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Report to Canada Council on Grant to Undertake Interviews about whether mitewiwin 'Omushkego shamanism' is a Religion.

Tape 1 - Side A

Hello, hello. This is Louis Bird. I am speaking to you from Peawanuck Ontario. Today is the last day of May. May 31st, the year of 2002. This, this is a report for the grant given to my by the Canada Council to visit five communities - including Peawanuck six, that is. To visit Attawapiskat, Kash, Fort Albany, and Moose Factory (counted as one with Moosonee), and also to do some work in Peawanuck. In the original proposal that was written for this purpose [it] was part of a major work that I was presently carried on of which we call Omushkego Oral History Project. The information that I have there has to deal with a lot of stories with shamanism - shall we say *mitewiwiwin* is the word in our language. In translation it is usually said in English as "shamanism" to make it easy. And therefore, this is a report.

It didn't turn out exactly the way I expected, or never is never happen what we expect. I wanted to visit the five communities to ask one simple question, because in our story collection are full of those questionable terms or unexplainable stories of events in our oral history that are very hard to explain. Most of the subject that ever come out in any story, mostly in legends, is full of this mystical power that those people or beings that live in time. And because today's situation we have experienced a new world, a new generation which we have brought up into the present day, into the world of high tech, and also where the religion seems to collapse and fail. Where the youth and the young people seeks some comfort in something that could be solid and help them to proceed in life. This was the reason this special project was to be carried out by me, Louis Bird. Why I was supposed to do this, and to go out and ask questions, just to confirm what he has believed already, that the First Nations spiritual practice was not the church as explained by the Christianity. It is in there in our collection of stories. It's there. But never was any question to say: "Was this a religion?" But the thing is, the young people seek that information, but cannot find the full answer. And for that reason I want to go out ahead and ask direct question to the elders. To say: "Was the shamanism a religion of the First Nations?" And this question seems to terrify some elders in James Bay and Hudson Bay Lowlands.

These are the first statements. That's the reason this report is made. Now let us turn back. If we can visualize the world as it is today. As I have explained before, the report for the Canada Council, the purpose for this project was to confirm what I have already collected in my main project - the Omushkego Oral History Project - on shamanism. To visit each of the five communities that are located around the shores of the Hudson Bay - southwest coast of Hudson Bay and the west coast of James Bay, from Moosonee, Moose Factory, Fort Albany and Kashechewan and Attawapiskat, including Peawanuck. These were only five communities that I was supposed to visit, that were mentioned in the proposal. To ask one question only: "Was the shamanism is a religion?" Questioned everyone for that matter, anyone who have heard the subject. If such person have, whether he or she believe it or not to be true or not. Whether they believe it or not, to be able to say "yes" or "no." That simple. To make statement of such subject - his or her opinion. That was the main object to this visit. The intent of the proposal is the visit.

And now, let me introduce the one - my train of thoughts - to come to the point later. Most of the nations in the world have their history, whether it's written in stone, some on hides, some on papyrus in the Old World, in the Middle East - Egypt - and the Far East. They have created their writing system a long time ago. That's what the European history says.

Every nation has its beginning - origins of their culture. They have developed according to the geographical location. Some develop faster. Some remain the same for years or centuries. Why? In North America the First Nation in some part have never developed their writing system. No need. Their lifestyle remained the same. They have learned to adapt themselves to the environment. They have learned to live with nature and naturally develop their body and mind to be able to survive on the land. Develop their body using all five senses every human has born with. Plus other extra senses that requires in order to survive in the wilderness environment. They have also developed spiritual connection to the environment. The system they use was the best way to be connected to the earth. Meantime they have establish how to gain these experiences and to what required to understand spirituality with the physical world.

You have - they have - gradually develop how to condition themselves to overcome the limit of the body by blending spiritual world in a very early age by dreams. And able to have vision. First they have to develop dreams by conditioning their body to be able to be between awaken state and sleep. That's the conditioning they have develop. This has this. This has to be done at a very early age. Start at the very early age of childhood in a person with the guidance of an elder who have gone this process of his own age. He's a perfect guide and a teacher for such goal to be a shaman.

Only experienced elder do have qualification for the child because he himself have went through this experience. He also have a long life to acquire such knowledge. Only a person who have acquired such a position can be a good guidance of an elder for the child. Once a person have went through all required training can he or she accepted as one of the shaman. Not everybody is required to be a shaman. A shaman or a

shamanism is not to be drafted to such state, but who has been gifted to dream. Now, let me explain.

We don't have exactly when this thing began to happen. I and the elders whom I have spoken to said this was there even before human came to exist on earth. As they say in their legend, the legends are the stories that are not quite believable, but the stories have been created for such a matter. Because stories, in order to come out to, to, from a person has to be some form of a cushion so that he cannot be called: "You are liar" or "You are fantasy." In order to provide oneself from not being accused is to create a story which has been created a time before his time and a story that has been created by a human experience and been condensed together in once character to play the role in one of those legends.

So in the first story that they free if we were able to place the legends in chronological order - I say from the first one to the next and to the last - which I try to say, if we could do that. If we listen to all five in any other stories that we have heard, we can place them in order. To create a story to seem to follow sequences that should have come if we put them in order. And that I have tried to do. And I have found out that I found some of them to place very well in orderly fashion that we can say we do have a developing story before human consciousness and into human. Because we have legends that involve only amongst the animals, the birds, the waterfowl and all flying species that have been known in this North America among the First Nation. So they have created such stories to cushion themselves from being ridiculed. And it has worked well. And these stories have been picked and guided and placed very well in order, in sequence, so that they can be applied in the First Nation education. Because the First Nation has not yet developed its own writing system and therefore has to have a mechanism to carry out their teaching method. And it works better in stories. In the mystery stories and maybe horror stories which help a youngster to remember the teaching. That is the reason they were set and, and placed that way until the time when human begin to emerge in the story. And thus came the human being.

That is a very brief background of what this is all about. So we come. We will bypass in this report about the events that other Nation arrived in among the First Nation in this country. Because it would take so much to explain - it would be too bulky to make this report. As long as it serves the purpose. The purpose is to report to one question that is there and why it was search while the others - the other part of the stories are in the process of creating. I have explain myself why - why was it necessary, the urgent need to go out and ask the remaining elders about the stories and about the specific question. Why do we, why was it required to ask the elders was the shamanism or *mitewiwin* a religion? Because in the definition of the Whiteman's or the European's style of mentality the religion is one of the social structures, social institutions that has been develop through 5,000 years, beginning at 3,000 BC and 2,000 years after or AD. So that is the reason I say time-wise. It's perfect in the history of the European. But the First Nation history, I have explained already that the First Nation - or at least the Omushkegowuk - have never developed complete writing system. They have symbols that partially been part of the syllabic writing. But that is not my expertise to talk about.

But I will say my certainty is that the Omushkego people did not write their language unless until recently as the European came in to teach their Christianity.

The question again - why do we ask the elders if shamanism was a religion? Because today they youth, the First Nation youth are seeking something they could hang on. Something solid they could, they could say this is our First Nation tools that we will depend upon, that we will lean onto, for us to survive. So they went and ask the elders: "What is *mitewiwin* and can we use it?"

In parts of this Canada - expanse of Canada - some parts are easily accessible because some parts of Canada it's still - some First Nations retained the belief and practice of such. I do not have to explain the location, but we know. The experts - the historians and the other people know that. We will deal with only the specific subject: to report what I have found out in James Bay area when question asked, "Was the shamanism a religion?" Because of the elders that have died in the past 20 years - let's say the beginning of 1965 - they were the ones who understand the word. They were the ones who could have opened up to us and explained to us what it is. If we had explained, if they had understood exactly what the religion is all about, even though our grandfathers who were born in 1873 or 1865 have joined the Christianity or embraced the Christianity, whether it was willingly or reluctantly, they must have a reason. There must have been a reason why they joined and why other parts able to retain their ancient beliefs and practices.

According to our local or district history, the missionaries that came about to convert the local people in James Bay lowlands have used all the power and skills and theorizing method to convert the district or territory people to Christianity. By fearsome, by powerful way of telling the stories. By condemning the local people's beliefs and practices. But that works OK. And therefore, and those that have lived from 1865 to 1920-40 have passed away during that period, during the period 1930 to 1965. And those who were born in 1900, they did not see anything in the James Bay Lowlands. Not many. Very few. And therefore have totally been Christianized. They have not know or experience of the shamanism or *mitewiwin* exercise. Or even to try to understand, because they were totally forbidden by the Christianity to even think about it. So therefore, they could not give an answer to my question when I say: "Was the shamanism a religion amongst the Omushkegowuk or Swampy Cree?"

That is the reason. They have been totally washed away the old, the ancient beliefs and practices. And those who still remember part of it only are able to remember it because it was all in the legends. The legends of, of animals like Giant Skunk and the legend of Sinkepis. These blend with mystics of shamanism. And also at the early times, when you begin to listen to the character story, character play the story - Wiisaahkechak - play many roles. And then again, next popular person is Chaahkaapish, who uses to extreme of shamanism or shaman's power. And then we have the rest after that. There is a time period there that the world to have seemed to exist without any progress or any changes. Until later that we begin to hear another legends of, of a person called Aayas. And then, and then another character by the name of Wemishoosh. These two characters came to emerge in time to have already into the worst kind of world. Into the immorality and all

this. And then the rest of the stories came. And then we have also quotation stories. Some are involved in only in time of the animals and even time before time (if there was such measurement). And therefore that's in collection of stories that I have which causes me to reach out again to approach the elders to ask the question: "Was the shamanism a religion?" Because our young people wants to know. They want to know, they want to practice, they want to understand it. And they do take a hold of anything that is there and practice it as much as they can. And believe they are truly on the right track. But there's so much that yet they don't know. And that is why this purpose, my visit to each community.

And to try to explain more about this visit to communities. My experience was similar. Some elders do not want to talk about the shamanism as part of the spiritual exercise. As a church in Christianity. Some elders say it's an individual development. These elders are part of Swampy Cree Omushkegowuk. Similar to the Cree. Cree is a word to describe those people. Cree is not the tribal name. They speak the same language, only slightly different dialect from Moosonee to York Factory. Their concept of ancient spirituality is the same. Some procedures to develop to practice. Therefore it's confirmed what I have believed in my collection so far. In my collection of stories in the Hudson and James Bay Lowland. The Cree people are Swampy or Omushkegowuk in tribal name. Their legends are similar. Develop in slightly different in each section or in a district of the land. There is no problem really. The theory is the same. The use and application of the legends are the same. Shamanism is the same concept. So this is the part of my report.

I know some of the people, some elders, have died since 1975 whom I used to hear as elders. My own, my own brother-in-law who always speak of shaman long ago, which he powerfully dramatizes and truly believe these were the facts. So were the others in his age group (he is around 75 years of age). In the Big Trout Lake area which is Oji-Cree speaking people are very real about this part of their history. They have their own ways of expressing their stories and legends. But similar to other tribes in the territory.

I took a trip to Big Trout Lake in August the year 2001 and then from Big Trout Lake to Shamattawa in which we paid our trip - me and my wife - to visit the communities in Manitoba. We take a side trip from Big Trout Lake to a place called Shamattawa and visit some elders. And there I heard and asked my question. And in the same way they were reluctant to speak about it. Most of the people that I spoke to, they usually speak about it in comical because to save themselves being ridiculed.

And from Shamattawa we travelled to York Landing. York Landing is a place where the former residents of York Factory people. And these - the treaty Indian people - move inland when the York Factory was abandoned in 1957. So they went to York Factory where they were promised they would have their own community. And some elders that were there when they left York Factory they were middle-aged people and today after so many years, now they are now old. They are not able to go back. But they have brought with them their stories and same legends that we have in James Bay and Hudson Bay and the same ancient beliefs and practices in *mitewiwin* - they still have the same. And I heard some of them. I did not interview them with the machine, but I just visit them and

able to speak with them about the past. And ask them the difference between the legends that we hear in James Bay and their ways of delivery. I have listened to them. I have also asked them the same question that I have asked in James Bay, saying: "Is the shamanism or *mitewiwin* a Church in our culture?" Many of them said it may have been a theory - only a theory - a long time before the European came. But after the Christian conversion, they say, it doesn't seem to be like a religion we know in Christianity. So they were very, they were very open. And they, they were willing to speak about it.

When I passed through Big Trout Lake my own brother-in-law who is much older, who must be about 75 years of age, truly believed that there was such thing. That there was no, no fooling around with the way people believe and practice. And still believe the old taboo. They still think that you should not talk about these things. That it is an individual development in the minds and the body to each individual. So therefore, according to him, he says, therefore it's not a religion. But was a must. It was necessary for the people to have it, for to develop it, because it provide protection for one person. It provide care for a family and then it also provide the courage for a person to live in the land where the land is very hard and harsh to live on. And therefore, to these people, the shamanism, the question or the subject of shamanism, is still a secrecy. It is not to be broadcast into public. That is to be - it is to be acknowledge and also to be kept as it were a long time ago. And it was only practiced in the wilderness. And so I understood the explanation of these people.

And now to go on to other ways. I recently visit other communities. I visit the community called Moose Factory in January [2002] and also visit Moosonee, which is more like one community because they are very close together. When I visit in Moosonee, it was very unfortunate that day because many of those elders that I have been listed in my visit have been taken to do some special shopping in Timmins. And all the elderly women that I knew who usually talk openly about the past were not in town. But I did manage to visit a few people. I had hoped to interview at least three people. My intention was to visit at least one elder who is over 75 or 80 that I would ask the same question. All I wanted was the simple statement, is to say: "No, it was not a religion." Or to say: "In theory or in the past it was." I did have that answer. But in Moosonee I did visit three elders and one middle-aged man. And I did speak to the young people. I will not be able to transcribe my recording of a young man. Only the young man didn't mind to interview him with the recording. And the two elders that I spoke to, they didn't want no recording. But they spoke to me their own way. And allowed me to write their stories, if I can. And I will be able to give their names if I were to do it.

In Moosonee the elders that I spoke to - one person is called Atoket. Atoket is the name. And his wife that he marries only 20-30 years ago. He had married twice. So the elder that I went to visit in Moosonee is name is Alfred Atoket. And he is around 85 thereabouts. I did not speak to him on the first visit. But the next visit I speak to him. The first visit I only speak to his wife. His wife who is much older than him and also came from across on the East coast of James Bay, in Quebec side. I did interview her. Unfortunately, she did not want to be recorded. With respect of her wishes, I did not. But did ask that I may write her name and also the stories she told me. And then next day

I spoke to Mr. Atoket. But before that, before I spoke to him, his wife told me that he was already too old and absent minded. Not quite know exactly whether he knows what he is talking about. But fortunately, he was very clear-minded when I spoke to him the next day. And I ask a few questions and I ask him about the question that I wanted. And to his reaction. He laughed at it for a little while until he come to understand it was very serious that I asked the question. Then he came to very respectfully what he knows and what he thinks. And he says: "People believe it was the only thing that was spiritual before the European, so they say," he says. "And today, as we have heard and told, us by the Christianity, it has been said it is the Devil's work. Demon's practice." So, he says therefore it is hard to try to explain such things. So at least I get a very straight answer. And the lady - his wife - was much more informative than he was. So that's the first part.

And then, the other person I interviewed in Moosonee, his name was Peter Nakogee, who is about 40 years old and has been through many things and had went to the European education and also have learn a little bit of the First Nation, or shall I say, the Omushkego culture. He had heard the stories and he had listened to his parents explain the things about the past, even though he did not practice much about hunting and trapping. But Peter Nakogee is an all-around bicultured person who happened to be a mayor for one term in Moosonee and has very many ideas about today's world. But his opinion is important. What he understood. He said: "The stories I heard from my parents," he says, "before the European came, the practice - the belief and practice of the First Nation was the only thing they could use in their livelihood." "It may not have been quite like a Church because it was individually developed." Exactly what my elders had told me. So it is his word. But he spoke some half hour his opinion about the matter. So that is what I receive, that is what I got in visiting Moose Factory.

I spoke to ask question to this young man quite different subjects, asking what his opinion about the past of our First Nation and also his opinion about the European coming and all the events that took place. Whether some were negative and some were positive. If we can place the events that took place to be negative from our First Nation point of view. For example, were the treaties made between our elders [and the Canadian government] right. Was it right? Was it just? To this young man's situation expresses very keenly as he can and he thinks it was not quite right. But he also understood the communication was not perfect which causes to come about. And the old man that I visit - Alfred Atoket - also mention his complaint about the promises of the commissioners who came to arrive in Attawapiskat where he was at the time of Treaty. He says it seems to have been totally meaningless - the promises. That is all about he had said. But he spoke quite a little bit more which not exactly what I was looking for. But it was nice to hear him speak his mind.

And now, I have met other people in places, in public places that I sit down with. Some that I sit down with having coffee with them and some that I just met in stores and asked me what I was doing in community. I give them the explanation. I said I came to visit some people, some elders, some young people if necessary, to ask questions. I said for the young people I would ask: "Are you serious about wanting to know about our ancestors' spiritual beliefs and practices?" Some say: "I do not belong to that category."

Some say yes and they explain their position why do they seek such information. Some of them think that shamanism is our ancestor's religion. Some believe it may have been. Some of them just curious and want to know. Some of them want just to belong to something that belongs to First Nation. So that is a general thing that I found in Moosonee. Unfortunately, the elders who usually speak well in public were not in town. The First Nation elders, especially the women that we know so well, were not in town. It was very unfortunate that they were not there.

I did visit another elder who is very quiet. Who is not really care much about publicity. He too have spoken to me about this question. So he says: "*Mitewiwin* may have been the only spiritual connection in our ancestors. Even if it was limited, it may have been the only thing. It works in [the] time. But after the European came this religion seems to have worked much better."

Tape 1 - Side B (transcribed by George Fulford)

And for that reason I was blessed to speak to such person who was honestly express his mind and give me straight answer to my question. He ask not to be mentioned. He ask not to be publicized for his statement or his opinion. But at least I have asked if I could include in my stories the way he sees things. So I did get the permission to write a few words that he said. And these are the ones I have just mentioned. He says in the past the shamanism may have been the only spiritual connection of our ancestors and that not all part of it was just. Because, as we hear the stories in past many times there is stories that have been used a shaman power or *mitewiwin* to kill or to fight one another. And so it is. And I tried to encourage this man to say even the European Christianity seems to agree to some extent of killing. That's termed a war. Sometimes it's justifiable to do that, even in their religion. And so far, he says he was very careful not to say that. Because he has been truly told if he ever talk against the Christianity which is very deep in his mind. And so is the others that I have spoke to. Those who are about 75 or more. They are very careful how to say that they would not condemn the Christianity. That they would not say the word against it, but avoid to speak something that could be the reason for totally reject the Christianity. So they were very careful. The older people than I am. But the younger - for those who reach 60 or 65 - have difference of opinion. Their mind is different than those elders. Those who are less than 65 who have not experienced the wilderness life - hunting and gathering and spending nine months in the wilderness by families - have totally different opinion. Different character. Their mentality is different. They much lean into the European way of thinking, as nearly as I can be too. I am that way too, because I have learned a lot in the European culture and try to understand it. There are those who are totally embrace the European culture and also the European religion and those are the ones who are very hard to express their own opinion about the question. For that reason. And that is the only reason they did not want to talk about anything in the open. Because they were told not to condemn or not to disagree of the Christian teaching.

Then, to carry on of what I have done. I know some of these elders - some elders has died since 1975 whom I used to hear as elders. And some of them were my relatives. Some of them are relatives of my parents long ago. And some of those elders have

retained the stories long ago and tended to overdramatize things and then sometimes their stories are not quite well, are not quite right.

And then I was not able to visit Kashechewan during that time in February and March. In those two months I was very busy having to fulfill other commitments that I was supposed to do such as attempt going into the hospitals and seeing the doctors whom I'm supposed to have appointment with. And sometimes the time has to be postponed for the next week or the next two weeks and then this disoriented my planning to visit the communities.

One other thing that has happened after I had received the funding is that the airfare have increased quite a bit. Therefore, my calculation for travel has been lessened to [visit] less one community. So therefore Kashechewan I did not visit at the same time when I visit Fort Albany May 23-8 because the river condition was not yet favourable for travelling across. And because the airline that could jump off across the river was very expensive for my budget. I was hoping just to be able to see some, and I did see some elders during that week.

On May 23-4 when I went to look at the elders gathering in Fort Albany there were some elders from Kashechewan that I was able to speak to a few minutes at least. And I had wanted to visit to the community if could find a way to get across. But unfortunately everyone seems to be busy in this time of season and also when the river is open people want to do their own things. That was my problem to visit Kashechewan. But at least I was able to phone people.

I was able to interview some by phone, some people that I know. There was an elder that I know is well-respected which I have interviewed by phone on May 9 in the evening and I have informed him that I will be speaking to him about the subject. And therefore I ask him about this thing. And I had informed him also that I may be able to visit his community. In his words of help he said he would have liked to see elders come together and talk to the same question that I wanted to ask. And perhaps get the group answering or the group to decide what this is all about - the question that I was seeking. But in his telephone conversation I do have collected.

And then I have run into some elders that went to the meeting during the month of March and April. Some elders that came from Kashechewan. I have sat down and ask very simple question of the same kind: Was the shamanism or *mitewiwin* a religion for our elders, our ancestors? Because unexpected question, they were unable to answer, to give me honest opinion or straight answer. But did speak to me as off record to their own opinions that it may have been the only spiritual belief and practice that they can have. Whether it was good or not - at least they have something. And then also they said that the Christianity was well embraced because it seems to have had much more comforting to have. So most of the elders think the same way.

And then not able to visit Kashechewan, I was able to attend this elders gathering which took place on May 22-4. On the last day I went to sit with these groups. Included in amongst them I was blessed to listen and to be included at this gathering of elders. And I

was even asked to speak, therefore giving me an opportunity to explain my purpose of the visit. I therefore asked who were present in that gathering that my wish is to ask a simple question. That is to say: Was the shamanism a religion for our people? I did not expect any answer. I just informed them. And then I also explain why do I do that. I explain to the elders that were there in that gathering the reason which makes me to seek such an answer or to carry such a question. Because of the situation that exist in Canada - across Canada. Our young people are eager to go back and ask the question about the traditional beliefs and practices in spirituality. And the youth are really keen in trying to understand. As I understand in the young people across [Canada], they seek some comfort, they seek some support for their struggle against this life as it is so confusing as we are today. They have tried everything else, I said to the elders. They have tried everything else. They have tried alcohol to find some peace or to find some excitement or something that is worthwhile. They also seek some same question in drugs and in other ways. And in having those substances also help them to mislead themselves and experience in unguided sexual activities which sometimes brought disease into their body. This is the way I put my presence into the new community [Fort Albany]. Of course I did not expect to get an answer right away because every elder that was in that gathering has other questions that he or she wants to express and also find an answer. At least I was able to speak to more than 10 or 15 elders in that community. Directly to them. But I was not able to interview them individually.

And the same weekend, on May 24 I was allowed to visit and sit with the special group that has been selected to sit together as elders and which is called *Shaapotawaan*. *Shaapotawaan* is a description of the . Two s apart and then connect at the top to be made into one large . It was done in the past they say when people arrived together in the place where they usually meet together. There were some of those families who were just a few and have very small material for coverage of the . And then when they come together it is easier to have one large shelter to accommodate more people more comfortably. Establish more social gatherings. And that's what I heard.

And this is the *shaapotawaan* that has been utilized in the local community. To have it as our ancestor connection and to have it as a locally-obtained information which is put into practice. To have some answer to some questions that are presented, that were experienced in that community. For example, when the time came to discuss or to bring out the subject of residential school, because one of the residential school facilities was right in close to community. Where many of our James Bay children have been brought in ever since 1930 thereabout. It was that time when the missionaries were given to take over the basic instruction to the First Nations. And it has been said there in that community that most people have understood only the good part of this residential school. The students - former students - who came to be brought in to that have never experienced comfort in bed and three meals a day and to enjoy togetherness in praying together in the Church. This is what mostly women remember these good part of life.

There are those who expressed their disappointment and disillusionment about the residential school and there were those who were still hurt by its existence and what they have experienced in residential schools. And these people are now 65 and over. And

they are today elders and they are the last group of residential school children are now 50 years old and they are the leaders today. They are the ones who seek the question of rights and wrong in residential school. And therefore they're the one's who organizes things to utilize the government grants that has been provided for that question, which is residential school healing - Aboriginal Healing Funds. And that is why such local activity was established. To have local material and local information which is called *Shaapotawaan*.

And therefore it's a good effort. But the unfortunate thing that I see myself is that our elders that are now who were in that school - they are far too many who have appreciate the residential school. And there are far too many who do not want to speak about awful experiences they went through in that residential school. And there are those who do not even want to speak about it, even though they are elders today. And those who were in residential school - those who were born in 1930, that period. My age group, when I was born in 1934 and before and after - this same age group of people, they are the elders today. And they were the ones who were in that residential school and they were the ones I included. We did not experience the James Bay area *mitewiwin*. It was already extinguished by the time we came into being. But it was still practiced maybe few years before we were born. And the stories still there and there are still the people who has relatives who have had such experience. And those who knew about the story of shamanism that has been converted very thoroughly to Christianity. Therefore in James Bay Lowlands it is very doubtful if there is any true existence of shaman activities or *mitewiwin* activities. It is very hard to bring it out. It is very hard to ask the elders to come out and help the youth who are there because of the process that has stamped out the *mitewiwin* activity, let alone to believe it today. And that is my story about my visit to Fort Albany.

And now I am trying to read my brief guideline to report to this activity. I have finished talking about the Fort Albany. There are people who do not wish to be recorded in the interviews. There are some who do not want to be heard because they afraid to be ridiculed. And some of them are simply shy to speak into the recording machine. But there were some who do not mind to talk about, to answer question in my interview. And there are some who do not mind talking about shamanism. Those who do not actually quite understand what it is. Or those who are questioning what is it all about. So some people speak about this thing. There are those who thing the teaching system - conversion system by the priest - they were so powerful it scared people. Only could think about spiritual life rather than the earthly life.

I was able to stay with one elder who formerly a member of the Winisk band where I came from. And he knows I am recording, he knows I am going to use his name and he has not stopped me, but he didn't actually permit me to record or to use his stories. But he says go ahead. That I take as permission. I told him my purpose of the visit. He understand it. And we have worked together before my grants to travel. We have sit together and we have talked about these things times before he left the Winisk area. I have hunted with this old man. I have seen him hunt successfully when he was in good health, when he was still supporting himself fully in the wilderness. And we speak

easily. We disagree easily and we are ridicule each other very easily without to the point of anger. But strong disagreement which usually called "constructive criticism". We actually did not agree to disagree, but we have hoped to agree. And he is very wise person. He has his characteristic, which I understand. And I stayed with him for three days, three nights. And with his wife. In Fort Albany. And I also was fortunate to stay in his brother's shelter. I mean to say his brother Emile Sutherland is the organizer of the movement called Shaapotawaan. He was the one who told the use of *shaapotawaan* and eventually to use it as a base of requesting funds from the Aboriginal Healing Fund, which was successful to the community. And were able to bring in the outside help and also to come to the footing of complaints and also a claim - financial claims - to come about. But locally, the leaders of such - not exactly members of the Shaapotawaan, but outside and also working together.

The organizer of the Shaapotawaan is a young person well educated in the white man's way and who has become a teacher for some years and then begin of the Indian Affairs at the tail end of the District office. I knew him very well and have understood him as one of the best-educated young man in the years 1965-80.

I didn't visit elder before I left and this was Paul Koostachin. My old friend. But Paul - I did not interview Paul for the question of shamanism because Paul is an old man that I know and respect and also a relative of mine. His wife [Susan] is my aunt by the relationship my grandmother and Susan's father was sister and brother. And therefore in that regard she is my aunt through my grandmother. And Paul married to her. She is blind and she is very kind and very beautiful woman. And Paul is a kind person because he is a minister. More like (officially) deacon. He has been with the Christianity - Christian leader - for a long time. And to ask him this question would be curse. I mean it would be a totally opposite of his work. And naturally he would condemn me. Not condemn what I do. But I didn't mind that because I know the man very well. He can he say anything that he wants with me. He can really condemn what I am doing if he wanted to. That wouldn't change my relationship with him. I talk with him sometimes because that's the only thing in the world he know is Christianity. Especially Catholic religion. And he's very strong about it. And he fights the new things that comes, especially when it comes to *mitewiwin* or shamanism. But recently he has been softened a bit with me with the subject and I'm able to speak with him freely, the way I want to. In his very short statement he said:

The *mitewiwin* was the only thing that our ancestors have used in terms of spirituality. And in our history says there are those who have use it well and there are those who have abuse it. And the abuse of it the most frequently used, which is very negative in our mind. And therefore, for that reason, I remain - Catholic Church is the only faith I believe of true.

The man is very honest. He does not now condemn this action. He is doing his best to include his own in his work, in his calling as a deacon. And he does well as he can.

OK, let me get back to Ernest Sutherland. [He] is the man whom I have stayed with in Fort Albany. And it his brother Emile Sutherland who is provided the shelter in his

former house. He is the one who have established Shaapotawaan. The name *shaapotawaan*. Similar to the Ojibwe's "long house" or the Iroquois' "long house." But it is not exactly the same. But it is a living quarters for some families. Maybe three families only in temporary. Only in specific season such as early spring, after the ice cleared off the river. And when they - the Hudson Bay and James Bay - begin to open, it was in that period that these people used to get together in the mouth of the rivers and perform their old traditional activities. And therefore in that time they used to set up these large s which are called *shaapotawaan*. But some elders who have not listened well to the past have said there was not such thing as using *shaapotawaan* as part of the *mitewiwin*. So therefore there is a disagreement there between these elders. I myself have never heard the *shaapotawaan* to be used as other than large convenient place for the large [number] of relatives to live together for temporary. I did hear some elders said it was in that *shaapotawaan* the opportunity existed for an elder to exercise, to express his wisdom and to give guidance. And also to advise young people and to share the information of their experience during the winter. And also to have the elders come together and plan the future action. To plan their next year hunting area. To appoint a place for them to go so other people would know where everybody is going to be going. Hunting grounds. And it was that time in the spring also when the young people take note to each other and have some kind of a engagement. Not necessary giving each other sparkling diamond. No. But the eyes would speak that. The sparkling of the eyes will represent like a diamond studded engagement [ring]. And it was that time also that the parents arranged the marriages, whether the young people know each other or not. For the purpose of establishing strong blood and pure relations. It was there that that code of ethics is re-established among the First Nation in that area. To my information. But the Shaapotawaan that is existed in Fort Albany - I have not heard any of this, I am sorry to say. But it was in my mother's and my grandmother's stories and other elders I have listened to have mentioned those things these stories. Not only did it happen in James Bay, at [other] times and other places. So therefore the young man Emile Sutherland have started this Shaapotawaan. The structure of the which was used between family members and apparently was used also for other reason which I did not hear. And it is a good thing that we have something from local area to stand or to use as a base of our First Nation activities. That's as far I am going to go with this because if I say anymore I should not do that. It is not my idea to express my own point of view, but to speak my experience and other things that I knew.

And now I will wait for awhile. I am sorry that I am going backwards in this report. But please, do not write my repetition. And also my sneezing and my rustle of papers. I have a few papers that I scribble on to remind myself what should I do. When I went into Moosonee and Moose Factory I was able to visit three elders and only interviewed one with the recording machine. And her name is Mrs. Chelton. And I recorded part of our talk and I did not record when she didn't want me. Two elders which I had spoken to had given me the permission write our conversation but asked not to be mentioned. To remain anonymous. In Moosonee not recorded, did interview him about shamanism. This was Alfred Atoket. And then there was one elder didn't mind - that's the one - Alfred Atoket. And also his wife. His wife is much older and she has been married once and she is from Chisasibi. That is the East coast of James Bay. She still have her dialect.

And I spoke to her of my questioning. In her mind she says please do not talk about shamanism, because she says she have a bad experience with such things because it's terrifying in my time. But anyhow I managed to ask her about if she things - could it have been a religion? And she says:

I am very doubtful because Christianity is much more pleasant to have because Christianity has not yet scared me and it always provided the peace that I look for.

So these were her words that I remember very clearly. And she talks also about other negative part of the experience she has about the *mitewiwin*. And she seemed to be so fearful of it. She didn't have the good memory of such subject. Therefore we managed to finish it off without going into further aggravation for her.

And then I spoke to a young man that I interviewed in Moosonee who was Peter Nakogee who was very willing to speak to me and did everything to give me the things that I need to know.

It's very awkward for me to try to make this report because I did not sit down to write anything and I did not transcribe the recording that I have. I have at least 15 tape recordings of the small interviews that I did, mostly of those three men that I have visit: [Peter Nakogee,] Ernest Sutherland and Emile Sutherland is the three people. We spoke for about one hour at a time as a three-way conversation. Because we tried to express the question that I carry. And the stories they heard from their father. Because these two men have the same father. One father, which is David Sutherland, who was at Winisk during his lifetime. And both men have listened to their father tell legends and tell stories and the culture history. And they have a lot [more] knowledge from him than I do. They understand their father and they remember his words. And with that I was just blessed to listen to them and to actually hear the first-hand information from them, as they have listened to their father. At times we exchanged these stories. Sometimes I tell them the same stories as I have heard it. And they were surprised sometimes, because they didn't hear the stories that I can tell them. So we more like entertained each other rather than interviewing - the actual interviewing process.

Actually I was very blessed to be able to stay with those people. And Mrs. Sutherland - Juliette Sutherland - has a lot of life experience which she conveyed to me. I felt so enlightened to listen to her life experience and things that she know. And beside her point of views, different point of views from that of her husband. And it was very interesting. She provide me many, many intellectual information and - I mean cultural information, rather than intellectual things. It is intelligent thing to listen to your own culture. Yes it is. She has that because she is same age as I am, maybe a year older and have experience a lot of different life. Because women do have different point of views. I respected that.

And so for now this will be my first tape recording. And the next two will be in more detail. So we go to the next.

