Title: 0123-Our Voices-Indian Sickness

Bird Number: 150203 Recorder: Louis Bird

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Louis Bird: It's more deep. Because Shamanism is much more deep.

George Fulford: I'm just setting this up because whenever I don't you start talking and saying everything...[Louis laughs]... why didn't I record that?

LB: Eh. Anyway, we'll go back there.

GF: Okay it looks it's actually recording.

LB: Okay, that's what I was saying. I was saying that reading the, the note of this father, what's his name? Baraga. No. It's the other one.

GF: Yeah, there's Baraga and then there's Saindon.

LB: Saindon, yeah that's the one. So that's the one who says the Indian sickness, yeah okay. That's the one I want to make a comment on. I said he uses his knowledge from the European point of view and the religion and sickness and disease whatever he knows there. And also he uses the bible that he uses, you know so much of that evil stuff there? For example, he knows of a... in time of Jesus that people were cured, there were beliefs that there people who were possessed by the demon, and also Jesus. You know just simply talked to them or, you know cured them. And you know, sort of throw away the demon out of them. That is very strong in his mind to this priest.

And that's what he tend to see the people, the way he speaks. He thinks that, you know, and also he has, a knowledge of the medicine and also philosophy. Okay, three of those things in his mind. He tried to apply both at the same time. That's what he's doing in there, when he talks to this Mr. G, he's trying to use this psychological thing, okay? And it did work, because the other guy didn't know that, he didn't know, this there was really nothing mystery about it, but he believes him. So the thing here is a mind, if the mind accepts the thing, and you truly allow yourself to be, submit yourself to anything, even when you don't know. It works! That's what the Indian people did. They asked

that, they have that mind power, they can tell you - Put your hand into that, that fire or that a piece of coal, white hot, put your hand there you're not going to feel it." And if he tells you about three times, you will do it and you see you don't feel it. And actually there's nothing wrong. They were able to do that by suggestive power of thinking. And that's what he was using with Mr. G, and I sensed that.

And so that's the kind of thing they, they use against the native people. And what they see, they didn't understand it was happening is that I think the way that my grandfather and the others were explained their problem when they were converted to Christianity. For this example, I don't listen to my grandfather or if it's some other old man, who'll explain that. When he tries to be join the Christianity, his wife urging him to join because they didn't like to be separate, in their mind, because she, she embraced the Christianity, and she thought it was much pleasant to be a Christian than to be the old stuff. So she convinced him to join the Christianity.

But when he says "okay I'm going to give it a try," he has been a master in his own, in all his spiritual beliefs and practice. He was able to perform things, you know like the great Shaman do, and, when he tries to release his old belief, he had trouble, and he had hallucination, because it's too powerful, and whenever he goes from his home, then he goes out there, and it start to bug him, as if a person is waiting for him to say "you deserted me!" and all this and wants to punish him to rejoin his old belief. And he actually see things, you know terrible things, like beast that wants to consume him. And sometimes with fire, sometimes the water opens up, you know, the ground, to swallow him threatening him not to leave, to hold what he was.

And he says this man is so terrifying, that's when he would run home, because he truly believes that he's going to perish right there. And then when that happen, he's much weaker, much more, much more reportive to his wife "this is what I got, I've been scared." And when that happened, he could not hunt. He couldn't go out the way he used to do because of this. And he tried to use the prayer, tried to the use the beads, the rosaries to try to over come. It didn't, didn't work. Because, he had so much in his mind about the old stuff, he couldn't... So finally he was totally beaten.

So his wife introduced to a priest, and the priest came around, and then he told the priest exactly what he saw, and what happened to him wherever he goes, and says: "ever

since I've been trying to join the Christianity this is what I got." It's suffering, and all this stuff, and almost crazy. And he can't hunt. And that's what he was describing this priest, but this one didn't listen. The other priest listen and he applied the same method. He knows there's nothing he can do to change what he went through at that moment. But the trick is to make him believe something to have his own faith.

What he did was, he tie him, the rope on his hand, like this, from the back. Just the strong, like a, the cord, you know one of those...what do you call those thing... you know the one on the ships you use, you know those kind of twisty thing? But not big, you know, very soft. So he make a, make shift knot, that he can put on his over the back, and then says, this, this was in the fall, about September, because he wants to go out in the bush and he was afraid to go there. That's when he has experienced this thing. So the priest says "Okay, I am going to give you a sign. You are going to go there by yourself, you gonna do exactly what you do all the time, and you will pray the Christian prayers. You gonna deny yourself that thing and it's not gonna be there soon. What you gotta do every, when you leave, you put this on what I am tying you behind. This is the symbolic thing. So when you have that a bit of restriction, you'll have it each day. When you get up, put it on and go to work. If it's necessary, take it apart to be able to do something, and put it on again, you know, on top of his clothes." So he says "By the time you return in the spring, you will be free of your problems. By the time when I see you in June, you will be cured."

And the man believe it, and he went. He took his rope behind him everyday his wife put it on him and he goes out hunting. He envision, visualized those terrible things, yes, but he went through because be believe this is helping him, you know? And he went through a month and by...I think it was by middle of the winter, and it begin to diminish this experience of scary and everything. So he begin to... stop those visions that he saw, especially at night, he described as this terrible thing. The voice, the loud voice and the fire in front of him you know, right up, and he just walks right through with the faith that he will. Then the fire would jump back there that's what he thinks, it doesn't leave him. And sometimes there's no fire, sometimes there's a terrible threat from the side where he walks. And he was told not to listen. That's what he did, he just ignored even though it's

tormenting him. The terrible voice, the person always threaten him you know, if he leaves, if he joins the Christianity. So this was the suffering that he had all that time.

Finally somewhere out in April I think, he almost... completely gone. By the spring time, and he was able to hunt just like, just when he would enjoy himself. And by this time also he got a habit of praying with his wife. And in springtime in June when he came, he was free. And the priest says: "Now I can take off the thing, you're not no more problem." That was it!

So that's what the priest was doing trying to do. He was using that, what do call that thing, a psychological thing? And, but this priest did not understand it, the problem this guy has. You know you have to untangle the mind that has been so powerfully invaded. You have to undone that. But just to condemn it into evil, it's demeaning. It's not him crazy, he make him crazy! [Laughs] Because he says you're wrong in doing the wrong thing.

But that why I think the missionaries did wrong. I don't say God did wrong, but they did using the wrong application. And they should have studied those people, poor people or, which they wanted converted and make a better life out of them, which they believed they wanted. Their good intention was okay, but the method they used, it was not. They should have studied. They should have studied thoroughly exactly what those people were going through and everything, and sort of applied things that were not so severe on people. You know, because there were so many who just went, just didn't want to bother to try. They'd die with the other stuff.

Because before that, I asked the elders that I have interviewed what happened to those people who didn't join the Christianity. They said "No problem. They just died just like the way anybody dies. Peacefully, sometimes very gently." There's nothing like in the book that you see devils just grab them when they die. No they did not say that, but there were some who abused their religion, who usually did something like stealing the man's stuff, or, or something else that is very bad in their custom. Yes, those were bothered by the end of time when they die. They usually confess, and then they have to confess their wrongdoing, and then they feel free after that. They just dying. So these are the things the missionaries did not study. If they had studied, they would have much

more peacefully convert the people instead of... savagely done something the way it has happened.

GF: There was a lot of starvation reported in the 1920's and 30's. I assumed it was because the caribou disappeared.

LB: That one of...part of it, yes.

GF: Is it possible that sometimes people couldn't go out too?

LB: That was the time to conversion. People got scared of the universe because of this conversion, because they were told that what you did is evil and, and when the way they used to respect animals and to you know for the God. They were told you are worshiping animal, but they could not defend themselves, because they don't speak the language of this dominating person. They know what they were doing, they're not worshiping animal, they're not worshiping the trees, sun or anything. They are worshiping God through these things. But they just didn't have a church like, there was no preacher, there was no leader, it was each individual person. And that is why it was so difficult for someone to come out, and how the culture's afraid to understand that.

There's no leader, you know, because it was not...there was no institutional church. So you really have to struggle each one, and have somewhere to bring them in together. And they were not structured that way. The spirituality was geared for their lifestyle. That's why they didn't make a community. It's better out there, and they could just convert for a few weeks, and back to the community, back to their own life. By greeting like this, and just every six months they come together. Like to say...to greet each other, to visit each other, to rearrange things, arrange marriages and all that. And sometimes they just go far distance to maintain the blood relationship, I mean, not to get so tangled up with their families, they go to James Bay, some of them York Factory, they all mingle like this, to think about those things, to avoid too close a blood relation. They have all those things.

The thing is how could they speak to the French people who come and tell them about their sins what they do. And the Hudson Bay Company also demanded the furs and caused them to compete and depleted the animals. That is happening, seeing everything happened at that time. You know, during first contact period, enough to the point of conversion, you know, so what they called being de-Indianization. And this is

what I see and this is what I hear from the elders. They not actually accuse anyone, that this is what happened at that time. They don't point the finger at the priest or at the management or the Hudson Bay people. They know the cause, they know what happen after that. They know about this conflict of the mind, because of Christianity and the old tradition. So, just they have to, the Elders recognize that that life is really cannot exist. Because if we have to mingle with these, the people who came from a far and civilized way to community workers, and we will have to change slowly, but they did change. Only in places where there is accessible to that. Like Sioux, like Mohawks, they're surrounded and they join very nicely. They don't know, they don't even know they were losing. Look at [inaudible] - he's much more white man than native [laughs]. His mind is like that. Do you know what I mean? Those kinds and then, shows me how in this way you are surrounded with a different culture, you cannot help but just to join, eh? You don't have a feeling of that. I wonder if you could answer this other thing. Someone is ringing [GF answers the phone]

GF: Why do you think that the women converted more easily than men, and the kids too, for that matter?

LB: That is one of the, that is one that I could avoid the final excuse, I will tell you this honestly. The Shamans, the Shamans that were there, they were the powerful leaders, and if the family have children and sons and all then this is a role man always a Shaman. He is a powerful man, but he needs a territory. You know, he has to have a certain territory. Not too many people...he's not free to be surrounded with other Shamans. That's sort of avoid them to be close. And, when he is like that, he is dangerous, because the other Shamans will bug him, it doesn't hurt him but it bothers his wife, the way he is bothered she is more scared and more bothered by this, these things. And the children know that, there is something scary going which they don't understand. So it... it's suffers...the wife suffers and the children suffers, because of what he is. And that was a negative thing about them. Even though he is a powerful man in support and everything, he can do that, being powerful other people sort of challenge him, even if he's a kind person.

And when he's challenged, these people know, the kids know and the wife know. And that's what, that's what hurt the women, so when thy saw the Christianity come in, it preaches "love thy neighbour, and everything" and "thou shall not kill," and her husband is powerful enough to snuff out the life someone who is bothering him. So it's all...it's really very different teaching, the one they have or forefather has is "an eye for an eye" situation. If anybody bothers you, you have the right to defend or even kill. So there's no stopping, nobody can stop you, there's no law. There's no law that tells you you shouldn't do that, he is the law, and each Shaman has that. That's why the separation was so strong, they could never come to their own community, they didn't pass that, so then the women and the children suffer.

So, when the mothers saw the Christianity, it was gentle and everything, they want to be there, they want that peace and love, so no fear. So they joined the Christianity first. And the priest seemed to know that. It works well, but men didn't want to try it because, you know, they lose their power. They didn't want the priest to come and bother them. Because, you know, if the priest come and condemn him, when he's okay doing his own thing, sure, what would you think they would do? They would like to kill priest. [laughs] But they did not, they just allow him to come and just don't bother him. So they go on their own way and practice their own, practice their own belief away from him, and just do it anyway. But still, it's the wife and the kids that are bothered by this thing, just when that happened.

So for that reason the women joined the Christianity. Once they joined they eventually forced their husband to join, convinced them after. And they, these men who were joining the Christianity, became totally helpless, they have no more power! They can't even go out there and they get scared. They failed, they lost their power to live, to survive, to apply their skill, even their mind power, they lose that because of the Christianity. They became submissive, they expected the priest then to be the father, to be a, turned their hope in him. And so it's to the men, to the fur traders. So they really became helpless. And that's the results of that. And you see today it's the same way, the same thing.

But the priest of course doesn't do that anymore, they don't preach so powerful as they were. Right now, you are a member, you just practice your members... membership. What it says there, but long time ago they they used to severe to convert. So this is what, this is what I learn by listening to those Elders' stories and everything.

My brother-in-law have tried to be a mitew, he accomplishes quite a bit yes. He went against his mother who says "you shouldn't bother." But he found it exiting when he was young, so he went out and tried to accomplish that. Partially succeeded, but the problem is when he goes to town then he can't practice that and he has to church, and the gathers, and he's all raising temper, and he also drinks and all that parties, he's a young guy.

So when it comes to hunting, when it's back to his trap line, it bothers him. He's the one also that tells about the terrible dreams, the terrible noises, and visions. And I ask him, I said "What makes you think, what makes you go like that?" He says "I don't know!" he says "I really don't know!" So he was saying "Maybe I'm just crazy." So I said "Did you really interested in having the mitewiwin?" And he says "I tried to, I believe it, I know it works." And I said "that might be your trouble. Maybe that is your trouble. You know, the mind, it's not working too well. Your, your mentality is not good, because you believe in two things, and it fights."

That's what the old people say. When you be a Shaman you have to stay a Shaman, you do not take anything else. And it works well there, for a time-as long as you live. And, but if you blend and if you want to join the Christianity, and you want to be as good as this, and when you leave back in to the old wilderness it comes back to you, the one that you have from there. It just like embraces you again, and gets mad if you didn't do it right. So that's what, that's the way I understood when I interviewed the Elders that way. But not all of them say that. Some explain that, some of them very faintly, some of them vividly, when they get going, you know. And that's why, that's why now, they don't recommend that it should be blend. It should be one or the other.

But they don't believe it's a sin, those people who have totally committed to that kind of thing, they can't believe it's a sin, or the wrong thing. They don't believe it's an evil thing. They say "how could it be?" If it was an evil thing, how did we, what make us survive. What makes us keep our strength, we must be doing something right, you know, for the great spirit to allow us to live, otherwise we would have wiped out. That's their belief. So anyways, sort of makes you think, maybe you're right.

So that's the thing that I wanted, I thought about when I listen to this priest, who called it the sickness, he didn't understand what caused that. And he didn't see those

people who suffered from it trying to change one thing to the other, he didn't live like that, he didn't feel, he just assumed he knew. But there are stories, there are many stories like that.

And I've seen three people affected by it. I've seen it myself. I talked with those people and I see them, how poor condition they are after. It's crippling their mind, it's really, one of them actually totally lost his mind, because you know, they consider him a mental retarded person. A bit of a out of control so they took him to the funny farm. And they gave him drugs to hold him, and eventually after twenty years of this drug, he finally lost his mind, he lost who he is. And he died without knowing, without ever expressing what he is. I shook hands with him and he didn't remember me, or even, maybe he know what he is but he didn't remember me. And I used to hunt with him. I used to ptarmigan hunting, used to have lots of fun together, as a little boy and he was a man.

And that's one of them who tried to blend. He tried to blend. Because he didn't have no, no, a proper supervision from the Elders, he did it by himself. And he did it late. And that's what caused it. And he believed the Christianity and he believed the other one. He goes back and forth, makes him...crazy. He's the one that used to say that the devil was sitting on a rock, "with a mouth of fire", he says [laughs]. Just like the pictures drawn on the paper. That's what he saw. So that's what this mind does to a person when you do that. In real life.

And that's what the, also the other person that I told you is related to me, who nearly lost his mind too. But he manages, he managed to stay sober, I mean, proper mind and managed to live by himself. But he could not stay with his wife because she was sometimes finicky. When it intensified in him he would hallucinate, and it was dangerous. So he was forced to separate his wife, because of that thing that thing the church did. And also the...I guess the police were...the RCMP know all that and the doctors who visit, so these three authorities, they said okay maybe it's better to separate. So there was no court session or anything, there was just three people with the power: the priest, and the visiting doctor and the Indian Affairs with it, and the police will come with and they say okay this, this man have a problem, because there's a history of violence

between him and his wife, and the kids were scared. So they said: "Well it's better maybe just separate 'em, live separately." And they're okay...they're still married.

And that's one and the other one is that I saw an Elder who has actually experienced that kind of problem even when even when he was an old man. One who was afraid the world is over? That one, yeah. That's what this young, when he was a young youth, teenage but maybe before he was twenty. He went into this practice to go for a vision quest, and what he's interested was women. So he found this woman in the wilderness, you know this beautiful native thing, and finally believed that he seed and he goes out there and enjoyed himself with the lady, you know, 'wilderness lady.' Actually it was just not real, cause it's all in his mind. And when he, when he begin to have children, when he begin to concentrate on Christianity, or teach his children, this bug him. And that bothers him.

So once in a while this being, the woman who used to come outside of his house says "Come now, why don't you come to visit me?" So he would go, maybe he would go out for, a day its supposed to be and he's gone for three days. Sometimes one week, he'll be gone! And his wife was worried. And sometimes she doesn't know whether he's alive or not. And that's what he was doing. Because he was visiting this wilderness person. So that's another example, and I saw this old man who behaved in such a funny way, and he has a vision, he says: "there she is, there she is, the wilderness woman!" And it was nothing there.

These other things I'm telling you, the priest didn't know that, even doctors didn't know what that is. There was no, there were no psychiatric doctors to deal with this thing. They didn't know that. But that does not happen now, because it's already wiped out now, you know the Shaman thing? That practice is gone in reality. But things that you hear is something else [Laughs]. Whatever it is. So that's my comment about this thing. If you can put that in your head, try to put it in words. I think you caught it there a little bit, but you just didn't see exactly what I am saying, you know? You explain about miraculous idea and the other priest, and also you explain a little bit of what the First Nation are. Yes, you went as far as to separate them instead of putting like this argue. It's best to do that. Let the priest do his thing in your story. Let him, what you understand he's thinking, and let-try to explain what was the —what was the problem in

you know, confronting these two ideas, who fell down. What makes them fall-what happened then? What was the problem in the family?

These things were what the priest didn't see because they only visit once in a while, at that time. And recently it's just 1960-55 it stop, it begin-we begin to live in a community. So this thing sort of-it's not in the open because we begin to live in a community. You don't see that much. But in the mind of the Elders like me, I-I believe it was. But I don't, don't practice it. And my grandfather was would have believed it because he had practiced it. Like...Toby had believed, but he's not practicing, he practice Christianity. Interview him, I said, "Do you believe that thing works?" And he says, "Oh so, in the past, worked." Because his grandfather was one of the powerful ones, you know the... So he know that. So he believe it did work. So he just live with the Christianity, just like I do. That doesn't mean they don't know it. They know it, they believe it too.

Thing is, to believe and practice is a different thing. You don't have to practice even if you believe something. So it's safer for the safe keeping for me and for others, to keep your mind in tact. You don't jump around, you just remain with one, and it's easier that way. So that's the most I wanted to put into your paper, so you will have that. If you want to revise it a bit you can do.

GF: I will

LB: And about John Michel, I think you just have to phone him. I don't think he would mind, I'm very sure he wouldn't mind at all, because told me if you write it that's fine, just maybe erase his name, maybe just say one Elder today, who is still living who was taken to the Fort Albany with Father Langois saw this happen. And say your story will point to the Father Langois who is, who is actually applying his cultural belief, and this youngster witnessed this thing. That would be great. But to save your skin you know, maybe erase his name. That'd be the greatest thing to do, because he told me, he told me he saw it. And he didn't know at that time, he said "oh I was young, I just... why does he have to do those things?" [Laughs] And only later he recognized that what he was saying at that time he says, "I need... what does he say? And he was hitting at the same... Cree chanting. [Laughs]. According to the native it was a sign where you have been fed by the Great Spirit and a symbol of respect and thankfulness. That was the idea.

GF: So what your talking about is when John Michel saw Father Langois hitting the bones, skulls of animals, that were put in trees by the portage along the river. Yeah. That must have been a very powerful thing for him to see.

LB: [laughs] For him, it confuses him really. But later on when he get older he understand, that's what he tells me. That's how the priest used to do that, how powerful the priest against that he says, you know? And he understood also what our Elders thought about this thing. He know all that. So that what to be explained. To explain what he is doing, what he think what he is doing, and to explain the youngster who saw, didn't understand why that he has to hit those things, and later in the years as he get older, to understand what it was, what actually the bones mean hanging there. I understand that too, I've seen many bones you know in the trees that have been put there and I know what that means. It's the respect of the animal, and also be thankful that God give you things.

The Great Spirit. The Creator, God, it's the same, the Creator and the Great Spirit's the same being that we say God in the Christianity, it's the same. No difference. So that's why were Elders, can't be that evil [laughs]. So they sort of say that under their breath, "can't be evil." Could it be the same God, sure. But they don't say, they don't argue with them, with the Church, no.

GF: So this notion of uh, Kihchi Manito, you think that was there before the Christians got there?

LB: Yeah, it was there.

GF: And was it a thing that had a form? Or was it a formless thing that came through all of the creation?

LB: It is all Spirit, there is no substance. That, they believe that. There is no substance to the Great Spirit. It's a spirit they say, not the substance. And that is why you know when they want to offer the prayer they don't have to make it anything to contain what they want to, they just pray right in the open. Every creation that is there just pray openly, when they want to pray. That's why they go into the higher ground also. It's the same basic instinctive act with every nation who wants to have a bit higher, like in the old Testament, you know, Moses climbed the mountain to speak with God. That idea was there before Christianity.

I show you the holy ground where he went there, you know the First Nation holy ground. That's where they went to to fast, that hill. And also the one that you see down south is a bit more shorter, eh? That's where they sleep for three days and three nights. More than that sometimes. So every place that you see a little hill, they used to use that. To the west, when we went to the, - Michel Pichapman, we didn't see that, it was to the North. There's a little hill there, outcropping the rocks. That is the famous where people go and do their praying. I stopped there to, but I did not do anything because of the Catholic Church [laughs]. So that's, they are places, things that was done just like the other Nations. Okay?

GF: That's great.

LB: I think I have done the most part. I have told you what I think. And from it you can pick out the right word and put it in and you'll be okay.

GF: Okay, that's great.

LB: Anything else about this paper?

GF: Well, about that paper? Probably, unless you can think of something yourself.

LB: No, no there is not much of a thing I can say about this, because I find it very, I find it very good. There are some, in fact, things that I didn't know that I hear, the date I didn't know. There is a piece of paper that John Michel Hunter gave me. I still have it at home. Where it says in Fort Albany, in 1640, some priest came in that was the first first Baptist.

GF: Father Albanal

LB: I think so yes. It's already recorded. Do you have that story?

GF: A little bit, not in there. There's not a lot, there's probably stuff available in archives in France? Or maybe some of the Church archives like the Jesuits. But it's not in the, I don't think it's in the Jesuit Relations because the Jesuit Relations are about the priests that came up the St. Lawrence river and up into the lakes like that. And those priests came up in ships into Hudson Bay. So it's not published as far as I know in that group. But it's got to exist somewhere, the actual records and journals of those priests. They've got to be somewhere probably in France, I'm guessing.

LB: I have that piece of paper, it's only one page, and, no two pages. John Michel Hunter gave me that. He, it was given to him a long time ago when he was a priest, I

mean he was a Chief. So I was asking him about this, we were talking about when did the Catholic church came to exist in James Bay. And I was just talking about this Xavier Fafard in in Albany, or whatever you call it, the priest that was called Albany. So he says, "yes, yes I know that", he goes "I saw that in the paper, I got the paper." So he says "I'll give it to you. I'll show you after." Then a month or so later, he came up and he says, "This is what I'm talking about." So he show me two piece. There's, a there's a picture in there. In the island, the Forno Bay the first, the community that was divided in two? You see the, the missionary house and you see the church, no you didn't see the church. But in there, that's where you'd see us in there.

And the other page says "The first practicing and the first practice and the marriage and there were names that were there. Kataquabit, there were the names very famous and who were married. The first marriage was performed in the, our group of people who were baptized, that time one summer. I don't know how many families. And this was Father Albany, Albany or whatever you call him. So he was the one that do that. In the picture, only the picture shows the old, the priest house. And that's a flat roof, two-story, three-story house I think. So the information those days were written in English, and I keep it somewhere, I have it someplace with my, the treaty, the treaty remember did I show you the picture? And it's in there, that piece of paper. Just to keep. So it must be some place.

GF: Indeed.

LB: It says exactly when the priest performed the ceremony in Albany, after they build houses. The thing is 16-1600, somewhere around 1660 I think.

GF: That's right.

LB: So they must have traveled there a long time ago.

GF: But only by ship I think. Now they're coming by the canoes. Explain how they got to York Factory and, and Fort Severn and those places, and Fort Albany. Well, maybe we take a short break and have a cup of tea, and then we can come back to that other thing.

LB: Okay