Louis Bird: Hello, Hello! Today is April 20th, the year 2001 and the time is ten minutes after ten. I am sitting here with Roland Bohr and we are going to talk about firearms and he's going to ask a question. There you go.

Roland Bohr: Okay. Well, I'd like to know about the impact the introduction of firearms had on the Cree people, as far as hunting and warfare are concerned.

L: Ah, yes, so that is the thing?
R: That's the thing.
L: That's the thing. I have my notes here.
R: Oh, you've got your notes. Good.
L: Just I don't have to read it. Well, the firearm was a in positively, positive way, one thing about the firearm does it, it kills instantly and then it is more accurate in the distance than the bow and arrow does.
R: So it has a greater range?
L: Yes. And also more accurate, if you, if you know how to use it. The bow and arrow, its straight at a certain distance and it can kill, but usually the power, the strength of it is sometimes not very, it's not very, it's not very strong, eh? And the animal will just run quite a ways, long ways before its dies. But the gun, if you hit it in the right spot, takes only a few minutes before it drops and dies, unable to run. And then in birds, because there is the pellets in it. You know the pellets?
R: Yes.
L: The shots? So you can kill more than one at one shot. And also the gun can kill the large animals like moose, caribou, black bear, polar bear much easier than bow and arrow. Bow and
arrows are just as good, but they are not as, as quickly as the gun. So that's one good thing about it. And also one thing that I have remembered people say, when you have a gun and the sound makes you feel you're so confident, brings confidence in you. You know you're discharging something to kill and the noise also help you to, gives you power, gives you confidence. That's one thing about the positive side of this thing.

And you also asked: In war. Okay. Although we didn't have no, we didn't have any well-planned wars, we didn't have that kind of thing in our area. Not out there anyway. May happen down South. But the gun, it gives - one way for the person who is using it, who has acquired it, it gives him additional power because it added the fear in enemy because you have gun - gives you confidence as an, as a attacker or, or if you are in retaliating the attack, whatever you do, defending. So the gun gives you that additional confidence and also the powder gun, the sound also brings more power into your side.

So it records alright, eh?
R: Yes, that's alright, it does.
L: It has a good microphone. Okay, we were saying, the, in war. So it, the sound gives the power to the, to the person who use it, because its a loud noise and also it has the mystic fire-smoke. Further give a person who attack to see that this is a, they call it a fire stick. Also this gun, because of its noise and because of its fire, it's, it's similar to what the dream quest visualized the thunder, the lightning and everything.
R: Because of the sound?
L: Yesh.
R: Is there a thunderbird connection?
L: Yes. So this gun brings that kind of a feeling into a person who uses it. As it gives them confidence. That's what I was going to add. And also the enemy that comes, also has the same idea, so he is fearful of this thing.

So that's what, that’s the sound in war and there is when our Omushkego finally got the gun from the European, you know, the beginning of the fur trade, it helps them to, to hunt better and all those things that has been hard to do, it gives the gun a lighter way, easier way to hunt.
And also many other things. And so these are the, and because I said before, eh? The Omushkego, when they were at war with the Inuits, on the James Bay, so they're fighting over their rights, you know, the right to hunt, you know, they are fighting for the hunting area, seals and all that. So the Omushkego have the gun first and the Inuit didn't have it. So they had the advantage and, and the most startling thing was, they have a gun the sound of fire, so the Inuit sort of, you know, they haven't seen this. So they called it a fire stick at that time.

So it improved their, the Omushkego improved their life and their confidence also when they have a gun. And in hunting for food. Food bring in easy, easier, and it also provide clothing for the guys if they can hunt better. And also, also those who move around, they have a dwelling, covering, well, like a covering material for the tipi, and durable because of the hides. And also it gives them the assurance to be able to kill a dangerous animals, like a polar bear, a black bear. And at season, mating season the bull moose is very dangerous and charge you, if you are there. So, usually when that happens, you know, if then somebody got the gun has a chance to load and he'll be able to knock down the moose, instead of hightailing it. Instead of running away.

So, many of, many of those things have been benefiting our Omushkego people, eh? And in caribou hunting, you can kill more than one caribou at once, that is in the winter time, also in the summer time. They can, they can follow the caribou and then they can shoot it, first by sneaking up on it and once they shot the first shot, they can take the guts out the first batch, or the first one they kill. Take the guts out and put it away and then follow the other group that's still there. And then in an hour, an hour and a half time, because the way they do following it, they would, they would sort of bypass the path on them, go ahead and then wait for them, and they'd kill another one. And then they'd do the same thing, they'd take the guts out of the animal, then put it away nicely and follow one more. So in a day they can, they can kill three caribous if there is only shot.

R: And you can't do it with a bow?
L: No, you can't that with a bow.
R: Why?
L: Because it's cold. It breaks. But in the winter, this can't be done.
R: That's what you said.
L: But in the summer time they can do it with the bow, yes. They can do that.
R: So it's because of the temperature?
L: That's the only thing about the, the bow is not so reliable on that way. So that's the good thing about the gun. And also, also the gun, when you shot an animal, you don't have to try to retrieve anything, the bullets, you just don't have to find them. But the bow, you have to find it, if you don't have too many.

And, so then, this gun, it's much more like a, it's part of the modern hunting. It gives the, it gives more success in hunting big game animals, and a greater number of geese to shoot in the fall. They can shoot two at a time, maybe more. And they're all in one shot, and which they couldn't do with the bow and arrow. And also they can have more things to store for their, for their winter, food. They have more, more food to preserve in the fall. So firearm did bring much improved life to First Nations in North America. So that's the positive side.

Now the negative side. The only thing that is mostly notable is the noise. Noise will prevent you to, to hunt quietly, as a, as a bow and arrow. When you have bow and arrow and you are now hunting in the fall, in, in, in the day, it doesn't matter which, what the, what time of the day. There is a chance that you could kill an animal here, quietly and be able to go on and not far away and then encounter another animal who has not yet hear anything. It gives you a chance to hunt a variety of animals close, close by. And if you shoot, when you shoot it's different. As soon as the firearm is heard, this animal is alert and ready to run, and also the other one around him, whereas the sound carries the gun. But bow and arrows doesn't do that. So the sound sometimes can give, can carry quite a distance under different conditions of atmosphere. Sometimes it's a, a roll a long, long ways and you are now disturbing the animals so far distant. You only got one chance to have a good shot in the morning, if you can kill the thing. That's bad thing about it.

And also, so there is also the, animals know that. When they hear the gun, they get used to it. When they hear the gun, they know there is a human here, so the caribous can be ready to just, just go, get away, when they hear which direction there is a gun. And a moose, if there is close by and they're ready to get ready any further notice, you know. So they can get ready to
jump out. So the sound of the gun does that.

And, a, and for migrating geese, the geese sometimes they come in in the fall, they settle into the field and when they settle into the field, there is a feeding ground, there is a sleeping area. That's where they go, every day. Every morning they go into the feeding area. And in the evening they go down to sleep in the water. And if disturbed, they fly away. But if you shoot a gun late after sunset, this fire, this gun will throw the flame out, the fire. And the geese see that and they don't like. They simply don't like that. They know it's dangerous thing and they leave the area, they go some other place. That's why the Native people say: “Don't fire a gun after sunset, because the geese will see that.” That's especially for the geese. And, a, and then also, when you hunt the geese, when you hunt the geese where they are flying and if you have black powder - you know how a muzzleloader can make a fire. They geese begin to see that. If they see it from distance, there is a smoke, and they know that's where the man is and they don't go there, they go around. So that's a negative side of the gun. And they are very, if one, if you fire the gun in the dark, this black powder will give lots of flash. And that's what makes the geese afraid of it and that is no good for them.

And that's why we, the Native people begin to have a new, a new teaching after the European came. It sort of added their, their rule how to, how to behave, how to respect animals. So they firmly say do not fire the gun after sunset. Do not fire the gun off before sunrise. You know, it scared the animals. So they, this, this gun, any other way it's good, but recently, after the gun powder is improved, after the black powder, and this thing is doesn't affect too much. At least there is no light when you fire so much. Just a few sparks and but still the noise still bothers the birds and they know, they know not to go anywhere you have shot, and the evening especially. They don't want that. They don't like that sound.

So that's about the negative side of this gun for the people. And one other thing at the beginning is that it was, you know the first gun the Native people have was, it needs a primary fire to fire the main chamber, eh? And sometimes that makes people accidentally shoot themselves when they think "well, it doesn't go and" and then they put it down, pchuck! And its.

R: It's like a matchlock?
L: Yes, yes. And then they, sometimes they would just bust their eardrums, or even sometimes shoot themselves partially, or, or, because they hold this, you know, it didn't shoot and at first people who load the guns, they usually load the guns with a fire powder already, but they just dropped the slug or pellets when they see the animals. They do that. And sometimes, when you have this matter of fire mechanism, sometimes it touches on a stick, it creates the sparks. After they have the spark, they had the flint and it touches the spark and it creates itself. It doesn't kill them, as long as there is no pellet or no bullet, but it burns them, or something. But many times they, they get accident, because of those first cuts. And they had to be very careful.

So that's the negative side of the firearm for them. There is much more beneficial positive thing about the gun, than the negative. They just have to know a bit more how to handle it. Once they know how to handle it, they're okay. Gun is very nice for them, it's very nice to have it. So that's the story about firearm.

R: And did the Omushkego people give up their bows right away, or did they use both for a time?
L: For sometime, yes. Our first, the first gun they have, it was not so good, it was not reliable. They know it was not reliable, so they used to keep their bow and arrows, just in case. In case the gun doesn't work and they have, in summer time, especially. And also, during the wintertime, they know the bow and arrow cannot be used during the coldest weather, like our January, at least part of December, January, February. That time it's really hard to use a bow and arrow, just to bring it out and shoot, because it's frozen stiff. The only time they can use bow and arrow in those days was if they do the funnelling caribou that I was telling you. So they can create a fire behind a snow bank, so the caribou doesn't see that, so they can hold their bow there, as soon as they come here. That's when they shoot quickly.

R: They warm it up?
L: So it doesn't break, yes. And they just keep doing that, another one. So that's the problem with the bow and arrow only in that three months period it's not, it's not reliable, really. But it can be. There was a way to hunt, even the moose hunting. They had a special way to do that, so the, the shooter would sit some place where this moose is gonna be chased. He already has that fire, you know, where he can just wait for it. And this way, when the moose appears, then he can shoot. So
it's a bit harder, not like in summer. In summer they can, they can shoot it anytime.

One other thing about the gun is that the first one only shot once and then they improved and a new design was a double barrel and that's improved more. And after that it was the repeating rifle that was very good for the big game animals. And that further improved their hunting, hunting technique and also improved their lifestyle.

R: And would you say, once somebody starts hunting with a gun, does that affect the animals so much that other people can not get close enough to hunt with a bow, so they have to have guns, too?

L: Yes, it did. It did sort of deny the other people who used the bow and arrow, when there is a gun around. It's sort of, like I said. It sort of limit their capability with the bow and arrow. Otherwise, the other one is getting more. But that didn't stop them from having bow and arrow. They still have bow and arrow. Those people, they, they didn't stay always close with each other, they always have their own area. So those who don't have a gun, they will hunt with the bow and arrow only. They won't even see the gun, the guys has a gun is a way out there some other place. So it doesn't affect them. And later on, when they able to acquire the gun, then they slowly change. Once they get the mastery of this gun, they still keep the bow. And then slowly they started putting it away. But they keep practice anyway. Practice to use it, because it requires a skill, eh? It also requires the proper wood for you to make a bow. But in time, about a hundred years time maybe, then the bow hunting is getting to be discarded. But it's still there. So, any other things? That's the bow, the gun. We can still pick up a few things about the gun, the effect of the gun and we can talk about also the bow.

R: You said that guns made hunting easier, but how did that affect the animal population?

L: Oh, diminished them, very faster. Faster, yes. For example, the, the geese. The geese began to dwindle down their population when there was a heavy hunting, heavy harvesting of geese. And also the time when the Hudson Bay Company began to establish goose camps and the geese began to diminish slowly, because it's easier to kill a lot of them. You know, when this Hudson's Bay goose hunting operation came into exist, that was a long time ago, probably around seventeen hundred or something, seventeen fifty. And, a, there were lots of geese. And then,
when they, when the people began to hunt, then there were few. And also they began to avoid where the people hunt. The geese began to know that, that's where the people are, so they, they, bypass that, they live in the other place.

And, like I said, because the Hudson Bay Company wanted to have more wild meat and everything, you know, for their, for their food. They, they gave what they call one ounce of black powder, okay? One ounce of black powder can create about eleven shells or something, an ounce. And the Native people are getting accustomed how to do. So they have their little black powder and just a minimum amount of pellets and then they hunt in a special way, they can shoot many geese. They don't have to be on the ground, yes, the ground is preferable, but they can shoot them as they land, then there's so many heads put together and they're in line, sideways, you know? This is the wind, and then they have the decoys that way and the geese come in to land like this on a side, and you can see all the heads. And that's what they shoot, right in the heads, all of those. And they can knock eleven geese at once. Eleven geese! One shot! They're only required to bring in five geese for one ounce of flour, the rest of it, they have. That's it. So they shot first. Whenever it's possible, they shot. If they could shot at least five at once, they already have their limit for the, for exchange. The rest of it is their geese. So that's what makes it hunting was so fast, they, they kill five, ten geese in one shot. That's what makes a difference. So after a while the geese began to avoid the area wherever there is hunting, his, so they have to move past there, in order for them to be able not to be bothered.

R: And you also said that women would help in making fletchings for arrows, putting the feathers on?

L: Yes, yes, yes. That was while they were still using bow and arrows. Yes, the women were, they're very good making those feathers, you know, for the end, for the, what do you call that stuff?

R: The nock of the arrow? The fletching?

L: Yes, that's it, the fletching. The women were good on that, because they can make string with the sinew from the animals, you know, sometimes just the beavers and the otters sometimes make a fine, fine, a fine sinew. And that's what they used to wrap around these feathers on and so
they won't hurt on the hand, the finger of the man, in here. They were good on that. So the women usually used to make that. But the men would put the head, if there is a big game animal. And if it's a goose they had just a little sharp thing, very easy to go through. And sometimes they got the big head, just to knock it down, one big head, yes.

R: Like a blunt, like a club?
L: Yes.
R: And what kind of, what would the fletching look like? Like three split feathers, or two, or what would it look like?
L: Three.
R: Three?
L: Yesh. Three, yes. I got the arrow in here, one here, one there and one here. We tried to make this thing smooth. Actually they trying to have that smooth, so it won't scratch your skin, or anything. So three, yes, they liked that.
R: Three?
L: Mostly that's what they want to do. But if you were in a hurry, trying to make, they usually put only two, a bit longer. And just to, so it won't touch your skin so much. So, that's how they do it. So the women were good on that, especially at the fine ones. But the men can make them, too.
R: And did people take feathers from the same wing, the same side of the bird?
L: I think they do, yes. Not the same, one of both sides, the wing. Because the way you put this one here has to be like the wing also. This thing. It has to be, so it will, it will, it will balance right. It will move right. If you have this the wrong way, your bow can twist.
R: Your arrow?
L: I mean, the arrow, can twist, or sometimes go like that, so you have to put the right way in, well balanced, so it would stay, that's what they were saying.
R: And how long would you cut the feathers?
L: It depends on if you're in a hurry, you will cut them about three inches at the most. The ones with three, three sides. Yes, about three or two inches down and not very high, about an inch, three quarter inch high, eh? You could cut that, you could trim it. And if you're in a hurry and
you only put two, you put them like this, flat, on the sides.
R: On the sides?
L: Yes, on the sides of the arrow. And that's what you put there.
R: Horizontal?
L: Yes. And that's what makes it also a controlled arrow, very good. That's when you, when you are in a hurry. But when you have time, you make three. Three ones. (269)
R: And what kind of feathers would be used?
L: They usually, some people prefer to have a partridge.
R: Partridge?
L: Partridge, yes, for some reason I don't know. Because they are compact, they are not rough, you know what I mean? And if you don't have the feathers, then you use the goose feathers, but you have to cut it down to the flat. You don't have, you don't put the, you know, the hollow, you don't put whole thing in there, but you put, you cut it flat right there where the, where there's attached, and they cut that, you know? And it, it can stay flat. And you don't take much of that to tie on.
R: And were they only tied on, or also glued on?
L: Sometimes when they have a glue, yes. But they make their own glue. They make it. Having a glue is much better. You don't have to have anything here, it's just smooth, eh? So that's what they used to make their own glue. That's when they cut the quill flat like that, and then it's a easily it fits in there, just glue it in. But usually sometimes it comes off if it's, for some reason if they don't make the glue right. But tying is much more dependable. Do you remember that they forget all about the glue they make? They make the glue out of the fish - what do you call it? Air bubble? What do you call that stuff?
R: Fish bladder.
L: That's the one, yes. I wonder what that bladder is. I think it's a buoyancing mechanism.
R: Yes, Equilibrium?
L: Yes, that's right. So that's what they use. So they boil that. They boil it with, you know, the whole bunch of them. The whole bunch of them, they boil it and eventually the water begin to
blend. The water begin to steam out and then this only the paste end up there when you are continuously doing this. You can stir it, stir it and there begin to be just like a, just like a paste, a very light paste. But they put something else with it, I don't know what they put in there. So they make something else in it and that's it and they put it in a bladder, more like, like a, sometimes it's animal guts. Put it in there to keep it from drying. Stick it into the feather in there, as where you could pour it. You know the, the feather they in there? And that's what they tied there and they can keep this little thing. And when they want to use it, they cut this off.

R: Like a tube of glue?
L: Exactly. Yes, yes.

R: So it does not dry?
L: It doesn't dry if you put it in the, in the, you know, the animal's stomach, whatever it is. The stomach that you want to use it has to be a beaver, or a bit of a stomach, or maybe it's a intestine, so you just take it inside out. And that's where you put your glue in to keep it from free -, from drying up. And then when, it stays there, then you put this in a pouring mechanism, you just tie it there, until you need it. And then when you use, just cut this off with knife and you can squeeze to where you want it. And a fine work at that, too. You can put it right there and then, and then temporary tie these feathers and quills in it, eh? And then when it dry, you take the string off, there they are. The women can do it very nicely.

R: And is the glue water-soluble? When it gets wet, it dissolves?
L: I think it dissolve eventually. I think it does, yes. But sometimes some people can make it with, where they can, it can stay for long time. It doesn't dissolve. But somehow I think that it weathered out. I mean, the water began to take it out slowly, if it's rain, if it's hot and all that, eventually starts to flake out. You just have to re-glue it again. Or change the feathers anyway, by that time. Because, then you, the feathers doesn't last very long, you know, when you put them in the quiver bag, or whatever, I mean the arrow, arrow bag. So it's constantly caring for those things to use, so it's dry.

R: And what would be used for bowstrings?
L: That is different thing. That is all kinds of stuff. They can use any, any person who finds that's
the best to use. I know that some of them, they use a, this thing, what do they call, the, the whale skin, the whale, some of them, some of them used the walrus skin. The walrus skin is supposed to be stiff, not stretch. So they say, when it’s dry. So they use that. They cut it into a fine string and then they stretch it. And it stays there for a long time. And after that, you know, in time the strings conditioned to stay, not to shrink. And that's what they use. Because they don't want anything to stretch when you do this, you know? Very stiff, eh? So that's why they do that. And some of them use other kind, other kind of strings. It's taken from different hides. Different hide, different way it works.

R: But it's rawhide?
L: Yes, it's rawhide. Has to be raw. You know, rawhide. And dried, like a cord thing. That's the one they prefer. But you know, in there, in the middle they have to have a cushion stuff, so it don't break there.

R: So it's reinforced where they put the arrow on?
L: Right. And also for your hand, not to skin it. With this rawhide, it's very sticky, just like a stick, eh?

R: It slaps the wrist?
L: Yes.

R: So, did people wear a wrist guard?
L: They have. Yes, they have. They make it. And also this.

R: Oh, like a shooting glove?
L: Yes. They have only the fingers covered only that much. So they put this and tie them here.

R: So you would use the first two or three fingers?
L: These. These. Mostly.

R: First two?
L: Yes, mostly. But some people, it depends on how a person is, if he prefer to have these fine. But mostly, I used it when I used to, then you put your arrow here, not here. Only when you want to walk around and you to hold it like this.

R: Again?
L: Like this. Hold your bow. When you want to walk around, you hold your bow like that.
R: So the arrow is on the left side of the bow?
L: The arrow is on the left side of the bow, and then when you want to shoot, you take, take it in, you hold it there.
R: Yes, yes. So the arrow goes over the hand?
L: Yes, and that's where you have this, this little hide.
R: Pad?
L: Yes. Pad. So you won't scratch your, these.
R: Protect your bow hand?
L: Yes. And also this thing.
R: So, it's like a Mediterranean release? The string goes past the first joints and the thumb doesn't do anything?
L: No.
R: So the arrow needs to have a deep notch?
L: Where?
R: At the end of the arrow.
L: Yes, yes. It has to. It has to be deep. It has to have something like. You have to saw it.

Interruption.

L: We were talking about the arrow and quills and the way they make it.
R: How long would the arrow be? The arrow shaft?
L: Usually 24 inch, maybe 36 inches, I think.
R: Thirty six?
L: Three feet.
R: Three feet?
L: Three feet, yes, because you pull like this, that's twenty four inches.
R: And then the arrow would be.
L: And then the arrow would extend there. But we usually used somewhere around 24 inches.
R: So, the bow arm is stretched out straight...
L: Like this.
R: And you pull back to about the ear, or the jaw?
L: Like this, yes. So that's why you do that.
R: So, how long would the bow be then?
L: About five feet. That's average, maybe. But if you're a tall man, could be a bit more. My father was six foot, two inches. The bow was about as high as him, six feet, two.
R: So, would the bow generally be like as tall as the person that was using it?
L: Usually, yes, but not necessarily. If you have a good stick, if you have a good stick, it don't need to be very long, or good material, whatever you use. This is something that I have asked my uncle. One time I asked, I asked him what did they make, what did they use to a bow. Mostly in our area is tamarack, that's the best for them. And it has to be on that white wood, I mean the red wood, you know, where this, like a, many trees that would stand out there. On the southeast side of the tree, there's always that, a red wood. And that's a, that's a spring.
R: That's what you use?
L: And that's what they used. They used it. They think that's the most springy. It's very, it's hard to pull and it goes back fast. Even if it stays shape, it stay, it begin to go stay in shape like not straight. It begin to be very this way there.
R: Like a string follow?
L: Yes. And later on, and then it stays as very stronger, so you don't, you do not necessarily have to pull so far. You know, you could just pull so much and it is very stiff, too. It doesn't break. After a yesr it's better. The first yesr is not too good. After a yesr it, it begin to condition in some way. The spring stuff, it's really flexible and very powerful. And the older it gets, maybe after four yesrs, it remains the same, and after it begins to rot and then it's no more strength. And that's when sometimes you don't keep it that long.
R: So a bow last about four yesrs?
L: Four yesrs at the most. If you can keep it that long. Sometimes you can't even keep it that long,
an accident happen, or maybe it is broken by something. So it can be when they used to have an
bow and arrow, they used to look, try every kind of tree that is, that quickly use. I know some
people say birch makes a good bow. Birch, in certain condition, to dry it first. You don't use it
right away, you let it stay and like, dry it long, condition it or something. I don't know if they put
it in any anything. That way if the board is smeared with something, I don't know. But this, you
conditioning it. And then it last longer, but not necessarily strong. It's very flexible, but not
actually would very faster as the other one. And that's what they find. And then there is my, my
uncle said, some people will have the roots of the tree. Whatever the tree has, the roots. Just the
roots. They are growing like this.

R: Of the tamarack?
L: Yes, and then they would take them. Its already shaped. And that thing, when its dry is it stays
stiff, very stiff.

R: So you make a bow from the root?
L: Then its stiff when its dry, very stiff. Very little spring. For that one they need the string to be
flexible. You know, like a rubber string, that can shoot, like a sling shot. That kind, that's what
they do. But they have what they use for that is sturgeon spine, sturgeon sinew sort of thing that
is out there at the back.

R: That would be the string?
L: Yes. They take that. But it has to be raw all the time. But they have to stretch it first. Stretch it
in a certain way, so there would be some springing in there, there's like a, like elastic. But they
keep that in a wet condition. And they put that on only when they want to hunt. And that one
stretch, like a sling shot. Tjuch! It goes about, this bow then has to be like this. That's what I hear
the one time. Never saw it. I never saw this to be used. I heard my ma and father was saying that,
too.

R: Yes, I remember you, telling me.
L: But sometimes they do it differently. My father was saying there's two ways of doing it.
Sometimes he say, you can have any stick, whether if it's tamarack, or any other kind tree kind
sort of, there's a tamarack, there's a black spruce and then there is, I don't know what the name of
this, I don't, this tree kind. Black spruce it's not recommended. It breaks easy. And the other one, we call “Minnahik.” This is the tree that, that is usually grow on the river bank, on the small creeks. I mean it's about this size. And usually have lots of that red wood, spring wood, or what they call it. Springy stuff. And that's what they use. And then at the back, you know they cut a curve in there. There is a little, like a, a, they call it, there is a stick, you cut a bit of a line in there, eh?
R: Like a groove?
L: Groove, yes. You going up the back, from the centre to, to there, and that's where you put this string, the sturgeon spine, I think it is. You also use a whale spine, for instance, the whale. So they take them and they stretch it and then they put that on the back.
R: On the back of the bow?
L: Yes, yes.
R: The outside of the bow?
L: The back there, the back, yes, outside. And that helps springs the bow, springier, faster.
R: Did you ever see Inuit bows?
L: Never saw them.
R: Because I have seen one.
L: It's my father who, my father says it was done. I only hear him say that.
R: And, the bows that were made from tamarack, were they wide and thin?
L: No, no, not necessarily very wide, maybe about two inches wide, but also an inch and a half thick. Depends on, ah, at centre it's big. And then it's getting tapered down at the, the tips. It's a bit wider over there, and, you know.
R: Could you make a drawing?
L: Some sort of, okay. If you see it from the side, like this. Okay? I will draw it like this. This is the way you hold your hand. This is where your hand is, right here. And there it goes down this way. Very thin. And but here is where your handle is. See that, eh? So when you pull it, when you put the string, it goes like this. Yesh, like that, eh?
R: I see. And what would it look like from the front?
L: From the front it would look like this, okay? This is the bow, the centre is right here. That's where your hand is, and it goes like this. Almost like a, something like that. Okay? Not much, maybe, maybe two inches here and then this tapered in to the, here. And then there's your bow string. It's a bit out of place, but it's.
R: I get the idea.
L: Okay? But it's flat here. Here it's getting thicker and here is the thickest through here, where you have your hand. Usually they put the string here, so not to splint.
R: Oh, they wrap it?
L: Yes, wrap it a little bit here.
R: What would you use for that?
L: With the, with the, with the rawhide. Very thin rawhide. You wrap it there, so it won't break.
R: Just above and below the handle.
L: Yes, yes, yes, because that's where you cut the curves out of it, or the grooves. So they sort of cut it there. I mean the hide.
R: And if you put this sturgeon spine on it, would be right here?
L: Right in the middle there, right on the back here. It would be right there and hooked on there, and it goes behind there and be hooked right in here.
R: And the bowstring would be on the other side?
L: And then, yes, the bowstring is on the other side. And this sort of pulls back to it, the back, this one. That's what they say. I think my father didn't like this kind of bow that stays that shape into that.
R: That has a string follow, yes.
L: He didn't like that. So I think this is why he preferred to have this thing to make it stick, to make it stay, you know? So it won't have this.
R: But this kind of bow would also be negatively affected by very cold weather?
L: Yes. Same way. Any, any, any stick will do, any kind of stick will do. It won't. It's brittle when it's cold out. Its cracks pieces. Almost any kind of wood will do that. Tamarack may be a little bit more flexible. A little bit, but if it's too much.
R: If it's too cold, it's too cold.
L: If it's too cold, it's too cold. That's it. I know that we make toboggan out of tamarack, mostly tamarack and it doesn't break easy. I mean, because it's a flat stuff. And more like this. But this one here, tamarack, can be like that. It seems, like it's out in the open, it's not heated up by the friction. You're just pulling it, that's why it starts. So that's why they tie this thing up here, so it won't break, eh? If they didn't make these bows.
R: And the wood, the dimensions of the wood, that would all be pretty massive.
L: This one here?
R: Yes. Like, the handle you said, is thick and also here the in the middle, the widest part is still about an inch thick?
L: No, no it would be about a half inch.
R: Half inch, okay.
L: It's maybe at the end would be only about a quarter inch.
R: Okay.
L: Very thin. It'd be tapered evenly. There in the centre is a bit of a high. Like a skis, you ever see those skis and they have a little, that's the way the make them look like here, and slowly, too.
R: They use a crooked knife to make it?
L: Yes. yes. Sure.
R: And how do you make the bow get the proper curve? (578)
L: The bow?
R: Yes. How do you.
L: Because you cut it the right way. Here is what, that's what you do. When you make it, you don't finish it right away.
R: Right.
L: You keep putting on that bow string.
R: And test it?
L: And you look at it, yes. Where it doesn't bend right and that's where you begin to cut a little a bit, as you try it slowly. Very little. Don't cut it right here, because if you do too much then it
gives out. So you have to try it. Try it slowly and slowly and then try again, put your string. Where it doesn't, you know, give out so much, so you have to cut here over here, too. So it begins even. Than you know that it's good.

R: So you take away wood where it's too stiff and you leave those areas alone, where it's bending too much?
L: Takes a long time to do that.
R: Yes, I know, I know. (596)
L: I was thinking about that. There was a man, pilot, eh? The pilot's always, just remind me of the.
R: Of the propeller?
L: Propeller, yes! And he was saying that. That's exactly what he was saying. You know, he was saying that, you know, the, talking about, he was talking about when they make an airplane and they make a propeller, they use only sticks, eh? At first? He says, when you don't make. END OF SIDE A.

SIDE B:

L: Engine. So this thing seems to be working the same here.
R: Alright.
L: That's how they do it. They see, I think there is some effect if it's thick on one side, but I forget now what, what the negative effect is. (003)
R: And both arms of the bow are the same length?
L: Eh, that depends again.
R: On what?
L: It depends again, here, at the bottom, or the top, can be stiff.
R: Yes.
L: Or it can be flexible.
R: So you make up for that?
L: You have to make up for that, yes.
R: If it's too stiff, you make it longer?
L: Sometimes I don't know exactly where it's stiff, at the bottom or the top, I think it's the top, because the top, it has less moisture that comes from the ground and it has here, the bottom, has a bit more moisture and it's flexible. But the top one, it's stiff. Even if the dry wood, especially the dry wood. But the green wood, you know, it's the same thing. The top has less moisture, the bottom has lots, lots of moisture. The moisture makes it, makes it flexible. So the dry wood, and they used the dry wood, they know this is dry and this is a bit moist. So you have to cut more on this one, cut less on this one, so it'll give the balance of strength, eh? (013)
R: And the bottom of the tree would also make the, the bottom arm of the bow? Or not necessarily?
L: Not necessarily.
R: Okay. You can.
L: You can do switch anywhere.
R: And the outside of the tree makes the outside of the bow?
L: Yes, umhm. Mostly. Most of the time it is, yes.
R: And do you follow one growth ring here? (015)
L: Uhmmm.
R: You don't cut through that?
L: You don't cut that. Be very careful not to cut that.
R: And you go with the grain?
L: Yes. The people who can get the, the wood, especially the tamarack. (018) Tamarack and also, the, not the this black spruce but the other, we call it timber, in English, but I think we call minnahik in our language. That's the one that grow in the trees and on the little creeks, the rivers, eh? They are bigger. These ones you can split, if you find the right one. You can split it and you can take it very nicely there and follow the groove, eh? On both sides. And that one you can switch around. No matter which way you put that stuff, it works.
R: So it doesn't matter if you use to (phone ringing in the background.)
L: As long as you cut it, taper it very nicely.
R: I better press stop at this point now.
L: Hallo?

TAPE INTERRUPTED HERE.

(024)
(026)

L: And you were saying at last, what was it? Oh, yes, I was telling you about the, some good.
R: Wood?
L: Wood can be turned.
R: Both ways?
L: Yes, both ways. It won't break. I've seen that done. There was when I was young, my friend, Mike, Mike Hunter his name. Here we were, doing this a lots of when we used to, used to hunt with the little bow and arrow, not hunt for living, just for fun. Squirrels and birds, things like that. So, he had his bow was giving so into shape and there was not much pull. So he was asking us: “Do you two want to turn it around?” And then I says: “Give it a try.” And it was, his father has cut it, eh? To make him. And I says: “It should be good.” We look at it, I know. It was summer time, so went to put it in the water, put it on this thing. It seems to work. Then you put the string over it and you begin to draw and it improved the spring.
R: So that works?
L: Yes.
R: So maybe it had string follow before and now had a reflex?
L: I don’t know. I was surprised that he was able to do that. So I guess I went, I went to ask my, my brother used to know that, too, eh? My brother used to hunt bow and arrow. For the gee-, for the, just for fun. So he says: 'Yes, people do that.' He says, when they find a stick that would be just evenly cut, so you can turn it anywhere. When it's getting too much in that side, turn it over. So that was done. I'm glad you asked me that.
R: I should have brought a book that has pictures. There is a bow in it that looks almost like the
one you've drawn. Maybe they have it here at the library, too, we can check later. But that's, I was surprised to see that. It's almost the same and it comes from farther North, I think.

L: Is that right?

R: Yes. I don't know from where, maybe Cumberland Gulf, but I'm not sure. But it looks almost like the, the one you've drawn. And did you see the one that it at the Hudson's Bay exhibit? The Inuit bow?

L: No, no.

R: Okay.

L: What does it look like? Made out of bone?

R: No, I think it's wood and I can make a drawing of it. From the side it looks like this. Like this. This is the handle here, so it's thicker there. And it's very thick. Even at, at the, the middle it's well over an inch. It looks almost like the, the grip for a, for a railing for a staircase.

L: Is that right?

R: Yes. But on the back, on the outside of the bow, there is a big, heavy cable, made of braided sinew.

L: Is that right?

R: And it's wrapped here, round and round and round, then at the handle and here. And the string is of course on this side. This part from the front looks almost like this, there is the, many strands of the cable. Like braids, like this. All braided. And then there is another cable wrapped around, around, around to, to fix it

L: Yes, yes.

R: To this place, so it doesn't come loose. And big nocks here, where this cable on the outside is wrapped around. It's long, or more. Just wrapped it around, around, around. That's what it is.

L: No, I never saw it. It's in here somewhere?

R: It's in the Hudson's Bay, in the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature.

L: Is that right?

R: Yes, they tucked it away into the corner of one of the showcases. You have to look a little bit. It's in the middle.
L: Is that right?
R: Yes. But they have it there.
L: I should see that next time when I come around.
R: And it's very big. Very big bow. And I don't know, where would you get wood, up so far North?
L: Yes.
R: Maybe it's like a part from a ship, or driftwood.
L: Could be, it could be. Driftwood, maybe. Yes, it is a driftwood.
R: And it's the, the cross section, if you would cut it here, it's really almost totally square, just the corners a little bit rounded, like this. It looks almost like a machined part.
L: Is that right?
R: I don't know how they made it, but, its very heavy. Very big bow. So, I wonder. I have no idea how to make a bow like that.
L: They didn't have any story about how they make it?
R: It just says: 'Inuit bow, sinew backed'. Period. That's it. So, I guess that these people must have their own traditions about it.
L: Must have reason to do that.
R: Yes. I was wondering if you could use such a bow in extremely cold weather.
L: Yes, that could be the reason, yes. That's the question I'm thinking, too.
R: But they also had the, the spear thrower? Like.
L: Oh, yes, yes.
R: You put the dart in here and throw it.
L: They have that, yes.
R: So, maybe that's what they used in very cold weather.
L: That could be, too. I know my, my ancestors use it little bit, not as much, but they used it when they're, whatever, whenever it is, maybe sometimes they don't have an a, a bow and arrow for some reason. And the, and the quick thing to use, maybe that's the one they made.
R: Like the one in the showcase upstairs?
L: Yes, yes. I'm just thinking. I never asked. I know there is a, there is a way of living there when they what makes me wonder. You do not always carry the bow when you make a, a move. When you move with your family. You just don't walk there and carry your just bow and arrow. You help. You carry, carry everything. And sometimes the bow and arrow used it as a, as a cane, as a cane or something...

R: Like a skiing stick?

L: Or supporting stick. And sometimes you can't even carry that, because you have to carry so much. So the bow sometimes, you know, it's kind of awkward to carry around. Sometimes they leave it where they camped. Leave it there for some other. So they move without it, until they find a place where they can stay. Then they make another bow. So maybe, sometimes, in between that they used to make something to, to throw.

R: Throw a spear?

L: Yes. That's why I think it's just throwing a spear is something that is an emergency sort of thing. That's not exactly the way they hunt, it's just temporary thing. I'm thinking. And of course, they also have a sling, you know? Just like a bolo tie. They have that. Some people were good at it, too. Hunting. I'm not so sure if they kill caribou with that, I mean, at least they knock it down. I know they used two stones to triple, to trip the caribous down.

R: Two stones?

L: Two stones.

R: With the sling?

L: With the sling, yes. Maybe like this, a stone, maybe this size, maybe smaller, and then a stone. Sometimes they find a good shape, maybe two pounds each. And the other one, same way. And they tie their string here and moose hide, or caribou hide, and then this would be about, about a foot. Two feet, altogether. And in the middle they have a little handle. Like this, just a string, it's a little wooden handle, or even just the hide, and that's what they use to do this, eh? And then they throw it into the legs of the animal.

R: And it wraps around?

L: And it wrap around, yes.
R: Like a bola?
L: Yes, so, so it temporary the caribou would just fall down with this tangled up with this thing. And so they run up to it and, and spear it. Or maybe hit it with the tomahawk. So they used that. It's funny with this thing. There is a name for it. I think it's almost called the same way as the do, the same kind of thing they use for, for, for the game. The game they do there?
“Pimmachasquayasquahegan,” they call it. There's a two, two things. Could be just heavy object, or sand in it. And then they tie it here with a string, very strong string. And then they have a stick here with a little hook, maybe about three feet long, and that's what they use to try to put it, so the opposing team sticks here and stick there, hundred feet between the, the these teams trying to put this thing into.
R: Into the goal?
L: Yes, the goal. And this one's trying to put it this way. And lots of running, to do that. And in order to make many scores, so they win. But here is where they run more, something like lacrosse. Exactly. But this don't look like this. But lacrosse, they have a little net.
R: Yes. To catch the ball.
L: But this one is only two. And this is what they used also for hunting. A similar type of thing, but it has a little handle. They throw it in the air.
R: Swirl it around.
L: Yes, yes. And then let it go and then sometimes the caribou just hit it right here, sometimes two, and then he falls, like this. And that's when they run up and hit it. Or tomahawk, whatever it is. I don't know the name of this one. But I know, this one is a, this one is what I, this one I know, yes, game stuff, Pimmachasquayasquahegan. It describes what you do. And this one here is a, I really don't know exactly what’s the name of this one. There's a name for that. Maybe I can find out.
R: Maybe later.
L: Yes.
R: And what kind of quivers would the Omushkego use?
L: A what?
R: How would they make a quiver to carry the arrows or the bow?
L: Oh, yes, yes. They, they actually they don't have the, the arrow carriers, you mean?
R: Yes.
L: Yes. They do have a, a hide, you know, any kind of hide. They, it's usually moose hide. Or sometimes it's a, the leg. You know, the leg of the moose. Or the feet, they make. The long stuff. They just dry that, take the bone out, take everything out and they sew it back and they stretch it and dry it to make it stiff. It's stiff.
R: Leave the fur on?
R: Yes, the fur on. But scrape it first, turn it inside out and then scrape it to clean. And then they put something in it to make it stiff, not to, not to fall off, so it can be carried like that.
R: Like a tube?
L: Yes, yes. Like a tube. It's a leg, I think. And so if not, they used the very hard part of the, of the moose hide, the back there where it's very thick. Cut down such and they make it into a little bag for bow and arrow.
R: And that would be tanned and smoked leather, or fur?
L: No, very raw.
R: Rawhide? Hard?
L: Yes, hard, yes.
R: Why would you use the hard.
L: Because they want to save them, to protect the bow.
R: Okay.
L: 'Cause if they drop it or somebody stepped on it, they won't break. But they do have a light stuff that is, you know, they have the, the bag that is really tanned hide and even decorated and all that. Yes, they have that. But for the real rough work they like to have the stiff one, so they can just throw it there, without worrying.
R: And so the bag would cover the arrows completely?
L: No, no. Not necessarily.
R: Or they would stick out at the end?
L: They would stick out at the end.
R: And you carry them with the feathers up?
L: Up, yes.
R: Not with the feathers down?
L: Feathers would be here, yes, not with the points up, no. The feathers have to be saved.
R: Yes.
L: You don't want to ruffle them up, but they do that. But the hunting, the, you know, the big game hunting with the sharp thing? They do have to have this kind.
R: Then they.
L: When they hunt, when they hunt the caribou, when they hunt the moose, or the caribou, you know, usually they can grab it like that, because the sharp stuff, you know, get caught there.
R: Yes.
L: So they hold them like this.
R: Yes.
L: So they won't, they won't get caught.
R: So that the sharp head doesn't cut the other feathers or anything?
L: And also that they don't get stuck, because it's sharp thing, eh? [Louis indicated that during big game hunting arrows were carried in the quiver with the arrowheads up, not down.]
R: Yes.
L: Some do that and some say they have the, they have the sharp on separate place, where they can just put it on. I don't understand that, but that's what they say. They do that with the spear, you know like a seal spear? They do that.
R: There is a fore shaft?
L: Yes, yes, but they have a string attached to that. I think that's what they do with the bow. They have a little string here. And then, when they shoot the animal, they know this thing goes in.
R: Like a harpoon?
L: And then it would just hang there.
R: Yes.
L: They have many ways to do that.
R: And was there a case or a cover for the bow as well, or would you just carry the bow in the hand?
L: No, just carry the bow. Carry it for any reason, you carry it for the cane, or staff before it's that. They can carry it for that. They use it for many ways. It's really durable stuff anyway.
R: And to make the arrow shaft you would use, you said willow, or?
L: Willow is the easiest thing to, to make. Because you don't have to shape it. You just cut the very straight stuff. Sometimes it doesn't have to be good, it could be a bit, you know, curved. But you make that into a place where it could be straightened. And you take the raw stuff. And when it's, and when it's dry, it's very, very strong, durable. It's flexible. It can bend, it doesn't break. But they can be very straight. You know, that's what they, they liked that. Another one you still find it's on the, all kinds, cedar, tamarack, and also the other kind of spruce tree.

TAPE INTERRUPTED HERE.

L: What else do you want to know? Anything else? Let me read this note that you have here. Oh, yes. There was something that I forgot to mention about, as the results of the firearm. In, in the Omushkego, in the Omushkego country some of our ancestors, when they have seen the gun, it has given them the idea how to use it in their own, in their own Mitewiwin, know the, the shaman power.

And there is a story, it's about some mitew personal practice shamanism were able to use the firearm, or a gun without re-loading. They were able, supposedly, to keep aiming and cause it to fire as if it has been re-loaded. This they have done during the time when other tribes used to come and attack them unexpectedly. And those who were, had the shaman power, sometimes they would defend their families by using this, just the gun itself, but without any gun powder and the slugs. And were able to defend their family.

So for that reason the gun, the firearm have given a strength to the First Nation and it has
been very, it has improved, it has give some additional ideas because of the firearm. And there's a story about also the greater shaman will have an idea how to harness his dream quest, having the thunder being its helper and was able to use a similar object as a gun barrel to guide the lightning bolt to kill his enemies. So the gun had brought an extra idea amongst the First Nation in Omushkego land.

So there is a story about this. The story is very fascinating and it's very powerful. So they called it "The Omushkego Who Fought With Thunderbolt." So, there goes. Shows us how, how powerful influence can this firearm can be. And there were some who have tried the similar situation. Those who pretend to be a shaman, trying to use the, only the barrel to fire the gun. Which, sometimes it was not actually work, they were just tricked to use.

There's a, there is a man who have lived in Winisk about 1955 up to 1965, ten years. And this man, his, his grandfather has been a mitew, one of the Omushkego most admired mitew, in the James Bay area. This guy I have seen living, had tried to imitate his grandfather by pretending to be able to fire gun without any stock, but just the barrel, even double barrel. Everybody believes that the first time that he was able to do that. Even the other person did the same thing. But the thing is, he was not doing that. He was not actually doing that. All he did was, he put the shells into the barrel and hit them with the axe or a hammer, hit the primer and causes to discharge, to fire the shell. This was a dangerous something, something to do. He could have killed himself by doing that. And he did it only to impress his own people, to impress for something that he was trying to impress. And the poor guy was not a mitew at all. He got sick and then he got what we called in our life, he committed a blaspheme act, which means sin against nature, in our tribe, in our tribal beliefs. And this man, later in his life, he became crazy. Lost his mind. And people said, that is the reason. Because he have done such a thing. He used to scare people because of that, because he pretended to be a shaman and scare people with this object and with this action. So therefore, in our culture, there is stories that tells us something that we want to know.

So that's one of the thing that has influenced our First Nation people by the firearm, which actually was not really true. It was just a, it was that, what do they call that? It's just the
nature of some Omushkegowuk that have so proud of themselves, they want to be something which they are not, trying to be a mystical person which they are not truly are. It's just shameful to say that, but it is. It has happened. So, one of the things that influenced people about the firearm. So there you have it. So I gave you the extra story.