

Title: 0070-Our Voices-Medicine  
Bird Number: 2046  
Recorder: Louis Bird  
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Transcriber: Julian Johnson  
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Culture: Cree (Omushkego)  
Transcript: Draft

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XXThere is a paragraph spoken in Cree at the beginning, including the words  
“Micmac” and “St. Lawrence River.”XX

Instead of speaking, instead of speaking in Cree I'm going to try to say this is briefly in English. This morning at 9:30 I went to see, or 10:00 I went to see a medicine man, a visiting medicine man who came to offer his services to us and view on it. So there was a question on my mind that I wanted to know about this man, because there is some, there is some concern in the communities and people are, are question or even, even disapprove the presence of the medicine man in the community. Some of them who have in my, my age group people who are under 60 and near 60 and over 60, these people who have children or their grown-up children with grandchildren are concerned about having the medicine man. Because these people have been living under their old under the, the Christian denomination, especially Catholic Church.

So to them the medicine man to practice of medicine man tradition one is evil. Because that is exactly how the early missionaries have described such, such an activity between our ancestors, and therefore such activity has been condemned ever since 1824 to 1832, during that period it was very extremely, extremely hard for anyone to, to try to hang onto his traditional beliefs and practice and its spiritual connection, spiritual ideas. This means that anybody that has, that has practiced drumming, singing and also who has practiced operating, practiced operating the shaking tent and also a person who has sang with the rattler, rattling and any person who have also does other any other activities such as practicing dream quest, shall we call it and then also practiced other, other kinds of rituals that has been handed down from the traditional culture for spiritual beliefs and facts. So for that reason ever since 19, 1832 people behind, I mean on, on from then on

who were born, who were born under the Christian denomination were forbidden to speak or even to talk about any subject related to this kind of practice. Because these practices were condemned, by the Christianity they were condemned as evil practices, so they were, our grandparents were instructed to never to, never to mention those things to their children, and also anything connected to that kind of thing of their culture.

And for that reason, three, three generations behind us, from today, any other traditional, any other ancient spiritual beliefs and practices were condemned and discontinued to be a practice. And the elders were strongly instructed never to teach their children about this stuff. So since then for the last hundred years, more than 100 years at least 63, 163 years, 163 years ago the Ojibwe on the southwest coast of Hudson Bay and West Coast of James Bay were denied to, to practice the old system, to practice only the Christian belief and their, and rituals that come with it.

The only thing, the only thing that will answers to retain was our legends, 5-7 legends and some others stories that happened a longtime before they even came and before Christianity. But most of it specially legends, the character who play in the story were forbidden to explain what they can, where, and to try to censor it. So the children were not out of curiosity asked questions and, and forced to pry out the information which is supposed to be no good for their spirits. And that's what happened, and now having, having known these things especially, my own father was not, was not introduced to this thing but he, he only heard it also in, in the legends and my mother and my mother and my father were very much spiritualistic people they were very much Catholic and the shamanism anything related to that drumming and singing and dancing and all that, whenever it is the traditional practice was condemned to, to the Devils work.

So they never did believe that. They only believe the Catholic Church and in also, in also a little they knew a little about the Old Testament and they knew, and they knew quite a bit about the New Testament as a life of Jesus and his teachings. And that all they practiced they never practiced anything else, my parents so they were very, very religious people, they would not approve what is taking place today. So for that reason we in my age group also have the same thing we believe that any other practice other than Christianity would be, would be evil. And therefore we're not very happy. I guess we are

sort of leery to hear to see people come in and start teaching our children about something that we didn't teach.

And for that reason I went to see, I went to interview the, the medicine man who is in our community, to ask him a few questions. One is to ask him about what they're doing, what they offer whenever they been invited, what sort of thing they do and if the person who has been Christianized were all his life, if they joined this group of what would they denied their former religion. That's the question but the medicine man assured me that there is not so, he says I came, I came only to offer my services as a healer and I do not oppose on anyone. I offer, I perform for my service to those people or ask and request my prayers and my method of healing. That's his statement: "I do not offer my services while in voluntarily, because of the probable negative action or negative result out of my offering. Therefore I agree for someone request if somebody make request to me to exercise my, my practice to heal," and this is what he said. Not exactly the words but is not, in that, in that sense that was the question asked first so he explained that, and from then on, from then on he opened up and tell me the whole situation, the whole thing about his service.

So he opened up to me and he tells me the way and things the lesser things that has to go with what he is as a medicine man. I will quickly try to list them here in my, in my listing. The one he talks about his first, first he says a person like himself, he has acquired this knowledge by listening by, by listening to the elders and having understood the meaning of such thing and also having tried the best to have to make it work for him and also believe and have faith in him. And seek the guidance from the elders and get their instruction from the elders and eventually went out himself to do a fasting. After four days a fasting he would have the answer he seeks for, and also eventually get into the place and spiritual mental where severe connected and he have shown by the grandfather which is supposedly God, grandfather has put him through to see the spirit world, in which the great-grandfather existed and lived.

He says that: "You know, in order for us to understand," he says: "we must, we must beautify ourselves by fasting and also praying and to understand the nature that is to look at the animals and plants and the elements like water and the air and everything so that we will see that this the creation." And there is some point that he was saying that

someone, that some people say they are looking for some Christ where is Jesus and where is God. So to his, to his answer he says there's no Jesus anywhere there is no Jesus as a physical person anywhere and there's no God that is a physical person anywhere, you will not find God there and all there and everywhere but you will, God is everywhere he is here and he is here with you, within you.

The only thing as you have to a sort of pray, and asked me that you be given the knowledge be given to understand that you are part of all creation, and in that each and every one of any living thing is part of God and is creation, even animals and mostly in human people, for he says what do you feel and what do you see, this part of God's creation and it was interesting that he had to say exactly almost the same thing almost exactly what I had thought in myself, because I have thought myself to conclude it. And therefore him as a medicine man, he said he had the dream and he has been contacted by the grandfather, his grandfather and told he was given to be a medicine man. That means to be a healing, to offer my gift as a healer and that I must give the service to the people. So that is that, is the way he, he explained about himself.

And then, then he started talking about on and on with many other things that I was just elaborate, I would not be able to say exactly what he said because I spent an hour and a half with him. And he was very nice of him to accept me, because I guess most of the things that I've told him a day before by a general speaking, he may have understood a little bit what I, that I have some knowledge about those things. He was ready to open up and the only thing that I didn't do is to offer him tobacco. And now there is something which I asked him, he says: "We know, we do not ask any other Christian denomination to denied their religion, I, me for us to be able to for me to give them some help to which they seek. All I want from them is that they request and that they will have faith in what they ask. Not really had saying that is their fate or heal them its, its, is partially because they ask me and I pray for them."

And then he went on to say some of the things that are not that he'd disagree or that doesn't seem to agree with what he believe that is to say, that is to say there is so much confusion, confusion in many ways, it's the human behavior and also in spiritual, spirituality. The institution that has been brought by the white man are not necessarily always helpful, that some do not help at all. And somewhere around the time he said the

rituals they do not count or even, even the medicine man or sweat lodge those kind of things that ritualize, sometimes they don't help, if you, if one doesn't actually believe it. You have to have faith, you have to have belief in the things that one studies but it has to be a vision before someone has to a person should fast as long as necessary, and the time that the required in the certain, in the certain way, in a certain requirement. This is for general knowledge. I have known that, as I have that I have heard of my old grandparents, my grandmother and other people that I've talked too. It was nothing new for me, I knew that but it was nice to have confirmed again by some other person, so far from this distance, distance from this territory.

Now everything else was very nice along the way there is a lot of teachings, a lot of precaution, he says everything has to be perfect. I know it also explains that about, about sweat lodge, that they also understand. They say there is a great spirit, there's the spirit, he says spirits, they are spirits, and when you go into the sweat lodge, they are sometimes right away the bad spirit will enter into this with lots and sometimes tricks you. A bad spirit what they called the beast is a variable anywhere. And whenever a person establishes or practice the, practice, the sweat lodge, is in danger of inviting or be tricked by the beast or the evil spirit. Because there is a way to ask the spirit who come who or right straightforward to say: "Are you a good spirit or are you the evil spirit?" When you ask: "Are you the evil spirit?" the evil spirit will not answer and leave. And if there's a good spirit will say yes and stay, and he will go on from there. They are the spirit of our grandfathers who are there, that we are called upon and there is the grandfather's spirit which I understand to me is God. But our grandfathers are supposedly, supposedly in this terminology is as represented as God's creation creator. And they are partially creation. And speaking for the creator, making people understand, to have a the rightful connection between the grandfather and the mother earth.

There is quite a bit explanation about the mother earth why is the mother earth and that the European and we the people today have now misuse and abuse the mother earth, meaning the earth itself, the world itself is being misused and abused, has been polluted in many ways water, air and also other things, so for that reason the mother earth is now getting tired or unable to adjust to the changes that are caused by human existence. And, and that someday that is going to a give out and someday that the

grandfather or the creator were allowed to renew the world that will come to an end as we know it today. And after it will start a new, a new planet supposed, supposed to mean, I hope. And that the spiritual world also will be a new start whatever that is and in many other things, and, and many other things.

And there's also that the, the word about how the creator wanted people able to live on earth that they should enjoy life that they should be happy to live on the, on the earth. And all those things were given to the people on earth. And, and that if, if one uses the, the life, his life and if he follows the proper instruction in life that he would be actually enjoy life on earth, even though our live is temporarily existence because our spirit will leave and go to the other world which is called the, "the ground and were everything is beautiful." In, in almost the same way as it, as we, as we hear the "happy hunting ground" sort of thing for many people. And I guess in terms, in terms of a Christianity that the spiritual is heaven and the heaven is depending on the kind of culture there is existed. Jewish people for example, they will have a New Jerusalem in that sense in so he says our Native people will have that, that happy in most beautiful hunting ground which they sort of enjoy on it, they'll find that in heaven. So this is what he says than in evil starts to say many other things.

One time he says are so much confusion today, the confusion of many things on earth, which we experience. And all this confusion is causing a lot of negative and negativity in the world. And again back into the mother earth kind of stand these anymore the mother earth is getting tired and may not exist anymore as it is today, and that the Great Spirit will see to it and to renew it. There was no mention about the end of the earth or people been stricken or strike down by any element that we see, so there is no, so there was no mention of it.

And at the end of it, and the end of it I was asking him about how it is with the, will there be any conflict between his practice of healing and between Christian person? What if there is any conflict? Would the Christianity necessarily be erased or put aside for the person to accept, to receive the, the healing from which he, from which he is all offering. To his word no. No, any person can keep his own religion and do not have to deny himself. But one thing that he make a mistake, he made a mistake or maybe he just did not misunderstood him. But he says in that, in that question awe he says: "I was

talking to an archbishop somewhere,” and he didn't say which one, he says: “I was talking to the archbishop and we invited him to come to see us in a sweat lodge and showing him about the use of a Sweet grass and other things that we use. And even though the archbishop asked me if it's OK and if it's all right to introduce the, the Sweet grass into his performance of Christian services.”

And this is what he said, the medicine man said: “I told this bishop that if you want to take, if you wanna get across and you take two canoes and one paddle you will not be able to reach across your destination where you will see where you want to go by this section, by this situation. One can always drift off, any other one will go straight with what you use, but did not both, not both canoes.” So the meaning of this as I understand perhaps this restriction, of trying to accomplish something what is requested or what has supposed to accomplished, and when is two religions to different practices and beliefs in the spirituality. Let's say when the man says: “See this nation across the river and you have two canoes to go across and you only have one paddle, so one canoe is going to stray off and the other one is going to go straight, the one that you are steering in, or that you paddle with, so that means you cannot use one religion, one religion with the other to expect to the both.”

So that's when I understand. So after twice, twice I have questioned him say that will there be any conflict, between you believe in practice and healing with through the people who have the Christianity already, and who have practice their Christianity with there be any conflict? He says no, he had said the first time and then halfway through his, through his story his instructions of a outlined of the whole thing about being a healer and as a sweat lodge. I use the utilization and I asked him again, so there is no conflict between your practice your belief and the Christian. Any person who has a Christianity can go and doesn't require to deny his Christianity? Twice he says no, the third time when he speaks about it there was a doubt, there was a story about two canoes with one paddle and that one canoe will our reach over the there. So there is that a little negative story that seems to say he, he has to hide, if he had to be requested to heal someone, and the Christian person he would only be able to use which he is paddle and steer the vessel which he supposed to have. Help the person across that is what I understand. And by that time is his story and his position was nearing to an end.

Now my statement, my name is Louis Bird and the man, the medicine man's name I am sorry to forget. I think his first name is Charlie, I am not sure. Anyway his name is there. But the last name I even forget. Because he's the MicMac Native person First Nation person, that he is the medicine man, a gifted medicine man, and also separately simply from sweat lodge. While he was speaking to me mention a little bit about shaking tent, but he was just remembering I have told him about shaking tent.

And one other thing I forgot to mention it was drumming. He explained about the drumming. He said the drumming is the heartbeat of the earth that's why we make that sound, and also the voice to start off with which heat produce it as an example, as what it should be. So, the drum is the heartbeat of the earth and heartbeat also keeps the timing with the song, whether the song for all satisfaction, or the song for the praising, or the song for the healing. And that was very interesting to say that if you, if you even put stick into the ground and says you listen to it and you hear the mother earth if you are gifted and then again that's why you drive the stick into the ground and put to drum in there which would connect the heartbeat and you make that heartbeat.

That's the drumming and also the drum is used also to carry the message across the wilderness and people who listen to it here it were also intern answered and carries on. This seems to me came from, or its a comparable to the African drumming, Africans are said to have used the drum to send message but the drums were more like a deadfall or sort of things that hollow sound laying in the ground that can be send the message far distance when it's, when it's a nice echoing day. Now that is the last that I have heard about this and that doing the listening to medicine man.

So the medicine man was not, was not performing his, his skills. He was talking to me as in, as an ordinary person, which I have requested because he knows he knew that I have told him that I can interview anyone, that I can interview a spiritual person and I can interview the priest. And interview the priest as human, not as priest, that I was able to do that, I think he knew, he knew that I do not have to listen to the spiritual instruction, that I could understand what it means. Interviewing is part of my, my profession. I now learn a little bit more about different cultural beliefs and practices, I have now understand little bit about the use and the origination of drumming and also



have a little more of explanation about the healing, that it does not necessarily have to be associative with the lodge, sweat lodge.

But the healer could only be a healer by using plants and pray, and that the medicine man is very peril, it's parallel as a Christian God almost I guess would be exactly the same. It's parallel to these things, because when he talks about grandfather that is a God, a person that is older than anyone. Your own grandfather is not God. But the grandfather of the earth is God and the Creator is the same person and the Great Spirit also combined in one person. So these things seem to be like a three different sections but it is not, its the same kind of person, is the same person, only that it has the same name in a different situation, so this is the way I understand this man. Whether I am wrong or not that remain to be seen.

Now I want to remind myself that here the states I went to visit the medicine man's this morning to ask him a question, as I have said before, what is this person that is seeking his assistants or help, in alternative medicine or simply just to get different treatment? I said: "Is there interference between the Christian person and then your ways of healing?" He says: "No." Or another question was, you know: "Is there any conflict between your healing system and Christian person, Christianity?" He says: "No," but the third time he mentioned about, about this he says no two boats can reach this nation with only one paddle and one steering system. That means no two of them doesn't work that way Christianity or his way of healing or his ways of pray, that's the way I understand.

Other than that human should a, that I have understood. I have known those things. I have heard from many of the elders who have simply, simply answered me my interviews. They did not necessarily a practice their, what they were talking about, but this man is actually practicing his skills as a healer, but my question was not yet quite answered by asking: "Is it necessary that you do the healing with sweat lodge?" He didn't say yes, and he didn't say no. So it seems that there is two different things that he does separately and he says you can still heal use the sweat lodge for healing but not always necessary. I was going to ask if a person is instructed to use the sweat lodge, a person by an individual, does he, is he trained to do with sweat lodge by himself, as a single person, or it's the learning to be healer with sweat lodge? Or one of the questions I didn't say is, is the sweat lodge as cleaning the spirit, or just the body? To my opinion the

body itself the doesn't matter how much you clean washing inside out and if your mind doesn't clean, if your mind is, if you still have a bad conscience, matter how much, no matter how much, how much scrubbing you do in your skin, and if you still have that bad conscience, it will never erase. You must believe in something, you must have something, you must have the method or the ritual when you do it that you will finally have the healing, the healing system in your body, that's what I believe. But I am right, I don't know, but I sure like to know. And now that's far as I'm going to say for the time being.

I have never met any other person who is a healer in my life. I have seen a shaman, or shall I say a traditional spiritual person and that was Albert Lightning. I did not speak to him. I just see him. And I have also saw other people that have supposed to be a traditional spiritual person, but I never be able to speak to them. And that's the end of this tape recording, and I hope someday I could keep this. I will have to add a little bit more, out of my own opinion. I have intend to see the shaman again some times tomorrow or this evening, if it is necessary, and I will offer him tobacco which I have promised to offer. That's it, thank you very much for listening.

XXWhistling and fiddle music on side B (Louis playing)XX