to the old system. They will never be like our great ancestors before the European came. That’s history. And that is why it should be written. And now, after saying all these things, I want to go back to that dream quest, and dream. The dream to come true. You know that the, the, the, how do I say that? Dream quest is just the beginning. And then there, then there is the next item is “dream vision”. Someone when
he has a, when he has, when he has able to do the dream and then now he can have a vision when he wants to, as a dream. So dream vision is the next; and then after that he has a power to create things by his mind power. This is a shaman. That, in, in, in a certain level of shamanism. The first level a person can do that minimum, and then the second level he can do it not as high a power, but the third level is the highest. Where a person once he gets there, he doesn’t have to do anything at all; all he has to do is use his mind. He can make things happen with his mind. Doesn’t have to have an object to do it or anything. But those people who began to branch off into the specialization of shaking tent, then that’s how they do it. They have to have shaking tent in order to do so. That is specialty communication.

So anyway, now, I am going back to this dream. I have mention about, the Native people who didn’t have a scientific knowledge of the environment, the total nature, the total world’s nature in all that, and the universe. They have to have it somehow; they have to have something. They have, they have to have the control somehow. So they try to dream; they try to visualize something that, this is the way it is for their own benefit. So let’s go back to this thunderbird! Now, thunderbird. That’s how those shamans begin to control the, an understandable thing, the mystery, they want to control. So once they get that, once they form this thunder into a bird in their mind, in their vision, it became a thunderbird. So they have a power to use it. They are able, they believe they can do it; they actually did it sometimes. Now, here comes the story.

When I speak about these things, I am preparing a listener how to understand Omushkego legends, how to understand, the totality of Omushkego culture. Okay. So the spiritual part, spiritualism of the Omushkego people, is called mitewiwin. So when one person practice that and has acquired a higher level, he is known as kichimitew. It mean ‘the great shaman’. It mean the higher power stuff. So the one who can control the thunder, or can use the thunder, is the highest one. I don’t know if it really happen, but it our legends there is lots of that. And it’s supposed to have been happening truly; it’s not just a makeup story, but it sounds like its just a makeup story. Is it possible? Scientifically no, no it’s not possible. But imagination, yes. In our imagination it can happen. But the story I am going to tell you, it’s a similar to this, the Hollywood movie style. This story I’m telling you about is, it’s there. We always look at it every day. The children of under five can enjoy looking at this, video games, where people can just point a finger and comes a flash of the ray gun, or laser gun. We see the, the big movie one time, I don’t know exactly what it’s called. Luke the Skywalker? Or whatever it is. Where they fight with the sword, with the, with, with the rod like a, like a, like a light bulb. The long light bulb. [laughs] As if they’re fighting with that but it’s a, it, it’s just flick and it comes out like a light. So, it’s, it’s similar to this thing that I am telling you, that I am going to tell the story.

Okay, here we go.

No, no, no. I still have to explain a bit more. I have to explain about in time past, that was before the Europeans came in the James Bay and Hudson Bay, and even after, maybe, I think maybe two hundred years after. I think the last time that this happens could be around one hundred and seventy-five years ago, maybe two hundred years ago, when the last, when the last other tribes were raiding the Omushkego people in James Bay area. There were, there were other tribes who came into this area, who, who raided the Omushkegos; they killed them all, they steal women, they, they captured young
people and they take them out somewhere. Whatever they do, it’s another story. There is actually a legend, many legends, about that. But what happen is that the Omushkego people have always been ambushed, and slaughtered, and lost their family, and couldn’t do a thing! And that happen so many times some Elders sometimes get so mad; some young leaders will get mad and wants the revenge. Sometimes it didn’t happen. We don’t know for sure, this is honest to goodness, we, the Omushkego, we do not know who are these people? The only name they give to these raids is what they called Aatawewak. That’s one name, and the other name is Atoyewak - yay, yay, that’s the different. And then the other one they used to call them Pwaatak. Whatever that Pwaatak mean; but the, the association with Pwaatak is usually comes to the land where there is no trees, wherever that is. Down south, or west. It seems like down, down south. And then there is Atoyewak, Atoyewak, that’s ‘yay’ there. So these ones seems to come from, nowhere. They just seem to appear in the coast of James Bay and Hudson Bay, and kill people. Simply just slaughter them. Nobody said they eat them; they just simply kill them and leave them there. Men and women, children and Elders, and everything. And then there is Aatawewak. Aatawewak, it seems to be, they originated from south, like James Bay, James Bay area, and to the southwest coast of Hudson Bay. They seem to travel long distance; they seem to go back to their homeland down south way past, way past the James Bay lowland and back into the Great Lakes area. Even some captives, people who were captive in the story, were taken farther south than the Great Lakes.

So there is a story about it. We are not going to mention about it, but we will talk about the person here, in the Hudson Bay, southwest coast of Hudson Bay, particularly in the Cape Henrietta Maria, not far from there, there is a river called Kinosheowisipi, means ‘Northern Pike River’. It comes, it comes out in the same place as Sutton River comes out. There is a joint there; there is a fork just at the bay right tree line. Kinosheo River goes to the south, south way. And then the Sutton River goes to the west, more like. There is a junction there. So this area, that’s where the people used to live, in this, to the east of this river, in the, in the bay area. And these people usually live inland in the wintertime, from these rivers, into, into the lakes, into headwaters of these creeks. They just about fifty to eighty miles distance from the bay. Sometimes they would move their family into the bay, to the east from this junction of the river, the area there they always camp. And, when they hunt, when they have temporary village, the men will go hunt either to the Sutton River to get fish, or they will go into the, Kinosheo River, or they go to the east to the cape. Whatever they want to; so the men will go that far distance, you know, for a few days. So they bring in food for the family.

And it was this time that one time, the camp was set in there maybe, maybe twenty-five miles due east from this junction of the River Sutton and Kinosheo. That’s in southwest coast of Hudson Bay I’m talking about. So they were, one Elder, who was related to the present day of family called Jokomonan; they were actually called Dokomonan, Daakomonan. So this old man, who originate from that name, he was a great shaman, a powerful one. The kind of man that controls thunderbird, or thunder. So he was, he had left his home and came up the river of this Sutton River into the, somewhere around half-way or on the, on the headwaters of this river. They called it Koochichii, means the outlet of the ri, of the lake. Because there is a fish there, there is a, there is a desirable fish to eat and he comes there to, to smoke the fish and take them home with him. Besides that, have a, have a sort of a holiday or something. He was there
by himself. So when he was here, the raiders arrive all of a sudden at this camp and kill off the families. And only two young men managed to run away. And they were, and they were also mitew. They were able to travel very fast directly to this place which is about eighty, I think about sixty miles distance. So they covered that distance, I don’t know how long. But they got to this old man to tell him what happened. So when the, the old man already knew, by his magic, by his mental contact. He already seen what happened there. But he could not do anything; he knows these two people are coming so he waits for them. So when they arrive that evening, the same day, he has his method of watching. So I think he uses the water; put it in the wooden bowl, whatever it is, and he looks at it, and put the cover over his head, and he says ‘Yep, I see them. I can hear them’. He says, “They are planning to come to the, at the junction of the, of the Sutton and the Kinosheo River because there is another camp there”. There was another family, where his family was staying. So he says, “I am going to meet them”. He says, “I am going to meet them right there, not far from the camp, to stop them”. So he tells the two young people, he says, “You may come with me if you want. You can follow me, but the thing is I don’t actually need your help”. He says, “I’m going to have to deal with those guys by myself”.

But the young people says, “We like to come with you! We like to come and help you, because we are so mad at those people who kill off our families”. So he says, “Okay. You can come if you can catch up with me”. So that morning, the old man took off. The ordinary starting off with his walking, with his feet. And he begin to just like, travel in different way. So within a short time he was there where he wants to go, almost like instantly, along with these two boys. So when he got there he prepared the stuff where there is a trail there; that trail has been there for centuries, and that trail is still there today. It’s visible. And that’s the trail that he went, because he knows these raiders will come there to follow the trail to attack the other village. He knows that already. So he, he stay, he stay there about twenty, I don’t know if its, I don’t know if its, five, or ten miles away from the camp that he wants to protect. Away from the family, anyway. So he went ahead to where those raiders will come. He knows they’re going to come. So he prepares the place and all that. Whatever he was doing, we don’t know. Nobody explain exactly what he did. But the young people, they saw him preparing things for their friend he was to. The only thing they can ment-, they can remember is that, they have a musket already, so it could be just after the European came. They had this, you know, front end, front end loading gun. And he set this gun right in front where those people are coming. And he set it up and tied with the very firmly, that it won’t move. Then he had loaded, just like as he load, as you load, powder and the, and the slug or, or pellets. But they didn’t know exactly what he put, because he says, “Don’t look at me”. So he set it right there behind the bush, and point it directly where those people were coming. So what he was doing was almost ready, everything was ready, so he sent the, he sent those two young boys ahead over, and maybe, maybe half a mile to the east. He says, “Take a look. See how far they are”.

So the boys went run up there as fast as they can; they actually see it from the hill, they, they see them coming. We don’t know exactly how many they are, so they did see them coming. Nobody said how many they are, but they were more than twenty anyway. Plus there are captives. So what this old man doing is that he put, he has made arrangement where they can walk. So when these people came in, the enemy in front and
the captive behind, so he went over there right in the behind the bush and besides the trail, and his gun is over here to, to his left, I mean, way back here where they going to walk. I don’t know how far distance. So he, when they came close, the boys came back and he told them to stay back, back a little ways because what he’s going to use is so dangerous. But this man has dreamt of thunderbird; he know how to use the lightening, the thunder. He knows how to use that. That electric power, whatever it is. For some reason he had able to use that. Using this substance as gun, he use that. So he pointed this gun in there where they’re going to walk, and he went up there and he, as soon as they walked in, in front of him, he got up and he says, “Those of you who are captives, step aside! Run away!” And then these guys were not ready, the enemies were not ready, because they didn’t expect anything. They had their bow and arrows tied together and they were just walking, expecting to find this camp just a little head. As soon as this shaman said, “Separate yourselves!” then he just disappeared, and appeared into his gun, and light, you know that firing mechanism? Lights that. And then again disappeared behind. Very quickly; the fastest time. And this gun begin a shooting flame of lightening into the, into the enemy, and knocks them out, and kill them all as if they had been burned. Their bodies actually hardly recognizable. But the captives managed to run away aside, and they were safe. But those who managed to run away, these enemies who managed to jump with the captives, they were shot with bow and arrow by this old man.

So he beat them, by using this power of his dream, of thunderbird. But actually he uses a thunder, the lightening; he didn’t use it as a bird. He used that, a flash lightening, using the gun as a medium. And then he kills those people, the enemies. And that was it! So that’s a story about the, the power of shamanism. The power of dream. The power of, of forming the power as you, to your advantage. So that’s the, that’s a highest level of shaman; if one can control the thunderbird is the highest one. He doesn’t need to, to set up anything. He doesn’t need to set up the shaking tent. And this guy also can do many other things: he can heal, he can restore the life if he wish. But usually this kind of person is very humble, very, secretly existing. So that’s a story about the mitew, shaman, using this power to his advantage or, was he using it properly? Was he, does he has a right to destroy these people who kill his friends and everything? Yes, I think it is, because all other nations have done the same. They have had the right to defend themselves, their family, their country, and everything. So this shaman has that right to do it.

Okay, that’s the end of the story about the powerful shaman; of the Omushkego powerful shaman. But that was the last story that, the last time it ever happen in that area, the shaman who did, powerful things. So now we know that, that the thunderbird is very highly regarded as part of being power of all First Nation people in Canada. No matter where I have gone, the thunderbird is always highly regarded and respect. A person who have acquired the knowledge of the thunderbird in such a way that I have described in the story is truly a powerful shaman. So now, we have touch a little bit of what, what the shamanism mean, mitewiwin. So some shamans have developed this power for the defense, for the, for the, like a story that I just told. These are beneficial, but the shamans who use it for their own, for their own, should I say, “negative advantage” misuse the power, killing people just for the sake of using this power, is not, is not the right thing. I am sure all the First Nation Elders that have understand these would say the same, and so is the Omushkego people. There were good shaman; there were bad shaman. Most of all, we hear only the bad ones. And we hear the most extraordinary shaman like the one I
have just talked about. And these stories, there are quite a few that supposed to have happen after the European came; maybe one hundred years after. But as soon as the Christianity came, they went underground. They didn’t actually stop, the Omushkegos. They practice it there in the bush, very, very secretly. And, the last one that we ever heard practicing this was about 1930. His name, his name was Sandy. Sandy Metat. So that was the last one in our James Bay shaman, shamanism, I mean that actually see, and, and been told us, told to us that he actually practice this. That family. But it’s not done anymore; it’s not there anymore. I don’t think there’s anyone who can actually accomplish that anymore because we are now living in a, in a community, and we have adopted Christianity to be our religion, spiritual makeup. Personally, I am not sorry. Personally, I think, I try to think that and I try to believe the Great Spirit has the power to change things, and I think it is time for that, that part to disappear, or to have accomplish its benefits. What do I, what do they call it? It has served its purpose: to let First Nation exist in the land before others came to use the land. That’s my idea. For now, I have tell a story to tell you why the shamanism. Why a person at that time has to have it. So they were many other people that has the same power, but we don’t hear the story about them because they didn’t do anything that is so extraordinary. They were lesser shamans; they didn’t have as much power as this guy that I have just mentioned. But this thing happens here, here in, in James Bay lowlands. It has happened; it’s not just a makeup story, but it has happened. It is believed it has happened.

Sorry to keep on referring to you Jewish people, but [laughs] that’s the only thing that comparable to it, because, because when the Jewish people had the power, they were powerful according to their, to their stories. It is belie, it is now, for, for certain, many people think in our days the Jewish history, the Jewish Old Testament is a, is, is just a history book, some people say that. But some people say it’s partially to deal with spiritual part of being. And the Jewish people themselves, it’s a fact. It’s a truth. It’s a word of God. And it is so powerful. And it’s convincing. So in the days of those Omushkego Elders in time before the European, what they did was the truth. It was the true necessary and required practice. It served its purpose at that time. But now it’s not. Many Elders have mentioned this; many Elders have said, “there is this person that I know, the anc-, the descendant of this great person of, in the story. His name is Xavier Jochamonan. That was his great-great grandfather whatever it is, that did that, in that area. I guess on his mother’s side, but we don’t know for sure. We cannot say exactly what date it had happen; we can’t. But we know for sure there was a gun, so it’s after the European came. So the first European who came in was around, 1600 or something like that. Columbus came 1492, and then there is that fifteenth century, that could have been a long time. But it was only in 1600 that the white people actually came to frequent in the, in the, the Bay area, Hudson and James Bay. So it is, the first, the first captain, Captain Button was his name, who spend the winter in, in Churchill River. So there was no, no nothing else. And the Native people were still living on their own land. And at that period, you know, there were lots of shamans and everything. But, the next hundred years it remained the same, until around, in York Factory, 1882, they have brought in with them their religion, which is Anglican; they brought their ministers with them, but they did not spread the Christianity right away. They only kept it in their own forts, and few converts they, they can, they can change.
And it’s the same thing happen in Kashechewan, today we call it Kashechewan, it was called then Fort Albany at time, at one point. These people, they were mixed. They were Anglican, and they were French, and they had Catholic. The French and English fight each other in Hudson, the Hudson and James Bay. 1717, the French took over the, the Churchill Fort, and they also took over the York Factory and Fort Severn. So they actually dominate the place one point, and therefore they brought in their own religion which is Roman Catholic. And within, according to the history that I have read, in the St. Lawrence Seaway and the lake, there were three kinds of Christianity already: there was that, how do they call that, Protestant, or Presbyterian, I don’t know what exactly they called it, but it’s the next one, it’s the other one that branch off from the Roman Catholic. So there were three there; so we only have to be, our ancestors only have to be converted by Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Church. Awful stories about those people who, who brought two kinds of Christianity. And the stories that we have in Kashechewan, the two Christian denominations that were fighting each other, condemning each other, there were only two of them. And then today, how many are they? They are about two hundred, and all condemning each other; and there’s a new church no good and mine is. Well, it is very sad to, to, to see these people fighting each other; and such a kindest and most usable religion they brought and they use it against each other. It’s really bad. That is why most of our ances, our, our, our youth are confused. Our young generation are beginning to see that. And they want to seek something that will bring a little bit of comfort, a little bit of control, rather than being pushed and pulled by different ideology, different denomination of Christianity. It is very bad for them. And now today they seek these things; they request that they are to hear. And they request the Elders to give them the, the knowledge.

But the Chris, the, the shamanism has been distinguished about a hundred and fifty years ago in James Bay and Hudson Bay, so there are not so many people who have a thorough knowledge about that. There are some. So our, all across from York Factory, from Churchill into James Bay, Moosonee, in Moosonee and James Bay, there are those Elders who have a bit and pieces of information which I have fortunately able to collect, and able to put it together as, as roughly what it was. And that is the one that I wish to be written down. And there is so much, and it is full of it in our legend and in our short stories, and quotation stories, and, other stories, other type of stories.

So that’s the end of my, my, recording, and I hope whoever listen to this one will be useful, and it can be written down.

Thank you for listening! My name is Louis Bird.