The continuation of tape recording number 2532 from 2530. It’s a it’s a same line of comments. Same kinds of topic. And today is January 4, 1992. It’s Saturday, and of course you know my name is Louis Bird.

This morning it is still early in the morning. While I have a clear mind and without any everyday distraction in the family, I take this opportunity to do my recording. And my recording is just like a personal memo. It’s just like a notes where I want to keep track of my thoughts. Which I consider most important at the moment or has been for some years. But the reason I do this, I think I already mention in the first tape, which is 2530. At that moment I was very sad, I was very emotional. This time I am in a different mood, I am more positive. And I would like to talk things more positively than negatively. But that doesn’t deny me to use negative terms to pinpoint what I am trying to stress. And I must confess I purposefully use a very simple English language because I am not, I don’t have any Whiteman education with any proof at all. I could only use the English language because I have adapted by working with the English-speaking people, but I do understand English language. My only problem is that I still carry my native accent with it, which I’m proud. I don’t have to be a perfect dialect with the English language, because there’s no such thing. As I understand it the English language is a multinational language. It came from the multiculturalism in Europe. The English language is every language in Europe and even part of the Middle East from where it emerges from. And it has become the international language. Especially for the businesses. I don’t have to go through all these things. The stress. My confidence having my native accent when I speak in English.

And now I shall continue my, my memoirs which I have started. Because I do not know if I ever have a chance to write all these things down because there are times I feel like I want to give up it all. I want to give it all up because of the things that I have to go through in life. And because of my health and because of my, my fatigue, should I say I am getting tired of trying to reason with things in my life. Because I want to reason with life. I want to understand life. I begin analytical. I analyze things. I question things. I criticize things because I was trying to find peace of mind. To accept things that are changing very fast and during my lifetime.

So my next topic is that I want to explain some things which has bothered me and also bothered some Elders that are same age as I am and also those that are older than me. I will still talk about two cultures that we are integrating our life into. Not only in Peawanuck, but all through the communities around the Hudson and James Bay area and also the communities that are inland of this region, the northern region of this province. Not only within Ontario, all these experiences are all known or are involved in each native community right across Canada. And there’s no one man, no one person can stop, or arrange or alter these things. They come. There’s no way to stop them. They just have to come with the turning the turning world. The world situation that’s developed today, we aren’t just have to get involved in it. But we must understand the world as it change. We must try to adapt it peacefully. And gradually, not suddenly, because we will have much and heavy conflict of interest if we do that. Conflict will be very distractive and could be very psychologically damage to our own people. We already have. The only thing is we don’t recognize it because we have become so greedy. We have begin to need some more. We have begin to want some more. And we don’t stop to wonder. We don’t stop to sit back and watch where are we now. We had begin that and this is what I’m trying to pin point. Now I’m going to get down to the next item, which I have had to record.
I’m talking continuously about the changes in our life. As a First Nation we like to use as a First Nation. The word First Nation came from the year of eighty. First time when the native people want to stress their differences between the European standard and the European culture, they were called First Citizen by the English language, by the politicians. When they were called First Citizens they said, “We are the first Canadian,” they say. The first Canadian, then finally it turns to the, in the old language first, the First Nations in this country. That’s the old language. And then translate into the First Nations. It was adapted then just a while back. So we love to use the word First Nation. But we were branded as Indians by the Christopher Columbus which today we celebrate the year of his arrival in this country. And now, to get back to this subject matter that I have in mind because I think it should be pointed out to some people who will listen or will hear or somebody may do this. I may not be able to do it my self. But I will do someday if I live.

The changes that are taking place for the last fifty years is very astonishing if you sit back and watch. I am going to take this this subject, for example, in my life; I am not the only one. There are others who live the same age as I am and have expressed this idea to me. They did not express their feeling in public, but they expressed their feeling towards me just to ask me do you rec, do you notice, “Do you, are you aware what does it do to you, what does it do to psychologically? What does your mind do because of these changes?” Now I have already said many times, our ancestors, or our forefathers have begun to adapt the Whiteman culture almost four hundred years ago. But the last three hundred years ago, the last two hundred years ago our forefathers and grandmothers have begin to adapt and material things also, I mean the food stuff. But in our area of this Northern Ontario such as Winisk, the first time our people in Winisk area have truly adapted to Whiteman luxuries in life was 1955 when the radar station was built. Then a young boys were involved in construction and then those were carried on to work with the maintenance group have adapted the Whiteman’s food. Have processed food. A Whiteman’s way of eating. All these was experienced through there. And this is the changes I saw. And truly it change them, even those people who are older than me. I have seen the changes in them after they have done that. Now lets leave that for a small example for the time being.

Now I’m going to talk another part of this change that I saw. When I was young, when I begin to be conscious. I mean when I begin to remember when I when I was young boy, the first thing I know about my parents was that they were very religious. The religion, the Christian prayer, Christian faith was most dominate in their life. And so were most of the other families that we use to see every spring, every summer. They were. But I don’t know how how faithful they were or how strong they believe in Christianity. I cannot say. At least in their practice, at least my parents I saw them pray three times a day. Once in the morning, once at lunch hour, and once in the evening. Sometimes twice in the evening. That’s literary sitting down in their knee praying, using a prayer book and singing. And truly submit themselves to this prayer. I grew up as a young boy that way. Sitting between my parents while they pray. I became conscious that way. I never understand anything, then later only... only years later I begin to understand that my parents were the poorest family in Winisk area. They didn’t live in right in community, settlement of Winisk. But they live around it, because they were too religious, to my understanding. They cannot park very far out from the church because they find comfort right in the church to see the priest say the holy mass every morning and the evening. They feel comfort and they feel a life support from it. And along with us, a young kids, or the children theirs. And that is how I see. I became too conscious about life. This is the most dominant thing that I ever saw. It was years later that I find out that my parents were of the poor. They were poorest of the family. Not actually the poorest. But not abundantly having anything. My father was sick and mother just maintained the family. Because my father has two different kinds of diseases which is epilepsy and the fainting spells, whatever this was, whatever the reason. I never understand, I never ask. But I saw is that I never saw a mother who was devoted so much to her to her sick husband. And never saw any complain from her. And the only thing that I saw that sustained them, was that church. Praying, praying, I never heard them ask anything. They just simply practice their praying. They have adapted Christianity so much that the material world was not really counted. They preach on
that us. Just like the way the priest use to preach to us. And when I begin to remember the Sunday sermons.

The first priest that I remember in those days was Father Parent. And he use to, his sermons were very kind. He was the priest that speaks not screaming, but just speaking as best as he can. And he was not aggressive type of preacher. He was just simply reading the bible and quoting the prayers and very little of his own made sermon. He was right down to earth sort of Priest. Maybe because he was not Healthy. They told us that he had a heart condition. And the next face that I remember was Father Murray. Father Murray was different time, but still practice his priesthood. But he was more down to earth type of person, more like a material processor, organizer. And then next we have Father Guile, which I don't know so well. He was another person who actually dominate your life actually judge you in the church sermon not only pin point your face, but was able to talk to you directly during the sermon. Condemn you for something he knows you do. Because through the confession. These things I saw. And at that time we were so highly or powerfully instructed that we should never think about material things. That this world is only temporary. That we should never even plan to store some goods for our own. Because God will provide us. That was the religion. And when I asked the Elders that where living how was the priest before these ones, so they told me they were much more powerful preachers. They were much more forceful. Telling the natives that they should abandon their paganism; their spiritual practice because it was evil. And all these things. But we never heard anything that we heard today. The preaching was simply conversion, not instruction. Not practicing Christianity. Not Christian faith. It was conversion terminology was like that. Every priest carried that up to the time I was fifteen years old. So the church is what I’m talking about. That’s why I say the missionaries had very little native language for them to correctly preach and convert. I’m not saying what they brought Christianity was bad. I’m saying the missionaries were limited to truly effectively convert our people into a standard of what they practice their Christianity. So the Chri, the conversion type of a of the preaching was still with us when I was young. But now, I begin to see the changes when I begin to learn to speak in English, to understand a bit of English.

I begin to see the difference when I left the community of Winisk, the settlement of Winisk to go and see the city in 1957. It was not my reason to go and check. It was my reason just to see. It’s something like to explore something that is out there. I went out there and I say many things, which no one see who live in Winisk all his life. I personally went to look and feel and what I heard from the few white people who live in Winisk settlement, which is priests and the Hudson Bay manager. They never explain these things to us. And when I saw, it was my own experience, with my own eye, with my own feeling that I have known, that I have learned. When I went to the city at that time, the way the priest was preaching and teaching the religion in Winisk and when I went in 1957 in Toronto to go to the church in Catholic church. First I almost was thrown out because I didn’t dress properly and because I was Indian. I was considered that I was just a simply not in the group. That's a first shock. And then again when I want to go to confession, because I could not speak in English, the priest says, “I cannot give you the confession, because you don’t speak in English.” Then again when I went to go to the biggest church that there was in Toronto that was St. Michael’s church. I went there and walked right up to the aisle and sit down in the open space. A man who stand in the doorway follow me and says grab me by the hand and say, “I’m sorry this seat is reserved.” I never understand then what this Reserve mean. This seat is reserved. I didn’t know that. So I was walked back to the rear of this church and everybody stares at me as if I was thrown out from the church. So it seems that I was not able to speak in English. I could not ask why. And it was later in the day that I went home. Of course I was humiliated and almost in anger. But the question was why did these people not want me to sit on the seat when it was empty? When I went back I speak to my friend who understand the city life much better then I am. I explained that to him what happen to me. At first he just laughed. It takes it's, of me. It was funny, after he exhausted his laughter, he explained that what he mean, “The seat reserved, that man,”

he says, “It means that people pay to see the preacher. They pay, literally pay to see them. And that seat is reserved for him or her or a family.”
And he says, “You must have walk in and take the seat that was reserved for one person, or they paid the seat.”

And he says, “You know that’s the reason we’re supposed to put money in the church when we go. Because the money that they put there. That’s what makes the church nice and being serviced.” So I had much more intellectual explanation intelligently explain to me by the native person so I could understand. So I was Ok. I was, I was really questioning about the church at that time. Why does this have to be so different than Winisk church where any man can squeeze any place as long as you get there faster and that you can stand any place as long as you don’t interfere anyone. And that time I was not even allowed to stand on the, behind the chairs, because there was some people sitting there with the ordinary chairs. And there was no more chairs as I told. So when I went to sit at the porch the men come and ask me he says, “Anything else you want?” I says, “I just want to hear them. I want to stay and listen to this.”

He says, “Well come time next time. Come again next time.” And that’s when I was very angry.

And I wanted to say, “What kind of a Catholic church is this?” And that’s one part of the experience, which I wanted to explain how we were treated differently then the way we treated in the city. And that’s my personal story.

And then everything that I have heard. This is another example. And it happens again here in the Winisk, in Winisk, the older, old village of Winisk. The priest were preaching against dancing. You know dances, there were dances before, you know, the Hudson Bay managers use to organize a small dance and people use to love to do that. And Fort Severn and places like that. And people loved to dance. Not necessarily a big party, but just to dance. New Years dance or some other seasonal, seasonal celebrations. And there was a priest in Attawapiskat they say who has forcefully enforced the church restriction, the church laws, the Catholic Church laws that there shouldn’t be any dance because it leads to sexual activity. So anyway the priest use to chase people home when you dancing. In fact sometimes he can fight. The story is still there. And in Winisk it happens the same thing. But this was a, I would say about seventy, sixty years ago. Friend of mine who had passed away the Elder was a young man then. Probably eighteen or something like that. And his, him and his group, the young man, they were young men that time, they went to the next village with a, I think it’s Webique. They went to in there in the Christmas season to buy groceries. And they having a dance there. There was a dance, a Christmas dance or New Years dance and somehow this story about them being invited or going attending, dancing there in that community was reported to the priest. And it was my grandfather, my own grandfather who was responsible to take care of the church when the priest was not there. Literally, he opened the church Christmas season when there’s no place. He was more like a, a layperson, they call it. Something like today, mission. I think mission is a bit more higher than him. So anyways he use to open the church and let people in. And also he took care of the house and look after it. He was one of those people what they refer now in the, in the Hudson Bay and James Bay history which they call a home guards. People who stay close around the, comm., a Settlement of the Europeans. European settlements like Pea, Winisk and Fort Severn. Families who stay close by to take care of the manager or to take care of the missionaries and things like that. And he was one of those. And he was asked to open the church, my grandfather, John Bird, John and he was asked to open the church for midnight, midnight prayer. And that’s what he did. And it was that time later in the Easter I guess, when people came back from the from the trap line, some body told a story that a few men went to the Webique and they happened to have a good time dancing. So my grandfather got wind of this and the church was forbidding the Catholic people in Winisk to do any square dance, especially square. And my grandfather reported those people. I think there were about three of them or five, I’m not sure. And when the when the priest came to the community that spring, he lash out at those young people who were attempting to dance out there. And he make them kneel down when we receive the Holy Communion. The church were different then. You cannot walk pass this fence sort of where you kneel down to receive your communion. And you’re not supposed to touch the holy host. It was placed in your mouth. And so this is where five maybe three young men were made to kneel down in front of the church and they were prayed for. They were called a sinners, because the my to the dance. And
they were humiliated in front of the Church. And this was a friend of mine who has begin to be an Elder before he died. Used to explain these things to me. And they were told they have to right to the pope before they can confess. They were denied confession. So they were told, if they write a small letter to the pope saying that,

“Holy father, please forgive me for doing this, breaking into the church loft.”

And then he says, “You will be, they will do it, you will have confession later.”

So anyway, according to my friend he says, “I wrote a very small letter. It says I went to the dance and I want forgiveness.” That’s all he has to write and he gave it to the priest. So he says, three days later he says, the priest call us.

He says three days later he says, “The priest call us.” And he says; “Now you can go to confession.” The pope has has forgiven you. The funny thing the funny part of that is that the priest said that, the priest himself. At that time there was no radio, there was no telephone, there was not even a satellite, there was not even a mail plane, just once a year, but no on Christmas day for sure. But there was not even a telegraphy message. But how did this priest ever get this small message to the pope so quickly and receive an answer? There you see is a clearly the priest himself were forcing our ancestor to take the Christianity and to comply to it totally. And now, I’m not continuing the church. It’s a missionaries. It’s the priest who misused their obligation in those days because they wanted our forefather’s system to change. And from it to not deny the Christianity at one step, accept, more like forcefully. Then it happens that a friend of mine were able to go to confession then. Three days only after he wrote the pope. Before he died, he asked the bishop to be is there any pardoning for this mistreatment from the church? And the pope, the bishop said at that time, the Bishop Bellow(?) I think. So he had make the excuse for the for the priest who had done that.

So anyway, ever since then my friend the Elder was very question, questioning about the church behavior, the priest and all that. So I am not the only one who questioned the activities of those early missionaries. There were many others who talk, who told story about them. There are other people who question about the, the priest and marching mission how forcefully they want to control their church members. Even using a physical power. So these are the people that are here. And that’s what we have been using now. We are using the same method what they use. That’s what I want to pinpoint that. We are using the church to condemn each other. We are using the church to try to, to try to hide behind ourselves, because the priest will say, “Yes.” But it’s not that way today. We see today that the priest doesn’t do the same thing what he did forty years ago, fifty years ago. They are totally different. The priest today are simply a working people. They just follow the ritual. The oldest tradition, Christian tradition there is. The Roman Catholic Church. And the Catholic priest today, they are just human. They are not holy people. They do not enforce anything. They just show you to practice your faith. They don’t use the church anymore to establish prestige in community, they just simply a priest. In fact, we cannot even have a priest anymore. And this is the sixty old old system that we ourselves are trying to use. We try to hide behind the church when we do something wrong and that is not right. We see for the last twenty years how many church have emerged from the Christian faith. They say at least five hundred.

We saw during the last twenty years, ten years especially, how many the new ministries, the dominant activist in the church, something like George Richard(?), Jim Richard(?) and Jimmy Baker. How foolishly and shamelessly perform the wrong thing in front of millions of audience, spending millions of dollars just to gain the material things, by using Jesus Christ name. To my opinion, that is wrong. So it is wrong, I think, to use this, the Christian church, which is the most beautiful established faith. To use it for the material gain. And that’s what I’m getting at. And this has been done to us by the priest. And we don’t even have a priest anymore. And I don’t think we should use that system. That’s the changes that I saw. That’s the changes that makes me wonder sometimes. Because I was so faithfully, faithful to the Catholic Church, I fought for it. I defended it. I even forced my my family to adapt to Chris, Catholic Church because the church says so. Have I done wrong? And that’s the changes that I’ve saw now.
Now we see the young get married, mixed marriage in the church. When I was married as a mixed marriage I was hidden. Only two witness to stand beside me.

Today it’s changed. Everything is changing about the church and everything is changing. And that is why it is pretty hard for the people like us, like me to live peacefully without being analyzing and criticizing someone. That’s why I became analytical about situations. That is the reason that I am critical, because those things I lived, two different worlds during my lifetime. I saw two different worlds during my fifty-seven years. And I began to question everything. Now where do I belong? Yes, anybody can say I belong to the old ways. Truly, it is. I am an old fashion and I don’t fit to live this world, this different world. Which like me sometimes to think I should leave this place. I should find a place where people still, I could belong to this. A faction is there. Maybe I don’t belong to this one. Maybe I should find somewhere that I can fit in and live peacefully without trying to fight the changes or pin point the changes that are negative, which I have been doing. Which lets me to be hated person. That’s what I am talking about. The changes during my lifetime are not easy to ignore because I’m very honestly believing everything that I am told and I’m trying to do it, I was trying to do it. I was trying to be faithful when I was young. Now I’m getting old, I question those things. I need an adjustment. I need an adjustment with, with the church, with the faith, with whatever faith that is advocated today. They even question, that you know, how many churches are there. Which one are these. I know, which one is the oldest one, that is the Catholic Church. And that is supposed to passed one from the apostles. And that is the reason I hang on to it. That’s the changes that I am talking about. That makes it hard for me to understand those things and try to adjust them, as I get older. So that is one part of the change that I live through.

Another one is a material world. I have loved very much the old culture. I was raised in it. I live in it. I have experienced it. The word, the famous word the Indian people use, the First Nation is living in harmony with nature. That’s what’s it’s called. And that’s what I cannot get rid of. I cannot leave it behind. I still like to practice it. And because I am getting old, because being sick I cannot practice that fully as I would appreciate, because I have to be around where my family is. I have to support my family at least to be alive. And that is part of the things that I have to go through. I am not the only one who feel like that. There are many Elders who feel the same thing, but they could not express it in English. They could express it in their own language. Seems that our language is also seems to be fading away. They cannot truly express their feeling. They could only exist. When I visit the Elder, when I talk with the Elders, they don’t need to speak. I could feel, I could feel their expression. There is no need to talk to express that. Even though they have found the old tradition, the old cultures, their own culture was harsh and hard, they still have it in their system. I have that to. Because I was raised in it. I have enjoy it when I was young and I still enjoy it. Living in harmony with nature is the word that most First Nations, that’s the only expression we could use to try to sum up, to sum it up what they want to say. They can speak for hours. But, three words can express what they want to say. But you must experience it in order to understand. One must experience it years before they can understand. And that is what we left behind, and that is which make me sentimental more often now as I get older. It’s not that I hate the new world that is emerging, the new lifestyle. No. No. I do concern for my children. The new lifestyle that they adapted is going to be hard. They must understand totally. Maybe it’s better for them to totally ignore, totally leave the First Nation culture so they not going to be altered to succeed in the modern world. And that’s what I tried to express as I speak.

In today’s communities that we have around the coastal area, we have not yet geared ourselves to be in that position. We make believe. We enjoy the better things in the material world because they come easy without much of our effort. It’s given to us freely, but the effect of it is a question. Is it worthwhile to say or to call ourselves I am the First Nation. While we are totally accepting and taking, welcoming a new a modern world. The modern living. Highly sophisticated lifestyle. We will never turn back. We will never understand what it means to live in harmony with nature. We will live in harmony with technology. That is I understand. And we must prepare ourselves. We must prepare our children to adapt it. And we must not alter them by talking our culture. Because we have already left it. That’s my total meaning what I’m talking about. Now I must stop and turn this thing and continue on from there.
Good morning. This is Louis Bird, from Peawanuck, Ontario. Today is Tuesday, January 7, 1992. The tape that you have just listen from, from this up to this point on, which is numbered 2502 is a continuation of my memoirs, recorded memoirs. In this tape it talks about the changing world, which effects my life and effects other First Nations around my area. And this tape was done on January 5 on Sunday morning. And now it’s January 7, 1992. I would like to continue with this, with this kind of topic, but in a different way. Each time when I have stopped once I begin, if I have to stop, the distraction thereof is cannot be restored. If I been distracted, even for a minute or two, when I have my line of thought flowing into my mind, they cannot come back after it been disturbed. So therefore, I have to listen back the tape. Listen, rewind and listen to the last comments for the train of thought that I was expressing, in order to carry on. I have now listened to this numbered tape, which is 2532, well on all the things that I have talked about in it. Mostly I mostly I have talked about the changes in the world and a tell the story, the examples about the changes in the church. And also I have talked a little bit about the material, the material world changes, which I have seen in the old settlement of Winisk, where I grew up. Where I grew up around it.

I am sorry that we hear that squeaking noise, but my tape recording machine has some difficulty. It just has, just has to do. When I get a bit more excited or get carried away, sometimes I would speak very fast and sometimes even use a wrong word and sometimes even my word would sound different word because because of my lack of speech. And also my grammar is not that good. But it’s better than to sit down and waste ten hours of writing because I don’t have that time. So tape recording can do that for me within one hour. Which would take me ten days to write it down in English. Same thing, it’s the same thing happen in my own language. I could write very fast in my own language in syllabics. I could almost write as fast as in English, but still forty-five minutes of tape dictating my memoirs, or recording my memoirs, it’s much easier and it’s much faster, and that is why I do this. And now I shall begin again. I shall try to record again this morning before everybody’s begin to stir in the morning. In the morning time it’s the best time for me to do my recording, when there’s no noise. During the day it cannot happen. And it is only in this community that I have electricity to use this tape recording. I could go into the bush and sit up a tent, but I would need, I would need a very good condition batteries. But in the cold weather like this, the batteries, D-cells they would freeze once I leave the fire going out, going out they wouldn’t work. In my recording would turn out to work in different speeds and I would sound like Mickey Mouse. So the sounds the sound would be very distracting for the important things that I want to say here. I don’t intend that any one to listen to these tapes but but by myself or if I could find someone to transcribe it. That is the reason I have to try to, say the worlds I want to use.

And now the beginning. And the other side of this tape I have finished saying about the changes in life that I have saw. And mostly on this tape, I have talked about the changes the changes that I saw in the church or about the church. I don’t have to repeat. I don’t have to repeat what I said about, about the story example of my former friend who is an Elder. And also the, my personal experience in 1957. We already hear that.

And now there are other changes that I want to mention. I may trying to express our experience as the native people in the, in the, especially in Winisk area. The people who have
lived in the Winisk River and its tributaries and the coastal regions, people who have used the Winisk as their highways and their travel ways to make a short migration during the four seasons of the year. Otherwise, who have ended, who have ended to stay in Winisk settlement from 1930 gradually into 1950 and then finally 1976 which was the beginning of the native community. According to my, according to my experience it was 1976 that the last family group left the community for the wintering ground. I call that the end of the old tradition. And the new tradition emerged from that. So the changes I have talked about, I mentioned only a few, I mention about, and the other side of this tape, the changes we have experienced, all of us.

During that time, during the last fifty years maybe sixty years, which led to the complete abandoning of our culture. Abandoning, I mean a family doesn’t go out into the bush to make his own living. The whole family. There’s nobody who do that now. Not one family is going into the bush during the time when the people use to leave the coastal areas to go settle their wintering ground, winter, winter camp for the whole family. That is gone. That’s what I mean. There’s nobody here who does that anymore in in Winisk area people. I don’t know about other communities. Even though we have a fast communication today, I never hear anyone to leave all winter or even part of the winter for the whole family, except a few Elders who go out in the fall to stay for hunting, for goose hunting. Then they usually stay till freeze-up and very easily get back to the village, or to the settlement, to their community. They are those that can do that. There are some in a nearby village, which is called Attawapiskat. There’s some Elders who can do that. And now there are very few who can do that in the next village to the north from us, that is Fort Severn. I haven’t heard anyone, as in whole family to leave the community for their wintering ground. And that’s what I’m talking about. And the same applies for to the Winisk people or Peawanuck. No body is leaving now anymore for the winter. And that is change. Another change that I’m talking about. But this change come gradually. It begin in 1954 and it finally it goes on to the 1976 and that was the last time the whole group of families left the community. And I would say that, you know what, what causes was that was the construction of a radar station nearby, and then also our community leaders were who were screaming for the changes, about their children who are going to school to Fort Albany.

Especially in Winisk area, there was a very strong voice. Because one of the young man who was attempting the Fort Albany and residential school had lost his life in Fort Albany in an accident while playing on ice with skates. And the boy was strong. There from their own I have heard some voices in Winisk area. People who were living there, though they did not belong to the, to the Winisk area, but they had settled in Winisk settlement, or in this community during these ten years period. Half settled there and with the families, you know and all that. This is where I heard strongly condemning the residential school, and so as the next communities around the James Bay. The chief at that time, who were a chief that time, usually the elders, they were voicing their people’s opinion, that schools should be in each community so that the children will not have to go, will not have to leave their families as they can live in community with their parents. This was a very good idea. This was, this was the first time that the native leaders in James Bay and Hudson Bay voiced their opinion together. And the government has to listen. The Federal government agreed with the with the Ontario government that the schools be built in each community. A day school at least. A day school they call them. So the children can attend schools during the winter, during the school days in the year. And that’s what happened and because the leaders what have asked and beg for deliver, they never considered the disadvantages. A disadvantage is that they could not leave the community, to move, because they have to stay close to their children would are attending school. Therefore abandon their family unit as a self-supporting group. And that was change. And the change that happened that time, nobody actually voiced that negativity. They over looked themselves. Not, there’s nobody else to come and tell them this this disadvantage. The leaders at that time never said anything. I guess most of us didn’t almost ready to take whatever comes. Anyways that’s another, another change. Which forces wou, which also finish off the culture tradition. That is a migration kind of life.

The people in the Hudson Bay and James Bay area are migrators. They are like a geese. They lived in the community in the summer for two months, when the fall, when the the fall begins, like when the season actually changes they have to leave the community and find their
place where they usually spend their winter. Call that wintering ground. Hunting ground. And long
time ago they use to have all, all communities who are able, who are healthy, usually the
community eagerly leave the community to go spend their winters in their own area. I mean
eager. Happy. They were optimistic because they were going home more like. And are family
move. And that was the small migration. Migration can be about sixty miles, even twenty-five
miles and some one hundred miles. And for those who have to go abundant area, they have to go
more than a hundred miles. And these were the people who use the rivers, the major rivers, the
tributaries of the river and into a connecting a river system which ever they went to go. And this
was practiced as far as I can remember ever since I became conscious in this world, which is
about 1939. I was only five years old when I begin to remember people what they do. Our parents
with them and other peoples. And that is all I ever saw is people coming during the summer and
leaving in the fall and you don’t see them until next spring as a family.

But later years when there was Hudson Bay stores were stocked a little bit with more
basics, basic materials like flour, sugar, tea. When the store begin to stock a can stuff, a few can
stuff, the native people use to make an effort to come to the community besides coming to the
church that they would love love to change their diet. The daily diet they have in their own home
ground. One of those things they wanted to experience. And some who weren’t health and have
the capable as traveling as a family unit use to arrive in the communities, in the settlements. This
kind of activity became a tradition. And each communities in the Hudson Bay and James Bay. But
this tradition started around 1950. No, no, just a minute. 1900, probably, as far back as 1875,
even a bit lower than that in some areas. The areas settlements, the European settlements, like
Kashechewan, which is in James Bay, Moose Factory, and York Factory in Manitoba. These are
the major depots, depots for the for the Hudson Bay Company. And also, that’s where the
ministers were, the religious religious ministers were a staying to. So two things were done by
these families from that time on. They use to go to a, to the this fur trading company to exchange
their fur for, for commodities as a, a White man persist for sugar, tea and those things. Actually,
they didn’t need them at that time, but they just want to change their diet. A diet, the way they eat,
I mean. They were not watching their weight. But they just wanted to taste something different
during that season, special season. And the whole family was excited about it. I remember when I
was young when a Christmas days come near, we were all excited to be prepared to leave the
hunting ground to go to the community. And as kids we were talking about having to taste candy,
even if it’s only one candy. And all those families then, they had the same excitement. Because it
also had spiritual value to Christmas day. Christmas season. Our Elders then and our parents,
who were mostly enjoying about, what do you call it, having to meet their friends to exchange
stories. To exchange there their prepared food supplies. And this became a tradition from 1900 to
even further back in Kashechewan and York Factory. But then in the areas like Attawpiskat,
Winisk and Fort Severn, that Fort Severn is one of the oldest trading posts. But it dwindled down
after 1900 and it began to be a small settlement. And it’s classified same as Winisk and
Attawpiskat and and Fort Severn. They classified in that nature. They were not, because of their
population they was, there were very few people living in there, probably a hundred, maybe less
than two hundred. But Attawpiskat has always been more populated, but it wasn’t established as
as by the European as Kashechewan.

So this is this is what I mean a tradition was established during 1900, up to 19, various
places was different period. For Winisk, it was established at least from 1900. This migration
during the Christmas season. Family unit to move into the settlement to have Christmas a
celebration and also to trade their furs. And that I remember. It carries on from 19.. 1939,
especially from that time one. And it carries on to 1952. Families moving in make a trip to the
communities for the Christmas religious celebration and also fur trade. But that, that was ended in
Winisk settlement, in 1955 when the radar base was established nearby community. So this
begin to dwindle. It begin to, it begin to change slowly. Not too many people can move during the
most two years of construction of radar station. There were very few families who leave the
community. And then after, after the radar base was established and those men who had
families, or who remained to be begin maintenance workers in the radar base. They didn’t go to
trapping. They stayed in communities; their family stay in community. And those that did not work,
they go only as a single man hunters, but in pairs, sometimes three. So that’s the effect of that radar station. And this was the first time that people, the men of whom the people in Winisk settlement were introduced to the wage earning lifestyle. They liked the idea. They like it because when you go there for eight hours into the radar station, you are certain to get certain amount of money. And it was the first time in 1955 that the native people in Winisk area value a dollar. Actually holding certain amount of, a pile of dollar bills and two-dollar bills and things like that. And it was the first time they also given a checks on there own wages. They have seen the checks. They had them before that. They have seen family allowance checks. They have seen old age pension checks. But, wage earning checks was the first there, first of their own. And which changes the mind, changes the way of thinking, and which led them to abandon the tradition trapping activities or self-supporting activities, which was a which was run up to the 1954.

Self-supporting is what I mean when they go out to their hunting ground, set up their own wintering cabins and whatever you want to call them. Moss-houses. And stock piling fish before freeze-up. And doing a bit of trapping while it’s still warm. And also, preparing the winter activities. And also, hunting, maybe probably killing a large animal as moose and store it up for the winter, and all the fish they can get. This was, this was a self-supporting. These things, they didn’t have to buy in the store. They have to get them themselves. And usually they go right where it’s abundance. And they do well. They don’t need too much of a of a the White man process food that was sold, that could be obtained from the Hudson Bay store. These are the changes that I’m talking about which we lost totally ever since 1976. Since 1976 then, the tradition ended, I say, from 1939 to 1953, thereabouts. During that period that the last, the last, Winisk area people tradition died there. So there was no tradition at least for the time being. From fifty-four, fifty-five to seventy-six, very few people went out to go trapping during those period, during that close, twenty years period, or at least fifteen years. Nobody went out as a family unit. Very few. Probably two, maybe three sometimes in one year, in one fall. But they only go for two months, three months period. Not all winter. And most of them just stay in the community after seventy-six, because of the school. Because of a day school that was been, that has been requested. So it holds the family unit in community. The men can go, only maybe a period of two months or three months at a time. And that was the beginning of the changes. So the new kind of life was beginning to take a hold, take hold in in Winisk people. So only men will go out to trap. And it goes on like that from sixty-five to eighty, even up to today.

After, after the after the flood of 1986 in Winisk settlement, now nearly is about five years now, I don’t think there’s any family ever left the community as a unit for trapping. We have now totally abandoned the old cultural tradition. That was the last one that was existed from the fur-trading period to the declining fur trading period. For the purpose of Christian celebration of Christmas. That also decline. Because we don’t go anyway anymore, we stay in one community. And now we don’t even have a priest. But the last Christmas we did, we did extraordinary have a blessing because we were luck to have the priest. Not only the priest, but the bishop. A retired bishop has agreed to come and spend Christmas day in our community. For those of us who enjoy those old memories and traditions in our fathers and our grandfathers when the priest use to celebrate the midnight mass without ever us worrying about how we dressed and how much money we got, only actually coping and really as non-materialistic as a Shepard in midnight. That was truly an experience. But that is not there anymore. Today, Christmas day is a Christmas tree, decoration, lights and some shopping to be done. But the spiritual part of life is not there as I saw it a long time ago. These are the thing that I’m talking about. These are the changes that I am talking about. Which sometimes makes you feels so sentimental because of those changes, especially when you old man.

There’s nothing wrong with the young people. To them, this is the world. This is this is the kind of world they come to be conscious of. There’s nothing wrong. The young people who have born in thirty years ago or forty years ago they don’t didn’t see the old culture. They didn’t feel it. They tried it, yes, they experienced it on their own effort, for they’re own, just to prove themselves they could do it. But they haven’t lived it, those who are forty years old. And those who are thirty years old, they have, they haven’t really experienced it year round, the old tradition. The actual self-sufficiency or self-supporting style. But this is only a few years back. If I have to go way back,
if I have to explain exactly what totally independence and total self-sufficiency was. My grandfather told me those things. But he never told me, in he prime. He never told me to what I mean to be proud to talk about, because he was already converted to Christianity. He was already converted to a modern, a modern world. A modern world is what I call when somebody can eat the process food and wear a garment that is weaved. That’s what I mean a modern living, in those days. Today, we look back on those days as if we were, wasn’t was before 1500 B.C. if we’d have to compare the Whiteman style. Our people in those days they were just like 1500 years also before, before Christ came in. Where people are fighting each other, killing each other like animals, fighting for each other for the small material gain and the crude weapon that he used, where the first civilization should have been emerged from. That is, in the Middle East. So this is what I am, I am talking about. This is what I think about. This is what I always talk about by myself. Or this is what I have in my mind. In this memoir, this recording is where I have my outlook on life. I don’t talk to anyone. I just have this in my mind. And I’m aware of those things. And I have stories that I can associate with it. Ok, this is where I stop for the time being.

--

To maintain the subject of this recording I would also like to include other things that involve about the changes that I am talking about in our lives, particularly in this community of Peawanuck. There is some thing that I want to stress again. I have done this in the first tape. That I said I wanted to stress the point of the quick change usually result in negative effect during the transition period of one one event to the other. Our experience from in Winisk settlement by the Winisk area people to the establishment of the new community of Peawanuck, we have that, we are experiencing the negative effect of a quick transition. But not all of us aware of this. I will give one example what I am talking about. When we were living for centuries in Winisk settlement, when we were making our annual return to that, at the mouth of the Winisk rivers, Winisk river, there was that tradition that last for ten, ten years, more than ten years period, which was established as a tradition. When that come to an end, there is a changing period there where everyone of us considered was a good thing. And whereas some of us have actually feel the loss of something. Especially those us who are older. Those that were old that time. My self, I was not yet considered an old man that time. But since then, from 1976, I have seen those, the negative effect of being cooped up in one community where before hand we were free to leave as we please and nothing to worry behind. Because no nomadic life, nomadic life is like that. Our forefathers, our grandfathers, even our fathers in my age which I am fifty-seven, we have seen our parents who didn't have any possession. A very small possession such as canoe, maybe a covering material for a temporary lodging, such as tepee covering, I mean wigwam. The material that covers with it and on all the tent was the only possession that was considered as a mobile home. And when anyone belong to that category of life he would have nothing to worry about behind. You are free to go whenever you wish. So the season dictate your movement. Just like as the rest of the animals and fowls move with the changing seasons of four times a year, or even six seasons of the year for the migrating life. And these were and these were the things that makes people so be free. Our ancestors were free you know. There was nothing that hold them in one spot. And that is the reason they never established any community or settled in one place. These are the things that make them so free. And those who have grown up as a young who became conscious of this kind of life as young people enjoyed all through the last time, they even die with it. And those old people who have lived to see the changes, it has just simply killed them. And then they, nothing wounded them physically, but inner, inner self, consciously where the bribes of those freedoms that they enjoy in their lifetimes. And I happen to see four old men who seems to be more like willing to die because of this. Especially one old man that I know. For some two years, I actually see his longing to be free. To go back to his older activities when he was young man. He, he actually expressed that to me. So is my good friend who is an Elder, Michele Patrick, he use to tell me these things. At one time, the last time that I ever saw him walking on his own effort with me in the wilderness. He spokes to me with these words that he was very sad to leave the world that he saw is changing. I did not see him cry, but I think it was inside him. And this is the experience that I’m talking about. And as I just begin to be an older person, I feel what he felt, but I do not try to insist upon anybody else to sympathize me or, I do
not want to give me feeling. So these are the changes that we carry and these are the things that we give into.

Now I am going to tell you a small story, I'm going to tell small story again. I already mention this once. I already mentioned about the thing I have experience in my life which led me to awake or to be aware the the continuous negative effect of the fast approaching civilization or a modern world. A time when I went to see in Toronto in 1957 after the construction work in the radar base. And during that time I was aware then how we were treated, our our people in Winisk area. This is a very short one, but I'm going to express it anyway. During that construction period in 1955, thereabouts or fifty-six, there was a man, there was a man who came in from England. He had joined the the Lands and Forest Department, Ontario Lands and Forest Department as a conservation office. He was an well educated man in his own term, in his own culture. But since he came to the most isolated area in Ontario and when he worked in Winisk which was nicely, nicely settled there because there was a very nice house, the most a modern building in community where where he stayed. Supposed to stay for a winter and hopefully later he would bring his wife, his family to be with him. Because it was required that conservation officers to station in Winisk because of the construction camp. Because of the camp across the river. So somebody to keep an eye on those things. That is the reason the Lands and Forest decided to bring someone to station there. Anyway this person was there and by that time I had already understand a little bit of English language and I was able to speak a few words. But I understand the situation this time. I was aware that we were treated as a minority in our own community, in our own territory. And I didn’t think that was right. And this particular man who was a conservation officer from England, just came from England a while back, and he didn’t understand the native people. But he had heard or read or seen many cowboy movies. So he treated us just like that. He treated us as the lowly, lowest and a simple-minded people, people who do not aware nothing and can be easily deceived. He believed that he could could have done it to us. That time then there was already been set individual trap lines in 1947 and during that time the Lands and Forest Department has said only individual trap line will be charged five dollars a year, but around the community, about four miles around the community, anyone there can trap without buying a trapper’s license. Anyone can trap there for free. And in the community there was some Elders and there was some families, maybe three families who stayed around as usual and they were given free to trap around. Trap muskrat and and a small mammals. Anyway I saw this man was stationed there in that early fall after the trappers have left, those who want to go away. He charged the people who were trapping around; he charged them around the settlement. Even the old ladies. Even the old ladies. Even the young teenagers who wanted to do a little trapping, he charged them five dollars. And I was working there in his house finishing off, doing a finishing touch like painting. And I told him,

I said, “I thought in 1945 was stated that anybody that lived in a settlement close around community would be an open space for them without being charged for a license?” He just automatically so furious,

“Are you going to tell me my job?” So he just almost throw me outside. And since then, that time, didn’t want me. First he thought he was going to hire me as his translator. When we wants to speak to anyone or he can, I could be on his side, but I said, “No, that is not the way it was said.” And he didn’t want to speak to me again. In fact, he almost hated me and he made an effort to try and put me down. And this is one example that I want to talk about. How it was obviously treated as, we were treated as truly minority people on, in our own territory. Which was a very very bad mistake in my opinion. And these are the small examples of what I’m talking about, how we were treated and how we were looked down even our own area in our territory where we were fully responsible for our own life. And those kind of people, they were there. And hopefully today, in this after twenty-five years, thirty years later, hopefully we don’t have that that sort of thing. Anyway, that’s a small story that I want to remember to make it as an example. But that’s not the only one. There are lots of those little examples that I’m talking about which have awaken me in my, in my search for the reason which something, or to analyze my past. So that I would be able to make a make a comment about that, and which has formed my opinion about the whole thing about a changing world from my life. And therefore this memoir which I recorded shall be close this type of subject, for the time being. It will pop up again.