Hello, hello. This is Louis Bird. From Peawanuk, Ontario. Today is June twentyseven, nineteen ninety nine. And, I am recording again, for Doug Hamm of Winnipeg, the university student which I have promised to send a tape recording, for the project. Now, in this recording, I will outline something. First, and for the reason, I think it’s important to do this. I’m going to tell the story, a little bit. I have sent a similar recording to Kimberly Wilde of Winnipeg, also one of the students of George Fulford. And now, first of all, hello Doug, how are you? [Chuckles] Well, it’s been some time. It’s been some time ago since I left Winnipeg. I have been here, and I have not make a trip, except to Moosonee once, to go see the doctor. And there’s not much happening in the community. It’s the same routine, same kind of life and everything. We have had a...we are in the process of electing a new chief, in the community. And I will not say it went smoothly. Because I have been insulted a little as an elder [chuckles]. No, anyway. It’s one of those political speeches. And that is, that, to keep all additions, grind down some people to gain the popularity or to gain their stuff. Well, I was a bug and I was stepped on. Just to gain the leadership. Anyway. That’s none of my business. It’s not what I’m talking about.

Now, here we go. What I am going to say is this: There are stories that I involve, in our in our area, as you know, in the Muskego tribal territory. This territory its measures in our mind, from a tip, southern tip of James Bay to the west coast of James Bay, within two hundred miles inland. And then, southwest coast of Hudson Bay from Cape Henrietta Maria and two hundred miles approximately inland, and up to the York Factory, and swings up to the west but these are a bit different tribes. They call, eventually Plains Cree. They’re the same, they use the same, they use the same language, but in a slightly different accent.
O.K. During the, in the past, I mean before the European came in, let us check the history book of European. There were anthropologist who studied the tribes, long time ago, I think in conjunction with the missionaries, and the mining explorers, and, simply, people who explore the land. Perhaps, most accurately, take records, places where they see, the Hudson Bay Adventurers, like they were the Hudson Bay Company staff employees. I think most of these things came from there, for anthropologists to concluded that, about the history of these tribe tribal people which we know them as the Crees.

Now, if I were to quote a little bit of very briefly about the history, one part of history, I think this has to do in the state. Some anthropologist and the state have concluded that, what year was it, I don’t know, what’s the name of the book, I don’t know, but it has been say that, at one point, by the evidence of the archaeology and anthropological studies, has indicated that once upon a time, years before the European came, the people who are called the Crees today, were expanded from east coast of James Bay, and east coast from Hudson Bay, within the range about, let’s say from west coast of Hudson Bay, into the Labrador. And then, down to the, what do they call that lake, Mistassini Lake. And these were the people who were called Cree, that are called today. But they were called Algonquins tribes. They’re in that group of people.

And then the they expand from there, starting from the east, that point, and then moving to the west, and all the way to the Great Lakes even south of the Great Lakes. And right up to the half-way points of those all province, ten provinces and then into the States and, way up into the mountain, the foothills of the mountain. That’s how far these Cree-speaking people were expanded. And apparently they were very dominating people. There were, there were powerful tribes. And they, really, they really fend off their territory well. They have a, they have wars between other tribes, smaller tribes around them, and Blackfoot and all those other tribes that are south. And, so much so, that they were intimidating those other tribes. And so the history goes, storybook says. Then finally, the Mohawks and Ojibways, and other tribes, Blackfoot, whatever you call ‘em, and few of the southern tribes, get together, and then decided, to fight, together, with the Cree people. And then they actually attack them in all places. And, divided them, and then scattered them all over, pushed them up north, right up into the province of Quebec.
up north, and Ontario province north, and then, Manitoba province north, and then Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. They pushed’em right out into the north section. And then most of them just, simply disintegrated. But, they didn’t finish them off. But they ended their domination.

And then that’s how the Cree people are now really expanding from Quebec to Alberta, in that region. So the end of the quotation of this, some kind of a story book, the history book that was, whether if it’s written in the history, I don’t know, I think it is only written in, a minute. I think it is only written in, in some books anthropologists wrote, or from his quotation. No. Now, finishing that. That’s the end of that. If there is such book, it would be nice to have.

Now, at that point, at the stories that I hear across this province, across the country. Different tribes that I spoken to for the last, from seventy six. Nineteen seventy six I begin to travel across, speaking the people, with the people in east coast. I have a good friend there in Moosonee, who lives in Moosonee who is, originally came from Mistassini, Lake Mistassinee. That is half-way point between province Quebec and Lawrence, St. Lawrence and James Bay. So, that’s where he was raised. And he speaks the dialect that belongs there. Now, mark this. These people were known long time ago amongst themself. They were called Chipewyans, these people, on the east coast of James Bay and Hudson Bay. These people there, the, what they call’em, James Bay Cree, they call’em, today. But, amongst the people themself amongst the tribes, amongst the Omushkego-speaking people, they used to call them Chipewyans. The only thing they call them that is, because when they speak, they use Chee. For example, when they say “kina,” which is means “you,” they would say, “chiya,” “chiiyatokaychak.” And that’s the way they speak. They give, they have that accent, the wiggling sound. And they mostly used “chi” instead of “ki.” We have forty-eight alphabets that have been created by the early missionaries and they have made divided them into, into four part, and forty eight sounds. Forty eight different sounds. I don’t know, phonics you call’em. So, “eh,” “hee,” “hoo,” “ha.” Is for the “a” sound. It start with “a,” “ee,” “hoo,” “ah.” And then down the line, you say “be,” “bee,” “boo,” “bah.” Everything start with “a” at the beginning. “Kay,” “kee,” “koo,” “ka.” “Che,” “chi,” “chu,” “cha.” So, saying that, these tribes in the east coast of James Bay and Hudson Bay they don’t use much “Kay,” “Ki,”
“Ku,” “Ka.” They use, more, “che,” “chi,” “chu,” “cha.” Specially “chi,” they use that, constantly “chi” when they put “ki.” When we use “ki.” So they were called Chipewyans. Just because they do that. Long time ago. Before the European came. And, since the word sounded similar to the southern tribes who were known as Chippewas, they tryin’ to change to Chippewas. And these were the Ojibway people. Ojibway. Instead of saying Ojibway, Chippewa. Ojibwe, Ojibwe, Ojibwa, Ojibwa, and if you keep on sayin’ that you will soon saying, Chippewa. So that’s how these names get mixed up. So, what happened after that we don’t know. How come we call the people we know to know today as Dene people, are called today Chipewyans. It was not them. It was on east coast of Hudson Bay and James Bay, the tribes were called Chipewyans, but they were speaking the Cree language, which is known today as Cree language. But they were more like, they were, different tribes they were different. Not different tribes but same language, in different dialect. They live in a different land, yes, different, sort of terrain.

And then, the same Omushkego language we call it here, in this area, the same language is used in, Manitoba, and then in Saskatchewan, and then in Alberta. Except that over there, it’s a bit alike, it’s different a little bit. It is not, they don’t use “chee” so much they use still “kee.” But they have much “yeh,” “yah,” very much of that. They have a different accent. So they were still the same tribes. And then, that’s what I know, what I heard about, and I heard it from here.

And, many times people have asked themselves, how come these speak, these Cree-speaking people, shall we say, Omushkego dialect-speaking people can expand a way out to the prairie, and to the foothills of the mountains. The question has been asked by amongst themself, amongst the Omushkego, or Crees, and then, the queried, then the story came out. Why it happened. It is a story called, “A Woman Who Carries the Language to the West.” I’m sure this story is there somewhere. But it’s very, it’s very good story. It’s one of the heroine story, for a woman, hero. I have told a story to Maureen Matthews. She found it very emotional. I found it too. Anyway, and that’s the way we understand ourself and our history. It’s a simple explanation, but it’s possible.

Now, we have done the job before, by going to the Hudson’s Bay Archives. I have told a story that involve Amo, a person called Amo, and also his brother Shiiwepan.
We have found these recorded in Hudson’s Bay archives. And now, this is where I want to ask, I wonder. There is something that has been coming, that has been emerge in our life, all James Bay communities. And the James Bay and the Hudson Bay communities that are now become a communities, they were, they were actually Hudson Bay Companies settlement. They are not, the Native people were not settlers, I mean the Omushkego people. They were the migrators, with season. They never settled anywhere. They are mostly migrating people they are, or, who have ended up living in this area. They follow the season. As they find out that procedure, they became established tradition, for a long time, many years before the European came.

And then, these people, cause I’m talking about, they were very, they were original people, they were very pure, Omushkego-speaking people. They did not, they did not blend with the other, the other tribes very well. Until they were, submitted in the very thin land and, statedly ever since then, the year that I’m talking about when they were beaten, they been integrated into Ojibway tribes. And then they been, they had mixed, dialect, into Oji-Cree as we know it today. Eventually, it happens that way. And they had covered the story, they covered the land as far as Big Trout Lake area from Hudson Bay, and also to the, all the great, all the headwaters of the James Bay rivers, James Bay and Hudson Bay rivers. All the headwaters they were belong to the Cree one time, but now, they are belong to the Ojibway, not exactly pure Ojibway, but Oji-Cree speaking people. They are Cree, really, but they just changed the dialect.

So now, their names, is what I’m getting at. These “Idnan,” headwaters Oji-Cree speaking people, they were the last to be, to be affected by the European arrival in the Hudson Bay area. And if one, if one goes around, in a James Bay all the way around, if one start from the, from Churchill area. Churchill was not the Cree-speaking people land, it was mixed it was, in the shores, it was, it was the Inuit people. And sometimes, during the winter, it was the Dene people. They used, alternately that piece of land. And sometimes the Omushkego people, used to push up north, very close to the Churchill. That’s a story I get.

Now anyway, when the European arrive in ah, in fifteen-something whenever that is, the Hudson came in into the Hudson Bay. They, there’s when the, that’s when the, the change took place. Come in.
The change I am talking about is...integration. Interrelationships between the First Nation and the European. It didn’t take very long. It didn’t take very long for, for the people to mix. Because the, the European fur traders, they didn’t bring their wives. According to the story. So, of course, the nature has it, the local women who were there, once they begin to work together, the women simply couldn’t help it, they have relations with the European men. And then, from then on, eighteen or sixteen forty-thereabouts.

The first white man who spend the winter in the Hudson Bay, is supposedly to be, in Churchill. I don’t know if I’m accurate, but I’m at least I’m trying. The first, the first the explorer. Or, person who sail in to the Hudson Bay was a captain Button. And who spent the winter in Churchill. He happened to lost a few of his men, because they had eaten the sick polar bear. According to the story. Anyway, it was that time. The people didn’t bother them. They were, they were those tribes what they call, uh, Dene people were there. And the Inuits, may not be there at that time. But the Inuit people saw them. They saw them I mean, Dene people. They saw them. They sorta help them settle, and then left them. They just went out on their own land. They didn’t think they could survive but they, left them there anyway. What happened is that captain Button lost his men.

From then on, that was sixteen ten, not one year, was left, that the European were not alive. They come steady and steady. And they begin to make friend with the Native people and they begin to work for them. During that period, that’s the time when it begin to have a mixed, relationship. That’s when we begin to have, half-breeds. In the James Bay I mean in the Hudson Bay. Southwest coast of Hudson Bay, and all around the Bay. In James Bay. And east coast of James Bay and east coast of Hudson Bay. All around the strait, wherever the European landed on the land, or settled to do a fur trade, in a few years, there were children who were born from the mixed breed of people. And it’s, it’s been a long time. It’s, I would say about four hundred years. Very close. So since then, steadily, continuedly, people have been inter-marriage, mixed marriage. And today, I have been saying this all the time, if you go to the east coast you will see, many traces of this, mixed blood. All the way from Great Whale into the Hudson Bay east coast of Hudson Bay and then into tip of James Bay, you will see this. There is no, not, very few. First Nation people supposedly are pure. They’re all mixed. Especially in the James Bay
and the Hudson Bay, southwest coast of Hudson Bay. You will see people five
generation or six generation of mixed breed. The red-heads, and then there are blue eyes,
and all this stuff. And these people, how are these things? They’re different. They are not
the same as a pure Indian. Not the same as those inland people like, people from, Sandy
Lake and, places like that, Pikangikum, or there places where the white people couldn’t
go, right away. These, that’s where you find a pure Native people. First Nation people.
Because this is, they were not mixed so soon, just recently, just the last thirty years. So, in
that’s what happened in those days.

And then, when they begin to work with the, with the Hudson Bay company these
people, they’re change, they change their names. They didn’t carry their Native name
since then, since those years. Almost four hundred years ago, in James Bay Hudson Bay.
So their names existed only as far as the eighteen hundred, if we check the records, now.
That’s what I’m getting at. We have names that are, have English name. English last
names. We do have Christian name. Given name because we’ve been Christianized. But
very few people carry their native names, very few. Let’s say for example in ah, the
Winisk area people. We have only some that are still used. One of them is Kostachin.
That’s, that’s a First Nation language, and it is still exist very strong, easy to say. And
then there’s Pennishish. It still exist. But it’s not used very much. And then there’s Gull,
Kiyaask, it’s still used. But it’s now is changing. And then there is, the other, the others
are gone. They were there, long time ago. For example, the people we know today as
Patricks, they are, they are now called, they were called, they were called one time,
Chekaapowetam. But they changed their name to Patricks, because, the Hudson Bay
Company could not pronounce the first, the last name, of the first name of the original
people. And, also Macs. They were Ashokamik. They been changed to Mac, to make it
simple. These names changes very fast in nineteen fifty-five, when the radar base was
built in Winisk. That’s where all the names were lost. And those names, they could have
still exist, if we wanted to keep them. And there were other names that did not have a last
name like, people who, who originate from the half-breeds. For example, in Winisk
today, there is a name called so extensively populating, is Hunters. And the Hunters were
not Hunters long time ago. The name came to exist in nineteen thirty-five, thereabouts, or
thirty-seven, just when the Abraham Hunter, that we know, in Winisk, his name was
given the name Hunter, because he was a good hunter. So the Hudson Bay gave him that name. And then it sticks.

But our people forget their last name. All we know, Abraham Hunter, who live from nineteen, eighteen-eighty-four to nineteen-fifty-seven, his father was known as, Kihchi Wemistikosiw, Kihchi Wemistikosiw. That’s all we know about his father. His first name I don’t remember. And they don’t even know, what was his last name, here, in Winisk. But by tracing the, where he came from. He came from Big Trout Lake, this guy. And he was known only as Kihchi Wemistikosiw. That means: “grand white man,” or “grand European,” in that nature. So, he came from, from the woman, a local woman. And her father was a Hudson Bay employee by the name of McKay. I don’t know if there were many McKays.

But there was Hudson Bay employee, who have had a child with the local woman. And in that places like, like Big Trout Lake and, Bear Skin, and, another community there, wherever there’s fur trade, fur trading has taken place from York Factory or Hayes River, that’s where this guy was McKay guy, from York Factory, was stationed, as a clerk or whatever, a post operator. So, every time when he stop someplace in a, where people are communing, they have the relationship with the woman and then they have a child. And, most of them took them last name as McKay from him. Whether it was the same person. That’s where this Hunter’s family came from, in the male side of the family.

Now, this is funny thing. We were talking about the Crane tribes, crane clan, Ochiichakotak. You know, this McKay guy, he married a lady. No no. I’m sorry. I’m sorry about that, I’m wrong. Do not erase that one. McKay’s wife was from, in the region of James Bay and Hudson Bay, exactly where I don’t know. Now, let us leave that one for a time being.

Let me speak about the names again. There is a family name that I told you that I have said a while ago, which I said it was known as “Chekaapowetam,” “Chekaapowetam.” That’s one way of saying Chekaapowewetam. It’s trying to make a sense out of it. But “Chekaapowetam” mean a persons who calls steadily. Chekaapowewetam. Means if you make a sound like this of the human voice: Aaaaaaah. Or if you speak: “Aaaanamaaanmaaaa” and you don’t make, it’s hard to understand.
Chekaape, it means like straight sound. So that’s what Chekaapowetam mean. So that’s how these people were known, Chekaapowetam, the original one. And this, Chekaapowetam had a son. And he was baptized in the Catholic church as Patrick. And then when he had children as Patrick, he didn’t have no last name; we didn’t use a last name. Chekaapowetam, he took Chekaapowetam as his last name. It was his father’s name. And then, when Patrick has a son, in the nineteen-thirty, he change his last name to Patrick. These, the sons of Patrick, they took their father’s first name as a last name. So, they didn’t want to use the Chekaapowetam.

Now, let us go back, into the first man. To Chekaapowetam. He married a woman who he related, who was related to Crane clan, Ochiichakosak. That’s where she was from. So apparently, when Ochiichakosak got disintegrated, the daughters, split into other communities. And we have part of that Crane family in Patrick’s family. There was my, there was a, there was a friend of mine whose name was Michael Patrick. A friend of mine, he’s an elder. And I used to we get along together. And he used to talk about this, Crane, Crane, Ochiisakosak. And, then he was saying, he has a relations with them. And I was, where’s the kidding him? And I says: “So you are the powerful tribe of the clan.” [Chuckles]. We used to laugh at that and he said something like that. I thought his father was related to them. But it was not. His grandmother. That has relatives with the crane clan.

So the story that has been existed, crane the clans of Cranes, Ochiichakosak. They were powerful one time. And then they, disintegrated. And, most of them are still in Island Lake. Island Lake I think most of them, and Sandy Lake area, and those places. They disintegrate, when they were, when they were getting to be so bothersome. They were fighting too much of the land for themself and, the other, the other people begin to, sort of fight them. So they disintegrate. And part of it is here.

So, anyway, the names are important. What I want here is that, I wish I could prove to say: these McKay families. Was there such a person in the York factory, an employee that was called McKay? How many were they? How many times did they came? And how come we got so many McKays in Big Trout Lake, Bearskin and all that, even some here? That have changed into Hunters. It’s a question. But nobody has done
What I like to find out myself. Is to see how many original names were written in the Hudson Bay record. That’s first thing.

And then, I told the story about the clan, of, crane clan. Just to show that, intermixed, or dispersement of the families, happen very short time. It could happen within thirty years. We expect to find clan. Crane clan. Clan to exist somewhere we don’t, they have dispersed. For the, for some reason.

And now, let us get back to the naming. I want to tell about a little investigation I have done amongst the elders. I don’t know exactly how many elders that I’ve, have I ask. In the James Bay and Hudson Bay. I know one recently. The very person that I didn’t expect to tell me was my uncle, who still live. His name is Peter Bird, Pennishish that is [chuckles]. But now we know him as Bird. Anyway, one time I was talking with him. And we were talking about the name of some person that we didn’t know who it was. I was asking him: “Do you know such name, that existed?” And he says: “Yes, yes, yeah, I know, I heard it,” he says. And then he says it’s very hard to trace the families, long time ago. It’s not easy to trace, where the family came from and where it goes. And I ask why.

So he said because, before the European came, even after they came, he says our ancestors, have one name only. Just one name. What they were given either when they were born, or they were get the name, acquire the name after they get to be a teenagers, or they could change the name three times in their lifetime. And then, their sons. They’ll have one name. Even if they have five sons, they will have one name each. And they could only be known as, by the father’s name. If they, if that could be traced that way, and once it’s forgotten he says, it is hard to trace the family tree. So, at least I got this thing from one old person that’s still living. And he was the one that ever tell me, the names are hard to find, because they change. For example he says there is a man, there was, there was a guy who was born, and he was given a name, when he was born. Just because something happen. So they gave him that name. I forgot the name. So when he grow up to be a man, he begin to be an expert moose hunter, to the moose. So they call him, a moose hunter, “Hanochimoose.” That’s about all they call him. That’s all his name. There’s nothing else. And then when he got married he’s got son. And his son’s called, and his son was called ”Maskwa,” the bear, and the other son was called, I forget
the name. Just a minute, just a minute, something to do with the tree, Minahik, I think, Minahik. I think that’s what they call the tree. You know the, the timber. So they, the other sons got just the natural name. The other one was called, “Mooshegiisik,” and the other one was called, animal, animal. I think Fisher, I think they call him. So all have different names. His sons. And they were, they had their sons, they had their daughters and sons after.

But the mostly outstanding names is a man. And sometimes, a woman can be very outstanding because what she is, and she is known to that name. So the name, never kept in the family. All we can say is, for example, as we have found out, Amo only had one name, like “the Bee.” And then he had a brother by the name of Shiiwepan. Where are the sons? I know Shiiwepan didn’t get married, but Amo did have many children. And he have, son-in-laws. But that Amo never sticks to his descendant. That name, didn’t stick. Only in the story it sticks. So that’s, that is something that is prove to be true. That the Native people, in the Hudson Bay or any other place, have only one name or two names. And some people can have three different names in their lifetime. And, the way they used to do is that for example again, like they use this Amo because he’s outstanding person. And, I like to say his son, could have been Mooshegiisik. And they would say Mooshegiisik, the son of Amo. That’s the only way they used to trace the family tree. And then after that Mooshegiisik the son of Amo, and then the boy would be called maybe, Petaapan, the son of Mooshegiisik. So the, this is the way they used to trace their, their family name. But, nobody has second name. The only way they could say it: the son of. The son of this. The son of that. Who, if there was an outstanding woman, it would be the daughter of. A person that we know of.

So, it was only when the Christianity came in, that people begin to have a, the given name. When they baptize, they give’em the, the apostle’s name and, in Anglican they get the Jewish, Jewish names, like Samuel and Isaac and Jacob and John and all whatever. And then in the Catholic church mostly, the, the apostles’ name, Peter, John, James and everything and then their family name. And then many people were given the family name by the Europeans. So their originality is very hard to trace. And for that cause, there are many problems that exist. People begin to, marry their cousins or something like that. And it, ended up in having, a deformity, sometimes, a mental
retardation. So because of that stuff. So that’s the reason. That’s one of the problems that I have found out investigating this. Because seems that, Omushkego begin to settle and begin to trade in Hudson Bay Company and they begin to stay in one area. They begin to lost the variety of marriage, because they don’t travel anymore. They don’t intermingle with the distance families. So they begin to isolate themselves in the small part of communities or a small district. And they begin to intermarry with their cousins and close relatives and begin to sick. Most of it is a mental retardation is, it’s quite a bit.

So that’s the results of finding out who is so. Who which, where this person came from. What was his ancestors and everything. And to be able to trace these inheritants. Because we, the people in Mushkegowuk, we understand, to inherit the disease. If one person is anything, anything that has been in our grandfathers, we carry that. We have known this thing, our grandfathers had know this thing. And our great-great grandparents have experienced such thing. So they have this, more like a law, or a, a policy. That when you have children that you must not stay where you raised them, but take them out into a different distance and get them to marry a person that is not close relationship, to avoid some disease. That’s what they were saying.

And one of the thing that they have thought, this is a different subject, o.k.? We were not only interested in a names. But it comes to this point. What I understand they do is that, to avoid this interrelationship, close relationship, marriage into close relationship. They understood to have a bad affect about it. Not a very good help, to do that. So they have the system, where they have arranged a marriage. So that one person will not marry a family that has a reputation of high temper. Or should I say, what’s another word for this? People who get mad so easy. Or, should I say who have a disease. Today we know as schizophrenics. Or, people who have, mental retardedness. Or, people who have extreme greedy. Greediness. These are the negative facts of life. And our ancestors understood this so they take other families, they study other families, what sort of a, they have in their families. Were they, healthy? Were they sound-minded? Didn’t they have did they have any deformity in their life, or did they have it, inherited disease in their life, so they chose this family, for their daughters, or for their sons to marry. It was a good idea of the pre-arranged marriage. But, that has gone. As
soon as the Omushkego people begin to settle into communities. And it stop. The cultural tradition stop.

And that’s one disadvantage about, having the Omushkego or any other tribe people, being forced to stay in a community. So, now, our elders who live they say: “Today, the men and women, are very weak. They’re not even at all, what our great, our grandfathers were.” And it is true. Me, I’m only sixty-five. And I have seen my mother, and her age group, who were so, what should I say? They were so powerful. They worked just like a man. They worked like a man. And they’re very, durable. No matter how hard they worked, they didn’t seem to get, they didn’t get sick. Delivering a child in outside was nothing to them. They didn’t have to have no hospital, anything. And they followed this tradition and they use the medicine from the land. Whenever they get sick and they had their own healing system.

And all these things involve, that I am talking about, starting with just the names of each one, but all this came as I begin to carry them, carry the stories from my elders and people who understand, people who have heard the, their grandparents tell a story, their aunts, and their mothers and their fathers who will remember the old stories. So all these things were there. And, since, that, the Omushkego people have settled into communities, they have lost their good health, good spirit, and strong, that strong make-up. And now, we don’t even half of that into our young people, they’re getting’ to be very weak. It’s unfortunate. O.K., we shall begin on the other side of this tape recording, to carry on.

Hello, hello. This is Louis Bird from Peawanuck Ontario. Today is Monday, June twenty eight, nineteen ninety nine. I am speaking from the bush, with my friends, the birds. There was a bird singing here not far away. I am just away from the community, just in the, on the road somewhere, where it’s quiet. Anyway, this tape recording is for Douglas Hamm. Hello, hello, how are you Doug? [laughs]. Well, I hope you’re standing here with me. But unfortunately the mosquitoes would just love you. They’re biting. [laughs]. They’re just set their drilling set into your skin and pump the blood out. But anyway, forget’em. It’s not that many. It’s kind of cold this morning. And, the wind is from the east. Sort of make it, cold weather.
O.k., we have listened to the side A of this tape recording, saying, starting with the very small subject and expanding into many other stuff. At the end we talk about traditional rule. For, for the good health of the people. That was, pre-arranged marriage. That was the thing. But in order to have a pre-arranged marriage, one has to acquire, and understand information of families, who they contact. As I said before they have to study the family. What sort of condition they are, are they in good health, are they in a good spirit, are they’re good mental capacity? And all that stuff. That’s what they looked at, for their, for the family, if they have a daughter which they have raised. The best they can. And, those who have raised the boy, the best, and the best they think, every, every family, think their son’s the best. Every daughter, they think it’s a most beautiful. So they give the best they can. So they want the best for them. So is everybody thinks that. All the culture people do that. All the nationalities do that. That love for the children, is so strong. And they want the best for their children. And so us, in the past.

So this was a cultural tradition. The culture begin its tradition long, long time ago. What I am talking about is pre-arranged marriage for the continual existence of the tribe and that was the reason. Where did they get the idea? How did they know this thing? One thing that we can know for sure is that they have always live by the animals as their food, the birds, the fish. Sometimes when they kill the animal, they find this animal is sick. And the sick animal they don’t eat. And they see the kind of disease they have, sometimes where the head was the wound, from being too harsh in the condition.

Sometimes they know the weather that has not been suitable for a period in time and such animals would get sick, for example the beavers. When the beavers are, beavers get too many, they begin to get sick. They begin to kill themself. And, many other things begin affected. Because the beavers too many, they block the rivers, they block the fish, and the flow of fish migration is stop. And then if they, the fish manage to jump over the dams, they go up the river, and they can’t get back down, sometimes, during the winter. And they stay there, and they begin to die with the, with the stale water of the beaver dams. And all this, there’s so much to tell. And from this observation in their culture, they established their own safety rules. And these rules became more like a very powerful policies. Even though they didn’t stay in a community, even though they didn’t have any large society, even though they didn’t establish the laws, and they didn’t have
any law enforcements. Even though they did not establish the, health centers and hospitals and, medical treatments. Each family knew how to deal with this. In their own family. And each have to learn as much of the safety and the good health for their family. And, this is important.

And that’s also important to know, about pre-arranged marriage. They have to know the names of the families they’re interested that they hope maybe their daughters and sons should marry, so that their health will be, will be will be good. They will produce children with the good health. To avoid this would be called inter-marriage cause illness. So they were not they were, very well-informed, somehow, by good observation, maybe good listening system. Maybe they have a good education system in their lifestyle. So that is the reason. And that is why so important for their timing period. To know all these things. And the kind of educated system they apply, in practical education, is it called I think in English. And observation, and listening. I think this is, what they use most and we could, we can confirm that.

That’s how they provide their education for their children, to have the children in the wilderness, where it’s pure, where it’s nice and clean. Gives them a good health and a sound mind. And this gives them the strength to be able to survive in the harsh land. The way they eat, the diet suited for their required strength and stamina. All these, was within the culture system. But that was the migrating life. That’s not, a society. A large society, or a community living. So each independent family is independent and self-sufficient. And each has its own education system for its children. And apply it, the way they see fit. And for the good life of their children. And that is the reason they have arrange marriages. And also that’s one of the reason they find out they are much in good health if they follow, the animals which they use as food, the migrating birds, the animals, like, caribous, in Omushkego land. And then the fish that comes and go in season. All this they know. And it brings and gives them a strength to go, to migrate into a one season to the next. To make that cycle in life. And that is the outlook on the past history of our people.

But since then, it is so obvious for the last three hundred years. This change has took place. Slowly. Un-noticeably. And creepingly. And with many, outside things. And new things. Even to the present day. Computer world today. High-tech world is
also. It’s way far behind for those migrating people who just came out from the bush, so
to speak. And so excited to join the major society of it’s far advancements and
everything. It sometimes springs worries. And disadvantage to the elders who have
thought they have a know-how, to take care of their children. And this is the reasons it’s
so important, to try to find the history of our people.

And also, another reason. After saying all these things, if we travel across Canada,
if we listen to the First Nation communities’ problem. What is happening. Our First
Nation are the most high rate of death, suicides and alcoholics and diseases. And now
sexual communicable diseases. They’re the ones who suffer most. And what cause that?
I don’t have the answers myself, too. But I do understand the studies that’s done by the,
European medical officers and social workers and, other people who do the survey. And
some elders who make a good observation about their community life, even though
they’re not active. They have tried to detect what cause this thing. And all across this
Omushkego land and also they used Ojibway-Cree land within, from the two hundred
miles in the, up to the bush, to the south. They do have the same experience. We hear
them all the time. We hear the area like Pikangikum, Ontario, where the suicide are
dramatically up in frequent. And we, just heard it continuously. And this is what the elders
and leaders begin to be aware. Is there a way we could stop this? Is there any way we
can, control it? What is required?

And some young people deal with, are looking for some answers. They know,
they have tried everything for excitement. They have, they have entered into alcohol, they
use it to try to distract their so-confusing world. And they have tried the drugs to
eliminate their loneliness, because there’s no communication. They have tried the pot-
smoking and the other kind of drugs, to experiment it and also for their frustration in life.
The question is: “Where is the frustrations coming from? What is that force? That
makes this thing happen?” And this is the question of the elders. And they’re so helpless.
Because they just cannot see. And so many others who concern about social living
conditions in the communities. And this is what’s happening.

But the thing is the youth themself are forming the organization. And they’re very
strongly demanding some answers. And they seek some kind of a, other system to use. To
try to, what do you call that? To try to, swing off this terrible thing that is happening to
them. And they want to find some information, none of kind of solution there might be some. So they go and seek, way back into their histories. What was there? How did they deal a new problem, those people? How come they didn’t have? Did they have? So that is the question. Did they have any medicine? Did they have any method of dealing with the problem, that cause people to commit suicide or to give up living.? The young people are seeking for this. And it’s so very complicated situation to try to find the answers. And try to find solution to the problem they experience, yes. The youth are truly having a problem. And we, the elders also, amongst the most concern. And we have no solution. Many obstacles are there.

I want to say this but I regret to say it. Many obstacles that are there, are originate from the European, industrious advancement. They’d say, one thing, that we know for sure, that the European brought with them, one thing, that is very negative, is the alcohol. Making a strong drink. And, to alter the mind of person. And a Native people do not enjoy the stuff but they like to try it out. It makes them go crazy because they don’t, have it in their system. And, many other things that comes.

And then the European also brought in their cultural tradition, I mean, the spiritual practice. That, also have a good and bad negative. The regretful things that I say is that I am a Catholic. I was born and baptized in a Catholic, I was raised and taught by Catholic. And I was raised by the most religious families that I ever see, my father, my mother. They prayed three times a day, I see this many times. And they strongly preach about the sinful things, which are considered sin in their Catholic teaching. And, in that religion, that Christianity, when it’s over-used, and wrongly abused, it also has a bad affect on children. More so this for the last thirty-five years. Or fifty years. Fifty years ago in a little village of Winisk, when it became a village in summer, it used to be very peaceful for a people to come together with a simple prayers of Catholic church, one church only, just one. And those, their traditional beliefs were not practiced in front of anyone. But it was believed, still in belief of the elders and concerned about it, in the wilderness. Perhaps some of them are still practice it, about fifty years ago. At least, believe in it. And then, when this was happening in this a small settlements of the European which became, a temporary residence of the holidaying hunters and migrators, the Native people.
Two months only, they stay in that community. And then, they don’t even stay all sixty days. They only stay in that period, once in a while. They, they go out and hunt in their own families, a little ways from the center. And they come and go during that time. And September they go away, back to their hunting ground. And, only two months to stay in each year for the last fifty years that I remember. From the days that I remember is nineteen thirty-seven. And then I begin to aware of this thing nineteen-forty, and then, practice up to nineteen fifty-five, nineteen-fifty-five, and then as a history goes, the radar base was built, and this tradition that lasted for ten or fifteen years, come to an end.

And the other stuff came in. The beginning of different thing. And, from nineteen fifty-seven, and then other churches came to be coming in contact in our area. Many different denomination of Christianity. It comes and go. And it disturb people. Divided families. And fathers and mothers and father and sons and father and daughters begin to, to disagree with each other because of different denomination of Christianity. And all these came. And all these add up, and every other stuff and alcohol, and then also the drugs came into a communities. And the liberation, women liberation, process which has taken place down south. This all freedom of activities brought many things. To make it to a right for every individual to do his own thing. Brings further confusion. So a, a fast-changing, culture of the, our ancestors. They don’t have the answers. No, none.

And today, the young people seeks the answers from their elders. From what happen. The Christianity has killed that old tradition. Christianity have denied that thing to exist, or even to think about. So the elders are totally helpless. They cannot bring that out because it has been, stemmed out of, I mean, stamped out of their brain. And, now they’re just, was just settling to believe and to practice the Christianity. Which also, which was only one, in Winisk. And now, thirty-five years later, thirty-eight years later, there are at least three different kinds of Christianities in Peawanuck. Plus the traditional old tradition, culture that is trying to emerge in our community. And, the elders today are totally helpless. They cannot provide anything.

And the people today, another, kind of things that confuses, is that, the new leaders today in community are young. They only, they were only born thirty, forty-five years ago. And they didn’t have no such experience about the traditional culture. And it’s very hard, to convince them or to tell them something that is not so nice, or that was not
very, very positive in that nature. So they don’t understand us, they begin to assume that it is, we are in a, we are reluctant to provide information. We don’t want to help them. So they separate themself. They go on to their own effort, to try to find solution. Or, go right ahead and, take the new stuff that is coming. That sounds great to them. So all this thing. These are the part of the problem that we have. Where and how can an elder be helpful for this?

The only thing that I personally think and hope to actually begin to have solution. One branch of thing is that give the true history to our First Nation young people. The true history for the last three hundred years, four hundred years ago. And try to bring out the old history of our people before the European contact. The truth. Not just the good part, but the truth, and the bad part and then I mean, positive and the negative part of the history. Give them lay out the truth into their, want to get information. And then tell’em exactly what happen when the European came, what was positive, what was negative. And why its culture begin to disappear. Give’em all this knowledge. They might form they might be able to establish the formula to straighten their problem themself. Rather than blaming anyone. And they have to deal this problem their own way, or after they get all true positive information, and the negative information.

So my part, is to dig up the old history. Is to listen the elders, and try to put things into paper. Because today, paper is important. Paper, can cost hundred dollars or, one word, in order to be useful. And that one word has to have an impact. And the piece a page has to have a power to reveal and provide some solution to problem. But not by word alone. An elder who speak five hours about the culture, it’s soon forgotten. But the written stuff can stay. That has been experienced by other nation. And that is what I think I am trying to do. I am trying to do this, not for me. I am trying to do this for my daughters, and for my grand-children that are many. And the rest of the others, that I grew up with them. Those who will have the same problem as they get to be an adult. So that’s the reason this idea of finding information is so important. For them. And it’ll also be beneficial to the European. Those who deal with the Native communities. Those who deal in business communities, a First Nation business. They must also know all about this.
To my opinion, when a person is blind, cannot see where he goes, he has to have a cane, and he has to have something else to help him. Only in his mind can he see, but he cannot see officially. So that’s what happen when we don’t give no information to some people, that wants to walk on their own life. That is what I think. So, my own opinion is not important. But the reason I do things it’s important. O.k. This is for the time being. I will close. I would find another way of making this understood. O.k. Thank you for listening. Bye bye.

This recording was done yesterday, June 28, 1999. Today is June twenty-nine, nineteen ninety nine, and it is now ten minutes to eight, p.m. I did not go out this morning where I usually go to do the tape recording. For stories or for partial of my work. Hey now, I have listened, a little bit of this tape, from yesterday. Where I said I’m going to try to find another ways to express the importance of what I am doing. What I am talking about. I have said, there is a negative, negativity of the old, traditional, the spiritual belief and practices. In time past. Of our Omushkego people. So here is a story that I want you to listen. Think, after you listen. If you were a First Nation youth, and you seek, your cultural information, whether you could find anything positive for your problem in our culture, from the stories of my mother, and the stories from the elders that I have heard.

First of all, my name is Louis Bird. I am a story teller. That is all I am. I am not an educator. I am not a philosopher. I am not anything what they say a person who profess himself to be an expert. I am not. All I try to do is, collect stories that has been told to me and put them into this recording, to begin with. And then, later, to be written down. Transcribed from the tape, into a paper, in the language that I am speaking, which is my first language. And then after that, they will be the material will be translated into English, or any other language. After then it could be edited in, in a better form of literature. Or, the material to be use, for some information purposes. So that’s important.

Now, before I begin I want to express one thing here, for the story. In our culture long time ago, there was such thing called, “blaspheme,” in English. But we call it “paastaahowin,” “blaspheme act,” it’s “paastaahowin.” “Blasphemy” is “paastaahowin,” and “blaspheming,” means maybe, saying something bad which, in similar situation. So, this “paastaahowin,” has been translated into “sin.” When the religious terminology was
translated, from our Omushkego elders. O.k., “paastaahowin” means: “sin against
nature.” That’s about all it would say. And that is what happened. If you do something
that you have been told not to do and you do it purposely, purposely and knowingly, or
prepare yourself to do it. Even, think about that you’re gonna do it you know it’s wrong.
That is what they call, “pastaaitewiwin,” because you already decided to do this thing
against the goal of morality. So that’s “paastaahowin.”

So, it has been say that, in our culture, that any child that is born, is the creation of
the Great Spirit, continuation of the God’s creation or Creator’s creation. And in order to
do, in order to respect this thing, our education system tells us, never to tease a
youngster, never to show aggressiveness in front of the children, when they small, when
they begin to aware their surrounding. And the most of all, no one ever tease or
intimidate the orphan, the motherless, the parentless child, the child that both parents
have died, somehow, alone in this world. This child is precious in the eyes of the creator.
And if we ever do anything wrong to him, to her, we will, if we make her, make him or
her cry, scared, or any other, to hurt her any way, or him, we would commit the highest
form of sin against humanity. Therefore, the Great Spirit, or the Creator will punish us,
punish the person who did such crime. It’s a crime against humanity, I guess it’s called,
but it is a crime also against the Creator. So therefore, the most heaviest warning has
been told us, you shall never, intimidate, harass, molested, or abused, or hurt, the orphan,
that the parentless child. There. Now we have it.

And then the story goes: There was a great, powerful shaman one time, in the area
of James Bay, up nearby the, a place called at the mouth of the Ekwan River, in James
Bay, west coast of James Bay, west coast. From this at the mouth of this river, there is a
famous place. Where people use to gather in the spring, like in June, first of June to
fifteen or even just a few days period. At the most I think about six days. So it was this
time that people used to gather there in the springtime, to renew their friendship during
which been denied them for nine months of the winter. And then also to have renewed
their friendship, and also to arrange many of activities during the summer. And this time,
it was the same time they also have a festivity. They used to have what they call festival
season, or days. It was not long ago. It was, after the contact with the white people.
Because, some people in this story did have a gun. Some storyteller says, they have a gun. Some storyteller says, no, they didn’t have a gun yet.

So anyway, and they exist amongst them is a powerful shaman, mitew, and they used to call him “the great one,” or “the fearsome one.” I think that the proper word is: “fearsome one.” So, what it means is that this mitew, he’s so powerful. One insult would merit for him to kill a person. Again, I will say this again. Comparison. In comparison to what we have experienced or seen. We’ve seen the movies. We have seen the old, western movies. We have seen, a proud, dignified, Englishman, European, who defend the owner. Or there was this cowboy, who’s been challenged by the newcomer and only seek the slight insult, that he would shoot.

Well, Kiche-Mitew was like that, long time ago, amongst the Omushkego people. And it so happen, in that, during that festival period, few days together in that area, there were many games. Many competitive games played day after day and until it’s everybody, everybody’s exhausted or exhausted his food supply. It was this time in the evening. People used to play something called, something like, what do they call that? The Mohawks play that game. The things that two balls tight together, and catch, like a hockey stick. And throw around, but the stick doesn’t, does not to shape like a hockey stick, it just a straight stick. And this is what the people used to have and run with this ball, two balls and, shoot’em into the goal. The goal is only two, two sticks standing apart maybe six feet wide, maybe even less. So there was a man who look after the goalie, more like, and partners in equal pair, equal number. And it was this game, in the evening.

Amongst them was this, the orphan young man who was just a little orphan boy, and who have begin to be about sixteen or eighteen years old, but still young man, but a fair size. So he was playing there, very, very excitedly with his friends and the other elders also playing with this game, because anybody can play as long as a person can run. As long as a person can just catch this twig ball and swing it over to wherever they can. So anyway, I don’t quite understand the game. But I know that’s the way they play. It’s something like a soccer, but the ball’s made out of something and then, a string attached to them. And they, and they are caught by thing and thrown around. And lots of running, lots of fighting, lots of bumping each other. All this game was kinda rough.
So they say it was this time in the evening. The people were playing, men were playing, and the women were watching, the kids were just watching and, cheering and coaxing, whatever they stood there aside of the team. And then, I don’t know who was winning but it was exciting! Very exciting towards the evening. And then, everybody knows, this great mitew, great shaman was just camping not far from here. You can see his tipi, is well, totally well, efficiently covered with many things, which shows the very important person. And rich, at that. And he had two servants, two men, strong men. And they, all of a sudden went while the people were cheering and laughing and yelling and, so happy! All of a sudden the great shaman step out of his tipi. All decked up with this great, beautiful black and silver coat of otter, otter, the animal that we have, that it still exist around here in James Bay and Hudson Bay. The black, silver-haired otter, is the most highly-prized in those days. So he came out, fully, fully sewn, and sleeve, and collar of the otter-skin fur coat, so beautiful, and so it has a, very special leggings and all that and all the trimmings.

So he came out with the stick, apparently to come and play. So all the people they say: “Hey, look at the Kitchi-Mitew he’s coming!” And then everybody sort of slow down, but the boys were just simply screaming at each other, just because they were just running and really, the game was going see-saw and everything. And this big shaman came walking down the woods, they came with a stick. And, other the elderly people, they just sort of put their stick aside and walk away, because they make room for him. And, the big shaman just walk through amongst the boys who are running around and happen to catch this ball as they swing it up and, catch it right into the right place. And swing it away from the young people. And, he goes after it and the other boys just stop. Freeze right their in their track.

But the young boy, who was an orphan, who was an orphan, he says: “Come on, let’s go catch it!” And he runs after that old man. And, he run and the way they play the game is that if you run besides your opponent, you just shouldered him off, or tackle him. And that’s exactly what he did to the old man, then the old man keep running, abreast of him and then, into the water, into the ditch. I mean the quiet side of the river. Into the water, he throws this ball this old guy. And the young boy, and the young boy didn’t
stop. And so later, they were right in the middle. Right up to their crotch-area in the water, and they lost the ball into the water.

But he was still, still trying to, the boy was trying to bring it back out. But the old man kept catching it. So finally, they lost the ball into the water. So when they lost it, the young boy says: “Come on, pick it up!” He says: “Pick it up,” he says, to the old man. And but the old man didn’t want to do that because, he didn’t want to wet his coat. So the young boy says: “Pick it up,” he says. He grab his neck on the left-hand side, no, with his right hand, and shove him under the water. He says: “Pick the ball!” And they could only see is, only the rear end or the butt end of the old man, shaking and trying to get off the grip. But, the old man just pulling up, and he says: “You get it.” And the old man says: “No right!” But he couldn’t get it. Back, down into the drink. And hold him there for long time. Until the old man almost fits and pull him back up again, almost totally out of breath. And the water is spewing out of his mouth and nose and ears.

And people look. They just freeze right there. Some impossible thing has happened right in front of them. The very most powerful shaman been dunk into the water like nothing. Him in all his glorious dress and powerful sign of him being a powerful guy. And the young man didn’t seem to know this thing. He just, have his, his, he didn’t let the man throw the ball in there because they were so having so much fun. So he just put them in the water. Finally he let him go and the old man was just almost drowned. And took the young boy took the ball and swing it up into the shore and came out. And, the old guy just drag himself out of the water and, dripping and everything and some men run down there to help him. But they says: “No, no, no, don’t touch him don’t touch him!”

And he came in off the water and squeezed the water off his nice, very expensive and handsome coat of otter. And, squeezed the water from his chest and from his arm and, walks off, into the distance of his tipi. So he says: “Truly he’s a very bad young man who have dunk and soak my otter skin,” he says and he walks away into his home. And everybody just scared. Everybody hush. But the young boy still says: “Come on, come on let’s play!” And then the big powerful shaman went into his tipi. And everything stop. Because everybody’s so sure.
That, that’s all he needs. He’s gonna kill the young man, or even the rest of the boys if he could. So everybody quit, and they all went home. And that night, the boy went home, and the other people say: “He have what he has done.” And his uncle says: “You should never insulted the old guy! Now, you’ve been asking, you’ve signed your death warrant. You’re not gonna live.” And the young boy says: “No, no uncle.” He calls this adopted father “uncle.” So he says: “No uncle. I shall not cry for help if I am to be punished.” He says: “I will, take my responsibility.” And that night he went to bed, and about midnight you can hear him scream and scream. And the old man just lay down there and think that he’s dead. No more screaming. When they get up, the young boy just, lay in his bed. All covered. And then when they make a fire, he gots up, he was still alive.

So the uncle is: “How did you manage?” So the young man says: “No problem.” So he begin to get dressed after he drank, whatever the breakfast was. And then, he says to his aunt: “Aunt, give me some of your needles.” And the, and the old lady says: “Why do you need’em?” And he says: “I just want them.” So he turn in the back of himself and he came out with the ball, with full of porcupine needles and everything he says: this is what the old man send me last night. So he says, I shall, I shall return to him. So he put few more needles into it added to already existing needles, and he went outside and put it outside. So he came in. That morning. But when he look outside he says, you know the old man has left! You know, the old mitew. So, his uncle went out, to check. Sure enough, everybody was standing outside and watching that old guy have left last night.

And so, that’s it. And the story switch to the Kitchi-Mitew. He was, in the morning, he got up. And he find out that young man didn’t die. It which he has, shortly could kill him. But, he got scared. Then he told his servants, says: “Let’s get on, let’s be on our way.” So they’re on their way very fast and everything then all of a sudden, the old man just crumbled and break his paddle and cross-piece of the canoe, and died instantly. And so they, they look at him, and he swings off into, inside the canoe. And, blood spill out from his mouth. And he die. So, that was the end of the Kitchi-Mitew. So the story is, if you fool around with the orphan, sometimes unexpectedly, this guy could be so powerful. Because, the old guy has commit a blaspheme act. By making fun
of this little boy, who was enjoying his life. So that’s a story about a kind of teaching and, the negativity of the shamanism. Thank you for listening.