Hello, Hello this is Louis Bird, here I come again. I have promised you that I will have only 3 tapes for this, for this report. This is a report for Canada Council. This additional tape that I make, it’s going to be very mixture of things. And I expect this tape to be in section, and it can be inserted in the right place of the total of three records that I have made. So again I will repeat myself quickly as an introduction thing, and whichever works best, it shall be put in the middle - in the beginning.

So if I begin by saying that this is a report for Canada Council which I received a grant from them and last year, I mind in August in 19, no August 2001 - help me to get rid of this 19 (laughter).

And the proposal that was submitted to Canada Council has stated that the job, the project was to start somewhere around early November. That was not possible quite that well because at that time I was very tied up into commitments. I did make a trip into Moose Factory in November, I think it is, whatever it is, December? I’m not too sure. It’s not in front of me, but I have a friend that I travel with who is going to know the date, I did not put in the date.

And, so Kimberley has a recording that we did in Moose Factory when we visit the students of Adult Education class and the date is there, but me of hand I don’t remember. So anyway, that was the first trip to go to Moose Factory and Moosonee, 3 days in Moosonee and 3 days at Moose Factory, in a total of 6 days for the trip, 7 days perhaps. And I was hoping to carry on and go on to Fort Albany to cash on the next, on the, on the following week after that. But due to my travel arrangements I had set the date when I will go back, and having done so many times with the Air Quebec, I that time, I just couldn’t do it. So I had to come back, and I could
not go away for the next 2 months. Next, I could not continue on to visit the community because there were many things that happens in between time.

I had made a trip, I made a trip in October I think to Winnipeg, and that is one reason that I could not go/start off early. I could not start off in October, when we get the money, when we receive the money from Canada Council, that was in August, I could have started off very early, but I did not because there was so many things that I have to do. And I have make trips and many other things and this was my problem. And it was the same thing in the month of January, and there were things that I have to do in between, and I couldn’t arrange my trip that would fit, and I keep on getting other invitations to go to the meetings. And at times I had to make my, I had to meet my appointment with the Doctor in February which I went to see him in Kingston and using that trip to go accomplish another thing. So anyway, I just briefly mention those things, these are not to be written in my report.

Here is the thing that I wanted to illustrate, I want to go back to the some people that I met when I made the trip down to Moosonee and also in-between trips that I have made. When I make arrangement to, when the arrangement was made for me to attend the meeting, usually I run into the Elders that I know from James Bay, and then I usually sit with them and talk about my project and also the idea of writing the history of our people from James Bay lowland. Most of them, writing a history is something that they don’t understand, they don’t see the value in it really, but they do no see to hear the legends that we got from James Bay lowland, because they heard them too, they have heard them when they were small and they were young, and they known them almost by heart. It’s not much use reciting the whole legend to them because they know it. All we have to do amongst ourselves that way is to take a high point, or comical, or most funny part in the story to entertain our self. That is what mostly what we do, but to sit down and recite a whole, the whole legend it’s not possible and it’s not necessary between the two of us, when I meet some Elders from James Bay, outside of James Bay.

I met some Elders in Thunder Bay and I met some Elders in Kingston, not complete Elders, but the middle age group who knew about stories and knew some of the stories that I know. They were from Moose Factory, they were from Attawapiskat, and from those places, the
patients that are there in Kingston, so I talk with them and I explain my effort to write the history of the Omushkego people. Quite a few of them do not quite get it, they don’t see that as important, but there are a few that thinks it is important. There are those who said, get the habit of talking about money, so they said yes, I could make money if you write a book. But that is not important for me, getting money is not the key thing for myself. The most important thing myself is to write the history that was oral up to now, and besides that, knowing that, knowing that the history of our people has come to an end for the last ten years as the nomad people. The nomadic way of life has come to an end, literally about 20 years ago. And so, having that experience and seeing it and happens in front of me, I have decided that it is important to start writing our history on paper in any form. Whether it’s loose-leaf, or a bond like a binder, or even if it’s in a file or book form, or any form, as long as it’s written.

It would be very authentic if it was written by hand in Cree first, but I have never found any one to do that except one old man who write mostly about his opinion and his life story. But that is not exactly what I was looking for. I was looking for the history of our people before the European came, before. Everything what they did, everything that they do, the medicine, the healing, the process of the dream quest for shamanism, the process of dream vision, what this that really mean to explain that. And also the subject of hunting, what is the idea of the good hunter, when is a person begin a man in our culture, how old is a person is to be considered a man and what skill should he have till he can come to the state that he be called a man. Usually in our history when a youngster or young boy begin to grow up, usually he learns the process of growing up and size, capability, and according to the conditions where he lives. And finally, by the time when he is 20 he is about or knew almost everything how to survive in the wilderness. And by this time he would have acquired a capability to survive and also to be a protector. And also at the age of marriage, much more so favorable for him to wait another 10 years, if it’s possible so he can get married when he is 30 years old, just when he is at the high peak of his physical strength. And that was the proper way, that was the custom.

But as it is today, some young people, young women get married very early age, 20 (laugher). Today, he will get married at the very latest at age of 15, so the life is different.
Anyway, that is a fact and these are the things that I wanted to include in a short report, I can not do that, the stories that I hear about are very long, and how to put them into a written form is another matter. But for me to tell them it’s alright, I can do that, I can just speak. I can correct myself when I am wrong with the tape recorder. But to have written down and hold my pen and think what I’m going to write next, it’s also take an effort. Besides, I’ve never been a writer, that’s the reason. So, I’m thinking about those things. How do you write a history, why should we write the history now, why is it important to have an Omushkego person to write. Because that is usually more authentic, it’s written by an experienced person, experienced in culture who actually feels emotionally, and physically, and spiritually, and all its total ness of the culture. And for a person to be able to write that and to express it his own way, in his own language and the language the fits with that kind of culture. And it is only the language that could only describe the picture it in words, but not in writing because we have never learned to write our stories. We had only learned and grew up to listen to stories and to use stories to express something, or to carry a message, or to keep the message in our mind. So the legends are more like a book, more like a material where the stories are kept, but the stories are kept in the legends. The teaching method of our culture is contained in the legends, that I have come to understand that, and that is the reason that I come to think I should write a story that we have, and that we will finally in the paper rather then in the stories. The teaching system the information that once required to survive on the land. Every aspect of the individual spiritually and physically and how do you bring those in parallel of true face of life. I mean to say physical life and spiritual life, how can you bring them together? That is what I am talking about.

And that is why I find it so important to do that. And I have tried, I have heard many stories, I think I almost heard everything there is to hear when I was young and when I got older, when I get to be 25 years old, I have heard many stories, and when I get much older, when I get to be about 45, I still hear the stories, but learn much more about our culture then I did when I was 25. So actually our cultural education never actually end, we always learn something every year, something new, something that was there that you did not encounter in your early years of your life and these are the kinds of histories that will carry down in the same process, the same
method as been used to carry the education system within, within the culture, within the tribes. So this is what I am talking about. And that is what I want to be written in the language because only the Cree or Omushkego language can fulfill that culture. Only the Cree language can express totally about our history, all of it if we can use all the things that are will there, if we can freely express what we want to put into a paper, and then we will not have missed anything. But if there is so much restriction, if there is so much secrecy then it’s not possible to do it. Why is there secrecy? Why is it the shamanism is considered taboo in one part, and total power in the other, and total awesome thing and full of pride and individual and so dramatized so highly, so powerfully and still want to keep secret about it. This is the question that has to be overcome and this has to come in time, maybe now is a time to write those things that were secret because why? Because it is now today in period in time when the First Nation have abandoned their totality of their culture, they do not practice their living culture any more, we do not, we the Omushkegos especially. We were the last ones to abandon it, we abandon our cultural activities in 1955. Before that we still carried on the same way we used to do, but we were much more well equipped. We had European equipment, we had canvass, and we had a few process food for example flour, and then we had a very compact lard, which very key food stuff in our culture and then we do have other process food that is very light to carry around. And then we also had a luxury item, which we call sugar. So the most important process food we obtain from the trading company was: flour, oats, lard, with baking powder, and sugar, and tea; six items, they were the most important for us. Out of these six items, a person can create a small lunch and to sustain them through the day until he get his original food which is the animals he kills hunted, and also the fish he can catch and the other kinds of species that he uses as a food. All these has to be written down in detail in the ways these things are used. In the way you are able to learn in the land to catch them and what year, what part of the year do you are, you able to catch those animal species or fish or waterfowl.

And then to talk about other survival skills in wanting to survive on the land is also very important, that is how do you navigate your territory. How do you learn to go exactly how you want you to go. Do you, do the First Nation called ‘can’t get lost’? (Laughter) Yes, they can get
lost but not tragically, perhaps they can just don’t get exactly where they want to sleep at night, but generally they can find exactly where they want to go. In fact, the First Nation in the real meaning way, never get lost because he has no stable home, no stationary home. Where ever he stop, that’s his home, so actually he never gets lost. So this is real, a real culture, this is real, this is not imaginary thing because as I say like animals that migrate, animals like geese, Canada geese do have a specific place where they land, where they eat, where they molt, where they spend the season. They do have special stopping places, but the Omushkego really it doesn’t matter where he stop if he wants to stop and winter camp here, he can do that because he has the skill to survive. He can winter camp any other place where it’s surrounding areas, where he can survive from. So therefore, the First Nation is that kind of, during of that period, actually never get lost, can’t get lost, because you actually ain’t home all the time.

And then to go to the other part of this culture is that spiritual part which we have deal in this report. And how do you go about getting that. We have outlined a little bit how we do, how a person care about it, and how our ancestor did use and follow the process that has been followed ages, long, long time ago by our ancestors. And we have outlined the purpose of this thing, why does a person have to have a Shaman or Mitewin in his life? We have said, a body has a limit, has no further what it can do, but the spiritual will exist in the mind of each individual will have an extra power, the will to live, the will to survive is there and that will is added by establishing the faith or the belief in one person and can transform the extra energy in the physical being and that is why this Shaman or the Mitewin is required. That is doesn’t require every individual to master, to be a master Mitewin, no. One person may be two person in a family, may be three perhaps, that’s enough, to have, always have an Elder is a must. We also have to depend on the Elder in any group in any area, because he is a walking library! (Laughter) A walking wisdom, a live wisdom and he gives advice to survive and that is the reason our ancestors always taught their children to respect an Elder, no matter what kind of an Elder, not only their own grandfather but another Elder at the same age group as their grandfather. This is a very powerful teaching and it must be obeyed by every youngster, and that is how I was trained myself, that I should always listen and respect any Elder that is same age as my grandfather,
regardless who he is and regardless of how funny character he might be or how wrong can he be at times. You are trained to listen to this old man, or an Elder, an older lady. You must not make fun of the old lady, or any old man, you must not laugh at them, how they appear, how they look and how they behave. If they grouchy as they get old, you must respect them, because you never know what they feel, they may have a disease within that you do not feel, they may have something that happens during their life time that has injured their mind and their body, and therefore at time they begin to be grouchy because of those things. So for that reason our parents used to teach us to respect Elders, to be kind to them, to be helpful to them, to assist them when they need help when you are around, and this is an important teaching. It’s one of the principal in teaching, and one of the list of code of ethics. We do have, yes we the Omushkego people have the code of ethics, they are similar like the 10 commandments, but they are not brought out as the 10 commandment. It is not stated to say that these have been written by the finger of God, no we, our Ancestors did say that. But they have strong expressed these principal things in life, which they have followed. And in words that are same English they are code of ethics. I think that is the right word. I have written them very briefly at one time because I wanted to show the young people the things that came from our ancestors in order to survive in the customs and the rules to follow. The morality of life and that is why I did that but also to prove that these things can be written.

It was 1965 that I begin to think that everything about the Omushkego culture should be written down before we lost all the Elders. I have repeated myself 100 times, I will say it again, that to be written the culture totally rightly, it has to be in Cree, the Omushkego language. Yes, it is possible to do it in English, yes, life I do speak about those things, I can express it very, very well in English because I have been blessed to learn and able to speak in English, a little bit any way. So this is what is actually a back up tape for what I have tried to put into my report. And I want to include some other things I wanted to say, I wanted to quote some Elders that I have remembered partially what they say.

There is this man who I have spoken to in Attawpiskat, the man called John Matinas. I have met his father, his father’s name was Albert Matinas, he was a well known person, he was
well know, I mean comedian sort of. He always have that nature of making you laugh and he expresses the present opinion about anything very openly, he is not afraid to express his opinion. He was, yes, he was a wise man because he was getting older and he has became wise because he grew up as a orphan. He have not his father when he was young and he was raised by different group of people and he has acquired many knowledge, many skills from other people, and suffered a lot of a love. He was denied of motherly and fatherly love in his young days and therefore had required quite a bit of this Mitewin, but he was one of the good one. But had some faults in him, he believe in Mitewin, he believe, but I don’t know how much he practice it. But he know very well about it, and his fault that I remember is that he likes to tease, he likes to tease a man which he thinks is not quite right minded person. And as a result there is a story about him scaring his fellow trapper in this area one spring that he actually scared the man, scare the hell out of him, scares the trap line out of him, but I mean to say that they were trapping on their trapping line and this man was with him and he begin so serious in saying the words of threat and that, the man, took off into the wilderness and found himself in the far distance of the community. And this happens inland up the river at Attawapiskat, of Attawapiskat and in the spring camping that is at the end of April. And then because he repeated say, stated the word for him, for that person to hear and actually believe what he was saying. Because this man was not, should I say, he is more like a child, his mind is like a child, not crazy but limited in mind and easily persuaded by words and by action and this is what happen. So he got scared, and he was sacred that he was going to be threatened his life, so he took off without very much of the things to survive. And then he ended up in Fort Severn which is about 200 miles distance in that condition of area in the spring time when there is so much water, when it is so hard to travel and he survive, and he ended up in Fort Severn and never returned because he was afraid and he says these people were I spend spring camping with wanted to kill me. And he quoted the old man saying that he was supposed to be killed, and for what reason he didn’t know. So he got scared and he took off, so this is the man that I am talking about, and Elder who is respected in the community and wise in many ways have abused his Elderness. To make a person, should I say? What do you call this kind of person? A person who has a childish mind sort of, to make him
believe what he says is true and that is the thing that he did not recognize it was effective because he was a respect man, and the result is that.

And this is one Elder of being carelessness what he stated, or what he say, or what he act in front of individual in which he did not quite understand, I mean the results of it he didn’t understand. Maybe he didn’t care, maybe he though it was just full of jokes and that’s exactly what he said he was doing. He said “I was only joking, I was only having fun.” And apparently the man who was mentioned was this man.

I did not want to mention the name but I will name the person that I am talking about. The Elder that scared the man, his name is Albert Matinas and the man who got scared is Alex Kino [?]. He settled in Fort Severn, and I think he got married there and had passed away already. He was a middle aged man, he lived a few years and I don’t know exactly what happened to him, but that is where he ended up. He never returned to Attawapiskat where he was originally from. So this is what the mistake an Elder can do, he can cause a lot of problem and not realize what he is doing until so late. That is why some Elders have to be very careful what they act and what they say, and this is what I am afraid myself. What ever I say in this story has to be conveyed from other person, from other person who tells a story, that I do not create story by myself, and that is why I do not wish to mention a person’s name because I do not want to dishonor his name or his being. If it’s a negative situation like the one I just finished telling, so being an Elder is not an easy thing, and that is the reason why many of those Elders that I have interviewed, that I have wanted to interviewed declined to be recorded. And even declined to speak to me some of them because they are afraid that they might be ridiculed or even threatened what they have said.

So this is very strong in this area, in our Omushkego land. It is very existent, it existing here and rumors can be very dangerous. Bad rumors, and accusations, even in jokingly can be very hurtful to individual and that is, one has to consider when you want to be telling a story. And that is one of the reason why also it is much better if you do not mention the name unless the person actually give the permission that you can use his name. The reason why I can name these
two men is because they are already passed away, nothing is going to hurt them in this world anymore because they are already gone to the next world. And that is one example that I wanted to bring out of being an Elder and being, to tell the story, the real story that is true you know just recently. That is why I don’t want to speak to the recent the history, I only want to speak only the very old, before the European and after contact, maybe at least 200 years past, before 200 years ago. It’s better because most of the people that I involved in the story have already passed away and their remaining descendants are not so much to be hurt if they heard the story about their ancestors. And that is why I, that is one thing that I wanted to express in this report; to be very careful and not to mention someone’s name.

And so the man that I begin was John Matinas. John Matinas is a different person, John Matinas is a very well liked person, he is easy going kind of a person. He can say things which actually doesn’t hurt anyone, and he’s very willing to console a person who is having a problem. That is a reason that they have put him that position of counselor for the youth in this community. And that is the reason why he can put up with the hardship of keeping his grandchildren in his home. So its not that I want to put him down that I mention my visit with him, but it was just an unfortunate matter. But hopefully in time this situation may change for his better, for his life better.

And then there is this man that I want to return to is Joseph Kataquabit. Quite a few people consider him as absent him person or shall I say mentally retarded person, people consider him that. But to my opinion he is the most clear minded person to remember the past, he can quote it his, a person a long time ago. And he can carry on the story from the, such person he quoted and he doesn’t mind telling a story about his grandfather and his grandfather’s actions, and all this and the same age group. He doesn’t mind naming them or telling a story about his own grandfather where he did wrong, and that’s one of the reason that I like to listen to him because I am the same way. I don’t mind to tell the story about my grandfather, my grandmother where they had been wrong, and had been kind of out of line. I forgive them, I don’t even have to judge them, I just have to say they are human after all. They did make a mistake, and that is the thing that I have learned a lot. We will stop here for a minute.
Ok, here is the last part of this side of the tape recording. I was thinking about while I have lunch what did I miss by talking about this, by remember the people I speak to in which I didn’t record. There was this man in Moosonee Alfred Itoo. He was talking about him being trapping up in Attawapiskat area in his trapping area. And he used to tell me that they went to Winisk once, at least when he was younger. And we talked about people who lived in that area. So he also mentioned this man what they call George Wabano who lived in that west, northwest from XXMahoganikXX and he said that man was a great Mitewin. So many people mention this guy that he was suppose to be a great Mitewin, and they are very proud of him but it not because he did a good thing that they were proud of him but that he was defending. Some other Mitewin challenged the people around the area and he was able to defend him from a distance and this was something that, another thing that I want to include whether we can call that is it right for someone to kill someone from the distance if he was not bothered? But the idea is that he was using his power to defend the people who were molested by this Mitewin which used to be exactly the way people used to do long time ago. These are the most outstanding stories that we hear about distance Mitewin coming and bothering the Omushkego Mitewin, whichever they come from. And the Omushkegos they say just don’t retaliate but they defend themselves and sometimes they give him the advantage, give them the advantage to be beat them. Rather then be provoking, it’s totally, it’s totally different from the other person we talked about by the way of Kishewiniam Grand William who used to more like looking for trouble just because he want to prove himself that he is still good. But the Wabano, we didn’t hear it the story for him to do that. We didn’t hear anything about that, we always have a, as a defender. It has been said that once upon a time this William was provoking someone or challenging some Mitewin from a distance and he was beaten. He was going to die, he was going to be killed. And in that time George Wabano who was also called each other my cousin with this man, George Wabano apparently knew this thing happening and from a distance saw his cousin was beaten, surely to die. So from there, from his own home ground he defended his partner and therefore even he say he revive him from the dead. Apparently Mr. William have died already from his defeat and then he come to life again from the power of the great Mitewin that they talk about. Yes, it is the same
Wabanoo family that we have in Peawanuck but this was about 1800. So that is one short story that we heard and this is from the story that this man reminded me of when I hear mention this George Wabano. Whatever reason we come to mention this guy, he told very quickly he says that Kishe-, Mishimitew That Great Mitewin. So I used to hear that word all the time. Apparently the Grand William was a Mitewin to be concerned with. So that’s the end of this part of a story which I wanted to insert many things to try to explain about the Mitewin. Okay? So we turn this tape and we go on. [end of tape]

Hello, Hello again this is Louis Bird and it is one o’clock exactly on Monday June 3, 2002. I have been with this thing from 9:00 in the morning or 8:00 trying to finish the story. Anyway, this tape number four tape is only extra tape, what do we call? We call this supplementary tape. In there, in the first three tapes there will be some information here that can be inserted in the, between those three, three tape recordings, and those 3 tapes records are and can be edited and take out some and fill some from here that will fit, that is sort of editing we call it.

And so, I wanted to put these stories here that are taken place before the European contact and then after. So this man George Wabanoo came to the area of Ekwan River somewhere around 1812 and he lives in the Waskatame they call that lake where the hill that located to the north east and that hill was suppose to be his place to recharge his (laughter) his Mitewin, recharge his batteries. (Laughter). Anyway, that is where is used to go to, around that area to do a dream vision this time, this is not a dream quest, it’s a vision, he goes there to have a vision, goes there to have a vision.

And another story that we hear about this man, you know he lives recently, after the European, after Christianity he was there. But originally he was from, what do they call that place Winisk Lake? I think they call it Winisk Lake but they call is Webique another word. So that is where he originally came from, so he came down the Ekwan and begin to stick around and got stuck in with the people and joined the groups. And he begin as a Attawapiskat band member at 1934, 1930 during the adhesion treaty and then finally his descendant, his son Jacob Wabano did remain in the Attatwapiskat band and his George son Xavier Wabano joined the
Winisk band later. And Jacob Wabano, George son did not bother to join the Mitewin, he just remain Catholic, and that how recently the Mitewin exist in this area. And the hills we see around this area, they were usually used as a dream vision area where people go to renew their spirituality - or as they call fasting. So this important thing that I am getting at, what I am getting at is this Shamanism didn’t die right away, it remain with the people who live in the bush. George Wabanoo did not stay in the community all the time, he just goes there to trade and then back again. Many people live in the wilderness all year round, not necessary into the Bay, but around the places, and this is their home, and this was one of them. And that’s how recently people stopped using living by the land. And that’s where this Mitewin existed only there if you are connected to the land and that’s where the thing will come to you or you could establish it there. So I keep on saying this. So that’s one story that I want to put in here, but that’s not all, there is this story about this man. It would be a story in it’s self if we are going into every detail about this man. But I only want to put in one of the high points.

And his son, one of his sons that I say before, his name was John Wabano. He was the one who take the example of his father George and he became a Mitewin. But John was, shall I say he didn’t use it aggressively, his power, he used it for his hunting, and trapping and he was known to be the best trapper. He was very skilled trapper and they say he applied his Mitew into that, but he was not a very sharing person, it’s very unfortunate to contradict those people when we hear so much as about First Nation cultural philosophy. Saying sharing is our thing, sharing everything, sharing the resources and all of this. But this man according to the story, he did not share very willing, in fact he got what they call pastaahowin because he did not give a food to some person who need and had made fun of him, and for that reason he dies of starvation. Not necessarily died of starvation, but he was weak and maybe apparently he had a heart trouble at the same time, so he dies as the, what do we say? The reason we say, the reason he died due to starvation or weakness he died. So we see, here is another Mitew who has been very noble, I mean ordinary but has the power and use it in proper but still has the character that didn’t show very much during his life, according to the end the of his life came out, and sort of, people believe it died because of that.
Our teaching, our custom is to teach people never to, not to commit blaspheme action or even words. “Do not blaspheme against humans”, it says, “do not commit any blaspheme action”, that’s what our code of ethics would have written. But this is one of those because this man did against this thing and he died from it. People think he died because of that, perhaps maybe it was his time, so anyway this happens recently. It happens in, shall I say, somewhere around 1930, thereabouts. So that’s how, that’s another person that was known to have retained such a Mitewin in that area.

And we have Sandy Metat and he have also, we have mentioned a little bit about other peoples, but I hope these names are not written down, just keep fictitious name or you could say another man. And then the story that I hear from John Coe, from him in Winisk before the flood. Here is a man that move in from Fort Severn in 1948, so he came to Winisk on a urging of a priest by the name of Father Morin who was trying to build a church in Fort Severn, trying to convert people but did not have much choice, I mean chance luck. There was already members, maybe one family was there with the Catholic Christianity and he had children and that’s why he was doing that. And he build a small church and also his residence at that time, and that’s when John Coe was in need of help because somehow he had lot his wife years back there somewhere and he has 3 children, 3 of 4? I’m not so sure. I’m sure he had one son and two daughters and they were only between 8 to 12 thereabouts. So he brought them home, he brought them to Winisk with the help of the priest, and it was this man that I managed, that I used to know him. Every year I used to speak him in the store anywhere, and he was a very well liked person and he always joke around, and I never really take him seriously as an Elder because he never seemed to be an Elder. And then he had a reputation of trying his luck on women (laughter) and that was the outstanding character of this guy. And people used to laugh at him, not openly, but at his back, back stabbing thing. But he didn’t know that and we didn’t know how old he was, he did know himself. Originally as a boy he was raised at York Factory and if he was actually was the age they say he was, he was 69 at that time, but he says that is not my age he says I’m a way older then that. But it seems to me that it is true because his story bring him back to be about 85, and that was 1986. If he was 85, he could have been born around 1901 or thereabouts. And maybe
less then that, maybe 1926 maybe he was born. Because by the time this thing happened with him he was 6 years old, about 6 because he didn’t remember.

And this is a story that he told me just Jan, Feb, Mar, April, May, June, July, August, seven months before he died. It was in January. One day I visit him in his home and sit there early morning and listen to this old man. And I was asking him this question I say have you ever heard any strange stories about Shamanism or Mitew there was some in York Factory. So he says, oh don’t say that he says, there were lots of them but he says actually I didn’t see one in action. But I just remember when I was young, he says, that were such things but I didn’t understand what was happening. So he is the man who describe the shaking tent, but this particular time it was the defense kind of usage. Because these group of people, there was three families, one of them his father and his mother, and then the other two families, and an extra old lady was kept there whoever her mother it was, the three men. And they had 3 teepees in the group and that fall he says, in the fall when we went up the river to go winter camping, as we leave the village we begin to notice that we couldn’t kill anything. They said we didn’t know themselves. And then he says, they had this very limited supply of process food from the store which they charged to their account. And after a month, or perhaps or sometime they left in September, and September can still be summer and October to 15 or 20. So at least a month anyway they stayed in the bush, which is not far from York Factory village. And he says we begin to feel the strangulation or starving almost because nobody can kill any food. Everybody cannot kill anything, even the rabbits, even the fish, and even beavers or anything what they would trap or hunted, they could not kill. So they begin to experience starvation, and it was in the week or after 3 weeks in time when their provision was getting, dwindling down and apparently, because that is what his father tell him. And it was at that time when they were really feeling hungry when that said to themselves, you know, which one of us cased this? Nobody said anything first. They finally know that something is wrong one of us is doing something wrong. So they begin to talk to each other to try to remember what they do wrong. So there is one man finally talk, and he says, “Well the only thing I can say me is for that I have insulted a man from up the river somewhere, and Elder that I have done something wrong with him and I am sure that
he is a Mitew and I have insulted his dignity and for this reason he is punishing me and along with you people.”

So they said, well this cannot go on, we cannot go on starving, we can’t even trap if we don’t have any basic food to go with, and he can’t even catch the fish, how are we going to survive? This person is going to kill us, apparently it seems like he is not going to let up, so they said what can we do. The three men and also the others, they talked about it and how can we defend ourselves? So they begin to talk about their period in dream quest, has anyone of us ever dreamed of using the shaking tent? All three of them have basically have a formation of a dreams about shaking tent. But actually how they use it, is something they didn’t actually have it clear in their mind. So one of them did have enough for him to try to use the shaking tent for their defense, so they finally coax each other, they said let’s build one. So they build it the way the person has dreamt and the way he heard, and they way the stories went and then he just follow the instruction that he had for it. And after it was done, he says, “I can not go in it alone, and this teepee structure that we make, it’s for offensive use - defensive and offensive.”

He says it will have lots of power, it will bring a lot of power if we can survive at all. He say, I will go in but I will need someone to assist me inside who will come with me. So he pick up his partner and he left John’s father alone, he says; “You can stay here outside, just in case we don’t go through with this, if we die, at least you will have manly power to go home and report and then take our families back.” So it was agreed. And they also depended upon this old lady that was there, so she agreed to sit there and watch. So John says that’s how my father described it, he says. So sure enough once they established the shaking tent and two people walk in and say farewell to each other for the good luck and everything, because they are sure if they could do it. And then, once they got in, and that was a time when John himself as a boy, 5 year old 6, was just coming out into the bush from behind there, sneak out from his house or mother had let me because she thought he was going to have his last pee. So his mother says, come in soon, so he run out and run down to the place where they have the teepee, the shaking tent, to see what’s going on. And just when he got there, they were just going in, he says. And a small talk with my father with those two and then finally they went in. And my father shut the door and
nailed it back to hold it firming. And he had watched, John had watched this establishing this teepee and then after that when the two men went in for a little while there was nothing happening. And then all of a sudden it was like a thunder. Even most like the lightening he says, but I don’t know for sure if was lightening says and thunder came in and then teepee come to lit, more like a light. You know like a light inside. And begin the bunch mean full of air. And it start to shake as if the wind is full of it and that is when I hear the voices, he says. Some animal voices first of all of all kinds, some of it that I don’t recognize, and then finally the human voice and everything, and then finally there exciting voice and then all of a sudden there was the Cree language. And everybody speaks it, there is so many people inside and they begin to argue, and argue, and argue for long time. And there was always argument that goes back and forth and the teepee goes was just simply ready to bust and it was squeaking, he says and you can actually hear those things that they used to tie together. For example the dog chains were used to be tie in the middle so it wouldn’t break. You can hear the chains clinking, he says in strain and that’s how powerful that thing is. And because of the argument and everything, he says; “I begin to overcome by my fear and I just run home as fast as I can, and I just jump into our teepee and I was, I apparently showed quite about to my mom that I was scared.” So my mom have, didn’t pity me to much, she says, “Do you see, I told you not to go there now you see what happens. So that’s his story. And then he says later in the years, when I was about 15, 20 year old, no, 15 I think he says even before that I managed to ask my father about the time I remember the teepee you made and the things that happened and the noises. And then my father say, “You remember?” Yes, I said, John says yes I said. And then I asked him what was it and that’s where he heard the story about why did it come about. And when he finished the story I said what happened. And he said apparently the other people, there were 3 or 5 other people who came into these area and begin to provoke our group of people and harass them with their power because they have been insulted.

And so, when we come to the near starvation and my father says it was time for retaliate or to try to defend ourselves because we may die together anyway. So apparently after he says, John says this thing goes on for about 3 or 4 nights. Finally he says it was over. So the people
say they have succeed, they have beaten the other group and that was around 1930, he was only about 6 years old, 6 or 5. But 1930, thereabout, he says he was not sure. I don’t know, I really don’t know about the age how old he see or what he was. I was born in 1934 and he died in 68, I was 16, 17 years old. So anyway, the story is like that. So this is a story about the way people experience with this Mitewin. It’s nothing to be brag about, it’s nothing to think it’s was it a holy fact. (Laughter) Was it the only thing to kill a thing a person out there in the distance or to argue with someone at a distance who tried to kill you or starve you and make you angry and to set up this tent and fight it out in front of the young people and everything? It was not a very nice thing to do

So here is another picture what this shaman or Mitewin can do. How do you judge about this thing. Do you say that it is proper, it is justifiable, it might be because even the European culture 200 years ago in America or any other place across the ocean or even in the middle east to just, 1940 maybe more, people still believe it is justifiable to kill a man if he steals something or if he doesn’t. In the United States, in the early days before the formation of the state or even after, people used to hang themselves, people used to kill, and provoke each other into killing, range wars and other stuff, gangsters. This is happening and that is not Mitewin, that was simply a bad situation. So this Mitewin it’s very hard to say a bad thing that it is bad for sure to kill a person in, by any means. If you kill a person or cause a person to die because you created a fear in him is that right? Is it right to do that? That is a question that I have. So somehow the subject of Mitewin the way it was, can not be fitted into this modern age or could it? It is the same thing that we have today. The moral teaching in the European style has been brought into us, our ancestors which well structured and well organized and the church teaches and it carries Ten Commandments from God which has been handed down to the Jewish. And it stated thou shall not kill. All these things did say.

Ok, that is only one commandment that says that nobody should kill a person. But when you look at those, when you look into the Old Testament when read it, there is some, what do you call that? There is an exception, that one person can kill a man if he wants to kill him to defend himself. So it lives today, today it is allowed for the person to kill a person if person is
threatening him. Where he believe he can be killed without just cause, without any reason, without him creating the situation. Whatever the reason, I don’t know, I don’t understand these white man’s law. And so it is the same thing with our First Nations the code of ethics, the customs, that’s is what they do. They say if a man is to harm you with his power of Mitewin and if you are able to defend yourself, you have a right to kill the person who does that. Or if you could have a power enough to just to teach him not to do it again, that is also allowable. So these are the things that are there that are not well defined to be because they have been forgotten but they are, they were there when I was young, I used to hear some Elders talk about this thing. And you could also hear them even in legends, it is where you hear those things. But at the time when I was young, I didn’t understand. But as I get older, and hear it and examine much more closer to what the legends said, then you begin to see what they mean.

So here, is one example about the Mitewin on the negative part of it. So there is this thing, there is this the European system of something when you work hard, plan a project or skimming. There is always that method of positive and negative, okay? Now, if we talked about Mitewin, what is the positive of this Mitewin? And what is the negative side of the Mitewin, and that is the question that is the thing that I am going after. Can we find that? Can we set it up and examine it and the First Nation can sit down together and agree between them or agree all across Canada different tribes to say? ‘Let this be so, let this be the negative side, and this is a positive side.’ And that positive side may fit well into the Christianity that should be adapted, but to create, to create and begin to process by blending the forbidden, what do you call this, belief, to start to blend into Christianity now without any proper examination, that is what I question. Is it right or do we want to accomplish anything that is right or shall we simply just let go to the young people just to follow what they hear and try to imitate what they hear, or just allow they to ritualize what they hear and let them be satisfied what they think it is. For example, I went to the pow-wow one time in Winnipeg, I went to witness this, the great feast. And I saw many dances, this has to do with the customary dance, the dances that people used to carry and the way they dress. Dresses that they wear and the way they wear things, feathers and things and all that. And I sat there and look at them, most of these were in flashy dresses that they have, what do they call
it, regalia. It’s all partially made from the European material, the cloth, the jingles, the beads, the bells, and all these are created by the European artists. And these were assembled together to be used in this dance and myself, and me always questions things I say, I wonder exactly how they fit this idea and then that was as far as I thought about that and then I saw these young people dancing with a very nice dress or regalia I mean, and some of them have feathers in their heads, and some have it strung up somewhere, so I asked one of the young man who dances who comes and sits down close to me and I ask, “may I ask” and he says, “yes, of course” I said when you create, who created your costume and he says, “I did.” I say how do you create your costume? He says by finding the material and I said is there a merit by someone culturally, culture values? Do you mend these things like a feather? Does one feather mean anything, or design or these things. And he ways, No, no such thing, I just make my costume and I just dance. And I says what about the dance, you have a basic, a basis of dancing that you join in and people use? And he says, not that I know of he says, just that I am simply enjoying my dance. (Laughter)

So that’s what I mean ritualizing the traditional activities, that is fine. It’s fine, it’s a show, but that is not what the real thing. So what do we do when the young people begin to take this seriously, when they think this is my custom, my religion, my spiritual salvation and they only have this. If they only have to find the material themselves to have the regalia. to have the custom which is not traditional stuff. That is what I am asking and that is why I wanted to gather some Elders in James Bay and talk about this, but it didn’t turn out to be. The mistake was that we never chose, we never select any Elders to do this. We just grab the Elders that were there and when he come in, when we throw these questions to this quick formation of think tank amongst those, the thinking was split the think was split and the time didn’t hold. (Laughter) And it didn’t turn out, so there two that simply didn’t hear the Mitewin and traditional activities because they were truly, surely, thoroughly being Christianized, and nothing else matter to them and the simply don’t want to talk about it. And the other two is me included, and this other person are flexible and his partially flexible but didn’t have acquired such a wide scope of vision or understanding or mental, mental horizon as I have, and sort of limited. And then the other person simply didn’t care because she never really didn’t care about the traditional stuff and
never really bother about other Christian activity anyway. So he was there alone by himself and he was not participating, he was just sitting and when I tried to start a conversation and try a subject that I may need him today, some, not a debate, but a discussion, it turns out to be a heated debate. At this agreement split and everything. We tried it about 3 times but it always ends the same way and some times even simply in frustration give it up.

And that was the reason I do that, I had these questions and I was thinking maybe I could assist my culture and today’s problem that we have with our youth in our alcoholic problems and substance abuse in communities because of the culture shock that we experience by abandoning our migrating lifestyle into community living, that is what cause all those things. And that is why I was seeking some kind of basis of, a base where a person can stand to deal the problems that he encounters with culture shock. But those Elders that we have, that we have pick for this purpose, the event they didn’t understand, there was too much, they were more like a Christian preachers and this is all they want to know. And I don’t mind them, they are truly Christian people, nothing else matter to them, but they are very strong preachers and against these alcoholism and everything in their community, but only on one, only one tools they use, that’s true Christianity. With a powerful statement and scary tactics, I don’t think scary tactics is so different for the young people. Many times I have advised by a young group as well as young mothers that what actually the youth are looking for is an Elders advice by understanding, by loving young people not condemning them, but we the Elders in Omushkego communities tend to have this system of condemning and down rotting the young people because they are functioning well. They way we expect them in the eyes of Christianity. So it is very difficult for the young people to, to try to find their own to assist themself. That’s what I see and that’s what some young people say that. It’s help they are looking for not damnation. But our Elders in James Bay lowland, as I said before, they thoroughly have been, they left the spiritual practices in which their grandfathers have used to survive. They have already rejected. And there is no other, except the Christianity that you have to use in community living. Christianity is very nice. Christian teaching is very nice, the man called Jesus will teach his people how to live, really, did not say anything bad. And that is the only church that is really have that kind of thing to say that
is impossible to follow that says that if any body ever slap you on the check, then turn the other check, very impossible to do that, especially for the Omushkego people because they were so proud. If you listen to me awhile ago I told a story about how the Mitewin reacted the other stuff. How is was treated. He will only take so much and then after that he will turn around, he didn’t turn the check, he just simply hid that. So that’s our custom, our ancestors custom. And so that’s what the young people are looking for, that is what they want, they want an answer, they want somewhere there, if it is any good at all. But they don’t have that information the way the Elders are behaving the way they are asked to provide some information. So this is my statement. And this why I wanted to see the Elders in the community hopefully to find this body of Elders to sit down together to set aside their difference, to set aside their devotion to Christianity and simply deal the Mitewin problem that now blend so much of the Christian damnation. To set aside their bible statement because that is not what we are seeking at this moment. It is what the young ones are asking. So we can discuss the situation and try to help each other to understand so that we can find an answer and present it to the young people, and also the Church leaders. And so there might be some solution. There might be some solution for all communities and for all people in all communities. For the Elders also, those Elders who have start their activity in the wilderness who are now forced to live in the community. These Elders have experienced culture shock also because they are now tied to the community. They can’t do anything. They are not too weak to go out, they are now too weak to be by themselves. And everybody else is tied to the community. And slowly without any warning slowly these Elders are dying of loneliness and, what do they call this shock, a shock of living so differently.

So if we could find the answer in this way maybe there might be a reaction to it. You know, you might find an action or some method to deal with this problem. Some communities fight alcoholism and then the only solution they find is to band the alcohol in the community. Well Indian Affairs, a long time ago, have created a law that called the Indian Act that forbid the Indian to be served with the liquor. That was for his good health because the Indian person of North America were considered less structured developed to fight the system of alcohol because it was very new to him, and there was the reasoning. But we, it can not be, if it’s not applied the
government is contradicting itself at the same time they are trying to force the Native people to join the major society to begin just a Canadian. But at the same time denying and caring the old law, old law, making law for the special group and the special status which separate them again and deny them some form that they get used to. Because there is no immune system in those people’s body and if they don’t have this thing, they will not have anything. Or they are going to acquire the proper use of alcohol. That’s us, that’s Omushkego, that’s what I’m talking about. So this is something that I think about the same time when I think about the youth seeking some assistance from their problems with alcohol, with substance abuse and all this.

I could go on and on, but for now I think I have included enough statement here to prove my project to visit the communities is a justifiable report what I have found out. But here on, we who are the leader who ever decide things will have this information for the benefit of the young people, the First Nation young people who seek so badly, so urgently to get some answers for their problem. And also to get some piece of mind to the Elders and those are very old people who have been provided to the wilderness will have also peace at least they will not see their generation being ended with alcoholism or go to jail all the time and all this. It’s very painful for the Elders to see this, for their loved ones to be taken to jail for their misbehavior. This is cultural shock that continues to exist. Cultural shock didn’t end with the fur trade. Cultural shock didn’t end at the Christianization or conversion. Cultural shock didn’t end with the closing of the residential schools. The culture shock carries on when people are forced to live in the communities. The culture shock still carries on when some of the things comes. When the school teaches with the computers and all that, many things happen and all these have to be dealt with. Our band leaders, our chief and council, our educators, our parents, our grandfathers they needed help and so this is the final of statement. And this recording itself is separate. It’s just my story (laughter). I am not hiding behind the Elders, I am speaking openly, me as an Elder and that’s why I am doing this. So thank you very much for listening and I hope this tape can be helpful when you write, when you do the transcription. And I wish I can have a copy of this one, this first one. If somebody can tackle this one, number four, Sit might help to understand the other three. But I will not be able to do it myself. So that’s it, and good luck for the transcribers.
That’s it.