This is the second tape from the tape dating December 8, 1999, which mark number one. It talks about Cree culture education. So this second tape is to continue from the side B of the first tape, where we were short of time... to talk about the shaman who was beaten by the young man, the young orphan man.

The story is like this.

The story is, there was a powerful shaman who could do almost anything, who had the servant and had been very well-off because of his, of his power. And also because he was so sure of himself that he would have whatever he needs. And then he was begin to be feared person because he’s so powerful. So people tried to avoid him so they won’t aggravate him.

And, as the Omushkegowak used to do after the European came, they used to gather into the outlet of the, one of the major rivers that flow into the Hudson and James Bay. Usually at this time, the European were trading at Kashechewan Ontario, which is in West Coast of James Bay. And, the people within the land, the Omushkego people and also Oji-Cree people used to congregate to Kashechewan at the mouth of the Kashechewan River, where the second oldest settlement that was created by the Hudson Bay fur traders, the English people. So anyway, it was one of those periods after the establishment, it could have been somewhere around 1700 maybe 18. I guess we can fairly say, at the beginning of 1800, because people used to have guns then. Not everybody has a gun, but there were quite a few. And, they had this new established tradition they did after the European came. They always go into the Ekwan River, from Winisk River, from Attawapiskat and way inland into the mouth of the Ekwan River and they used to meet there, and every spring after the ice cleared off the rivers and partially opened into the James Bay, west coast of James Bay, they used to go there and they meet, in that Ekwan River, to the north side and right up to the about two miles to the north. That was the famous campground and it was that time they used to have all those games, and competitive games and reunions and everything, before they push on to Kashechewan. Besides that, they wait there for a week to have the James Bay shoreline open a little bit more so they can paddle along the shore. And those who have canoes and those who don’t, they just walk on the shore.

So it was one of those gatherings that they were having games and competition games and shaman games, I mean shaman’s competing and showing off how much they can do. And it was one of those things that happens in that story. And there was this
shaman who was, they called him “feared shaman”, and in our language it says “koschigan”. And also at the same time there was a young man who has been an orphan as a child and he was been raised by his uncle. I don’t know if it’s, if it’s his brother’s...if it’s his father’s brother or if it’s mother’s sister, I’m not too sure.

Anyway, it so happened this young man, as it was believed in those days. Usually an orphan would acquire a powerful shamanism because he’s not loved, he doesn’t receive full love from parents because his parents are not there. So he’s always in that state of loneliness and always in the state of needing, needs comfort and everything. And he’s always in a state of fear. So he’s always conditioned to be that way. It’s just the exactly exact condition to be shaman when they are in the quest to dream, when they want to get dream. So the young person doesn’t have to want to because he’s already have it. So usually these kind of people were extraordinary very powerful. So this was the condition. Because of the shaman that was there feared and the young people and the young person who was nobody knows, he’s just nobody, he’s just one of the young poor guys. And he was around, but he was just a young person, perhaps maybe 15, 18. And he loves to play with people and likes to play the game that people play. So it was that evening, one day, that he was with the game with the other young people and some other grown-ups. They had a team and he was on one side. As they were playing so intensely they were really trying to win the game. They wanted to make more score than the other team and he was really pushing, this young man. And that moment, that evening, Mitew happened to have this urge of trying to pick up a fight. He had a dream and he wants to try it out, I guess he thought it was. So in order to attract attention he came out all decked out in dress and dressed up. As if to say, in European term, “dressed to kill.” So the most highest prize there is a thing that they thought it was in those days was otter skin. There is an otter who is totally black and inside, inside the fur it’s just like a silver lining. It’s a very beautiful stuff. And it’s blue/black outside. We don’t find many of those, but this guy did and he had enough required, enough pelts to make a jacket and the leggings. So that’s the way he dressed. And he came out all dressed up. And bring out his stick a drawing stick. So when people, those who were playing and those who were observing, who were sitting on the ground they said “oh no, there comes the shaman,” you know, and they say, “we are now...we’ve had it, he’s looking for a fight.” So many Elders just leave they just didn’t want to witness anything and some people sticks on and but, the team, they were just so intense, they were just really trying to win the game and they forgot to look at him. And some of the people said, “There comes the shaman.” So they said, “Hell with the shaman, lets win this game.” So they really did ignore him. And the shaman came in and joined to one team and then he began to play. And everybody forgot about him and they just play as hard as they can. And it so happens some people did aware of the shaman, they just didn’t want to, they just want...they just didn’t to tackle him, you know because this game you really tackle someone, you shoulder your way and you fight, you kick or not kick but you push him with your body. It’s something like a hockey game but it’s not, it’s the winter time. But they have two balls that are tied together almost and then there’s string across and then they have this, a stick that looks like almost like a hockey stick except that it has the little notch in there where you can put your stick in the between the balls and you can through them any way you want. So this is
what they were doing. I forget the name of that. I...there was a name for it. But it...the name has to do with these two balls “pimatishkwan”] something...I forget...I will remember someday. [Editors note: I spoke with Louis on April 2, 2003, and he came up with the word “pimatishoweaskwaiagan”-- “stick-hook ball swing”]

So now, this intensive game was going on and that shaman was in amongst them, nobody really care, they were so intense, they would push him around and kick him around whatever it is, and then finally he’d grab the ball and run away with it the other way, into the creek. And the boys were so mad and they said, “bring the ball back, what’s the idea, this is the way we won,“ and he keep on running and he...the young boy, the orphan boy run after him and push and shoulder him off and then grab the ball and bring it back and the shaman catch up with him and grab the ball and throw it back into the creek. And he did throw it back into the creek. There was a creek there. Not very deep, maybe up to your crotch area, muddy, and that’s where he’d throw the ball. And the young boy was mad at him. And he says, you know, “What’s the idea of throwing the ball, don’t you know the goal is over there.” And the shaman just kept on going like that. So the boy just run after the ball and the shaman behind and they’re trying to catch it under the water. The boy found it, but the old man caught it back again and shoved it under. And by this time the young boy was very frustrated and he grabbed a hold of the old man on the neck, the back of his neck, and dunk him in. And he says, “get the ball!” So he hold him there for a long time and the shaman ass end was sticking out and wiggling and everything and he pulled him out, “did you catch it?” And the old man didn’t say a thing; he just spit out the water and everything. And then he says, “Find it!” and he dunk him in again as far back as he could and the old man was just kicking the water. Finally he almost stopped, then the boy pulled him out again, he was actually falling in the water. And the old man couldn’t speak. So finally the boy caught the balls and bring them out and shoved the old man back into the water.

So he brought his ball back, by this time everybody was aware, that shaman has been totally insulted. Means death, the boy is going to be dead. So the game is forgotten. Nobody wants to play anymore. And so the boy says, “Come on, come on lets finish the game, to hell with the old guy, let’s just finish the game, we were almost winning.” But all of them just sort of dragged there feet back home and didn’t want to play. And the old guy just came up and the other Elders were sitting by the creek and they didn’t want to look, they didn’t want to comment anything. So he came out and all totally, totally soaked. All his beautiful uniform. And his hair was braided in front of his head. And that also dripping and everything. So he came in and he muttered his way up and he says, “truly he’s a, what do you call it, truly he’s a bad boy who has soaked my uniform, my best uniform.” That’s all he says and he just walks away dripping into his tipi. And the game is over and everybody just went home. So certain that this old guy is mad and he’s going to kill the boy. And no one dared to step up and defend the boy.

So anyway, the games over. So all the players went home, and so is the old man. And his uncle, his uncle was there watching the game. So when he got home his uncle was there at home and he scorned him right there. So he says, "Are you tired of living? What is the idea, why did you have to do that to the old man?” So the young boy didn’t say anything. And his uncle keeps saying, "there is nothing I can do I cannot defend you,
that guy's powerful." And so the boy says, "well, he says, I will not call your help if anything happens. I guess it will be just up to me...that's it." Still his uncle is just simply couldn't believe it. His aunt is crying, so sure that he's going to die. So they went to bed anyway. With sorrow and everything. But the boy didn't seem to care; he just went to bed as everybody went to bed. So the uncle and the aunt were just laying huddling each other and just waiting for something to happen. Towards after midnight and there it is. All of a sudden the boy screams in agonizing pain. And it seems just to die off, struggling and screaming and yelling and talking as if he was fighting someone, but there's nobody there. And the uncle, uncle didn't move. He just didn't want to interfere, and so with his wife. So the screaming and painful yelling was still there. And then finally it stopped, that was it. So the old couple just laid there and they said, "He's dead." So they said, whispering to each other, says, "we'll wait until morning, until dawn, we will give him a proper burial somewhere."

So when the dawn came the old lady made a fire just like as usual, tried to think that there has nothing really happened, except the death and everything. But, to her surprise, the boy was there! Sleeping! Breathing! So she nudges her husband and says, "get up, get up, look at this!" So the old man get up and look, there's the young boy sleeping quietly as if nothing has happened. So they begin to get up. They make something to drink, breakfast. They begin to eat. Once they finished the breakfast, they talk to the young boy. They said, "Are you ok? Are you alive?" So the young boy stirs a little bit, he says, "of course, of course I was just asleep." Says, "We heard your screaming last night." "Ooh yes, oh yes, yeah I did get, I did receive something from the old man, I guess." So it was just early dawn, not yet, not yet quite daylight. And, so he got up. So they gave him a drink of something. So as he get up his blanket is rolled aside, then he finally reached behind him and he come out with this...something, a large...dandelion – you know the way the dandelion look like the one that blows in the, in the wind, sharp things that looks like very fluffy, that's what it looks like. And all these, there were quills in there, porcupine quills and other stuff in there. And he says, "This is what he sends me." So he holds it up, like you know, he says, "Look at it," he says. I forget what is the parts that those quills are sticking into, I think there's animal parts that he has stuck those needles in, this old guy who wanted to kill the young boy. But, the young boy says, "I survived." So just before they finish, he drinks his tea or whatever it is, so he says, "Auntie, could you give me a couple of your steel needles." You know those beading needles that the white people use to give. So she says, "Why do you need the needles?" So he says, "Just let me have them." So the aunt says, "Well, I have a few." She says, "How many do you want?" He says, "A couple will do." So she handed over the pin cushion and she said just pick the ones you want. So he picked two of those beading needles and one square, triangle sort of needle, the one that you use to sew the hide. So he says, "ok these." So he handed over the rest. So it was done, it was done already. So he says, "I shall send these things to this old man I can't just hold on to his property. So he put needles in it, three of them, then he went out and...gone for a few minutes, come back in. So he says, "he shall receive it sometime today." And then he went to sit down and drink some more and have a little breakfast, and then he lays down as if nothing happened. So as the sun rises, everybody begins to rise and they look towards where the old man used to have his tipi...the old shaman. There was nothing there. The tipi's gone,
only the poles are standing. And somebody said they went to look, everything was gone. So one guy said, “it was about before dawn that we heard the noise and we see them, very quietly loading the stuff in the canoe and they left, these two men and the shaman.” Apparently they say that he’s going to go away and then kill the boy from there. So they said, the boy just didn’t even bother; they didn’t even go there.

[NB: there is a break in the tape. Louis picks up the story...]

Now, let us pick up a story about the shaman’s trip up the river as he goes away. What happens is that he had sent his...his power to this young man during the night, that night. And nothing happened. He knows that they didn’t kill the boy. He knows that he is going to be beaten. So he instructed his servant to take him away as far away as he can and perhaps find something he can defend himself with. But fortunately didn’t turn out that way. They were going ahead and up the river and not far distance and by the afternoon they were just going and going and he says “come on, come on, faster, faster” he was trying to reach the place where he used to go to offensively like a, like a fort or something. He was trying to reach there. And the two men were straining, poling and paddling and he was in the middle. He never did use to pick a paddle. This time he was picking a paddle and paddling as fast as he can. And then all of a sudden he break the paddle. He can hear the loud crack. The paddle is usually strong, but he breaks it in half. And he just crumbled under the...on the bottom of the canoe. And crippled his legs and then dying. And then after it stopped quiv...it stopped jerking and everything. So the two men look at each other and says, “What happened?” So they beach the canoe, check him, roll him over on his side, or on his back, and then he came...the blood came out from his nostrils, his mouth, his eyes, and then on top of his chest lay this pin cushion full of pin steel cushion on top of his chest, you know, sort of coming out. And they said, “That’s what kill him.” Never in their life have they seen such a powerful man to be so pitifully dead. At that moment they took an opportunity to say, “Well, good riddance. He has been ruling us too long. In fact he enslaved us. Let’s get rid of him.” So they pulled the canoe right up into the bush, along with the old man and his stuff and everything. And filled the dry branches and everything from the tree and all the dead trees and piled them on top and set fire to it. And from the distance, from the Bay Shore, they can...people can see this black smoke coming out from up the river. And they know, this was the end of the shaman. The young boy of the orphan age has beaten the great powerful shaman.

So that is the sample of a story about shamanism. There is nothing pleasant or love in it, but pride and some bad things. Many stories are example as that. Very few are beauty with kindness and love.

So that, the thing is, this shaman was so proud. He was so confidence in him self, he forgot. Sometimes the giant can be killed by the smallest man. So he had forgotten that...so he was beaten. And that’s the end of the story. So to...so to go on. This story is a lesson in life. So the Elders used to interpret this story to say, no matter how powerful you are, you should never show off. You should always consider other impossibilities because you are not the power. The power is the Creator; the Great Spirit is a power. You
should always consider mostly an orphan child. Sometimes power and the greatest will come the most humbled person. And that is the lesson. The humble shall destroy the elite people or the powerful people. And that’s the teaching. So shamanism is not all perfect as it seems to be, when it’s misused. But when its used properly it is a good thing, it’s beneficial to people. So that’s the end of the story. So that is the reason people trying to get the dream to be, to establish themself as a shaman. But very few, there are few stories existing to talk about the good shamans, but many bad ones. But they are teaching us. They are teaching us to avoid these things, in our life. So that the stories, the bad stories teach us to avoid similar situation, if we were to grow up, if we were to have such acquirement. If we were a shaman, it tells us not to do these things that are bad. That is why the stories are provided. That is why the stories are exist. So any of the good stuff like the good life and everything, they don’t actually come into the...they don’t stand out in the story because...that’s where, that’s where everything...we don’t hear much about the good thing but bad things usually sticks out in our mind. Anyway, that is the meaning. That is why the stories are told.

Now getting back to the subject about a shaman. Not all persons are required to have the...to acquire the shaman powers. Not everybody needs to. If a person is born and he doesn’t have any, any interest at all, he can exist. There is actually no danger in having anything, having none at all. Sometimes you are better off. Sometimes people don’t bother at all, they are no danger, because there is no communication, there is no connection. When there is a powerful shaman and he is threatening and he is very mean to any of the people, and if you don’t believe in him, he won’t bother you. He can’t do anything to you. So that is a good thing about not having, not having, not having a shaman knowledge.

There is something else...that people have a long time ago. Maybe it is, this is my personal opinion, I have heard some Elders say the same thing, and it seems to be, it seems to be the truth. They say that animals have instincts. They don’t necessarily have to have condition themselves to have these powers. That means they don’t have to condition themselves to dream. Or to have, to practice the dream quest, what we call. They are born with it. So being in the forest constantly and without any comfort for the body that is provided to them. So in the wilderness they are conditioned automatically to live there and they are also automatically acquired these gifts, for them to have something for their protection. That means they have, they have a know how. They are gifted to have these for their own survival. They know the dangers. They can feel dangers ahead of time. As if their mind can see ahead, or even as their mind is awakened and that danger is near. And they also have the bears. Black bears have this for sure, for certain. They can hide; they can actually almost make themselves invisible. If they are unfortunately or suddenly close encounters to the human person. So they just freeze, they just don’t move. And they just begin immobile. And at the same time they are almost invisible, they make themself almost invisible. They can hide very easy. So that is about the animals. So the bears have it, the wolves have it, all the big game animals have it--moose, turtle and even some smaller animals like otters, beavers, mink, even some others. The birds have it, the crow have it, I mean the raven. Ravens have it, the owls, the eagles...hmm...most everybody
else, most every all kinds of animals have it. So they, they have it because for their
survival. But not as keen as human. The don’t have any defense system, but the human
has a defense stuff. Even offensive things. So they develop these things. The human
develop these things in conditioning themselves to dream. But the animals they don’t
have to condition themselves to have this. It’s just automatically in them. So that is what
the Elders have been saying. So it seems. I am going to tell a small story about this.

A man still lives today; his name is Toby Hunter, here in our community of
Peawanuk. At the moment he’s not with us, he’s out there in...in his goose camp, in his
trap line. He once told me that he had a strange experience one time. What the Native
people believe is that, if you mishandle the animal carcass or dead body, or if you misuse
the animal, which you use for your own food. For example, what Toby Hunter says, “for
some reason,” he says, “I could not kill a caribou,” and Toby Hunter is a master hunter.
He masters the technique of being the best caribou hunter. More in fact, he was just a
simple good hunter, so there is no question that he will not kill caribou if he looks for
one. So this, he know this. And then, he says, “one day,” only once he says, he didn’t say
how many times, but one day he says he simply couldn’t kill caribou, one winter, no
matter how many days he hunt. So he says I don’t remember ever abusing the animal.
Whatever I have done, he says, I have offended the caribou. So he says, “Whenever I hunt
that winter, never, never have I had a chance to kill it. As if my shells, my rifle shells
have no bullet at all. I shoot the same as I shoot every time when I hunt do the same thing
as if there is no bullet in my gun, in my shell”, he says. So he tried it three times where
other people could simply kill a caribou and he could not hit. He was so frustrated he says
one time he just took his gun and throw it in the snow in frustration. And he had to have a
partner. And he, first he had given his gun to him to see if it shoots straight. So the guy
took the gun and shoot the caribou down. And he says, “nothing wrong with it.” Then he
tries it again, Toby. Toby tries it again, and still couldn’t hit anything. That’s when he
gets frustrated and through his gun down. He says he was actually going to leave it there,
this old man. But his friends said not don’t do that; maybe it’s just something that
is...something temporary. So he took his gun back and just didn’t hunt any more. He just
simply didn’t try not, try to...he tried not to hunt the caribou because, you know, he
couldn’t kill it. So for that winter he never did hunt. He goes with the hunter but he never
tried to shoot ‘em. So some how. He was telling me one day. One time by himself he
followed the caribou and the best, the best of his technique to make sure they don’t know
him, so he was alone, he says, “I was here in this location. I was very sure there was no
way the caribou would know me. I was behind the wind I hide in the thick bush in here I
stay, watching the caribous move closely by. And just beginning to wait they might walk
my way yet. And then, all of a sudden, the leader of the herd, seemed to stand up in the
high ground as if to try to see something and look my way. His tail up. Soon as he does
that other caribous begin to shuffle around begin to lift their tail up. Which is the
indication that they are now aware there is a danger. And as soon as they do that, he says
“this leader just simply make a move to run.” And he says, “I didn’t even want to shoot
‘cause I know they know me. The leader knows me even though he didn’t smell, he didn’t
see me. Then he just took off away from me, not towards me, even though I’m down
wind.” Usually the caribou, when they sense some danger they would just run down wind
a certain distance to try to find what they are feeling...to try to smell what it is. “But this particular caribou who was a leader,” Toby says. He says, “Simply run away from my direction. Without any investigating what sort of a thing that he was afraid of. Unless certainly he knows exactly who I am, he says. So this is what makes people think caribous has an instinct to tell him there is a danger. Or do they possess similar thing as human. Shaman power to be aware to scan their mind if the danger is around. So this is the story which is true. Where Native people, especially the Omushkego people have said, that animals do have similar powers as the shamanistic thing...shamanism. So it is usually one of the herds of the caribou they have such a leader such a look-out person at the caribou who keep them alive. Many expert hunters said the same thing but not all say or suspect that the leader do have the shaman power but they know he has the scanning system which tells him there is danger. So the animals are gifted. So the Elder, Toby Hunter that is now still still living says this happens to him once. I heard him say it in a very small way but I have already heard the men who has with him when he was hunting. The other person’s name was Michael Patrick. And he was...he was stunned. He just...I just cannot understand why a man simply could not kill a caribou. While he, he’s one of the best. He says, “there is such thing. there is such thing as animal knowing something whatever it is. What does a caribou he’s telling, does he kill something of does he actually have the knowledge. Is he has a mitewiwin, hhmmm, that’s the word.” So any way. Some people believe that. I personally have experienced that too. Myself I can kill a caribou almost as easy as I can kill a ptarmigan or a sharped-tailed grouse. I am lucky. I am not the best hunter. But I am just luck. Sometimes I think that the caribous just simply want to die. And they come to my way. Sometimes I find them. Walk up on them and they just simply stand around as if waiting for me to shoot them. So my father told me, he says I am going to be the luckiest hunter. I will always be able to get the caribou. And he was truth, it was the truth. So many Elders that I have been...many hunter’s that I have been with, they have noticed that. They always want to take me with them because they know they will get the caribou. I have noticed that myself too.

But one day, one particular year, this was 1985, in February, me and my friend Mr. John Michael Hunter were hunting caribou, we were so sure of ourselves because we never, we never failed. So we went, we went to the place that he knows well and we found the herd of caribous. And the first day we thought it was just the bad luck, we just simply couldn’t shoot any. We didn’t hit anything. They seem to know us as if, as if they know if we came right in there. In a bad place. He says, “well, it’s a bad spot”, that’s what we were saying. So we went again, the same herd we followed them and we catch up to them the next day. The same thing happened early morning we catch them and they just simply know when we were there. And we chased them maybe for three hours. And we caught up to them again and they know exactly where we are. They go into the thick bush, they just hide from us. And they know exactly how to get away from us. And that’s when Mr. John Michael Hunter says, he says, “Louis, forget it” he says, “We cannot kill them.” He says, “three times we tried it.” He says, “If we were lucky we would have killed them.” So he says, “I think there is something wrong.” He says, “the caribou are afraid, they need...they are telling us something.” So I didn’t listen, I was sort of mad at myself. But we gave up anyway, we came home. He never even bothered to look at any other caribou trail, he just went, came home, the man. And I was very angry that we came
home anyway. So he says, that evening, he says, “I know they know, they are trying to tell us something.” And so in 1986 in the spring of May, 16, the whole village was wiped out and destroyed and one Elder died and one young person died. It was when during after maybe in June sometime I happened to run into my friend who was in the village during the time. So I asked him, “was it very dangerous?” And he says, “Yes, it was dangerous.”

It is amazing that we are a lasting people, lots of us could have died, even myself he says.” “So,” he says, “that is the reason the caribous tell us that there is something wrong.” He says, “I know that,” he says, “There was something.” So that’s what the caribous are, animals do that. Are they shamans or are they just telling us something or just an instinct or just simply a smart herd of caribous that knows exactly what the human hunters do. Is it a coincidence? No. I do believe there is such thing because it has happened to me. So for that reason, our ancestors have experienced the same thing and they have considered that animals do have a shamanistic powers. Just like the shaman who has the scanning ability to see things around him by his mind so they think caribous have it, moose have it. And the rest of the animals have it. They say, “for their survival.” So that’s the end of the story.

I don’t know for sure if these things are true. But I do think maybe there is some truth in it. But I would not say myself that animals do have some shaman power. But I think they are gifted. Sometimes there is a higher power that indicates something. Maybe it’s not the caribou themself, maybe it’s not the human himself because of his bad luck, but there is something that tells you there is something that is going to go wrong for your life. For that particular year in 1986 in February, it has shown us, me and my friend, that the problem will come in our community because when we hunt, when we succeed, we usually feed people who cannot hunt and we usually have their pleasing and also their satisfaction and that is why the Elder said, “there is something wrong.” So that’s the end of this story. I will speak other subject on the other side, similar things that may show us something that the Omushkego people have experienced. Not only the Omushkego people have this. The Ojibway, our next door neighbours up to the land do have it, the Inuit people up to the Northwest and the Inuit people up to the east coast of Hudson’s Bay knew all of this, most every tribe understand what I’m talking about. For the time being. On the other side I shall talk some more...ok.

Side B

Let us now talk a bit more about the subject of shamanism. Omushkegowak, Omushkego cultural beliefs and practices are contain a lot of this shaman subject. In every life, in everything they do they have this cultural belief. When which they believe and practice, they have which they believe is the spiritual part of man, in which they say they develop it in a dream wishing the dream and after a succeed of a collection of dreams in their mid-life they begin to apply them. They begin to use each dream to benefit them or to assist them in their life. As if to say, in similarity, when the child is young in the Christian world, he is instructed how to live Christian life. He is given a set of instructions, set of rules to follow. And he must obey them and follow them and practice them and have faith in them. This is exactly the similar situation that existed amongst the Omushkegowak people in this territory. The territory I’m talking about covers the tip of James Bay to the
west coast and the Hudson Bay coast from the Cape Henrietta Maria to the York Factory of Manitoba. Within 200 miles inland from the sea shore. This is the Omushkegowak territory and that is what I am talking about. I am not taking about the Oji-Cree people, speaking people 200 miles from the coastal region and inland. I am not talking about the Cree speaking people which we call to the east coast of James Bay and the east coast of Hudson Bay to the Labrador area, I am not talking about them. I am not talking about the Prairie or Plains Cree people, I am not talking about them. I am not talking about the Blackfoot tribe. I am not talking about the Ojibway tribes who are living Kenora to Winnipeg area. I am not talking about the Inuit people that live from Churchill and up. I am not talking about the Inuit people who live at the Belcher Island in Hudson Bay and to the Labrador, even up to the Baffin Island. No, I’m not talking about them. I am talking about this particular stretch of land which the people live which they call themselves Omushkegowak, that is where I am talking about. Any other tribes that live around this area, I don’t know them. They have different beliefs, different practices but similar to the Omushkego people. I am not considering I know everything else what the other tribes have. And I do not include their expertise. I do not include their style of doing things, only the Omushkegowak. This is the truth. I heard many things about the Ojibway tribes. I heard many things about the east coast Cree people. I heard about Inuit peoples, I heard about Dene people to the North West Territories and I heard about many other tribes across Canada in the way in which they practice their cultural beliefs and practices. These are not the ones I’m talking about. I’m talking about the Omushkegowak and that stretch of land which I have described. So they call it Omushkego territory, but the Omushkegowak have always in the past blended well with the other tribes. They have accepted other tribes who come to join their living, their life. There let it be the Ojibway people, let it be the east coast Cree people and let it be the west coast plains people or even the Blackfoot. I don’t know about, much about the Dene people. I do not speak that far.

So this is the way the Omushkegowak developed their spiritual connection to life. At the beginning, the child is to dream, to quest for dream, to try to find as much as he can dream and to use the dream as a tool for his life. And then when he grow up, begin to be responsible, the accumulation of dreams to be used as ammunition or tools for his survival and for survival for his loved ones—his wife, his children, his grand-children. So that is the whole thing. But the way they do it, it is the individual who develops it, it is an individual who dreams. It is not a church. Very few actions they have done requires the audience or the assistance or to be assisted as they practice their own thing. The only time that the Omushkegko will ask people to be with them is when they go into offensive. When they want to fight other shamans, the distance in which they do not know. And they have to have some audience around them. And just in case if some those people who sit around may have dreamed something to assist the person who is operating the shaking tent. Or, whether he uses the shaking tent or not, that he will have the assistance or backing from his own people. That is the only time that they ever ask that people would sit around. And using, mostly they use the shaking tent and they use a small drum, the hand drum, then they use the rattle and then they sing, without drum and without rattle they can sing. They can sing to heal, they can sing to pray for the benefits for good hunting and they can sing for praise to the creator. They can sing for thanksgiving, they
can drum for thanksgiving. The Omushkego have seldom been said that they have a large drum, the war drum. No, they have very seldom use. According to the information that I got from the Elders. But unfortunately, most of the Elders that I have interviews avoid subject of this shamanistic subject, because they have been instructed not to pass on the information to the new generation, by the Christian leaders. And by the Canadian government and by the other scary tactics that the whiteman has in order to control our people. It has been said by our members, by our some Elders and educated people have found out how the whiteman have used other tribes to try to kill off the people that got in their way. For example, one man told me recently that the Mohawks were used by the English people to kill off the Ojibways and the Crees to eliminate them for the sake of the whiteman. And they were told to kill every Indians they can find out of those tribes and they should bring the scalp, the hair, the top hair piece of the person. And if they can have many of those and to show to the European leaders this is how many he had killed for the whiteman, then he’d get paid, they get praise for it. So the Mohawks have done that, the Iroquois may have done it the same way and they have hunted the Omushkegos for that reason. This is the story that I get from our Elders, but it’s all hush-hush, nobody says that in the open. And it also has been said the European, the early missionaries had made an agreement with the government that they should use all possible force to kill the spiritual connection with the Omushkego people or any other tribes that stood in the way of the land development for the European. This is the fact. I am not angry what I am talking about but I am speaking it clearly. Many Elders understand this but they never say a thing. And for that reason many Elders have been scared. Many Elder women are totally scared of the whiteman because of the scare tactics they have received. Not long ago when I was young I used to see people scared of the R.C.M.P. because they think it’s the government police, it’s the government soldier that kills people if we don’t do what the government says, this is their law, that’s the prosecutor. They didn’t know about that. They didn’t know there was a judge, they didn’t know there was the lawyers. But the police was the enforcement officer only, not the soldier. But according to the stories that we have, these similar uniforms was used in the west when the war broke out and during the Northwest Rebellion. So all the Cree people and also the other cultural people around the Canada have believed the R.C.M.P. were the meanest people, the killers for the federal government. So that was the concept. And for that reason, in my lifetime I have seen people terrified when they see the Redcoats. Because the stories that had been brought down to us about the Northwest Rebellion. And the stories that had been brought down from the States. And where the United States before they break from the imperialism, that they have used the Negro slaves or coloured-people slave to push off the Indian part of the way for the land they claim, in the early colonial states. So this has been brought down to us in this area. And it’s very, it has been traumatized very highly and kind of scary tactic. So our ancestors where not so courageous about that. They submit very easily. They couldn’t use their shaman power to depend on it. So this is the oral history of our people, this is what they say. This is not said in the whiteman’s world, not from the storytellers from the whiteman, but it is amongst the Native people who have brought this with them as a whispering thing. It’s a very hush-hush thing [Louis chuckles]. So anyway, so I don’t care about those things but I am trying to talk about what those people were.
I have said one time, the shaman power does not work in against the person who doesn’t know anything about it. The whiteman didn’t know anything. Not the ones who came to explore and the Hudson Bay Company and these things, no, they were just simply doing their business. They were business people, they were not spiritual leaders. The Christian leaders, their belief is totally alien to what the Native people have. So the mind didn’t connect. So they could not use the First Nation people Omushkegowak understand that. So they tried to use it but it didn’t work. It didn’t work on the priest, it didn’t work on the Hudson Bay managers. So they said, “well, it’s a neutralization somewhere.” So they sort of stated that, “maybe the Great Spirit is allowing this to happen, maybe truly now the other people will come and stay.” So they didn’t use it. But they used it against each other. They fight each other with it because they had the same connection in mind. So, that is something that is missing in the European history. It did never said exactly this but this is what I heard from the Elders. But unfortunately all our Elders are now gone, they are die. There are very few people that still exist who actually remember and believe the stories they have heard. Not necessarily believe but knew they are forbidden subjects, because of the instruction they receive from Christianity. So, whatever has been done I personally don’t care. I do not have any grudge against the Christian leaders who have used it or the way they use the Christianity, they are humans, they are not spiritual people, they are just humans. They use the religion as they see fit. And I can’t believe that’s the way the instruction was put at the beginning. I think the original establisher of the Christianity, Christ himself, that’s not the way he said it. He said, “turn the other cheek, or cut off your finger if it makes it you sin.” It’s not like the old way of saying, eye for eye, or tooth for tooth, foot for foot what ever it is. No, we have that, our ancestors had that and eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. If somebody come to harass you and hurt you, hurt him as much, or even kill him; self-defense. But there has been instruction that says you should not use your powers just for the sake of pleasure of killing a person. There had been strong instruction on that, not to do it.

So this is our Omushkego cultural beliefs and practices which has not been told by our Elders to the next generation after the Christianity, but it has been submerged. Many Omushkegowak have went underground to practice their spiritual belief and practices. They are the ones who remember it and their neighbours who watch them do it. But the last that we know was, it was 1930 and the last shaman practice system in James Bay, was close to James Bay. And it was in that similar time that southwest coast of Hudson Bay in the York Factory area, so the last group of people who still held on to the old practices. In their memory, those who have died 10 years ago who were about 80, those who died about 5 years ago who were 95 or even 100, they know all those things, but they are all dead. And those of us who have come to an age to be called as an Elder that we over 65 and things like that, we didn’t see those things. We just barely here them as a whisper. But we encourage some of those who understand to tell us so we will know. Because today our cultural history is not written and it should be written and regardless. So that is the reason why had an idea to try to write these stories down.

So shamanism is one of the major content of our culture of the Omushkegowak people. If it wasn’t for it the Omushkegowak people would have been died long time ago. They could have been killed off by other tribes. But because they have this defense mechanism they have survived. And they were most feared one time but they have
dwindled down, for some reason, maybe because they have submit themselves to be controlled.

Now let us get back to the shaman power. Once again, I said it is not a church. It is an individual developed personally by a person. The only time that ever uses as a communal spiritual stuff is when people use a shaking tent on offensive reason, the only time. Sometime the other time is for entertainment. The shamans are allowed to have entertainment with this shaking tent and those who have power to be able to expose what they can do, there were times in the past where the shamans came together in friendly terms and showed their power how they can do, just to show there is a possibility, but never to use it aggressively to their gathering, to their friendly gathering in the season. There was instruction, there was more like a law that says, “you do not use offensive, you do not intimidate the other fellow man, you just entertain, that was allowed.

Just like today, competitive games, the world champions come to meet to show who is the best but no intention to start a war with it. All nations come to the one certain area, given time to show their skills, the most skills are gathered, the champions should they play, they exhibit their capabilities and they are honoured that way. Similarities existed among the Omushkegowak people. They came together in the spring after the winter has past. They came for the thanksgiving gathering and also the feast and everything and the games to exchange and also marriage vows to be exchanged, and all the other trade goods to be exchanged and friendly, friends to be rekindled, and that was the reason. And in that time there was no games that go farther than just entertaining. Outside and that, as they are out in the wilderness by themselves. If the other person is coming to harass another person, he or she may be asking for trouble himself. And there is no pity, there is no mercy. If a person tends to get rid of this nuisance he has the right to kill and that was the law, an eye for an eye or kill or be killed, the survival of the fittest. So that is the true history of our Omushkego people. Many of these things were useful in those days, these things were useful in that time, in that setting, in that period in time. But today, they are not. Those things are not applicable because today most of the First Nation people have now migrated into the city, into community living, they do not live in the land anymore. They do not use the wilderness as their home and therefore they lost contact with the wilderness and the power that they could obtain from there to be able to survive. That is the truth. It is very obvious today that it is so. And it’s also, almost shame to see it being denied, being absolutely throw away such and outstanding quality of a nation. Because today we tend, we the Canadians like to say we are multi-nationalism [Louis chuckles], we are multi-national nation and we begin to be proud of it today. We cannot let the French people go to separate because we think they are very valuable. We have got rid of this eliminate tribes and tribes and divide them and kill them off and subdue them into one powerful government. No, that has not been working in a free country, that is not what it means to be “free country”, but usually it doesn’t work actually what it’s supposed to mean. That, the old culture, the Omushkego culture and tradition and practices are now gone. And, none of our people ever yet tried to write it down. Because it’s not practiced anymore it’s going to die with the Elder. I repeat myself 100 times at least. And I’m saying it again. It is gone, it will not return unless, the great catastrophe of the world occurs. Unless this millennium that we are afraid of so much, it may eliminate life as we know it then who will survive? Maybe the First Nation who are
still attached to the land, they might survive, if there is not too much pollution or polluted water, whatever it is. So there is that nagging question, “who will survive?” So for the time being, the old stuff doesn’t require anymore. So that was the Omushkegowak culture make-up. The physical education must be with the spiritual beliefs and practices, in order for one to function in the wilderness, in order for one person to call himself a home to his own land. To have the territory, to have a district where he can move freely without any wires, without any meshes—square meshes, without any fences, without any restricted rules that are centred into one governing body. Each individual was his own body. Family unit was the biggest, the “clan” is the biggest governing body that existed. But it was not to mean so large, it means to be individual family. Like animals, the animals do not stay together, when they are raised. They go just one year and the next year they have their own family. Be as the wolves, travel as in pack, maybe 15 at the most. They have a social life, they have a well-organized life and they travel, they don’t stay in one place. They travel a long distance in circle and so is the rest of the animals. To use the land as it’s all of its size and not to destroy it. So the Native people were made that way, they were brought into this land to use it as the animals used this land. Until such time that other nations came in to settle into the communities into our larger cities as we have today.

And for that reason the Omushkego culture come to an end. It began to deteriorate when the spiritual part changed over. I’m not saying that the Christianity is bad. I am saying that the cultural beliefs and practices were eliminated and then therefore is not necessary the part of the cultural activity today. The Christianity has taken over the Omushkegowak people. They have that Christianity to practice in the wilderness, which I think it is even much milder. The old culture was cruel and harsh but the Christianity is smooth and non-violence nature and it is very good. It’s good to be in the wilderness with it. You don’t have to fear a man. If you know he is Christianized he is not supposed to kill you. He’s not supposed to challenge you at least, that’s what we believe it is. But mostly today we see Christian people kill each other just the same. I will not go further with this argumentative subject, but I will only talk about the old culture that was exist among the Omushkego people and how they obtain it and how they practice it.

Now let’s go back to the Omushkegowak culture. The Omushkegowak because they live in the wilderness, they follow the wilderness rules. There are rules in the wilderness, there are laws, more like nature’s law. You see it amongst the animals, they follow these rules, they follow the season as the season is the law enforcement. The season makes animals move, migrate, and people follow these animals because that’s their food, that’s their food supply. So the nature itself is the law and therefore required no uniformed law enforcement humans. So all the laws that existed in the land of the Omushkegowak people, it is right there in the wilderness. And that’s their culture, that’s their lifestyle, that’s their land. When we say “lands and resources of the First Nation of Omushkegowak,” it’s right there, “culture wilderness”. Every inch of it, not necessarily square inch, but every area of it. It is there home, it is there lands. They have respected so far, long time ago, they haven’t destroyed it. So that’s where they practiced their cultural beliefs and their spiritual belief, and their Creator and the Great Spirit who oversees all things that we see.

So for their individual survival they have a certain rules to follow to establish their power to believe in dreams, acquiring things in dreams and understandings. To deal with
the things that are not explained, that they could not explain because of lack of science procedures. But to have at least satisfactory, satisfactory answers into the mind where they live, and it is there. So that’s what the, that was total culture was with the Omushkegowak.

So shamanism is a name, it’s the only name I could use in English. But in our language they called it mitewiwin. Then you call a person who has it as mitew. But mitew is actually a cultural identity. You are talking about the First Nation whether he is Omushkego or Ojibway but when you say “mitew” you are showing the respect of his make-up. You are not insulting, you are respecting the person when you say that. So it is not necessarily evil to be a mitew in those days. There were mitews who were very beautiful, who were very kind, very useful and beneficial to their families.

And so, once again I’m saying, the Omushkego did not use a large drum to sing, as we see it in the other tribes. No, they didn’t have that much. There is a story one, there is a story that I have heard once. I may have time to tell it here, just a minute [Louis checks to see if there is enough space on the tape to tell the story].

Ok, I think I have time to tell a story. There is a story about the clash between the Omushkegowak in the west coast of James Bay and southwest coast of Hudson Bay within the area of Cape Henrietta Maria to the York Factory. There has been clashes between the Inuit and the Omushkegowak. I have asked people “why, why did this happen?” I guess in time past the Inuit people have shared the resources on the shores of these two Bays. The Inuit people living on the ice mostly, they have shared the seals that are plentiful on the shores of the west of James Bay and also the southwest coast of Hudson Bay. So in times they were sort of fighting for these resources. They were trying to push of the Inuit people, try to push off or scare off the Omushkegowak away from those resources. And the Omushkegowak also did not want to be pushed off, because this is also their homeland. The ground is their homeland, the Inuit is on the ice and also, plus the land. The can survive on the ice. They can travel on the ice or as long as the ice is solid. And they eat polar bears, they eat walrus, they eat seals and there is fish in there. So that’s why they are sort of attached to it and they fight for it. So that is the reason one time they say at once they used to clash together. And sometimes they even attacked and ambush, the Inuit people ambushed the Omushkegowak to try to eliminate their problem. So the Omushkegowak being killed off without any mercy of course brought anger in them and revenge took place. And the revenge sometimes is very cruel. And it was those days that the story begin.

One time in the James Bay area, because the Inuit people used the in land which we call, “akaneskii” in James Bay and also those small islands. So they used to attack a small group of families and then the whole tribe began to aware of that and they were very annoyed and they said, “let us do something, let us so these people we are disagree of what they treated us.” He says, “let us kill them off if we can.” And it happens after the European came, because the Omushkegowak and also the Inuit did have a gun, not everybody. So when the west coast of James Bay people, in a place called Ekwan and Attawapiskat and Kashachewan, they came together and they said, “lets go attack the Inuit people in the Akimiski Island.” Akimiski Island, Inuit people used to live on the southeast end of the Akimiski Island and some of them to the north end. So they were always camping there during summer. And then the Omushkegowak decided to attack
them there. So they gathered the best 100 warriors which they are trained, great hunters. And they have also shaman powers. So they went half way to Moosonee area which they call “neow” mean “peninsula”. So they went there and they stopped there for 10 days. They drum, the war drum. They build a drum that is big and they drum all night, days. And they drum to establish, to encourage themself to go attack. After 10 days they set sail from the land in directly across the Island which is cannot be seen by the eye, so far. The distance may be more than 20 miles. So they said sail right into the end of the southeast coast of the Akimiski Island where the Inuit people were camping. So they went there and they killed them off, they wanted to kill them off, all of them. They had all the shaman power to use it and so does the Inuit people have it. They knew when they come, they prepared and they fight. And when they were pushed off into the water and there was still a few ice left around, the Omushkegowak chase off into the waters these people, women and children and all and they kill them. And some men and women, especially men who have the shaman power, just jump off into the water and turn into a seal and therefore could not be killed. So the Omushkegowak people failed to eliminate totally because of this shaman power.

So two stories here, quickly that I exposed. That the Omushkegowak people did have a large drum only for the sake of war drumming. They never used that for any other reason. That’s the only time that I ever been said they build and big drum, to build the courage to go and kill the Inuit people. So there was one story that stands out very openly. That’s one story. Another story is there existed in Moose Factory area the Omushkegowak people and also the east coast Cree people. The always encountered the Inuit people in Great Whale River. Just at that peak of that peninsula between Hudson Bay and James Bay that’s where the Inuit usually come. The main body of them was on the Belcher Island. And they come within the main land into the Great Whale River to hunt the whales and seals. And the Cree people used to be pushed down south or inland. Sometimes they clash, they fight. Sometimes there is a story that says, “the Omushkegowak people arranged the war party from Moose Factory from Moosonee area and then they gathered strength as those rivers up to the east coast and clash with the Inuit people in Belcher Island. That’s one story. We don’t know how true it is. But there is another story that says from within the west coast of James Bay, it was the west coast of James Bay after they push of the first part of the Akimiski Island, after they clear off the Inuit people, they scare them off into far up north, Inuit people did not stop harassing the Omushkegowak people on the south west coast of Hudson Bay and the west coast of James Bay. They usually attack the Inuit people from the Cape Henrietta Maria, where the ice always stucks during the month of June and July and part of August, before it’s melt. So they usually come across, travel across from Belcher Island and landed on this Cape Henrietta Maria and attacked the Omushkegowak people unexpectedly; all live on the south west coast of Hudson Bay and the west coast of James Bay. There are stories that have been told and sometimes these Omushkegowak people get so frustrated and made and they would organize the war party and they would travel across this land on the ice in June and to go attack the Inuit people at the Belcher Island. The story goes that they went successfully onetime, maybe 200 years ago and they kill most of them off. They did kill the leader, yes. And then to be so ridicule them they cook a one person, they eat the Inuit human body. Such dirty story, awful story. But it stop, it stopped the Inuit people
harassing the Omushkegos and the Omushkegos didn’t bother the Inuit people anymore. And that’s the second story.

Now the third story took place in York Factory area on this side to the east of York Factory. People were bothered by the Inuit people somehow. What year in the time, we don’t know. But one time there was another time that the Omushkegowak people had enough, too much. So they organized a war party. The go up into the Eskimo point, they call it today. They went to kill the Inuit people, as many as they can. Again, they eat ‘em. Just for the sake of, what do they call it, total humiliation. So those who have went there and they came back, they told a story they were asked, “how does the Inuit person taste?” So they say, “well, actually it is actually delicious, it is just like a red-throated loon.” So the quotation had always been existed and it is a great, nasty story behind it. So it has not been our favourite story. So I do now believe what the European people have come to conclude that the tribes, half the tribes did fight, did have a skirmishes amongst themselves which prevented them to have a strong nation and to be productive and industrious. So they have conclusion according to the history. It is maybe true, maybe what our Elders says in our Omushkego or the Plains Cree Elder that I listened to one time. He said, in 1976 he says, “the Great Spirit had give us the land to be a custodian over it, not to destroy it, but to keep it and to use it all. The Great Spirit has give us ‘till such time, until have we have visitors from an other land.” So, there was more quotation and there were more words in there but I do not push to use it in this tape recording. So anyway, our Elders have come to conclude that also. The time was there when the Great Spirit gave our ancestors to live in such a way as they were, to use all the land so it won’t be wasted. And that it will not be destroyed. That their would not be any city built or anything or altered as it is but to use as it has been created. Until such time they said. That time has changed. And today we see the truth. We see all the First Nation people have come to settle into community. Either by force by materialistically or by just losing power of the old tradition is gone. The old cultural beliefs and practices are forgotten and gone. Now these things that I am talking about, which they were so important into your culture make-up have now turned into a showcase. People get dressed up in the old ways, more exaggeratingly, just for the show, for the money. But the real truth about it is not there. So this is what I am aiming to do and this is what the Elders had told me that it was like that a long time ago. And they have their conclusion, they say, “the time has past to change, has come.” They say, “the time has come to change. That old culture has now past.” And they do not argue with that. So that is the reason. It seemed to indicate the truth that all the Elders have gone and all the skills that were required for that kind of life is gone. We are now different person. We are still the same tribes but we live differently. And that is the sad thing about that. And that is all I have to say for this recording and thank-you for listening.