

Title: 0126-Our Voices-Report for Canada Council #2 (Religion)
Bird Number: 030302
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Date Recorded: May 31, 2002
Transcriber: George Fulford
Date Transcribed: June 2002
Language: English
Culture: Cree (Omushkego)
Transcript: Draft

Tape 2 - Side A

Hello, hello. This is Louis Bird again. This is the continuation of my report about the project that I have done which I call *Mitewiwin*. *Mitewiwin* means shamanism. So the name is the only [thing] I go by. I have spoke about very quickly, very quickly, my visit to the communities. I think I am going, I am going to speak about how these things go about. First of all, to repeat myself, if I have not said this already, because I do not - I usually do not write what I'm going to say. And therefore sometimes I repeat myself. Now, here I begin.

The second tape for the report of *Mitewiwin* for Canada Council. My intention was to get to visit communities, five communities, and to ask question. Simple as that. Which is say, was a shamanism or *mitewiwin* a religion for the Omushkego people? That's the question.

Before the European came into this area somewhere around 1600 or before that, there was no, there was no religion. The religion that we know of today which has been brought by the Europeans. It should be easy to understand, because the Europeans have recorded their history for 3,000 years before Christ. And then after that, it just went into more deep, more advance and more recently have developed much more, more...more easily to read. And much more faster to write with the machines printing and all that. Well, technology is what makes the things speed up. And so when the European came into this North America, especially in the James Bay area, we the people [called] Omushkegowuk (also to the east coast of James Bay and Hudson Bay) - we were in the same level of development. We were still using the land. We were still living in the land. Our forefathers in 1600s were simply living in the surface of the land and also living as gatherers and hunters. And then, they didn't have to develop any writing system. And they didn't have to develop any institutions that requires in society. Or living, or in living together. I think we call community living. Because they didn't live like that. They were migrators. They migrate with animals they hunt and they as food. They waited for other migrating birds and to go meet them when they return in spring. And when they left they go up the river to go to the place where they can fish and get their supply of fish for the winter - sometimes to last through the winter. Sometimes also to find a place where they can spend the winter where there's rabbits and some other food items. Sometimes close by to the big games. So moving with season - especially in the

northwest. Southwest of Hudson Bay and also west of James Bay. This was the kind of movement they have. Seasonal movement. These are the people I'm talking about. And doing so, they didn't have to establish the community. They didn't have to build the villages or cities or anything. Therefore they didn't need no...

[Please note - I have over-recorded this recording. We shall switch. We shall, we shall write this bit in different piece until it end. It's not so far ahead. We shall listen.]

But they were stamped in their minds and printed in their mind and written almost like in their mind and they learn very early by listening to the legends and stories. And that's, that's equivalent to the writing history. The legends that are there. I would say it is like having books. A book for this and a book for that. So legends are called have characters name in it. And these were the information that was passed down to the next generation. And so that was before the European came. So they have sort of their spiritual connection. And which was called then *mitewiwin*. But *mitewiwin* doesn't necessarily describe evil thing. The *mitewiwin* is a generalization of a spiritual connection. Whether you want to connect your spirituality with, with the creation that you see. If once you have established the concept of Great Creator. The Great Spirit. The Creator. Once those, our ancestors have established that, and as they begin to verbally express their knowledge of those who have lived for ages, have begin to establish the stories to pass on the knowledge so it can be, it can be used for their education system. And they established it that way.

So the stories are very important for our culture. For the Ojibwe tribes. And also it seems to be a pride across the land. Other tribes use it almost similar. Their stories are the same, except that different name. And that is very slightly different. So the storytelling - the legends telling - and reciting stories, is part of the education system. It's just like reading a book. And let someone read a book and others listen. It was almost the same. And it was usually the elders who have the full knowledge and a good memory being stamped into their mind they never forget the, the content of the story. Or the divisions of it. Or the series of one story. So each story was applicable in a certain season. Sometimes stories can be applied in that season can be told. And this was the way they used their education.

And now let us go back in the spiritual thing. The thing we call *mitewiwin*. In English language we call the shamanism. So anyway, shamanism is I guess a general word. There is other names of sort of similar to First Nation activity. Something like which we hear the European term is witchcraftism. In Africa they call it voodooism. And also other nations [have] this activity. So we in the First Nation in North America especially - we call it *mitewiwin*. I think this word applies almost very large area within the, within Canada today. *Mitewiwin* is well understood what it means. And therefore this is where the spiritual connection established. It exists there, in that practice. Our culture practice, historical practice is *mitewiwin*. All the legends that are there - they're all blend with this mystical powers of the character who, who is in the story. And have, have powers to accomplish something which is not possible, actually. But are dramatized for that young people can hear it and will desire to know more about it. And only then, the youngster

when he hears this, sometimes dreams it. And then he begins to dream and then the dream come into play. And it is the elders who know about this thing how to develop. For an individual, not for the whole groups. So it said.

It is an elders who have the instruction. Not actually curriculum. No, it's not that. It's not like writing a paper you call curriculum and then where you can follow how to teach. No, it's not. This teaching is more like elders' responsibility to do. A guide, guiding service. To guide the youngster how to get it. The elder doesn't instruct the young person. He just support him and sort of give him advice how to, how to handle those things. The dream. The first thing is - dream. One has to acquire a lot of dreams and also apply the meaning of the dreams and it's the responsibility of an elder to interpret that dream and give encouragement to the young person to go on and carry on. And as a person group up and has many more dreams, whether they terrible, or they are horror dreams, or if they are pleasant, mystical things - something that's not possible in real life. And they still have to go on. Especially things that the youngster think terrible or scary.

Supposing everyone is afraid of thunder, a lightning and storm and tornadoes and twisters. You name it. Everybody is terrified [of] those things when you are a young person. And that's why those people can dream about these. Because they are afraid. And so in their dream they wake up sometimes. And there is the parents who say, "It's alright, it's only a dream." So if they tell the story which is, which is how they react in a dream. And then the parents will know this young person is somehow gifted in something. And then is reported to the elders, or grandfather or a grandmother. So the elderly person or persons were easily understood what a dream means and they say: "OK, this youngster is gifted to be a dreamer. OK, let's sort of guide them." So they have a system that is developed to guide this person to have, to accumulate dreams and many dreams and that could be it translated or interpreted into life experience to come. So that's why they encourage this young person to go, to go out, away from home or even a distance from home. A night, two nights or even three nights, to begin with. And then later on, when this young person is getting to be a teenager or youth - that period - he is constantly pursuing more dreams and as the advice from the elder. And it is only him who keep those dreams. He is not supposed to tell anyone. Except just one person. That's the guide that he has as a private teacher, or a personal teacher. So only to him or to her that he is supposed to tell a sketch of his dream. But never explain how it exactly in there. But the old, old person - the grandfather - can understand exactly what this person is dreaming and then give him advice to go back to the dream and try to capture the dream that he has before and go into it again. And this time not to be afraid but to try to accomplish something. In doing so many times.

You know, sure - a person can come to maneuver his dream. Or even to establish it as the accumulation of knowledge. So in order to have these kind of dreams, they say one has to condition himself. Some tribes - even Omushkego - may have exercised this. Some men who want to revitalize their dreams and revitalize their *mitewiwin* has to go fasting. And before they go fasting they have to deny themselves with many things. They have to detain themselves from having sex. And then also to, not to gorge themselves with the find food. Overstuff themselves with food. And also not to go out and have a very

comfortable blanket to go to sleep. And these were not, they were not allowed to do that. But they were supposed to go out into the wilderness at a very minimum of clothes, blanket and not much food. It was up to them to be out there and fast and pray. And then, only when they are really hungry that they should hunt a little bit of food they might need.

And as they get stronger in power, more accumulates more dreams and more became - they begin to exercise some of what they dream. And then their guide, maybe grandfather or any other person go with them at the first period, first time, until they get used to being alone. Because the young people do not like to be alone at night by themselves. Once they get over this fear of being alone then they go out by themselves. But still it is recommendable that an elder should be close by. Whenever they are there and experience some terrible things. Always remember that there is this elder who is his guide, that he can always just call for help if he cannot handle he is into. So actually, these people are supposed to be conditioning themselves to dream. Conditioning is exactly what the dream quest mean. It means you have to make yourself to be on a state of half asleep and half awake, when you go into a place where you have to dream. And some people go out into the sound of falling water. Something that will constantly awake them. Some people goes out into the trees and tie themselves into the trees or a little scaffold where they know for sure they have to watch their movement, otherwise they could fall. For that half-dreaming state is what they want to develop. Some people goes out into the higher - wherever there is higher ground. They prefer to be there. And sleep there on the ground without much comfort. And so they can be in a state of half asleep and half awake. And that's when these things came in.

Soon it comes as a physical beings. The voices became communicable as human. And then also the things they have form into their mind begin to be being rather than non-physical being. For example the thunderstorm became to be a thunderbird and actually saw a bird that come or even can summon or come to them. If a person a dreams about the wolf that is one of this powerful animal. If they dream the wolf, yes, that wolf has to be friendly to them. They have to win this wolf in their dream as their partner. Once they make friends and once they establish a friendship, they now have an helper. And then they also have many other sort of imaginary beings that they created in their dreams, which they could summon in their future, if they need some help. They can dream of all kinds of things. Sometimes many beings, just when they need help to do something in the future in their life. And that is why dreams has to be many. And the most people can acquire the most useful things are at least twenty dreams - it's plenty. Twenty dreams that well established. Well believed and have faith in them. These are the person that wants to acquire in the dream quest.

After the period of dream quest, and then the person is now in so such level that his grandfather will say: "OK, this is great; you are now going to live and exercise these things." And once this person have to that level he can still go on as long as he tell his guide or advisor what he wants to be. What he wants to acquire. So, still he can do it as long as he tells his teacher. Then he can go on. Continue and have more dreams. And probably as many as thirty, maybe more. Just some, but not all can do that. And these

are people that we call *kihchi mitew*. Means "great shaman" and they are known to be one of them at that time. And they are then begin to live.

And then some of those people would have dream specific things. For example, some of them could have developed the dream of being able to perform or operate a shaking tent. If this such person have dream frequently in his young days he can go on and expand it and use it. And this is a most useful person. Because he can provide the communication and communication at distance, and shall we say the foreseeable things. He can be a prophet. He can foresee what's going to happen in a few days ahead or even six months ahead by using this. But not always. Only when he's in there. Not every day when he's walking around or as an ordinary person. Only when he has to ask a question. And then he is a servant to his members of the family. And he is very useful person. And he can utilize that shaking tent also for, for non-offensive reason and also for the offensive reason. Which means, he use the shaking tent defensively. That means if other shaman or any other person the members of his family is bothered other shaman he can, he can set up the shaking tent and defend this person. By using the powers he has dreamed. And readily used for the communication at that time. So this is the person who dream about who is going to use the shaking tent.

So there are many different kind of things that each individual has to develop on his own on his dream quest. For once they have established for one specific thing he sticks to that and get advice from his elder how to do it. And it is up to him to develop it. It is up to him who has faith in it. He believes in it. And if the person is a negative kind of person many negative things come to him and act them out as go on.

Some, some good people sometimes who genetically or inherit the goodness of a man - they can develop this thing into a very good use. They can be very holy person. And very gentle and very generous people. And that is the difference about of that stuff. But is not a church, they say. The elder says though it's not quite Christian church. Not exactly like that. Because it is not developed to be used in groups. Only during the shaking tent can a people come and sit around and absorb and listen - even question to the thing. That's the only thing that comes close to being a church. So the rest of it - it's not. It's individually developed and it's up to individual to practice it and believe it. They believe. They believe - that's it. Having the faith in this dream and whatever they have.

So that's the definition about the shamanism. But that's not all. Beyond I can go on and say more about what goes with it. What comes with this activity. Hold on. Let me go on. This is what I have heard from the elders, from the time when I was young boy up to now. Today I am 68 years old and every year I have a little bit more information about this. A little bit more understanding what was it and what it is. So now I want to speak a little bit more about this thing. We know we have as human, we have five senses that we use every day. We see, we smell, we feel, we hear, we - also, all those things. And we also have extra things that we don't know. We have senses that we can sense a person we love who is lonely back way out there maybe 100 or 500 miles. Especially if it also a child. And especially if it's our brother or sister or mother or whoever - our grandfather. We can feel those people. We will sense that there's something wrong if they're, if

they're sick or if they're sad or if they wish to see you or if they longing to see you. Or if they sad or lonely and crying - you could actually feel those people. Feel it in your body. But you don't know what is - who is that. You cannot pinpoint who. But you could almost sense if it's a child or if it's an adult and if it's an elder. You can have those difference of distinguish things. So this an extra sense that the First Nation people have developed. I don't know exactly how many - how much other tribes have explained this. But I know here, in the Omushkego tribes, this is exactly what it is. It's there. I have it too. I have it. Not as expert as my mother or my grandfa-, grandmothers. Not everybody knows this. It is only when a person is aware of it. And if you are encouraged by an expert how to use it. How to understand it. I don't know what to compare with this thing. There's nothing that I can compare. But I'm going to leave it at that for now. That's one extra sense.

And then the people who are - let me get back a little bit. This thing that I told you - it is called *moonisowin*. *Moonisowin*. It's something that you feel. Not exactly feel it as being touched. No. But feel it as if not exactly as being told and hear the voice. No. But your mind sort of tells you there's something wrong. But it doesn't say. You don't hear that. But you do feel it in your body. Sometimes you cannot sleep. It awaken you. Something. And there is something wrong. If it's a relative of yours is sick or worried or near death or even those who survive - you can feel them. So that's the way this thing is partially explained.

And there is another stuff that a woman has. Our mothers, our grandmothers have this. I believe almost every female have that. And it is called in English "women's intuition." It is very keen. It's very amazing about this thing. I have seen women who have it, who can use that. Who have acquired it, somehow. And it's very interesting. And these things that there existed a long time before the European came. And when you go into, when you go into the *mitewiwin* training and then in the dreams - that's where you begin to have these things. We said - I said before, in dreams there are many dreams, many sorts of characters that you dream in different ways. Animals and birds. Any moving thing. Or even the weather. Even thunder. Even the sun and the moon and the salt water and the [fresh] water. And you even dream underwater - the fish - all this. You dream those things. And sometimes you try to use these things. You could dream about the fox because he's cunning. And you could dream about the eagle because he's most powerful predator who fly. He's a very respect-, so he's dangerous also to humans. And you have to dream this eagle and he became as your helper. And also you have other stuff. You could dream about the water. Anything that is dangerous you dream. If you dream about the water then you dream about the water - being drowned. You cannot live there. But thing is - how do you survive if you fall [in] if you're not a good swimmer? And then when you get down to the last moment of your life - can you summon to help you? Yes, in a dream you could do that. Some people who dream - they say they have dreamed being in the water and have turned themselves into a fish. Therefore can survive. Managed to swim of into the shore and then turn yourself into human again. That's why the dream quest is there. And then also your people - almost everybody who dreams in the young days dream that he's flying. Or travelling in the air somehow. As a person. Some dreamer's dream quest can turn themselves into a bird. Any kind that they wish. And in

that dream is that you can't beat them in dream quest period. And it goes on and on. Almost anything.

And there's also, there's also outside of this from dream you do have some connection with that. If you were to dream that you have friendly with such animal for the good use - for your own use - you have dreamed this. Let's say you have dreamt about muskrat as your helper. What do you do? Well, you can use in your power (because you dreamt the muskrat) you could muskrat as your spy. [Laughter] That is a human spy. Yes, yes. Even the human spy. To spy on people. Or to spy on beavers. Because you want to go hunt a beaver and you want to know how many houses he has. So you dream of using the muskrat to tell you where it is. So you want to kill the beaver - then you summon this muskrat in there because he always live very close to the beaver. And then you could summon him in your mind and say: "OK, Mr. Rat. Tell me where exactly the holes are into the beaver house or outside of a house. How many beavers are there?" So that the muskrat will just inform you. Even tell you where the holes are. And then when you go out to hunt and then you just dig right there with muskrat who tell you [where] to find the holes and that's where you're going to catch the beaver. That's one way using the animals. Using their skills where you cannot do it.

That's the same thing with the weasel. The weasel sometimes, some *mitew* uses the weasel because he's tiny and he can go somewhere you cannot go. Even the mouse. Even the shrew - the smallest mouse. You can use that where you want to see. And then also you could also use the birds in the same way. Like hawk. You can have some kind of a hawk and use it as your partner and your helper. And whenever you want to see something - to find something that you want to see - you could ask the hawk in your dream to say go do that for me. And let me know where this thing is. And the hawk will do that. And that's for you. That is your helper. And so goes on to say many way. And it doesn't stop.

And there is also other stuff that I awhile ago I had it in my mind. The seven senses I talk about. There was also - you could do this to animals. You could do this to birds. And to waterfowl. Whatever it is. Anything that flies. And you could also use your own way. Your own physical being. What you could do is you could train yourself to leave your body and be out there without moving your body. You see - actually stand - even be seen. But you're not there. You are here. Whatever the word in English that is used for this. This is what you can do. And they can also have - some people can do this. The *mitew* can do this. They can make you, they can make a human person or any other person do what they want. Just by using the mind power. And then they can make this person walk as if walking sleep. And do something with them they don't even know. And after that they don't remember doing it. And it a *mitew* who can do that. By just forcing this person's mind to do this.

Now, there's also I've already said a person who can leave his body more like and see around him. Where he wants to go hunt. To see if there's any sign of animals. That is usually very simple to do that for the *mitew*. And then they also have many other things. Some *mitew* can use any kind of thing. Any living thing. Some people can use a box of

beetles you know, for some reason. There's stories about those. And then there's also can have the wind. If they have controlled the wind in their community - I mean in their dream quest. In their dream vision they can create this thing they want. They can use the wind to aggravate another person. A man who have insult him or a woman or another *mitew* who is bothering them. The *mitew* can create a small tornado or a twister to go and attack that person. Or somebody can do many things. Or a person can just send something that physical a very small thing and send it to another *mitew* to aggravate or to hurt or even to kill. These are things that happens. But these - some extra senses that people used. One of them that I say - to be able to project themselves into the distance without moving. And also to be able to see. His eyes - mind's eyes - going out there and actually seeing. And it usually actually happens. And these are the things that we know.

And then there are other things that I cannot now remember. And these are the things that happened before the European came into this land. All our ancestors. Every tribe have a similarities. Not exact copy of each. But they are. It depends on the geographical location. If a person live in a mountainous animals and everything that lives there - that's what they associate with. And if a person lives by the Bay like the Hudson Bay - he has all the sort of animals that he has to be friend with and use and be his helpers. And then there also the *mitew*. Not to do with, this is nothing to do with extra sense. But it has to be in a dream. Some people dream during their dream quest, they would have created the beasts of their own kind. Of their own wish. Of their own will. After they have mastered this thing. So they could create in their minds some kind of a beast who will be able to fight for them if another shaman is sending his beast to kill him or terrify him. He can create one and then fight. The beast only fight, but him, the two men just sit there - their minds fighting. And whoever is stronger is the winner. And if the beast - one of the beast is killed - the *mitew* dies right instantly. And they also - another thing the *mitew* can do is to go into actual inside of a man's dream. They can go there. They can meet this guy in dreams. They would fight. And whoever killed in that dream dies. Doesn't wake up again. So these are the things. Some people can even induce themselves to sleep and then go out there to fight their foe and return only if they survive. This is the real, this is the real stuff I'm talking about. This is not what we see today when say we saw Indian powwows and *mitewiwin*. The people we saw running around the fire. And people dancing around. All these physical things that we see - that is not, that's only [in] the service of the thing. It is only ritualization of stuff that was partially done long time ago. That was done. It is only partially seen. But the real *mitew* doesn't show all these things. That is why most of these teaching - the Ojibwes and others - any tribes across Canada. They do not tell you exactly what the *mitewiwin* is. That is why it is so considered highly secret. Because if start telling the things you have lost your will and your power. That's the concept of this thing. It's totally different that the Christian teaching. Not at all. And therefore it has been said by our ancestors and elders it may not be possible to blend them. One has to be totally eliminated or at least put aside and then practice only one. And they say, if a person try to use both, it usually is a consequence. There is usually a person lost his mind and doesn't have the proper mind after that. Because he didn't have no guidance to begin with. And it was ad-, it was advised against for the, for young, for the person to try it later in years, when he's already grown up. Because a youngster have to grow with this thing so he will be able to survive

it. Of it's severity in tests. A strong body, the strong spiritual can be developed. But the weak body - it will, it will succumb to the power of mind and cannot survive it. Just [like] having a great physical test and mental test together. And if one person has a weak body, usually the body cannot withstand. And that is what happened. And that is why it is so have to be selected. And it is a responsibility of an elders to see to that it doesn't happen. So this is partial explanation about what *mitewiwin* in all about. I could spend time to explain all these of what elders have told me, which I have listened to. Unfortunately today, none of them knew enough and none of them can tell us without worries. Because of restriction by the Christian [church].

Tape 2 - Side B (transcribed by George Fulford)

In our area of the Omushkego this thing has been distinguished quite long time ago. Only a few people retain it. And then it's almost gone now. I think my recording system is coming to an end and I should now stop or just continue on, I think. It has already switched itself to Side B. So I better be careful that I don't overrun on the other side. And so I will, I will - I am trying to summarize the things I have heard in the past and also what I have heard here the last December into this time. My visit to communities. I want also to explain about last summer. Last summer I was fortunate to attend a festivity in Big Trout Lake, Ontario which was taking place [in a place] which is called *Kiiwewin*, I think. It means visiting each other. And they usually enact activities that are created in the community. It's a festival day. And I was included with the visitors. And then I took the opportunity to see some people I know and sit down with some and have a few words with them and talk about a little bit of my interest. My question.

I have a brother-in-law who lives in Big Trout Lake area has a strong belief in this subject. He believes it was there and it's still there. But not in the open. But he, he is a Christian. He has been baptized in the Anglican church and he practice the church at the same time still believing the old stuff. I don't know how a person can do that. It was forbidden for my young days to do that or to believe one thing and the other.

Therefore, I did not actually visit there to do my interviews about the subject. No. I just went to visit because it was an opportunity for me and my wife to go. We were intending to visit in Manitoba for one week. To visit my wife's relatives and to find some information about visiting. As we finished our visit in Big Trout Lake we take the side trip from there. We took a trip on charter to Shamattawa, Manitoba. And then we met some people there that we know. That we know before. And we, I was able to talk [with] those people about this *mitewiwin*. Whether if it's a church, whether we can call it a church or not. As I have experienced, before, that's what they say. They said no, it's not exactly like a Christian church. But it is, it is, it was supposed to be the only kind of spiritual practices connected to the Great Spirit and Creation and all that. That was the only thing that our First Nation has. And it could have been considered the cultural religion or spiritual connection. The difference about this, as I said before, it is not, it was not created for the group or community. Because communities did not exist a long time ago. And therefore it was developed individually. To each individual has to establish it in themselves and use it.

So we visit Shamattawa where we met some elders. And then we went on again by airplane to go to York Landing, Manitoba, which is very close to the railroad - CNR. And not far from Thompson, Manitoba. We visit people there because that is where most of the former York Factory, which was abandoned in 1957. York Factory, Manitoba. Where the Native people were there, the First Nation were there. I don't know what percentage were halfbreeds but there were some treaty people there, and some not. And so the treaty, the treaty Indians took the trip inland. Some of them went to Shamattawa. Some of them went to the York Landing. And some of them scattered all over. And some Metis or halfbreeds went to Churchill and some went to work on the CNR halfway between Gillam and Churchill. Some of them even to the south. And some went to the Norway House and some went to the Split Lake, Manitoba.

So we were able to visit a York Landing people. Most of them were from York Factory. And then those who left York Factory in 1957 are now over 75 and they are too old to return, which they wanted to do. They wanted to return to their former home and re-establish themselves there. But unfortunately they are now getting old and they are weak and they cannot, they have now give up the idea of going back there. But they do organize themselves to visit York Factory each summer for a week. To go and stay there and visit the old place. And these are the elders that I was, I had an opportunity to speak to quite a few of them. But I never did actually prepare myself to interview them with a recording. No. But I was able to speak with them. They knew also what I was doing. They knew already because my wife's cousins are there and they know me, what I do. And they - many elders - were informed that I was a person who collect stories. And then a few of them spoke to me openly. Some of them answered my question about shamanism. But I didn't quite ask them if there was a, to say, do you think it was a religion? But most of them would just tell me the stories. And it was there that I find one story that I love most. About the thunderbird [laughter].

One elder who unfortunately was deaf - couldn't hear very well. He could speak to me. He could speak. So he told a very short story which I found very comical. And it was not, it was exactly for that purpose that the story came out. It was, it was a contest. He says there was a contest one time, what they called "Indian Days". And one of the things that they do is to have someone - a man, or whoever - whoever can tell the funniest story. So there was a contest. So whoever tell a funny st-, a funny joke or story, would have a prize. So this man who tell me the story is an elder about 75. Maybe more. And unfortunately he very hard of hearing. But he knows that I was collecting stories. And I was actually - he knows that I was collecting shaman stories. So I visit him and he tells me a small story, which goes like this. He says:

I was, I heard about this story a few summers ago that we had the Indian Days and there was a pers-, there was a time when the, when people will ask who will have a funny story.

He says:

There were many good storytellers. There were many comical stories that were told. And quite a few people around. And there was an elder sitting there, close by. Just sits there and never said nothing or anything. Just listened. And then one of the, then finally one of the people who organizes this thing, says: "What about you, our grandfather. Don't have any stories that you could tell us. And maybe you might win."

So the old man says: "No, no, no. I'm just enjoying myself."

And they insist. And then, then finally, then finally says, this guy said, said the man. Then finally he says: "Well, I only have a small story," he says, "which happens to me not long ago." "At one summer we were, we were living in the village, where we were living. I got tired of staying in the community and I wanted to go out. This is summertime," he says.

So I wanted to go up the river and hunt the fresh food. So my wife and I took off and take our tent and canoe and we, we took off. And it was my usual responsibility to find food everyday, when we were living. And as I was expect to bring a food for the supper. We travelled the afternoon and towards the evening we noticed that the cloud formation was turning for the great, great - ah - rain. And also possible storm. A thunder storm. As soon as the cloud formation come so close and hear the thunder we decided to stop and make a tent. And we did, we did created and set up our tent and stove and everything. Our camp, really. Unfortunately I didn't shoot anything or kill anything for supper. We do have a basic items we can use. So anyhow, once we move in it's begin to rain and the thunderstorm begin to come over to us.

And my wife says: "Well, I have nothing to cook because you didn't kill anything today."

So the old man says: "Well, it was very unfortunate that we didn't have anything to... We didn't even see anything, in fact."

But they say that we did manage to set up a rabbit snares before it's rain. And then we, when it starts rain, we just sit inside our and have, have our small supper and while we sit there thunder became over and lightning goes on. And then it pass. And then the other, the other parts of cloud came over. Thunderheads, they call them. And then I ask, ask my wife, as [laughter]. I ask my wife if he would, if she would eat a thunderbird if I were to kill one.

So she says: "Anything that is food I will cook because I'm hungry."

So anyway, I walked out to see how far this next thunder will be arrive in our camp. And sure enough it was right over us. And then I pick up my gun. My double barrel. And load the two shells and then, just fire into the air. And, and then I came in. Bring my gun

inside. "That's the reason I went out," he says, "to get my gun. And fired two shots up into the sky, into the, into the cloud."

So he sat down and wait for rain to stop. And it was three hours later. And he says: "We hear drop outside, not far from our tent. Something dropped down. And I said: 'What is it?'"

Then I went out and check what was falling down. And then a little ways from our, our door, there lies a thunderbird. I have hit it. I have shot it down. So I picked it up. And it's heavy - really. And then brought it in and show it to my wife.

And she says: "Surely is thunderbird."

So he said: "What do we do with it?"

And she says: "We'll cook it." She says: "I'll cook it."

And she start to pluck the thunderbird. And sure enough, soon it was in a, in the cooking pot and ready to be eaten. And it was just toward dark by the time we finished eating. And it was great. It tasted very n-, very tasty and very good. And, but it was a fresh food. Very fresh. We know it's going to react to a stomach because it's a fresh food. Because we haven't eaten such fresh food. But, um, we lay around because we have stuff ourself. And we lay around and it's getting dark slowly.

And soon my wife says: "My stomach is full in me," she says. It's really, and it's really rumbling and it's really working away. Whatever, whatever cause it."

"And I feel the same way," said the old man. "I feel that I have so, so much gas build up in me. And really wants to let go."

So we just sort of lay around in our beds and, and my wife also and me. I lay down. And very soon I have to let go the gas. "And it was already getting dark," he says. And we were just about to put the light on. And so I just let go, he says. Let go the gas. And, and to our surprise is there's a great blue flame came out from my real end. My wife sort of startled and every time when I let go it's the same thing happen. And so is my wife was suffering about the gas stomach.

And I said: "Well, just let it go. It might, you might ease the pain."

And then she let go and [he] says: "That great blue flame came out from her real end. And, and that night. Then that's all we did. We just alternately flash out a blue flame from our real end all night."

And, and at that time I was almost screaming and laughing at him.

And then he says: "That's the thunderbird for you," he says. [Laughter] And those, that was the end of the story.

And the man says, and that man who tell the story, he win the first prize.

So this the way. And this is the way people tells a story. And I understand that they tell you a story in this comical way because they don't want to be so serious about telling you the story about shaman power and also many other stuff. And this old man knows about this stuff. He knows the subject. But the one who tells the story, because it was not exercised anyway (it was not used anymore) so he sort of make fun of it. And, and it is very funny in the Cree language. Especially the old man who tells us the story, because he has a different dialect, of their own dialect in York Factory dialect. It's a bit different than, than in James Bay. And that's the story.

So this is what I mean. Some people do not tell you the story in serious manner because they are afraid they may be accused by the church of spreading and reviving the traditional belief and practices. So, in-, instead of doing that they use legends. And usually put it into comical s-, sense. And, and this old man was quite an expert on that. And it's very funny. So most of the elders that I have in this subject asking them a question, they do that. They would tell you a story which they have heard. Usually they pick the negative one. Not, mmm, they don't usually pick up the positive kind of story. Because those elders have been, have been converted to Christianity. They truly believe what the missionaries have told them, that this is a devil work. So they don't want to talk about it because they were totally discouraged to say, to do that. So that is why many of them tell you the story. To cushion themselves and to protect themselves from being ridiculed and being accused. So they tell you in comical way, Or any other way. So I understand that. Because one elder t-, one elder told me that.

And that's the situation about this question: "Was the shamanism a religion of the Omushkego people?"

So the answer to that I usually get is similar. It usually is told, told me in stories rather than making a plain statement to say "No" or "Yes." So, at least I have got some reaction. And here I am. And I have done that. The unfortunate thing is that I did not expect to go that far for the amount of money that I have received. So I had make, make on extra trip into that area which has cost us together my wife about \$4,000. Maybe \$4,500, I think it is. But I s-, we split the cost. I pay a little bit because I wanted to visit also the elders different kind. Different. Far, far away from this area. To see the difference. And to r-, see the reaction. So it's all the same. And most of them says, the shamanism or the *mitewiwin* that our forefathers used, it is not exactly the church as Christianity. But it was the only thing they had before the Christianity arrived in our area. Many of those elders that I've spoke to, they are - the oldest could be about 80, and down to, and the younger to as far as 60. The 40 years old people do not have much of information. Fifty years old, yes they have heard of it. So that's the thing that I have experienced about this question of shamanism. And there is so much to explain how, how this - how to see the difference. You have to listen to the stories. You have to listen

to the legends. And then other stories that have been made to express or to explain the mystery of such thing. There are many unbelievable stories that have been told to me in terms of shamanism.

To summarize. In my understanding shamanism is not a church. But the reality today is our young people, our youth, are seeking some, something they could connect themselves into their culture. Some identity. It is important to have identity. So they want to go back to that. It doesn't matter whether they understand it or not. And that was another question that I asked the elders. To say: "Do you think it's proper to explain this thoroughly to the young people, or to teach them what it is?"

So many elders says no. So many says: "No, it is not going to work. And it's not nice to work, to, to do that." "It is against the church," they said. Even though we have some indication that the church leaders are willing to have asked reconciliation for what it has been done. So, the elders that live today over six-, that are over sixty under eighty say, no. They have already been converted to Christianity so much that they don't see no possibility of returning. Or even reviving it. No. But they hear a little bit about information that some part of the world, some part of this country, the Christianity begin to accept partially of activities or rituals that were used in First Nation spiritual practice. For example, the smudging. That is usually not condemned very much by the church. A sweet grass burning. That they accept because in Christian church there is that. The burning of incense. The fragrance of, of, of tar. Special kind of tar that came from Europe or some other place. That is acceptable. It is similarity is there.

I think in part of Canada also, some part has been adopted to use a small amount of drumming and a few activities that doesn't seem so harmful to church. That is an explanation I tried to give to the elders in order for them to free them to express their stories or their opinion about the question. But there's so many that has been strongly forbidden to speak about such thing. And also little on trying to revive it or help someone to revive it. So it is the experience that I have in visiting the communities. I did, I did record some but it would take time to try to transcribe their, my conversation with them, or their words because most of the time they tell me a story rather than answer the question. They tell me the story which is negative, which will show me what I'm asking - it's not actually acceptable question. I found that most. More than fifty percent of the answers are negative. And that gives me the idea, the, gives me the confirmation which I believe it was, which is, was, also in my collection of stories which I hope to write. Which I am in the process of writing the history of our people in Hudson Bay and James Bay Lowland. Only in that section can it be done. Because our Omushkego people have been truly converted to Christianity. And to them not too many people say that it should be secret anymore because it is not used anymore.

So the question. What will happen to our youth who are so eager to understand or to get information about the subject? That is the remaining question which is not going to be answered yet. In the meantime, life goes on and my project, which I intend to tell, to try to write the history of James Bay and Hudson Bay-James Bay are. And my own effort, which I already collect stories. Now it's only to put them into a paper. To write them.

Originally I had hoped that I could transcribe the recordings into Cree, which I was not able to do. Because I never use any typewriter in my life. Let alone use the computer. I do study. I do learn bit by bit to try to use the computer. But I could never write sixty word a minute. Never. I could maybe write one page a day. At one time I was able to write five pages a day. But somehow I cannot do that. Because of the time, time squeeze that I have. So for the time being I will stop here. I am going to try to record one more tape which I am going to call, I'm going to include into my report for Canada Council who have provided me a grant to make a trips. Unfortunately, the price of air fare in our area has been increased. And also I have to spend a little bit extra trip on that money that I receive. But I did get my, I did get my proposal done and this is my report. I shall stop now here. I do have space yet, but I'm going to stop here because it's getting a little bit of disinteresting. I mean my enthusiasm is gone for time being. Thank you.

Hello, hello. This is Louis Bird. I am starting again. Today is Monday morning, June - I think it's third. June 3rd. And time, my time is 11 minutes after eight a.m. And the year is 2002. Yesterday evening I spent time to try to record what we have just heard. I have tried to do some words that can bring us back at the beginning, before the European time. And to, and to a main subject remain as *mitewiwin*. Which actually really the question that we want to find.

So in the, in, at the end of this recording I talked about the procedures that is required for one to became a shaman. Not because I want to revive the shamanism or *mitewiwin* of the Omushkego land. No, that is not the idea. The idea is to provide information for those who are interested. As I have said before, the youth are truly interested in finding more information about these, the First Nation traditional spiritual belief and practices. For their reason, for their own good reason. Some want it for something they can depend on. Some want it identical item that they could say "I am the First Nation." So they have to have something that belongs to the First Nation. And this is one of them. At least, in most they interested is that the ancient spirituality, the ancient spiritual belief and practices - what were they? And some wanted to use it as a, as a church, more like. Establishing it into some form of a church, so that it can be used amongst the group.

So it is, it is not a bad idea. And it is not bad to wish to do that. But the thing is, how much do they have to know? How much shall the, our elders should help. How much should they tell? How much information do they give? Should they give only the things they think is good, or should they encourage to tell everything what they know. But most of the elders advice, as I said (I went to visit) - they are very reluctant to speak about the subject because they didn't do it. They didn't use it. They didn't practice it. Those who were born in 1900. And my age group - I was born in 1930 and 40 thereabouts - and by the time I, I grew up, I have never seen such thing. But I heard a lot of it in, like I say, in stories. And therefore the stories that we have from our ancestors are our culture history. It's simply put. In the oral form. But not in the written form. And this oral history was good while the people were in the wilderness. While they were still practicing their survival activities on the land. But now they don't live there. Now we all, all the, all the area of James Bay and Hudson Bay, we have moved into community for the last 30 years. Gradually settled into community. And the practice that was there in the, in the

traditional land and the traditional activities and culture establishments are not practiced anymore. Let alone practice the spiritual belief and practices. So that's the truth. And that is the reason why it is a little bit too late to ask these questions to try to apply them in our life. Because we are not going to live that way anymore. Our young people grow up in the, in the community setting. And also different lifestyle. And in different language in different culture. And only in the activities of the sports. That's the only place that our young people practice hunting. But not necessary trapping for survival or subsistence. This is the true.

Many young people that were born in 1970s have not - not so many have actually a year round in the wilderness with their family. That is also fact.

And now, beginning back to the a little bit more about the past. When our ancestors live in the wilderness and follow the pattern of seasonal movement - it was in that time that this spiritual belief and practice that was most valuable. And most intimate related in the culture activities. It was necessary. It was necessary at least for a family. At least a member of a family to acquire such qualified capabilities for protection. And, as we said, one at least would have to have to be able to have the foresee the problem ahead and once, one family must always have an elder who have a life experience living in the wilderness. Who knew the weather. Who knew the movement of the animals. Who knew the movement of the fish and all the rest of the, of the species that they use for food. And also an elder who knows the territory very well. And knows exactly where the next, the next section should be, should be go. Should be so the family go to continue, continue survival. And this goes around each year. A routine. And an elder who have done it is an expert. And an elder who have acquired spiritual traditional spiritual belief and practices included with his physical culture is totally independent person. And he automatically became a teacher. He is a master. He is a leader. Most of the...in custom requires that we respect those kinds of elders. And that's the old tradition. But today it doesn't apply. Today there's no such culture. Today people move into communities. Different kind of leadership is required. Different kind of a leadership. Which I mean there has to be one leader. There has to be a society services establish by outside. Other nationalities who have expert on their own lifestyle. So the First Nation for the last 50 years have not acquired that expertise. And for that reason our elders are not reliable for the different culture that we are now we found ourself into. And this is the, this is the truth. And it's truly the fact of today life. In, in the meantime we have already settled into the community from the last 30 years. Probably from 1960 people began to have a housing into the small settlement of the European. Where the Hudson Bay Company used to do the fur trading. People are forced to move there. More so in the decade of the '70s where people began to demand to have the, the r-, the local school. Community school. And also when the residential school begin to diminish or sort of disengage. And therefore more members, more families, get stuck in the community because they have to be close to their, to their children to go to school. And this is, this is the fact. And that's what lead us to, to move into community and to establish different kind of life. And that is what I wanted to explain very thoroughly.

I am not much so interested about the past to try to express how we must know or how we must strive to get back. Because it's almost next to impossible to bring our young people back into the old ways. Because certainly they would never want to live the way our forefathers lived. And only if they could go back to the spiritual belief and tradition. Traditional belief and activities - they might. It may not be, it may not even - that may not even hold them into wilderness. And besides that. The way it has been happening recently when the European arrive and they want to claim the land for their own settlement and development into a nationhood have acquired some method to acquire the land. Using many of the institution they brought with them. The legal matters and also the spiritual stuff. And everything. All those things have been well-taken care of and works smoothly into acquiring the land in which they want to claim. And this is the knowledge that our elders did not know. They were so new to the different culture. And we were not going to that kind of stuff. But we can always say, right now, very quickly, when the European came they changed the First Nation lifestyle. They change it physically. They change it spiritually. Physically they make, it makes the First Nation to be dependent upon the Whiteman. His trade. And then, after the Christianization, totally the First Nation became useless in his own land. And then dependent upon totally to the Whiteman. And then in legal system. After the treaty was made they have submit totally to be, to be ruled under the rules of the European culture. This also at that time those who signed the treaties did not understand all these things. What was taking place and what was happening.

For the exchange. It sounded so well. And for them they have faith in it. And they believe in it and they submit. So they signed the treaty. And after they signed the treaty they also have agreed their lifestyle will be ruled under such different culture. And the spirituality also will change. And that, that they will have to be trained in different lifestyle. And that was the aim. The aim of the federal Department of Indian Affairs is to de-Indianize the nations that have signed the treaty so they will became one nation under the one rule and under the one services, without any special status in the future. And this was the understanding that I got. But our forefathers who signed the treaties didn't understand that. And this is the events of the European arrival. And very fast pace. And then now, we are at least 75 per cent of our culture has been wiped out. The only thing that is [left in the remaining] 25 per cent is the language. The language which we will not even ready to let go. We will not yet. We have not yet developed the writing system by the time we were forced to let go. And this is why, this is why this - the project of collecting oral history and gathering the in- ... the oral history and histories of the James Bay Lowland. And all its components. It is important to get it all into a paper for this time. That's the idea.