

**BIMAADZIWIN (THE GOODLIFE):  
SHARING THE LIVING TEACHINGS OF THE PEOPLE OF SAGAMOK  
ANISHNAWBEK  
IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION**

By

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### Abstract

This research is a presentation of the living teachings of the people of Sagamok First Nation; an Anishinabek (Ojibwe, Odawa and Pottawatomi) community located midway on the northern shores of Lake Huron in the province of Ontario. It is a conceptual exploration into the lived notion of *bimaadziwin* (primary translation is the goodlife) as defined by this community. This account is not only socio-historical, but is philosophical as well, offering an intimate journey into the lives of a People that have survived, struggled with and resisted the colonial process. Their living voices and lived stories embody the hope, dreams and examples of the reality of a People deriving from a strong culture, tradition and language. The experiences, philosophies and worldview of the People of Sagamok are presented textually (words, interviews, poetry) and symbolically (material documents, archival work, photos) in order to show the beauty and tensions of a community in reconstruction.

This research is Ojibwe research, an insider's deliberate attempt to understand the nature of her home. This research is also an investigation of the 'his/story' of Anishinabek education, as embedded in a larger structure of imperialist domination and the future of Anishinabek education, as moving towards the recovery and honouring of 'our knowledge'. This body of work exemplifies emerging research methodologies that are reflexive and respectful of First Nation's protocols, shedding the boundaries of investigative practices beyond the colonial gaze.

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*Meegwetch* (thank you).

## CHAPTER ONE: COMPREHENDING THE ANISHINABEK OURSTORY

### Introduction

This introductory chapter lays the foundation for this body of research. We begin with an exploration of the central thesis and core concept *bimaadziwin* (goodlife, living teachings), then move into the notion of combining orality and material documents, then expand on the concept of other-than-human experiences as ourstory and then present the necessary research protocols and community sources of knowledge. We conclude this chapter with a brief introduction on the nature of this research, provide the rationale for an Anishinabek ourstory, expand on the methodology by surveying the tools in the formation of landscape and present a concise profile on the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek.

### Aboriginal Sovereignty

The spirit in me is he who governs me and my soul.  
 My Soul tells my heart to feel for my people,  
 My heart electrifies my ears to listen and Hear my people,  
 My ears translate the message to words. Words that are to be spoken of.  
 The spoken words becomes a voice.  
 The voice becomes leadership.  
 We as aboriginal people have a "Spirit" and a "Voice", therefore, we are all leaders.  
 Leaders that govern the "Path of Life" that the creator has given us to walk on.  
 I believe in my spirit, for he has been here for many centuries.  
 - Unpublished poem by Joanne V. Owl

### A good visit

I was sitting in the kitchen of my friend Joanne Owl; her home is nestled between a great grey grandfather rock, strong medicinal cedars and rolling yellow grasses. I look to the east of her home and there sits a lodge, where the visiting Elders Archie and Albert await the many people from my home community that come and see them for guidance and healing. I'm comforted here, it's as though UBC, research and words like 'discourse'

and 'hegemony' are worlds away. I can't help but feel better, feel more alive than I have in years. My friend asks, "How's the research going?" "Alright" I say. But she knows better I'm sure. It's not alright. I feel heavy, as though I'm carrying a large burden on my shoulders, one that is unnecessarily too big for me.

Unknowingly to Jo (but knowingly from the Creator) my friend has perfect timing, she heads off down the hallway and comes back with some poetry and work she's been doing for a course she's taking at the Anishinabek Educational Institute.<sup>1</sup> She proceeds to share her work and I feel more than privileged to be her audience. As we talk over tea and the conversation moves towards the Elders Archie and Albert, Jo recalls a time when the presence of these gifted people was rare and not welcomed. "The people are coming back to it" Joanne says. I think about that statement 'the people are coming back' and I think about 'what made the people, our people in Sagamok move away from our traditions, our language, our way of living?' What forces throughout our own his/story have sadly driven our people away? The people are coming back. The people are coming back and that's a good thing.

#### Worldview (universe+view) = Bimaadziwin

In their paper Worldview and Narrative Tradition, Overholt and Callicott (1982) seek out an appropriate cultural definition of worldview that best describes the Ojibwe position within the field of ethnometaphysics. Overholt and Callicott begin this process by examining the work of Irving Hallowell, who is best known for documenting and analyzing the spiritual practices of the Ojibwa Nation, and that of Robert Redfield. Their combined investigation and collective synthesis then identifies worldview as "that outlook

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<sup>1</sup> The Anishinabek Educational Institute is an aboriginal post secondary institution located at the Union of Ontario Indians head office on the Nipissing First Nation in North Bay, Ontario.

upon the universe that is characteristic of a people...the picture the members of a society have of the properties and characters on their stage of action" (p. 4). This definition is particularly useful for the scope and meaning of this work, but needs to move beyond these perimeters to respectfully represent the ontology, axiology and epistemology of Ojibwe people.

Worldview is symbiotic with the Ojibwe word *bimaadziwin*, which is best described by Deputy Grand Chief of the Union of Ontario Indians Nelson Toulouse in these terms,<sup>2</sup>

*Bimaadziwin*, well I mean the obvious, the first thing is ah 'my life', and ah [pause] but it could, I mean 'my life' probably means a lot of things, ah and you um probably talk about a whole range of things, certainly would be about experiences, your, your beliefs, ah your health, um, you know all those life experiences that you have, how you identify yourself, you know how are you, why are you the way you are today. (N. Toulouse, personal communication, July 15, 1999)

In those terms worldview is opened up to a greater breadth of meaning. It encapsulates the simplicity, complexity and interconnectedness in relations that is often characteristic of Ojibwe people.

*Bimaadziwin* is a powerful word. *Bimaadziwin* is the 'goodlife' that we aspire to, it's the way we think, the measurement of our behaviour and it carries a lot of responsibility. Peter Owl, a respected teacher on Anishinabe clans, states that *bimaadziwin* is carefully sharing with others your gifts, doing so respectfully from the truth of your spirit or there are consequences if not shared properly,

The information that we give to someone, it's got to be untainted, it's gotta be pure, it's gotta, you can't mix, you're not gonna mix it up because if you do, then you're gonna frustrate individuals, somewheres along this frustration that's gonna set in, and people become disillusioned, because they've heard the truth, but because this, there was ah, the adulterated word may have been intermingled in with that eh, and

<sup>2</sup> The Union of Ontario Indians is a native political territorial organization representing 43 Anishinabek (Ojibwe, Odawa & Pottawatomi) First Nations in the province of Ontario.

it sort of causes a problem, it'll create doubt...the teachings within a community, within a nation have to be pure and they have to be sincere, very sincere, *bimaadziwin* is just a continuation of one's learning...we all become responsible to another or to somebody else, the more I know, the more responsible I become, the more you learn, the more responsible you become...it's life and it's sharing of life. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

This research, this text and accompanying dialogue is in itself a material representation of *bimaadziwin*. It is the 'goodlife' and 'sharing of life' as I know it and as I relay it from the experiences and stories of my people.

How does the sharing of this story take place? For what reasons does the sharing of life, sharing of *bimaadziwin*, become necessary? What drives an Ojibwe researcher to seek out meaning by rendering the familiar places of her life to becoming the strange, the peculiar and the most unordinary? To scratch the surface and begin an exposition of the answers to these questions, I'm reminded of A. C. Wilson (1998) when she states,

Very few have attempted to find out how Native people would interpret, analyze, or question the documents they confront, nor have they asked if the Native people they are studying have their own versions or stories of the past...to truly gain a grasp of American Indian history, the other historians--tribal and family historians--must be consulted about their own interpretations of and perspectives on history. (p. 23)

My hope is that this research, as being conducted in my own unique location as a member of the community of Sagamok, is one that provides detailed descriptions and insights into the motivations, behaviour and vision of my people. It is the goal of this study to provide a deeper understanding of the metaphysical question 'What is an Ojibwe goodlife?' as it relates to members of Sagamok Anishnawbek.

The research process and the driving force behind sharing *bimaadziwin* is best reflected in a visit I had with Elder and master ash basket maker Irene Makedebin. We sat in the living room of her home talking, me on the couch and her at a small table while she

worked at her handicraft. She began this talk by going into a nearby closet and taking out her hand drum, she carefully took it out from its wrap, played it quietly and told this story of its meaning,

This Elder said 'this drum carries a message' he say 'you talk with this here, call it your nephew [a drumstick] and ask to play your drum', I guessed how to play it or I don't know...he never told me anything about the message, so after we come home [pause] I keep wondering what that message is in there eh, you know, I'm kinda scared to eh, that's the year I was doing my quill work, yeah just getting the urge you know like ah [pause] what kind of message is that [pause] so all of a sudden I thought about this old lady telling me stories eh, and ah I said maybe I should, tell, tell those stories over, I never thought about the message again, it's just that [pause] its come out, just come out like that eh, realize, realize, I keep telling the stories that she told me and maybe that's her there [in the drum]. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

The significance of this 'telling' has many implications for an Ojibwe researcher. This material representation, this private narrative, this presentation of archival documents combined with the testimony of members of Sagamok, is our community drum that is representative of the knowledge and experiences of our ancestors. When we tell 'ourstory', we are relaying the *debwewin* of generations from time immemorial.<sup>3</sup>

*Bimaadziwin* has always had and continues to have a practical living application. If we think carefully about it's meaning we are reminded of words like life, sharing, values, worldview, experiences and learning. A more broader application of *bimaadziwin* entails that responsibility that we (as cultural members) have to one another and to those generations yet unborn. As ourstory in Sagamok began to unfold the potential for that practical application became more obvious for curriculum change at our local on-reserve school. How could the sharing of 'ourstory' become the sounding board for curricular transformation? How could 'the story that was never told' become the vehicle in which

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<sup>3</sup> *Debwewin* is the Ojibwe word for truth. The deeper meaning is its representation in the Seven Grandfathers, or the Seven Teachings of the Anishinabe, as described by *Mide* teacher Eddie Benton-Banai who states 'truth is to know all these things'.

our children could learn and live by? The sociological accounts, the stories, the archival documents, the photos and the key resource people within this dissertation soon became that practical focus for curricular change at our local school. Embedded within our students' daily subject areas had to be the space for these stories to be told. In connection with our local school improvement plan this research was conducted in correlation to a comprehensive curriculum project. The project would involve the creation of a resource directory (human, geographical, land values) that could be drawn upon by the teachers to provide a more Anishinabe (Ojibwe, Odawa, Pottawatomi) inclusive school. The curriculum project would also involve the creation of lessons and units that reflected the culture and history of our community. This curriculum project is *bimaadziwin* as praxis; theory (ideas, philosophy) that is manifested in practice.

#### On combining orality and material documents

I've been fortunate that in my research travels I've worked from a reflexive and exploratory stance. I knew that this work would be categorically located within the reaches of ethnography, but the old definitions seem to sift away as I worked on this investigative life journey. The primary methods were participant observation, open ended interviews (utilizing snowballing participant selection techniques) and the review of archival material documents. It seemed like an even keeled approach to data collection, a nice neat package, but as time moved on the boundaries of these methods moved closer towards the notion of the postmodernist crystallization of research. Soon the linear and compact categories of canonized research devices dissolved and I was overwhelmed with narratives, life histories, historical analysis and threads of visual anthropology

(photographs). The research package is rich, intense and concentrated, providing deeper insight into *bimaadziwin* in its fullest sense.

The notion that history is a linear sequence of events has been challenged by various community members in our talks together. What is regarded as important in terms of remembering the past is etched upon the memories and style of those that deliver their living accounts. On this particular occasion, Elder Irene Makedebin talks about the past in a story she told her family doctor,

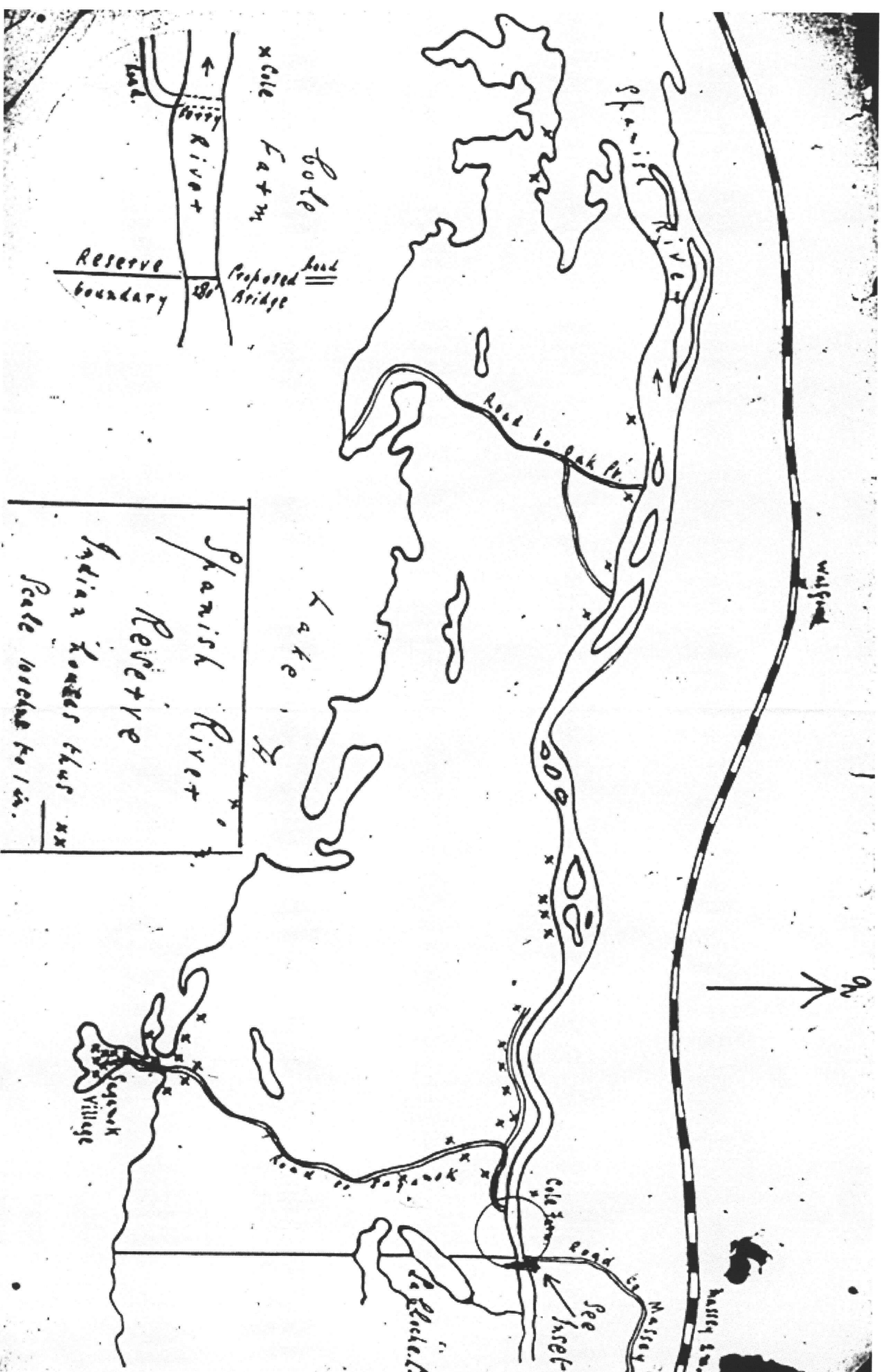
I was telling Dr. Keenan they [the old ones] knew a long time ago before white man even got here, they used to be medicine men eh, I guess there was quite a few of them then, and they were really ah strong persons, and ah one time I guess they were just sitting around like ah, they do in um in circles, putting your tobacco down or something [pause] cause they usually do that, and I guess this old man here, I remember just sitting there smoking his pipe and [pause] all of a sudden he put his tobacco in his pipe there and he's start telling them that ah 'there's somebody coming' [pause] 'somebody's gonna get here' [pause] 'that's gonna like lose all the traditional ways of an Indian, all the, like the medicine men, there all going to destroy our' [pause] 'traditions, and one of those will be with a black robe, a black robe there'll be, big black dresses are going around the room and you're in there' look what's coming...so it's true you know they're, they broke ah [pause] nearly lost a traditional teachings and medicine man and all that, even the language you know...just to think sometimes I sit here and you know what she, she used to tell me [pause] think about those stuff, stories she used to tell me and ah it, it was true, he knew what went ahead of them. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

This conversation provides insight into the Ojibwe conception of past/stories that delve into explaining the evolution of a colonized peoples. Our Elder recounts her tale as though she herself were present prior to European contact and settlement in North America. This 'telling' is important because it conveys the experience of being and existing as colonized subjects in Sagamok First Nation. This story is also a healing step towards understanding how to decolonize ourselves and grasp what was lost.

As part of that colonized history we are often reminded of those larger forces existent in Sagamok that predetermined and framed the relations between Natives and non-natives, one of those entities being the Hudson's Bay Company (henceforth HBC), which can be considered the foundation of Canadian historical identity. The exploration of material documents in this research is deliberate in its attempts to illuminate a more personal account of those agents responsible for colonizing a people. These documents move from their lifeless states to becoming living witnesses and evidence to a time gone past. To provide an example of 'what's yet to come' in the next six chapters, let's begin our journey together by examining documents concerning the building of a road (Figures 1.0 to 1.2). The scenario is one where the Sagamok Anishnawbek members have no access to the mainland as there is no bridge and the roads are in horrible condition. In Figure 1.0 we are presented with a map of Sagamok (then known as Spanish River Indian Reserve No#5) that provides the backdrop for the land in question. The portion of land lying between the Spanish River and Lake Huron and west of the furthest boundary line on the right is Indian Reserve territory. There is no suitable place to build a bridge or cross over safely except for the area deemed as sole property of the Hudson's Bay Company, which is the point furthest east on the map and north of Lacloche Lake.

In Figure 1.1 the story of those colonizing forces that shaped the historical relations between members of Sagamok Anishnawbek and their non-native neighbours begins to unfold. The 1<sup>st</sup> letter reveals the reluctance of HBC to allow road development from the First Nation to the town of Massey and cites causes related to 'unauthorized people being on the property'. HBC claims that many fires have been set and that they have had to absorb considerable costs. This letter is coming from HBC in Winnipeg and their source

Figure 1.0 - Map of the Spanish River Reserve Drawn Freehand in 1926



Note. Spanish River Reserve No#5 is the former official name as registered at the Department of Indian Affairs under the power of the Indian Act. Sagamok is the official place name as known to the Anishinabe people for this tract of land. It means land of two points joining. (RG 10. Volume 7724. File 23036-3 Part 1)

Figure 1.1 – 1<sup>st</sup> Letter Dated September 11, 1937 to the Indian Agent Regarding HBC Parcel of Land



LAND DEPARTMENT

**Hudson's Bay Company.**

INCORPORATED 27<sup>th</sup> MAY 1870.

HUDSON'S BAY HOUSE

WINNIPEG

September 11th, 1937.

C. F. Rothera, Esq.,  
Indian Agent,  
Thessalon, Ontario.

RE LA CLOCHE RESERVE, ONTARIO.

Dear Sir:

We are in receipt of your letter of September 3rd with which you enclosed a sketch plan showing the approximate location of the proposed road through our La Cloche Reserve.

With reference to cutting a road through our property, we do not wish to stand in the way of any development but we are reluctant to grant the permission requested since we have already been put to considerable expense fighting fires and loss through burning timber by unauthorized people being on the property.

If we were to grant permission to cut a road, the property will be more accessible to vandalism. However, we are writing to our local representative for advice and will let you know our decision later.

Yours faithfully,

WJT/VMC.

For Manager.

R. & O.E.

ALL QUOTATIONS FOR THE SALE OR LEASE OF LAND ARE SUBJECT TO PRIOR SALE OR LEASE, TO CHANGE IN PRICE WITHOUT NOTICE AND TO THE USUAL TERMS OF THE COMPANY'S CONTRACTS FOR SALE OR LEASE

Note. The Hudson's Bay Company owned this large tract of land, although there hadn't been much activity on it by HBC in years. Of importance is the communication about the road and possible bridge that affected specifically members of Sagamok First Nation. It is a two party power conversation, HBC and the Indian Agent. (RG 10. Volume 11386. File Sault Ste. Marie District Roads, Spanish River etc., 1930-1941)

Figure 1.2 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter Dated October 30, 1937 to the Indian Agent Regarding HBC Parcel of Land



LAND DEPARTMENT

**Hudson's Bay Company.**

INCORPORATED 27<sup>th</sup> MAY 1870.

HUDSON'S BAY HOUSE

WINNIPEG October 30, 1937.

F. C. Rothera, Esq.,  
Indian Agent,  
Thessalon, Ontario.

Dear Sir:

RE LA CLOCHE RESERVE, ONTARIO

In further reply to your letter dated September 3rd.

We have now heard from local people with whom we correspond for information and advice about our La Cloche property and we have again carefully considered the effect of a road through this property.

For some years we have been endeavoring to sell the whole reserve en bloc and have made some special efforts this year. The indications point to the prospects for selling en bloc as being better than for selling in small parcels, and it is expected that a purchaser will prefer to have full control of the property and that if a road across the property could be used by the public, the appeal to prospective purchasers would be substantially lessened.

If this were ordinary farming land we would only be too glad to accommodate you, but we are sure you will recognize the importance to us at the present time of avoiding the establishment of a roadway for the public across the Reserve.

Yours faithfully,

*Manager.*

E. & O.E.

ALL QUOTATIONS FOR THE SALE OR LEASE OF LAND ARE SUBJECT TO PRIOR SALE OR LEASE, TO CHANGE IN PRICE WITHOUT NOTICE AND TO THE USUAL TERMS OF THE COMPANY'S CONTRACTS FOR SALE OR LEASE

Note. Of importance in this letter is the fact the HBC has been trying to sell this parcel of land but had been unsuccessful. Their motives for not permitting Indian Affairs on behalf of the Spanish River Indian Reserve to build a road is questionable. There is an underlying assumption that HBC is restricting Native access through this parcel because connection to an Indian Reserve during that time was not economically viable or attractive. (RG 10. Volume 11386. File Sault Ste. Marie District Roads, Spanish River etc., 1930-1941)

of information regarding this tract of land is a local representative that is familiar with the area. The impending decision to not allow road development based upon these charges is unreasonable and suggests that the local informant has allowed their personal bias against Natives to interfere.

In Figure 1.2 this position is reaffirmed when HBC Winnipeg responds with their decision based upon the advice of their local people within the First Nation/Town district. HBC cites economics as the reason for denying development of a road through their tract of land, but the truth of their motives is revealed in the underlying tone. The only 'public' (as it is put in the letter) that would be using the road is the membership from Sagamok First Nation who need to get to town safely and efficiently in order to purchase supplies. There is no other public seeking to use the road and it was not the desire of people in that time (or even now) to frequent a First Nation in Northern Ontario. The motives and decisions of HBC (as advised by their local informants) are obvious: racial discrimination and the affirmation of colonial power.

#### Other-than-human experiences as ourstory

Every human society maintains its sense of identity with a set of stories which explain, at least to its satisfaction, how things came to be...sometimes these stories incorporate moral teachings and what we have come to call religious traditions, the actions of the higher spiritual powers or invisible forces that were important actors in the more spectacular and memorable events of their history. (Deloria, 1994, p. 37)

When I was interviewing various community members about the notion and achievement of *bimaadziwin*, I was quickly introduced to historical, philosophical, mythical and sociological stories and experiences. Some of the most interesting perspectives on the 'sense of past events' came from individual insights on the 'supernatural' powers that are at work in the community throughout various periods. At

times I do believe that the word 'supernatural' is probably not the best expression to use to explain these occurrences because it implies something 'greater than'. I think that for this work we'll call these entities and 'tellings' of those experiences as 'other-than-human' encounters. These narratives are told in the spirit of Vine Deloria's (1994) position when he speaks about the validity of other constructions of history. An example of this is reflected in a conversation I had with language teacher Sandra Corbiere,

A long time ago, when she [her grandmother] was just a baby and her grandmother would speak to her eh, she used to tell me about things that happened a long time ago...like ah, they're were still in canoes and different ah people coming in, different nations eh, and ah some of the stuff that happened like ah [pause] the Ojibway women used to get stolen and taken to another part, and she used to talk about that and ah ah things that would happen like ah when you're traveling on the lake, there use to be those ah animals ah big animals use to come after you eh...but ah you used to see them in the water. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

The preceding monologue is important because it reveals a number of things. Firstly, the relations between Ojibwes and Iroquoian people had always been rocky. There are tales of great wars between our nations prior to European contact and immediately thereafter. There are certain sites within Sagamok territory that are places where these battles happened. Secondly, the presence of animals in the lake, albeit they are not meant to be helpers to Native people, have served their purpose in warding people off the water. Today there are still reported sightings of 'creatures' being seen off the North Channel roaming the waterways. These sightings are welcomed events because they represent the living presence of ourstory.<sup>4</sup>

We were told it as young children and learned to understand as adults the maxim that *there are two sides to every story*. (Morantz, p. 338, 1996)

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<sup>4</sup> The welcomed presence of 'other-than-human' creatures is significant in Ojibwe cosmology. For detailed descriptions of this phenomenon refer to Basil Johnston's books on the topics of the Weendigo and Bearwalkers.

In her paper Discovery and Exploration in Interpreting Native Views of Early Contact Morantz raises some cautions concerning Native interpretations of Native events. She raises the flag that, although history has been written and framed within a western colonial discourse, we must be equally cautious when giving “back history to those who have been denied by it” (1996, p. 338). What Morantz seeks to illustrate is that all researchers must be careful of infusing ethnocentric accounts/interpretations with anything that resembles ethnohistoric writings. She tackles this by critically reviewing her own earlier work about the Crees of Rupert House. Morantz (1996) revisits her earlier research intentions when she states, “I was certain I would be able to correct, to some degree, the totally European biases of my earlier histories, based as they were only in the journals and correspondence books of the Hudson’s Bay Company” (p. 339). Her version of history had gone through much growing pains in terms of trying to find balance in maintaining the integrity of both orality and recorded his/story. Her cautions for all researchers are important in terms of presenting versions of ‘ourstory’ without romanticizing or idealizing ‘times gone past’.

While Morantz focused on being aware of our own biases that may influence the breadth and spirit of our work, fellow scholar and Crow Creek Sioux Elizabeth Cook–Lynn had another and more familial approach. She states,

The role of Indians, themselves, in the storytelling of Indian America is as much a matter of ‘jurisdiction’ as is anything else in Indian Country: economics, the law, control of resources, property rights. It goes without saying that it reflects our struggle with the colonial experience of our concomitant histories. If that sounds benign, it is anything but that. On the contrary, how the Indian narrative is told, how it is nourished, who tells it, who nourishes it, and the consequences of its telling are among the most fascinating--and, at the same time, chilling--stories of our time. (1998, p. 111)

Any questions surrounding my writing and researching about my community, Sagamok Anishnawbek, from my location as an Ojibwe woman is certainly a topic for arguments over identity politics and subjectivity/objectivity. But I refer to Cook-Lynn when she emphasizes the importance that 'our narrative' and the telling of 'ourstory' offers a critical perspective on his/story that has only recently had the space to be told. The sharing of *bimaadziwin*, the sharing of our life, our experiences and our red knowledge is the 'living story' of 'things that were' and 'things yet to come'.

When the topic of writing about Indians comes up the first questions that come to mind are Who is doing the writing? [and] Why? (Wilson, 1998, p. 23)

I am a cultural insider to the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. I have lived there all my life. My roots and connection to that area are found in my family and in the land. There is no other place in the world where I feel such a deep seated and soul connected familiarity. This research is written by myself (an insider) that has been positioned in a peculiar and interesting space. This journey has many tensions within it, of which I will discuss a few. The first tension involves the relationship between my location as cultural insider and community protocols. Let me begin by stating that much research has been done about Ojibwe people and a few projects have been about my home community in Sagamok First Nation. Prior research space was occupied by cultural outsiders who came in, did what was required and left. Most research about Ojibwes was constructed in a frame which our community members term 'his/story'. This meaning that the majority of research about Ojibwes has been conducted by those that reinforced a colonial and patriarchal version of events. Very few researchers have stopped to confirm with our people and our experts their understanding and interpretations of life, moments, documents as they related to us. Much research has been framed in such a manner as to fill

the space of a predetermined theoretical framework. Much research has been done at the expense of true reciprocity and reflexivity. Does this mean that a cultural insider will do better? Perhaps. Does this mean that a cultural insider will offer a different version of 'his/story'? If she or he adheres to community protocols then it is with great hope that the version she or he presents will be one of 'ourstory'? This being an approach which embraces the unique position that the cultural insider occupies.

Can the cultural insider shift from this position to that of outsider? Is this a possibility? The definition of an outsider has often been relegated to those researchers that have come from outside the cultural group they are studying. But the definition of an outsider can be understood at different and varying levels. There have been times when our own Native people have been positioned in their communities as outsiders (culturally, socially and/or politically) which further opens the argument over authenticity and truth. Within our First Nation communities there is a complex social network at play. There are certain families that occupy certain positions within the community (political, economic, cultural). There are certain types of information that the cultural insider may or may not have access to and there will be times that the insider may not be in position to say certain things (those things that cannot be said or will be left unsaid). This is why the location of the First Nations researcher needs to be carefully laid out and considered. I have often throughout the course of this work talked about myself, my family and my relationship to the community. This has been deliberate in my attempts to demonstrate the level of authenticity and reliability of the information. One of the main factors that affect an insider's status to becoming an outsider will always be in the intent and in the protocol of the research. If the insider in our community seeks to conduct research for personal and

individual gain, then he or she will receive a limited view of the story. If the insider in our community does not adhere to community protocols of respect then she or he will not be welcomed and regarded in a good way. These types of behaviours will position the insider to that of outsider. Am I an outsider? That is the question which I hope this research journey will answer for you. The tensions between the lived concept of insider/outsider is a complex and compelling part of this research story.

Everybody dreams, no matter what culture they belong to or what they believe, but how people view their dreams and interpret their dreams depends greatly on what they believe. (Spielmann, 1996, p. 194)

As I was sitting in the apartment of language teacher Sandra Corbiere, most of our talking was about the subject of dying and dreaming about those that had passed on before us. Sandra had some good words to say about my mom who had passed on to the Spirit World a few years before, my mom's grave was just on top the hill above her apartment. Sandra had known my mom quite well. She had been an elementary school counsellor for 23 years. Her death, like many deaths in our community, was completely unexpected and we were unprepared. Sandra, also aware of loss, relays this dream to me,

There's other teaching that we hear, that ah Anishinabek are together out there, they're not separating [pause] like this one person that told me, he says 'something happened to him a long time ago [pause] when he actually died and ah he travelled eh', he travelled to the other world and that...it was just all Anishinabe people. Anishinabe all over no matter how far. All you see is Anishinabe people. And you see all these people laughing, they're happy and ah I said 'now I have to travel back', he brought me back. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

The purpose of this account had many meanings. Firstly, Sandra told me this story to share her understanding of loss and her interpretation of 'life after this life'. Secondly, this excerpt represents our 'other-than-human' experiences that are part of the daily living story of Sagamok people. No book, no research, would be complete without an exploration of

our constant connections with *GitcheManitou*, the daily spiritual elements existent in our lives.<sup>5</sup>

#### Sources of knowledge and research protocols

I used to pick tobacco for her eh [her mother], gee I'd be sitting there waiting for her to finish, that was this mitts for us, yip, yeah it get to, to talk to, to an Elder and he will tell you 'she knows'. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

When I began this research process in a formalized manner, as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. during the summer of 1999, I had many mixed emotions about the impending experience. The notion of 'expert' kept filling my head and questions surrounding the nature of that word continued to arise. I knew that I was writing this thesis as an exploratory journey on the concept of *bimaadziwin*, but the more people in Sagamok that I talked to and interviewed made me soon realize how little I knew. I had been confronted my entire academic life with the words 'Indian Expert', 'Aboriginal Authority', 'Ojibwe Specialist' and realized how little these words meant in the Native reality of 'who knows'. I felt as though I were in Kindergarten again for the first time in comparison to the knowledge possessed by the many people in my community. The true experts were those who did not seek or desire any title or recognition, it was those who made the time to sit with me and talk about 'their life'. The true experts were those who were respected for the type of knowledge possessed.

In my mind, the presence of Elders and respected teachers present throughout this text begins to deconstruct those old colonial conceptions that had inhabited my former experiences. The questions of who knows, how they know and what they know would soon be replaced with an enhanced understanding as provided by Clan Teacher Peter Owl,

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<sup>5</sup> *GitcheManitou* loosely translated means 'Big Spirit' but the scope of this word is interpreted as 'The Great Mystery, Creator of all things, neither male nor female'.

*Bimaadziwin* is, it's a value, it's a value eh? Individuals are responsible... there's a certain obligation that I have [pause] its gonna be sustained, how am I gonna do this? Or how am I gonna enhance *bimaadziwin*, what can I do to make you more, the values within your life, able to ah, you know radiate within your own circle, then, *bimaadziwin*, is this, it is life and the strictest teaching that they have is to be able to retain whatever information, whatever teachings individuals have [pause] all those values that seem to come to this quorum, then we become responsible to be able to distribute the gifts, it becomes a gift to other individuals. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

The responsibility that all community members have to develop their own gifts is the greatest challenge we all face. These gifts will be representative of the knowledge we will possess and pass on. The Elders in our community are recognized as the carriers and transmitters of knowledge, they are the ones that know. There are also other teachers within our community who are not yet Elders and their sharing of specific teachings are symbolic of what they know. The sources of knowledge within my community of Sagamok are dependent upon the information you seek and how you approach them.

Some of the forces that took aim at destroying our way of life and essentially dispossessing our Elders and traditional people of their power will be discussed throughout the entirety of this work. There was a time when most of our sources of traditional knowledge were forced to go underground. There are still times today when caution is used when those who possess certain types of knowledge are within our midst. Figure 1.3 documents the power that Indian Affairs had in respect to our daily lives and Figure 1.4 demonstrates the resistance to religion that my community possessed.

In Figure 1.3 we are confronted with an all too common scenario where the basic necessities of the people of Sagamok are under the contemplation and control of bureaucrats in Ottawa. The letter details the absolute need for repairs to roads on the reserve. During that time farming and livestock were one of the main sources of livelihood

Figure 1.3 - Letter Dated May 29, 1931 to the Indian Agent from the Department of Indian Affairs Regarding Road Work on the Spanish River Reserve

ADDRESS REPLY TO THE  
SECRETARY, DEPT. OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
OTTAWA



IN YOUR REPLY REFER TO

No. 23036-1

ALSO TO THE DATE OF THIS LETTER

PLEASE WRITE ON ONLY ONE SUBJECT  
IN EACH LETTER

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS  
CANADA

May 29, 1931.

Sir,-

The Department is in receipt of a communication dated May 26th from Chief Louis Solomon and Councillors Frank Geguetch, and Antonie Toulouse, advising the Department that a resolution has been passed by the Indian Council and members of the Spanish River Indian Reserve No 1, asking that a sum of at least \$500.00 be provided for the repairing of roads on the above mentioned reserve.

This road work is considered necessary in order that the Indians may be able to move their threshing machine wherever needed on the reserve. According to this communication the Indians are willing to perform statute labour on this road work.

As you are aware there three Indian bands interested in the funds of the Spanish River reserve, and each of these bands are located at different agencies. Before going any further with the matter I should like to have a report from you as to whether the Department would be justified in granting this expenditure.

Your obedient servant,

✓ A. F. MacKenzie.  
SECRETARY.

C. F. Rothera, Esq.,  
Indian Agent,  
THESSALON, Ont.

Note. The power that Indian Affairs had on the daily lives of the people of Sagamok is great. In order to get necessary repairs to roads required firstly the authority of the Indian Agent and then the authority of Indian Affairs Ottawa. The main spring to fall activity of this time for members of Sagamok was farming. It was key to survival, therefore the threshing machine for hay was a necessity. (RG 10. Volume 11386. File SSM District Roads, Spanish River etc., 1930-1941)

Figure 1.4 – Letter Dated June 2, 1933 to the Indian Agent from the Department of Indian Affairs Regarding 'Holy Roller' Performances

TRANSCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL

4019-4

June 2, 1933.

Sir:-

I am returning herewith resolution enclosed with your letter of the 1<sup>st</sup> instant passed by the Indians at Spanish River Reserve, with reference to "Holy Roller" performances among the members of the band.

Will you kindly let the department have a report in connection with this matter, together with your recommendation in regard thereto.

Your obedient servant,

A.F. MacKenzie.

Secretary

C. Rothera, Esq.,

Indian Agent,

Thessalon, Ont.

encl

Note. The Band Council Resolution that is discussed in the above letter is in response to the presence 'holy roller' (extremist Christians) activities in the community of Sagamok. The BCR was a rebuking of such activities in the community and the need for some protocol for redressing of this undesirable behaviour. (RG 10. Volume 6607. File 4019-8)

and survival for families in Sagamok First Nation. The presence and mobility of this community threshing machine was vital to the fall haying of family fields. This hay would provide the necessary food throughout the winter for the memberships' livestock. In reality, this exchange between the Indian Agent and A. F. Mackenzie would continue on for months before a decision would be reached. By the time the funds for road repairs would be released, fall would be quickly approaching and thus it would not provide adequate time for this project to be completed.

In Figure 1.4 we are introduced to a situation that is a consistent theme of conflict (both past and present) in the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. The Chief and Council during that time had passed a band council resolution expressing their concern over 'holy roller performances' that were affecting the cohesiveness of community members. They felt that these gatherings were a negative presence in the sense that this indoctrination of Christianity was pitting member against member. There were public denouncements by members of the band of all Natives (often their neighbours) who were not 'born again' or the 'openly converted'. In these 'holy roller' sessions the message being transmitted was that all Natives who did not 'accept Jesus as his/her Saviour' was damned to hell. These extremist Christian gatherings continued to take place and were a source of discontent among members. To this day one of the main factors that divides the members of my community Sagamok First Nation is religion. It is a war of the churches in terms of members assessing whose beliefs are supreme and dominant.

While it is obvious that such forces like organized religion and government have altered the path of the people of Sagamok, what is most frustrating is how these forces succeeded in taking the authority away from our traditional people and Elders. During the

time of our subjugation we allowed these outside structures to become the canon and valid discourse of 'who knows'. We no longer relied on our traditional people and sacred teachers for their direction, but began a misguided and confusing journey where our way of life became the separation between the sacred and the secular. Our story soon gave way to 'his/story'. To understand the aboriginal version of past events is to understand the complex reality of aboriginal present, which is trying to rationalize and break away from the western frame of the colonized experience.

American Indian communities possess internal histories of relations defined according to their separate cultures. Tribal communities are built on an infrastructure of interrelated societies and roles, such as clans, leaders, warriors, medicine persons, and others. An important part of this network is the community's relationship with the flora, fauna, and metaphysical spirituality. This network is based on socio-cultural understanding of a religious nature. Such an understanding of the internal history of what has happened within the community remains foreign to the Americentric historian. This dimension of Indian history cannot be seriously studied until new tools of historical interpretation and new theories can be developed. (Fixico, 1998, p. 91)

I recall sitting in the boardroom at the First Nations House of Learning (University of British Columbia) with my fellow peers discussing the complexity of the research process in Native communities. It was always a lively discussion considering the varying interests and disciplines of the individuals concerned. We had often sat together and participated in the many Graduate Student seminars, which was a good thing because it had often provided us with insight on the research experiences of others and allowed us the space to think about our own research plans. On one particular occasion I remember listening to Jo-ann Archibald of the Sto:lo Nation talking about issues surrounding reciprocity and respect in research. For a long time those two words stayed with me. I would go over her talk and re-examine her experiences as she worked with various Elders

in her study of storytelling. I would ask myself in what ways was reciprocity present in my research? What protocols of respect known to me as an insider were utilized?

No research class or text could have outlined the appropriate way to conduct research in my community of Sagamok First Nation. No text would have said that the necessary protocol to engage in this process would begin as all things in Ojibwe territory begin, in ceremony. I went to see my Uncle Martin Assinewe, told him about the project and he relayed that this was a good thing for the people. I went to see my uncle a second time, offered him tobacco and told him I wanted to do this thing in a good way. He accepted and was happy about this. I went to see this Elder a third time to make preparations for the ceremony and he instructed me on what to do. The fourth time we saw each other was on the shore of Toulouse Bay, the place where my family first came to Sagamok First Nation from Drummond Island (see [Figure 1.5](#)). The persons closest to this project and to me sat in this circle. My uncle lit his pipe and the beginning of this research journey had started. It wasn't going to be easy, that I knew and expected. The lighting of that pipe signified the responsibility I had accepted.

Reciprocity was present in the sense that this project was a shared venture endorsed by our Chief and Council and legitimized through the authority of respected Elders in my community. The living stories and experiences of the people represented the larger narrative of myself and the collective identity of people within Sagamok First Nation. Each talk with the people began with the sharing of a gift (tobacco) and the return was them sharing their gift of life. People within the community were aware of this project and sanctioned it with their stories. There were also times that people I spoke with would tell me that this 'telling' was just for me and not meant for print. That direction I respected

Figure 1.5 – Photographs of Toulouse Bay and *Nokomis* (Grandmother) Madonna Toulouse, The Beginning of the Research Process



Note. The 1<sup>st</sup> picture is of Toulouse Bay which is situated on the North Channel in Lake Huron. The 2<sup>nd</sup> picture is of my *Nokomis* (grandmother) Madonna Toulouse who is standing just off the shore of Toulouse Bay. The rock behind her is where the research process began in a good way with a pipe ceremony.

and honoured as such a gift was meant only for our oral traditions. The issue of responsibility and respect for the teller is always present. Earlier when I said that certain stories and life experiences were not meant for these pages, this was an important factor in applying Native research ethics. It is imperative that “persons participating in this process may feel empowered” and this can only happen by “engaging native communities at every level of the research endeavour” (Webster & Nabigon, 1993, p. 167).

Research in Native communities is a challenging and rewarding life activity. Issues related to Jo-ann Archibald’s principles of respect, reciprocity and responsibility permeate all activities that I am engaged in with this conceptual study of *bimaadziwin*.<sup>6</sup> I am an insider. I am from the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek and come from one of the largest families on the reserve. Everybody knows me as Dorothy’s *daanis* (daughter) and everybody knows my father Nelson who is the Deputy Grand Chief of the Union of Ontario Indians. My place within my community is a good one, I’m known as a young *Anishinaabekwe* (Ojibwe woman) who occupies the role of an educator (just like my mom). My clan is *Genozhe* (Pike), which has the traditional role of a philosopher/teacher/mediator for the Anishinabek people. In all senses I’m in the community niche that was meant for me. This is my responsibility and path that I’m fulfilling. As for reciprocity in my research, that is inherent and a necessity in order to occupy my respectful place in the community. It is a unique place to be and the discipline required to fulfill this location is good for my spirit.

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<sup>6</sup> This is taken from a Graduate Seminar that was facilitated by Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald at the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) at the University of British Columbia. The seminar dealt specifically with research protocols and ethics in Native communities. The seminar took place in the FNHL boardroom during the Fall of 1998. She has published many accounts that deal comprehensively with these topics.

### Story/telling/s and the nature of this research

If they were looking for information and you knew what they were looking for, you tell them, you sit there and tell them the story and you didn't point in that direction, you never sat, you never sat with anyone, you never spoke with anyone and point at you know, point in their direction, it was an insult, it would be an insult if they did, it was a wave of a hand...you never took the, your finger and you know point it at individuals, because you were insulting this individuals intelligence by having to turn them in a direction. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

Respected clan teacher Peter Owl and I were sitting in the dining room of my home talking about the way knowledge was passed on throughout the clan system. We were engaged in this conversation because I was trying to establish some parallels between modern methods of Native research and traditional ways of Native research. The main thing that I took notice of is that if an individual wanted to know something (back then) there was a protocol to follow. The first thing you did was you had a question in mind, you wanted information so you sought it out by thinking about how you were going to ask the question to access the information you wanted. Then you articulated your question to the person who 'knew' this information. Your question would begin with the protocol of giving this person a gift and then she or he would proceed to answer you in the most appropriate manner, which usually was in story form. When we thought of traditional and contemporary ways of doing research, not much had changed. The emphasis still was on the protocol and method of the telling.

An example of relaying a story is when my *Nokomis* (grandma) was recounting her childhood in Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island before she moved to Sagamok,

Oh she could make a meal out of nothing [her mother], she sewed, she made Indian handy crafts, sat up half the night with a light around her, she, she made Indian handy crafts [pause] although my father worked all the time, but pay was very small in those days...and my mother did the best she could, when she finished ah sometimes you know an item or a box and ah in Wiky you know they didn't give you cash, you had to trade, so buy the necess, necessities of life, there was no

buying candy and stuff in those days, no pop, I don't think there was any pop in those days, and you, you don't buy bread [pause] mother always baked bread. (M. Toulouse, personal communication, November 3, 1999)

The purpose of this talk began with a conversation we were having regarding 'kids these days'. My grandma and I were sitting about and she was telling me about these young people that had come into my uncle's store and were hounding their mother for junkfood. The mom eventually just gave in to the demands of her kids and my grandma was expressing her dismay to this situation. She was also expressing her views of contemporary parenthood in the most respectful way possible. The method of her telling was not to say 'I disapprove of today's parenting' but was to be respectful and let the listener take from the story what she or he may. The point is that, although *bimaadziwin* is about sharing our life, we do so in a manner that challenges the listener to think. It is as Peter Owl suggests when he alludes to the fact that it would be an insult to the listener, and in this case the reader of the text, to point you in the direction of where to go. The most respectful way is to challenge your mind and tell you in the most descriptive way possible that an image is forever imprinted in your memory.

Language teacher Sandra Corbiere and I have had some very interesting conversations. We had gotten into this discussion about the different teachings, songs and stories we had experienced over the past couple of years. We were discussing everything from Creation stories to women's hand drum songs. I had told her that although I had heard the lodge song 'All My People' on several occasions, I could not remember how the end beats go to that tune. Sandra laughed a bit, then relayed these words to me,

The Anishinabe used to gather, and ah just talking and smoking those pipes and in the morning just visiting with each other...it was I, I guess to ah my understanding some teachings that you're not ready to hear or listen to. You always fall asleep. You always. The grandmother will start talking and ah telling a story and you'll

sleep. So enough...and if you're not ready to learn something you, there's always something that happens and I'm sleeping. I fell asleep [laughs]. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

The message for me was clear. It was a teaching that was often told by several people amongst our community. If a person is truly not ready to accept the responsibility that comes with knowing certain types of knowledge, then he or she usually will not remember. It is the way of our people. Knowing is a great responsibility.

This is the way and why we do things

And, and there was you know, going to one I remember ah an Elder said in one of those workshops, he says 'you are here for a reason [pause] everybody's here for a reason', you know that really stuck in my mind, you know I'm thinking why am I here? What, what am I supposed to be? Ah what am I supposed to be doing? (M. Trudeau, personal communication, December 9, 1999)

All research begins with a question. It is the question that drives us to explore ways to illuminate or explicate the answer. The question that drives this body of research is 'What is an Ojibwe goodlife according to the people of Sagamok First Nation?' This work is primarily an exploratory journey into the concept of *bimaadziwin* (goodlife, living teachings) as it is defined by the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek. It is ethnographic by nature. It is an exposition of Ojibwe cosmology and an interrogation of the forces that are responsible for the subjugation/colonization of the people of Sagamok. It is a descriptive and figurative excursion into the mindset and current reality of the people of Sagamok. This research attempts to address the questions that Language Teacher MaryAnn Trudeau presents as to the 'why and how' of our being.

This research is not meant to be a study on discourse analysis or in storytelling. The focus is on exploring the concept of *bimaadziwin* according to the members of Sagamok First Nation. However, it is interesting that throughout the course of my visits

with various people there has been much talk about stories and the protocol associated with oral traditions. The purpose and method of orality is best exemplified by Band Councillor Raymond Owl when he recalls,

Oh that, that's all we did at night, listen to the old man or some other people, we congregate, different families eh, especially in the summertime, we go ah camping eh, we meet up with other people and at night there was a big fire [pause] some places where, where we met and everybody would, old people would tell different stories, one night be all scary stories, next night might be all happy stories, like ah you never knew who was gonna start, but a stories gonna start, it was you know it was good, lots of scary stories, but mostly scary stories are the ones ah hopefully the, the young people were listening, like you, you go back and think now the stories that you hear, why they're was telling you, if they, they were warning you. (R. Owl, personal communication, January 21, 2000)

The focus of the telling was in the purpose and the imparting of certain knowledge. It was usually relayed by the Elders of the community due in part to the fact that they "had a major responsibility in preparing the younger children for specialized roles" (Archibald, 1995, p. 289).

These stories and life experiences were always told when our people gathered together or sat visiting with one another. On the other hand, traditional stories that were sacred were not told until the first snow had touched the ground. The teaching behind this is that all knowledge has its appropriate time and place and all knowledge has its responsibility and consequences. If a traditional Ojibwe story was told out of its place then the teller was said to 'get a frog in their throat', usually implying that he or she would have trouble with their voice because they disregarded an important rule that is our oral protocol. The complexity and intricacy of the oral tradition is truly amazing. It is as clan teacher Peter Owl describes,

The storyteller would either look in one direction and the listeners, and they'd never look at him, but everybody would listen and several nodding of heads and,

you know [pause] everything worked, it was unique the way everything worked. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

Respect for the teller was given only through acknowledging the telling of the story by nodding your head. There was limited eye contact for the reason stated previously, the listener had an equally great responsibility to draw upon his/her imagination and mind by focussing on the speech, tone and description of the telling.

The old ones they can make it, try and scare you and everything, everything to do with life, you know they tell you stories about it, some scary, hopefully that you wouldn't venture that way, you know but they'd make it so scary, another one jumps in, tell you another something else really scary you know, but it was all made so the younger people won't ah take those chances I guess. (R. Owl, personal communication, January 21, 2000)

This excerpt returns to the notion of the purpose of stories. Often these stories were the sharing of *bimaadziwin* (goodlife, living teachings) between clans and members. These tellings had their purpose because the social order of the day focussed on community survival and the success of community members' niches. These stories were the pedagogical tool in traditional education and the "success of this system depended on the strength and wisdom of parents and elders" (Archibald, 1995, p. 292). These traditional forms of education worked to ensure the social and cultural survival of our people. Their strength and effectiveness declined as the presence and power of religion and government increased.

I had spoken earlier about the purpose and nature of my research. I had also alluded to establishing some parallels between traditional Ojibwe research paradigms to current ones. In consideration of this, I will relay an experience I had while I was sitting at my uncle Martin Assinewe's house. We were talking about the difficulty and discipline required in walking the path that was given to you. Martin talked about his role as an

Elder and I talked about my role as an educator and researcher. Martin encapsulated the spirit of our discussion when he stated,

I do have to discipline myself sometimes you know, we'd walk on the mountains, go someplace where they'd let ah our people that been there like you know...we don't have too much time so we, we, re, revisit some of the areas, some of the ah old time ah people we had gathered...hopefully do some ceremonies there you know, pick up what it is and who all know, or even to strengthen out the things that we need. (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000)

Walking this path, whether it be just our daily life or working on a research project of this size, requires a new way of doing and seeing the world; it involves a purpose larger than yourself. It is as Elder Martin Assinewe describes, we must purposely and with thought revisit those spaces (spiritual, cultural, and physical) in order to find what we need to strengthen ourselves and our communities. This is a focussed research journey that invites the reader into the landscape of his/her mind.

#### Tools in the formation of landscape

Archival data are the routinely gathered records of a society, community, or organization, and may further supplement other qualitative methods...the decision to gather and analyze documents or archival records should be linked to the research questions developed in the conceptual framework of the study. (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 85)

Interviewing, participant observation and recorded observations (field notes) guided the creation of this work. Equally important was the use of documents (archival & photographs) that furthered the understanding of *bimaadziwin* as it relates to the First Nation community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. Enhancing traditional ethnographic methods with pictures, letters, poetry, comics, maps and other documents provides the reader with a richer dimension of the research question; thus broadening the research experience for the researcher, researched and ultimately the reading audience. The research landscape is enriched through a variety of pictorial and symbolic documents that

complement the nature of this work. Newer and creative forms of writing and researching are continually utilized in a conscientious effort to engage the audience with the research beyond the frame of singular levels of text and words.

*What is an Ojibwe goodlife according to the people of Sagamok First Nation?* is the fundamental research question that guides this work. And as I sat on the seventh floor of the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa, Ontario I worked with that question in mind. I reviewed reel upon reel of microfilm that dealt specifically with my community and sought out documents that would address an aspect of the research. At this point I had completed the majority of formal and informal interviews and was aware of emerging patterns and concepts. Each archival document selected was done so deliberately in the hopes that all would contribute to the richness and breadth of understanding *bimaadziwin* (the goodlife and the living teachings) as lived and envisioned by the people of Sagamok.

My trip to the Archives in Ottawa was planned out four months prior to the actual visit. There were a multitude of steps involved in the acquisition of archival materials related to Sagamok First Nation. The first step involved conducting an on-line search of records that I wished to review at my impending research visit. This search is within itself a lengthy process and requires the researcher to be very aware of what they are looking for. The next step involved is getting prior access to the documents themselves and the issue of who had legitimate access became a problematic area throughout the course of this research. The National Archives was the ultimate determinant of which individuals possessed authorized access to certain documents (access codes). The next step of filling out the necessary applications for access was a stepping stone unto itself and involved two separate letters from the Chief and Council of my community requesting that I have full

access to all documents related to Sagamok Anishnawbek. The submission of two letters from Chief and Council became a necessity as the National Archives Access division deemed the first letter (in Band Council Resolution form) insufficient in detail as to the nature of my access. When the application was finally completed, the on-line request for records was submitted. The turnaround time for the records request and their availability was four to six weeks. At this point I was able to plan my visit with legitimate access to the records that I had requested; which was a month and a half later.

The inclusion of the many archival documents throughout this work is necessary. It not only provides agency for the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek, but also illuminates the pursuit of *bimaadziwin* and those forces that sought to dismantle it. It is a singular experience to talk about the impact of the Hudson's Bay Company on the people of Sagamok in text form and quite another to show the impact through documents (letters) from the company itself (the players). The archival documents are therefore deliberate in their purpose. They enrich the work by providing an element of multi-dimensionality in the landscape of the research and the experiences of the reader.

Films and photographs have a long history in anthropology. Called visual anthropology or film ethnography, this tradition relies on films and photographs to capture the daily life of the group under study...provid[ing] visual records of passing natural events and may be used as permanent resources. (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 90)

The decision to use photography as one element within the methodology came at the earliest stage of the research process itself. Photos have often been criticized for freezing 'research actors' in time, not allowing them to move or grow beyond the anthropological gaze. I thought about these criticisms, recognized them and accepted them. But I thought that if the inclusion of pictures was used in a manner that provided agency to the People

and their land being studied then those frames could be broken. The pictures throughout this work emphasize a necessary element of *bimaadziwin* (the goodlife) acknowledged, lived and aspired to by the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek. Although our People had many external political and societal constraints exerted upon them they still exercised their power (spiritual, physical, mental & emotional) to make a difference in the outcomes of certain situations, therefore acting independently of those constraining barriers. The photos provide agency not only to the People but to the land and environment (animate actors as opposed to inanimate ones) as well.

It was a way of life, it was just a way of life. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

Throughout the course of this research I kept my digital camera close by. As the research emerged I would take pictures of those goodlife activities (places, people & events) within my community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. Each photo that has been included in this work illuminates a particular element or level of *bimaadziwin*. In the preceding [Figure 1.5](#) (page 22) are pictures of Toulouse Bay and of my grandmother Madonna Toulouse. These photos are representations of *bimaadziwin*, that goodlife and the living teachings of our people. The connection to land, respect for earth, connection to our grandparents and reverence for protocol is the spirit of *bimaadziwin*. The photos provide a richness and depth that cannot only be talked about but needs to be seen as well. As stated previously in reference to archival documents, it is one thing to singularly represent an idea, concept or thought in text form and quite another to show it. The photos bring to life a People and landscape that would otherwise be denied by a world of words. For me, these photos are agency in action.

Conclusion: profile of the community of Sagamok

The community of Sagamok Anishnawbek is located 15 minutes off Highway 17 and is approximately one (1) hour west of Sudbury, Ontario. It is nestled on the North Channel which is a water tributary of one of the great lakes, Huron. The culture of the community is Ojibwe, Odawa and Pottawatomi. The language is primarily Ojibwe with some Odawa influences in its dialect. Current political memberships are the North Shore Tribal Council and the Union of Ontario Indians. The main employment for our membership is seasonal, logging, housing and roads projects. This is a progressive community that has its own on-reserve school, alternative school, business centre, water treatment system, health centre, gymnasium, band office and several on-reserve businesses.

The particular demographics of the community are as follows:

- Total registered population for Sagamok is 2075
- Of that total the registered males on-reserve are 637
- Of that total the registered females on-reserve are 570
- Of that total the registered males off-reserve are 390
- Of that total the registered females off-reserve are 467

Approximately two-thirds of that population are under the age of 30 years. The main concerns of this community are socio-economic, cultural and health related. One of the greatest challenges facing the community of Sagamok is youth unemployment and secondary/post-secondary dropout rates. The other challenge is the rate of diabetes among the membership and the final challenge is the survival of Ojibwe language and culture. In terms of a visual aid please refer to Figure 1.6, a map that is a useful tool in providing a picture of Sagamok.



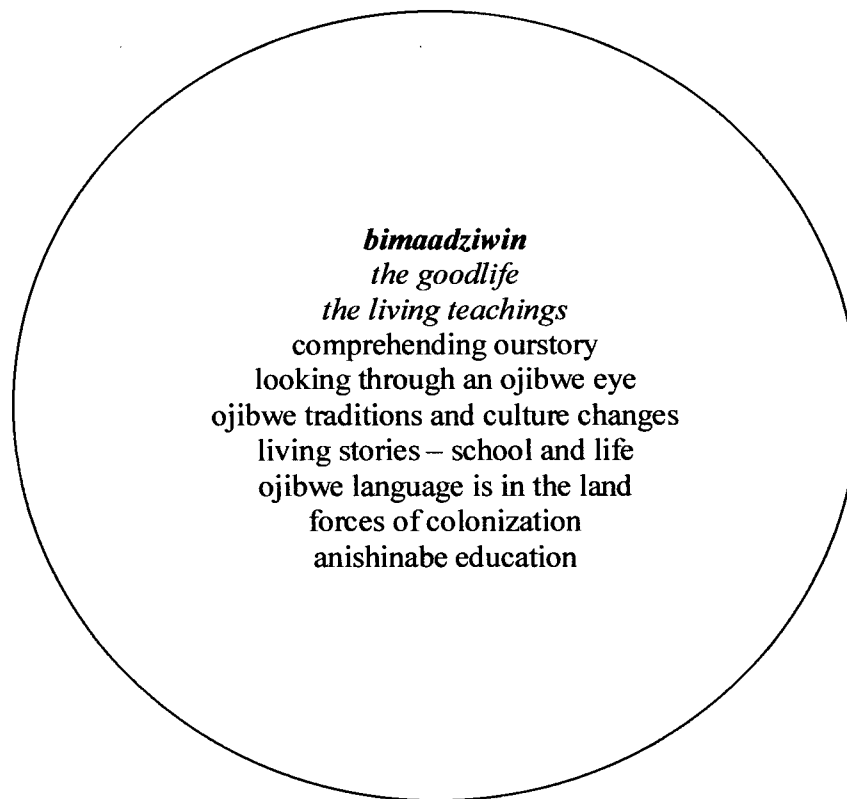
*Bimaadziwin* means life or living. (M. Toulouse, personal communication, November 3, 1999)

I conclude this chapter titled Comprehending the Anishinabek Ourstory, which has been an introduction and overview of the research. The rest of this work will render the reader familiar with the many good teachers, Elders and family members within my community that have guided this work. Those being my mother Dorothy Hope Toulouse (now in the Spirit World), my father Nelson Toulouse, *Nokomis* Madonna Toulouse, clan teacher Peter Owl, poet Joanne Owl, master ash basket maker Irene Makedebin, good woman Sandra Corbiere, language teacher MaryAnn Trudeau, storyteller Raymond Owl, Elder Martin Assinewe, good helper Hubert Eshkakogan, veteran Dolphus McGregor, good granddaughter Virginia Assinabe, my uncle Paul Toulouse, family matriarch Angeline Stoneypoint, my brother William Toulouse and our many ancestors that speak through our living documents, brought back from the recesses of the National Archives of Canada.

The next chapter to follow is a discussion of Ojibwe worldview and cosmology entitled Looking through An Ojibwe Eye. Based upon several conversations with various Elders and respected teachers from Sagamok First Nation, we will survey some of the main themes that represent the complexity and dynamics of Ojibwe philosophy. At the same time we will explore in greater detail the scope, depth and meaning of the Ojibwe term *bimaadziwin* (goodlife, living teachings).

In summary this work will be based upon those patterns that emerged from the analysis of the research findings and corresponding discussions (Figure 1.7). The rest of this dissertation will be organized accordingly. Chapter Three will explore the changes in tradition and ultimately the culture of the people of Sagamok. Chapter Four will present the living stories as to the school and life experiences of the people of Sagamok. Chapter

Figure 1.7 – The Existent Framework Emergent from the Research Findings



Five will illuminate the importance of language to culture and the changes in language of the people of Sagamok. Chapter Six will interrogate those forces (government, legislation, religion) that subjugated the people of Sagamok. The final chapter (seven) will discuss the implications for education that this work has raised.

## CHAPTER TWO: LOOKING THROUGH AN OJIBWE EYE

### Introduction

This chapter is an examination of the worldview and cosmology of the people from the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. We begin with an introduction of the living metaphor 'looking through an Ojibwe eye', moving into the notion of connections with the land, then exploring the lived concept of cycles of life and concluding with a presentation of teachings in life and returning to a holistic 360 degree vision of the world.

### My Inspiration and Aspiration

My surrounding is so beautiful and very precious,  
 The air I breathe, the water I drink,  
 The beautiful trees and all the other plant life that surrounds me,  
 The beautiful birds that sing and that fly above me,  
 The sun that shines upon me and all other living things,  
 The rain that sprinkles upon each and everyone of us,  
 The rolling thunder that rolls in the spring and summer;  
 The shining, twinkling stars that look at me from above,  
 The grandmother moon that shines her bright light for all living things,  
 The moving clouds that are above me,  
 The voices of laughter that I hear from a distance,  
 The movement of animals of different kinds,  
 The movement of humans is steady each day;  
 Oh, how beautiful life is...  
 Just the way the creator thought it should be;  
 The peace it brings too my spirit and soul,  
 The energy it restores within me;  
 All those beautiful things, I feel in my heart presently;  
 I sometimes give the creator thanks for allowing me to feel his beauty;  
 It so inspirational to see and feel all of this;  
 And to enjoy it; more so enjoy it to its fullest;  
 My aspiration is to learn and feel  
 From the spirit of the animal life,  
 The spirit of the plant life,  
 The spirit of humans,  
 And all of the universe,  
 With both, the inspiration and aspiration I seek!  
 - Unpublished poem by Joanne V. Owl

When we speak of the Ojibwe eye we do not refer to one of those two masses that fill the spaces within the frame of our face. The Ojibwe eye is deeper and concentrated and is hidden from within our human view and experiences. The Ojibwe eye is that connection between our heart, spirit and mind that perceives and interprets the greater world and universe. Seeing with an Ojibwe eye is "a whole and comprehensive vision that entailed not only vision before but also vision behind (a three hundred and sixty degree vision)" (Dumont, 1992, p. 75). What this means is that Ojibwe people from time immemorial have always embraced a circular and interconnected way of seeing the world. Despite the assaulting forces of colonialism on the people, one only need to begin to search within before she or he will discover that ability to journey inwards/outwards. Seeing with an Ojibwe eye is comprehending the deeper meanings occurring in our daily natural experiences. A prime example of this concept is best understood as told in this story by Elder Martin Assinewe when he recounts the beginning of his spiritual life,

When I was on the trap line my stepfather said, one time he said 'I'm gonna get some, some meats like you know, oh butter whatever it is for short, I might be gone for a week or ten days' he said...and the ah so anyway like you know I um check all the traps...so one time I was walking and I heard this splash going on, I know there were we had traps cause it was in the spring, muskrat season eh, beaver traps too and then they um and I heard splash and I thought to myself I wonder what that is, it got closer and closer, finally you know I seen a big eagle, a golden eagle like then ah so it was caught in the trap, so this was a beaver trap and the ah I thought to myself right away I had that fear you know, its like one I can't spring them that much...but this is a big bird, get him, so I went shhhh, like that eh, and then I saw right away, so this, this, this, this knowledge is it, and then the ah as I can see as well its trapped right here, there's no injuries yet but there look to be eh...now I pin him down eh but I couldn't even do that, it was so strong like you know, pulling him out, I said 'I'll just leave it there, maybe my stepfather will come' and but I don't know, and I thought to myself I can't do this, I cannot leave him there, ah something was telling me that I have to get this bird out, I don't know how though, so finally something came to be, my packsack was little extra big, of course, my packsack was this size, it was always big...so anyways I unloaded my packsack and I had some long gloves eh, put them on and I ask so I put the packsack over there, you know [pause] so [pause] and ah that's what I think to the knowledge of the Creator it seems to me, so

I went like this eh [motioning how he covered the eagle with his packsack], of course me and her we got soaked...I put the packsack over her because of his claws eh, so anyway you know as I fell on top of him he's struggling and I'm, but I managed to keep him down eh, as long as he didn't scratch my face eh...I never thought I was going to be, to be here, sort of a miracle I managed to keep this things a wings down and then I had nothing, it just took off after that [pause] that was the beginning of some of my, some of my ah, spiritual life like you know, I think it meant to be [pause] and ah not knowing how I was gonna get that thing out eh, I think if I had failed there like you know [pause] I feel a very sense like you know the ah the powers involved. (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000)

The story that our Elder relays is a very important one. Martin was a young man when his stepfather left him alone on the trap line. The events that occurred with the eagle were a test, one of the many in life, and a reflection of the other-than-human presences existent in our everyday reality.

Fellow colleague and respected *Mide* teacher Nick Deleary (1990) has made great bounds in advancing the understanding of Ojibwe worldview from an insider's perspective as a legitimate discourse. To clarify his position I will begin by briefly explaining the term *Mide*. This is short form for the word *Midewiwin*, the Great Medicine Society, a highly respected sacred order in the Anishinabek nation that was forced to go underground as a result of the colonial project. *Midewiwin* knowledge is sacred knowledge and remains only within our oral customs. Nick Deleary introduces the concept that of the 'great family of relations', which is a central notion in Ojibwe cosmology. He draws upon the stories of the people in order to present a definition of the preceding term. Deleary (1990) reflects that "It is common sense to realize that one is related to a tree: it needs the same elements to survive as humans...the implication of this for the Anishinabek is an equality of spirit between man and the tree. Western man has severely limited and detached himself from the world of nature" (p. 12). This notion is best exemplified in these comments by a Sagamok First Nation resident and veteran,

Like if, if you kill a deer eh, you will see these native people talking, to the uh, that most white people say look at that stupid Indian talking to that dead deer, you know, what's the use of talking to a dead deer...look at him talking to that plant there...no but ah there from Johnny's teachings eh, the Creator [pause] his spirit is in everything that he created eh, anything that's [pause] I don't know, that was created, the Creator's spirit is in...like if it's a medicine you're pulling, it's not the plant you're talking to it's the spirit, the spirit of the Creator that's in the plant itself...same thing with animals eh, if you shoot a deer whatever, whatever you kill you know that you're going to use...it's the spirit of the Creator in the animal you're talking to. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

The emphasis is on the spirit of the animate object as being respectful and equitable to your own. It is representative of the Creator and therefore commands the same respect as all things in life.

William Asikinack in his paper Anishinabe (Ojibway) Legends through Anishinabe Eyes supports the position of Ojibwe worldview as a legitimate discourse. What is interesting about his paper is his explication of other-than-human entities as embodying the deepest sense of Ojibwe worldview. Asikinack (1992) states,

If we, Anishinabe (Indian people), and our heritage, are to be understood, then our beliefs, concepts, values and codes must be studied. One way of gaining this understanding is to listen to and examine our stories and myths, the manner in which our people's values (world-view or cosmology) is articulated and symbolically expressed. (p. 156)

Therefore comprehending the notion of the Ojibwe eye means fully and respectfully delving into the tales and experiences of the people. It means listening to the stories with our hearts, minds and spirits and taking what we were meant to take from them. It means attempting to understand the Ojibwe experience with the world and the meaning he or she derives from it. For example, a respected Fire keeper (has the spiritual and physical role of maintaining the fire pits at all sacred events) from my community Sagamok Anishnawbek relayed this experience, which illuminates the interrelationships between man and nature,

He [a man now in the spirit world] was out on the lake with the dog on the sleigh and ah [pause] when while he was out where he went a storm came in, blew in, and he couldn't see where he was going so he just put the dog on the trail and ah the dog brought him home...through the blizzard, couldn't see where they were going and he followed their tracks, the dog followed the tracks. (D. McGregor, personal communication, April 30, 2000)

The people of Sagamok Anishawbek are philosophical and one never truly recognizes the value of these lessons until much post reflection. A fellow academic had spoken of the Ojibwe way of seeing the world being based in a three hundred sixty degree reflection, the ability to see ahead and behind, the ability to see the world in a circular manner. The people within my community have historically shown their ability to see the world in such a manner and have best represented their views in the continuous conflict with colonizing forces. The materialization of seeing with an Ojibwe eye is reflected in Figure 2.0 when conflict abounds over the resurrecting of a telephone line on the Sagamok reserve property. Townspeople and their representatives from Spanish Mills require the telephone line and the members of Sagamok see no use for it. The members of Sagamok perceive this telephone line as a continual encroachment into their First Nation territory and request that it be removed. The townspeople refuse and petition the government to intervene in this matter and make the Natives leave it as is.

#### Time immemorial meaning in the land

Anishinabe stories and myths embody meanings which are as broad and deep as the stories and myths of any other peoples of the earth: therefore time and deliberation will be required for adequate appreciation. (Asikinack, 1992, p. 156)

I recently had the privilege of listening to a fellow brother from the West Coast talk about the cosmology of aboriginal people and that of his people the Wetsuweten. This gentleman was one of the leaders in the landmark Supreme Court Case Delgamuukw. The spirit of his speech had reached a place deep within myself when he carefully discussed that the

Figure 2.0 – Letter Dated May 7, 1898 to the Indian Agent from Representatives of Spanish Mills regarding the telephone line and Resistance of Sagamok Natives

TRANSCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL

198187

Massey Station, Ont., May 7, 1898.

Mr. B. W. Ross, Sep't.,

Manitowaning, Ont.

Dear Sir:-

Your favour under date of the 5<sup>th</sup>. inst. has been received. I beg to advise that Dr. Hershey and myself have attended two Council meetings held on the Spanish River Reserve by the Indians making overtures re Telephone Line across the Reserve at mouth of Spanish River: At first the only objection they had to the line being there was because it was the property of the Spanish River Lumber Company but we convinced them that they did not own one cents worth in the line and they verbally agreed to allow us to leave the line there but would not give us any lease of the ground for any length of time this was the first Council meeting held on the 27<sup>th</sup>, ---, but it seems that some person induced

Monday May 2 >

them to hold another Council to which Dr. Hershey and myself were invited and we went and all they done was to say that the line could remain where it was until the 1<sup>st</sup>. of July as the present Chiefs would not extend the time beyond the limit of their holding office of Chiefs and their successors could do as they choose about leaving it there without molestation.

198187

Figure 2.0

Continued...

The Spanish River Chief and about all of his band have no objections to the line being here but the Sagamuck Chief and two of his Band, their names are Tooluce, object on the ground that some one got some timber from the Reserve one time. We offered them free use of the line when ever they might require to use it, which is frequent as a large number work at the Spanish Mills each Summer, we also offered them a percentage of the earnings of the line but they would not give us any permanent lease of the ground for this purpose for any consideration. We showed them that it was doing them no harm and was not constructed over any land that could be put to any use as it is all rocks at the mouth of the river as you are aware.

We feel assured that the Department has no objections to the line remaining where it is so long as we can satisfy the Indians from time to time as they bring up objections: The Chiefs said they had written to the Department asking that the line be removed and they do not now care to contradict themselves but that they would not write again on this subject. As you understand this telephone is almost indispensable to the people living at the Spanish Mills, especially in the fall and spring.

Trusting that we will not be compelled to remove the line at least for some time to come.

I remain, Yours truly, E. D. Milling

Note. This letter is significant of seeing with an Ojibwe eye in contrast to seeing through Western eyes. It is related to the *Mide* story about the time of Creation explaining when the red brother and white brother were walking on the same path they came to a fork in the road. The white brother chose the attractive path of technology and was given a 180 degree vision of the world. The red brother took the less attractive road and was given a 360 degree vision of the world, the ability to see the world in a circular and holistic manner (inner/outer/behind/forward). (RG 10. Volume 2874. File 176 352)

worldview and orientation of our people is rooted in the land. It is the places that our ancestors roamed and made sacrifices for us so that we may move beyond survival mode into one of sustenance. I hung onto every word that he said and reflected upon all the life conversations that I had been engaged in with the teachers and Elders from my community. All our knowledge and unique ways of seeing the world is rooted in the ground beneath our feet. It is the cycles and familial patterns that our bodies and spirits have for ages past become accustomed to, it as my friend Sandra Corbiere states,

Well we have our plan...of the winter, it's ah our animals fast at the time, so ah when they breed generally after that seasons over in the Springtime, that's when we feel the new life come, in the summer time we get to enjoy all these things and in the fall we get ah, ah Anishinabek get ready for winter, so our seasons are very important to us. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

Seeing with an Ojibwe eye is intimately connected with the land, the animals and the environment from whence our people have lived since time immemorial. Relaying that thought world has always been done in conversations with one another and in our inner reflections on the teachings of the earth. The cosmology of the Ojibwe, more specifically that of the Sagamok Anishnawbek, was best represented in the preceding [Figure 2.0](#) which demonstrates the collision of two differing worldviews. The presence of that telephone line on First Nation territory signalled an invasive force encroaching on the livelihood of the people. The resistance of the Chief of the one community is seen by the townspeople of Spanish Mills as another 'difficult Indian', but in reality that Chief could see the larger picture of meaning associated with that telephone line. To allow the presence of that telephone line on our First Nation territory would negotiate the validity and sacredness of the already declining Anishinabek land base. An authorization of this telephone line would

signal a historical pattern that was all too familiar; allow our non-native neighbours access to our lands, then soon it would no longer be our own.

A respected peer and fellow *Anishinaabekwe* (Ojibwe woman) Mary Laronde from the Teme-Augama Anishnabai has always been in my view a lady filled with fire and passion when dealing with aboriginal land issues. I do believe that Mary has fully encapsulated the theme seeing with an Ojibwe eye when she eloquently states,

The Teme-Augama Anishnabai come from no place on earth: n'Daki-Menan is our true Motherland. It is not a wilderness area or a park; not a source of timber, wood fibre or precious metals. It is the source of life. Quite simply, it is home. (Laronde, 1992, p. 3)

The land and all that she provides is our way of life and the root of our cosmology. It is a known fact and has been historical colonial policy that to dispossess aboriginal people of their land base is to dispossess them of their identity. All that is important in our sense and perception of the world around us is grounded in the earth beneath our feet. Anishinabe were entrusted by the Creator to be the stewards of Mother Earth, to care for her and her children, and now we are faced with the greater challenge that threatens our way of seeing the world which is "colonial attitudes towards land management...[which have] depleted the Earth's resources to life-threatening levels through clear-cutting, strip-mining, flooding, burning and other dangerous practices" (Laronde, 1992, p. 1). The source of our dreams and visions has become the bastardized tool for party policies at both the federal and provincial levels in their perverted efforts to solicit and sway Canadian votes.

My uncle Martin and I were sitting at his home, he made a good pot of tea, and we sat looking out his bay window. He recalled the many people that had come to his home just to sit and reflect on life. Martin always had company as people sought out his guidance and friendship. Martin is one of our community Elders and I always felt it a great gift to sit with

him and talk about life. My uncle Martin shared this story about the deep relationship that he has with the land,

So I went back to where I was when I was seventeen, eighteen years old, when I was out on the trap line like you know, I was only getting closer and closer everyday you know, and it felt like my heart again [pause] I felt quivers, as I saw the trees, the places where I was, seventeen years old, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty one, my grandpa was, and they were welcoming me, just a beautiful you know [pause] I think I was crying, so it wasn't sorrow but joy. (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000)

Our Elder reflects the spirit of thought of many Ojibwe people within our territory. The true understanding of 'self' comes from the teachings that the earth provides us. Our languages and culture have been borne from the land. The way we interpret our world is based upon this understanding. To disconnect indigenous people "from their land can be likened to genocide in slow motion" (Burger, 1990, p. 122).

Next to shooting indigenous peoples, the surest way to kill us is to separate us from our part of the Earth. Once separated, we will either perish in body or our minds and spirits will be altered so that we end up mimicking foreign ways, adopt foreign languages, accept foreign thoughts...Over time, we lose our identity and...eventually die or are crippled as we are stuffed under the name of 'assimilation' into another society – Hayden Burgess, World Council of Indigenous Peoples. (in Burger, 1990, p. 122)

The Anishinabe people of my area are engaged in a daily battle over protecting our ancestral land bases. The land is known to be the 'source of all things we are'. When you listen to the stories and living teachings of the people of Sagamok you can envision the places that they have been. Their tales evoke images so vivid that you can see the stillness and quiet of the waters before a storm as they describe it. You can imagine the mighty sturgeon slicing through the river carrying a message of warning to his clan family. The land is in the language and all that we know. The land and state of the land is a constant reflection of who we are as Ojibwe people. The land is central to our philosophies and seeing through/with an

Ojibwe eye. It is as Elder Martin Assinewe describes in the earth/Ojibwe metaphysical relationship,

Again and again, I sometimes get distracted you know but it, there is a great love we ah what we see it has an open heart, what we see, all these trees and you know everyday, you know there all open, waiting, waiting there for us to presume what we thought, to go ahead and start fuelling something about our life and about our Nations before something bad happens eh, they're looking at us now, we are the ones that was put, we were put in place to look after it, that our way, that's where we have to leave it, we can begin someplace but we're not gonna make it, we have to go back with it, the time, length and what were committed, we have a commitment to do, love, god is pure love, they are pure, mixed, you know very mixed, we have lost control of our love, and we have abandoned, maybe not through our fault sometimes you know, but we like to blame it on somebody sometimes. (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000)

Within our Anishinabek territories we have been fortunate in some senses to be signatories to pre-confederation treaties. The intent of our Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850 was to establish with our non-native brothers and sisters a living arrangement for mutual co-existence. Often treaties are misinterpreted as being only for the benefit of Native people, but they were developed to arrange respectful use and occupancy of the treaty land area. They were primarily meant for the benefit of the children of the Crown, our non-native neighbours, who needed land, shelter, food and economic sustenance to survive in this foreign and already inhabited land. The following Figure 2.1 is an official copy document of one of the addendums to the Robinson-Huron Treaty regarding timber rights and sales in our territories. The conditions of this treaty were to have the Crown act in 'good faith' on our behalf. What the general population does not realize is that in international treaty law when the conditions of a treaty are not fulfilled, then the pre-existing arrangements prior to that treaty are reinstated. This means that since the Crown and her children have not lived up to the conditions of the treaty then the preconditions of that treaty are in force. The

Figure 2.1 – Timber Rights Addendum to the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850

TRANSCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL

(copy)

329397

We the undersigned Chief and principal men of the Band of Indians owning the tract of land known as Reserve No. 5 (five) and described in the Treaty affected on the ninth day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty with the Chiefs and principal men of the Ojibeway Tribe of Indians inhabiting and claiming the eastern and northern shores of Lake Huron by the Honorable William Benjamin Robinson on behalf of her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland as being situated at Spanish River north shore of Lake Huron, in the Province of Ontario and Dominion of Canada and laid down on a plan by John Stoughton Dennis, Provincial Land Surveyor, dated September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1850, on file in the Head Office of Indian Affairs at Ottawa in full Council of our said Band assembled at the Village Spanish River Reserve on this first day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy-one, do hereby consent and agree to surrender, and by this Instrument do surrender to Her Gracious Majesty aforesaid, Her Heirs and Successors In Trust to be sold for the joint benefit of our Band aforesaid on such terms and conditions as to Her said Majesty's Government of Canada shall seem proper, the whole of the merchantable timber on our said Reserve. The entire proceeds of the sale of the said timber to be invested for our sold joint benefit and for the benefit of our descendants for all time to come, in such manner as to the said Government of Canada, shall seem to be most conducive to the interests of our said Band.

In witness whereof we the undersigned Chief and principal men of the Band aforesaid, and as representing the entire said Band, have hereunto set our hands and affixed our seals on the day and in the year first above written, in the presence of our Superintendent, William Plummer Esq'r, who has been duly authorized to accept and approve of the said Surrender.

Shai mah gah Chief	(seal)	Cai bai osai	(seal)
Ouing gun 2 <sup>nd</sup> do.	"	Ojou muckquon	"
Cah tah Pashe	"	Mishose Kezhik	"

Figure 2.1

Continued...

Yah be se Kung	“	Eshquaigah bow	“
Cah gage shee	“	Pahence	“
Squai Kezhik	“	Ahnomas sin	“
O Misquo onoquet	“	Pen nah douze	“
Ca baish Kung	“	Naion nab gutdabe	“
No gr Kizhik gweb	“	Me big o mish	“
Caijwaikeh	“	Pe tab we gwonabe	“
Wah sui Kezhik	“	Waim bwai gwon	“

Cum squa benoquai

On behalf of Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, I hereby accept the surrender above made by the Chiefs and principal men of the Band owning the Reserve, known as the Spanish River Indian Reserve, north shore of Lake Huron of the merchantable timber on the said Reserve.

(sgd) Wm. Plummer.

Visiting Superintendent and Commission of Indian Affairs

Certified a correct copy of the Original

Note. This addendum to the Robinson-Huron Treaty is significant to seeing with an Ojibwe eye because it represents the values of our people. The principal signatories from Sagamok were thinking seven generations ahead. (RG 10. Volume 2360. File 72745-3)

Crown and her descendents do not have the right to occupy and use the territory and lands of the Anishinabek Nation.

### Cycles of life

I was visiting with Raymond Owl, his home is situated half way around our First Nation overlooking a large swampy area, he is a member of Sagamok and certainly a master storyteller. We sat in his one room 'trappers shack' (as he calls it) drinking tea and eating baked scone that were generously provided by his wife Janet. We talked about everything that occurs in life. What truly amazes me about Raymond is his keen insight into the world that surrounds him. He lives off the land and possesses extraordinary skills in order to do so. A visit with Raymond is always enjoyable and one always leaves with a greater understanding of the world around you. Raymond expresses a key element in Ojibwe cosmology that reflects on the importance of the seasons,

I cherish them, I guess that you miss them if you were you know if it was all summer round, you'd want winter to come, you'd want summer, spring to come, fall to come, because we so used to seeing nature change, everything got to change in your system, your everything, everything dies, everything starts again, it's life. (R. Owl, personal communication, January 21, 2000)

Meaning is constructed from the teachings that the earth provides. This is a prime example of that three hundred and sixty degree vision that encompasses seeing the world in a holistic and circular manner. It is comprehending the universe in such a manner that "everything that exists is bound within the great cycle of time. There is a time to be born and a time to die" (Peat, 1994, p. 180).

Seeing with an Ojibwe eye is rooted in understanding, accepting and respecting the natural course of events in life. We are reminded constantly of the cycles and the movement of life in a circular manner within our daily experiences. Nature is one of our greatest

teachers. The earth and all her inhabitants are infused with the spirit of our Creator. Hubert Eshkakogan, a veteran from our community, elaborates on the importance of the season of spring,

Well everything comes out. It's almost like ah you got another new life coming out eh. Like the smell of the breeze coming down. The birds are warming in. Flowers come out, this time of how you work, once you really, when you and know yourself too, you know you see everything coming up eh. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

The seasons signal changes in life and the Ojibwe 'way of doing things' adapts to the flow of that time. The seasons often best represent the underpinnings of the daily life of Ojibwe people in my territory. Our conversations and stories surround what we have learned from the earth. Our Elders and respected teachers are the living interpreters and conveyers of our cosmology. Our worldview and way of making meaning is to embrace nature in such a way that "the human species is not apart from it, it is a part of it... We are not superior to nature, but rather its fellow traveler" (Mohawk, 1995, p. 64).

Robin Ridington in his study of the Beaver Indians illustrates the complexity of their worldview as they embark in their regular hunting societies. The hunt was representative of more than going out and gathering game for survival, but represented a deeper connection to the land and the animals that inhabited her. Their culture and unique way of seeing the world was supported by the process and protocol that the Beaver Indians were engaged in. It was understood that "In order for a hunt to be successfully completed, the animal had to have previously given itself to the hunter in a dream" (Ridington, 1992, p. 161). This is parallel to Ojibwe worldview in the sense that when an animal gives of itself to provide food and warmth, there is much respect given to it, that animal is our relative. Our own traditional hunting societies relied upon their dreams and visions to have a

successful hunt. As time and the colonial agenda become a constant reality, our societies changed, but the heart of our relationship to animals did not. It is as Elder Irene Makedebin emphasizes when she speaks on the importance of land and animals,

Nobody comes there to tell you what to do eh, you want to go and get a meal in the bush well you're gone, but ah in a white, in a white man's world you can't do that, so it's good to try and keep ours you know. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

The importance of maintaining our connections and relationships to the land and the animals is integral to seeing with an Ojibwe eye.

While the Beaver Indians existed in groupings according to hunting societies, I've witnessed a rebirth in my community of returning to our original clans. The significance of Anishinabe clans are as *Mide* teacher Jim Dumont (1993) so eloquently states,

Each clan had a place within society and each had a designated function to serve. From time to time, as the need arose or according to the ritual and seasonal ordering of the particular clan, each clan would gather to meet, give teachings of the clan origin, instruct of its role and prerogatives, attend to clan needs and discuss the concerns and issues that were its special responsibilities. (p. 74)

All clans were represented by one of our animal relations from the land that we occupied. Our roles and duties were unique and representative of the characteristics of that particular animal. Historically, seeing with an Ojibwe eye would have been guided by these traditional roles. Changes occurred as the forces of colonization eroded our belief in ourselves. The cosmology of Ojibwe people in Sagamok is making its return to our original places. Many families in Sagamok seek out their origins and roles as they existed prior to the settlement of reserves. Seeing with an Ojibwe eye is about looking back and looking ahead, three hundred and sixty degree vision. Although many forces attempted to destroy our way of life and essentially our culturally specific way of knowing the world, we have survived, thrived and awoken from a deep slumber.

On many occasions I've sat with clan teacher Peter Owl in an attempt to better comprehend the social ordering and epistemological foundations of our clan system. I've tried my best to make sense and derive meaning from the inner workings of our traditional family groupings. It is a good thing that teachers like Peter have much patience when it comes to attempting to explain the complex nature of our clans. An example of the profound character that Peter truly is, is exemplified in his symbolic explanation of clan roles,

So all this information then it's just, it's just locked in there eh, it's, it's like a fabric that is sort of woven, individuals carry one thread, and you have each clan member carry one thread, and you have the other clan members carry one thread, pretty soon this fabric thing it begins to form some kind of cover or shelter, whether it's a safety net, social net, well these clan members are weaving this fabric that's gonna sustain, sustain the nation, and the expertise that they have the Elders are sit, sitting there they know how to garner all of the good information eh, so they, they can, they can pull one string and ah, this fabric will start to tighten up, now if there's a problem there someplace, there's another member, clan members somewheres in there that knows how to pull this one cord and it sort of releases, and whatever it is that is not beneficial to the community then is able to ah, either drip through or fall out eh. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

The clan system was integral to the way Ojibwe people perceived and made sense of the world around them. It was the basis of our knowing, the source of our knowledge. Our way of seeing the world would have been based in our life/family paths. I look around my home community of Sagamok and see the people coming back, searching, and in pursuit of their traditional identities. The significance of this returning to the original teachings reminds us of the concept of the circle. Our people went along on a journey far away from where we were and have returned to the place of our beginnings.

I remember days at the University of British Columbia when I was completely baffled by the term 'epistemology'. I've read about it, digested it, consumed it, reflected on it and have attempted to find some parallel within my own experiences in order to

understand it. If epistemology is the study of what counts as knowledge, then it is safe to draw some conclusions as to how this term relates to Ojibwe ways of knowing and what counts as our knowing. The clan system was our traditional measure and instrument for determining what counted as knowledge. It is as Peter Owl deliberates,

So that's some of the things we say 'how do we know?' and the clan system starts kicking in, the one clan may be really I don't know let's say professionals in area of life eh, then the other clan that's all they ever do, is just the other area, so they become experts, but when they have come together, when they exchange information, all these professionals, all these experts, even though they may not look like experts, all that information is tied in there. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

As the Ojibwe way of seeing the world was radically altered by the onslaught of colonization, I've wondered about the present and what counts as knowledge now in our society. Seeing with an Ojibwe eye is as I know it not an event to be named and coded, but is a daily process, infused with the belief and knowledge from the land and our Elders. This process also involves a daily commitment in attempting to understand ourselves as colonized subjects trying to reach back into the teachings of our ancestors and reclaim what is rightfully ours.

### Teachings in life

Aboriginal society believes, however, that while the individual must be permitted and encouraged to express his/her potentiality with the greatest possible freedom and autonomy...it was not by imposing rules and laws...but rather the value of respect was engendered in the individual person from birth and reinforced throughout individual and community life. (Dumont, 1993, p. 59)

I am constantly reminded within my community of how our traditional value of respect is alive even in these most contentious times. When somebody passes on from this world to the next our community rises to the assistance of the family affected. Death and dying in my home is about a community engaged in grief and hope. Throughout our own history,

even at our worse times when we were so disempowered from making any decisions for ourselves, we always put our people first. In Figure 2.2 we are presented with examples of Band Council Resolutions (BCR's) that demonstrate the commitment and compassion that our leaders possessed. These BCR's were made during the worst times that faced all of our world peoples, the Depression and World War Two.

The teachings of the Creator are strong and we are given daily reminders of the gifts that are here for our respectful use. The preceding figure is an example of the strength of a dispossessed people living the concept of a 'shared community'. It has always been the protocol of the people of Sagamok to care for all members and regard them as your 'extended family'. Even today as the wheel of the information highway encroaches into our world there are examples of this notion alive. The spirit of our ancestors guides us in our life journey and we draw upon the gifts that the Creator has bestowed upon us to walk that good path. It is as Sandra Corbiere states,

It's all about the teachings...and you know [pause] um and also your pathway, it helps, it helps you to get from one [pause] like when your life is over then you travel on. It helps you, as you go along, go back, it's all about the teachings. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

Seeing with an Ojibwe eye is fulfilling the path that you were sent here to walk. It is about searching and acting in kindness towards all. When I reflect upon Sandra's words I'm reminded of that three hundred and sixty degree vision, looking forward and looking back.

But, underneath it all, there was this common understanding that there was a divine force and that this divine force had created everything and that humankind was created by this divine force as a part of it and was obliged to live in harmony, to live in harmony with creation. (Snake, 1993, p. 13)

Seeing with an Ojibwe eye is reflected in a deep-rooted consciousness. Each of us as Anishinabe people have a journey that is about learning teachings in life. I have often

Figure 2.2 – Sagamok Chief and Council Band Council Resolutions (BCR's) dated February 5, 1940 Regarding Relief for Membership

R, P, G, Laurence, Esq, Spanish, River, Indian, Reerve,  
(Indian Agent)  
Sault, Ste, Marie, Ont, Massey, Ont,

Dear Sir;-

Feb, 5, th /40.

Our Regular Band Meeting Became Due on the Above Date, and the Following Resolotions were Passed Through the Indian council Meeting.

- (1) Meeting opened By Chief, W, A, Toulcuse, with Prayer.
- (2) Motion Moved By Douglas Sissenah,

Seconded By, Mike Trudeau, that we Request the Dep,t of Indian Affairs Ottawa, that Angus Owl be Granted By the Dep,t of Indian Affairs Material for Building Purposes as his home was Burnt to the Ground, (Lately) all his goods with it all his Blankets Burnt, also his Clothing and nothing left, he wants to get help for a Building Size 16,X 14 Feet.

(Carried)

Motion Moved By, Tom, Owl,

Seconded By, Peter, Sagejiweose, That we Request the Dep,t of Indian Affairs Ottawa, Relief for Antoine Eshkakogans Family, as Antoine Eshkakogan is at the present time in the Hospital Recently Injured By a horse at work, our Chief had given them Five Dollars Relief, we wish they would get a Little more till Mr Eshkakogan gets well.

(Carried)

Motion Moved By, Joe Bennett,

Seconded By, Patrick Pelletier, That we Adjourn.

(Carried)

Signed Chief -

Councillor -

" /-

Note. Band Council Resolutions were official requests from the elected Chief and Council on Indian Reserves to the Indian Agent (established through the power of the Indian Act). These BCR's are symbolic because they represent the forcible adoption of non-native government protocol and processes. These particular BCR's are ironically symbolic in terms of the spirit and value of Ojibwe responsibility for community that resonates through. (RG 10. Volume 11326. File 6-33.)

thought of the concept in the quote above that describes our sacred relationship with the web of life. I have often asked myself if I fully understand and live the breadth of its meaning. There have been times in my own life when I have been lured away from knowing myself and my people. Those times have been the darkest moments in my own life journey. I was so caught up in the illusion that any world but my own 'red world' was better. I sought out ways to erase my own unique way of seeing the world because I truly believed it as inferior. Upon much thinking about this life journey I had to recall the time when I returned to this good path. I had wandered for many years in darkness and confusion. Continually reaching for false rites of passage that did not contribute to my well being (alcohol & drugs). One of the most important things that I learned is that time of darkness was one of the seven stages in life that we go through.<sup>7</sup> I had stayed in the wandering stage for a long time until I found the road that was meant for me. The struggles of this journey of life changes is illuminated through the words of Elder Martin Assinewe,

The power that you have in there like you know, if its not used then its taken away, some days you know, the spirit will take this way, then the balance of power they say, so when you go this way you're separate, and you need to separate, time, hard times, because that's the reason the spirit is taking you there...for you to separate, for something, something new that's gonna come along. (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000)

I've been privileged to sit with many people from my community engaged in conversations about the teachings in life that we have learned. One of the key elements in the Ojibwe cosmology of my community is the personification of natural events. On one of my visits with Elder Hubert Eshkakagon we were talking about the impact that medicine man Johnny Waseshkung had on the community. Johnny had been in the Spirit World for

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<sup>7</sup> Traditional teachings of the Anishinabe indicate that there are seven stages in life that each human being goes through. Each stage in life carries its own struggles, challenges and rewards. These seven stages in life are not stagnant and inflexible, but, are fluid and reflexive according to the path of that individual. The stages in life are outlined in Chapter Seven when discussing Anishinabe Education.

quite some time now, but every Elder that I had spoken to had referred to this character Johnny. Even my own father vividly remembered stories about his times with the reputed medicine man Johnny Waseshkung. Johnny was wise and possessed a great deal of knowledge about the universe. Hubert Eshkakogan recalls this teaching in life that Johnny shared,

He [Johnny Waseshkung] used to sit there in a thunderstorm eh, telling me if these were the young ones or middle aged ones (thunder/lighting) or, or the older that were coming by [thunderbirds], and he used to mention these seven waves of them coming in...it'll, it'll come by seven times, little seven, little waves going across eh, so they were all different, yeah [pause] and so Johnny could tell which, I guess which ah which of the thunderbirds it was then. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

The thunder and lighting within a storm were said to be thunderbirds, spirits of the Creator's making, that were coming down to earth. The thunderbird in Ojibwe worldview represents a sacred being that is closest to the Creator. The importance of this teaching is significant because it offers cultural explanations into weather phenomena.

Learning and living the teachings is central to seeing with an Ojibwe eye. The core of the teachings emphasizes that "the human, natural and spiritual worlds are tightly interwoven...[that] everything...has its place in the cycle of life" (Johnson, 1992, p. 74). Intimately connected to this core teaching is the notion of protocol. Everything in life is to be treated in the same manner you would treat a family member. Everything in life is ceremonial and requires the appropriate protocols to be followed. An example of this is the use of our tobacco, when approaching an Elder the protocol is that a gift must be given, the gift is to offer our medicine tobacco, giving from your left hand because it is the one closest to your heart. To disregard the protocols in life, especially those within Sagamok, can have grave consequences. It is as our Elder Martin describes,

It's all this ah these animal lives that are on top...I know some medicines like you know and some Indian tobacco and things like that eh...about your age you know, we was left in the bush on purpose, I said 'I had gone to ah places', you know if you gonna go ahead and do it, be careful, there's circumstances you know, couldn't fake I said, if you go ahead and do these kind of things you know without knowing it, I guess I says, maybe the tobacco might not work or the plant, the heal, the heal herb might not work, maybe it will, it all depends on the spirit...but as far as I know I said ah 'for it to be affected' I said 'you're supposed to follow the rules you know', and I can't teach you the you know the easy way, that's what we like, my teacher is very stern, I said so I just follow what I know, what everybody else knows you know like, I don't know how to change it. (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000)

Learning and living the teachings is a demanding, gruelling and rewarding process. There are no shortcuts in accessing Ojibwe knowledge and our teachers demand the very best of ourselves.

I'm always amazed by the power and majesty of nature and continually reminded of the notion of cycles. I'm constantly reminded that "the sacred circle of life, wherein all beings, material and immaterial, are equal and interdependent" (Sioui, 1992, p. 8). An explanation of this is rooted in the phenomena of decreasing water levels in our Great Lakes. It was foretold by some of our Elders that within our area we would experience much difficulty with our water and that it would prove to be scarce. The reason accounting for this situation is that the sacred cycles within nature have been severely interrupted by humankind. As it turns out each spring and summer we have watched the water lines on the rocks drop by at least 3 feet per year. The situation has worsened to such a point that within the North Channel maps indicating shoals are now inaccurate as more arise. The natural cycles of the earth have been disrupted and now we all suffer the consequences of disrespecting and mismanaging Mother Earth. That sacred connection to the earth has been violated and now we are faced with the harsh reality of receding waters. Human constructions of development have had adverse effects on the natural order of things. The

concept of respecting our relationship with the earth is encapsulated by Language Teacher MaryAnn Trudeau when she states, "you probably could get revenue from it [trap rock mining and other ventures on-reserve] ah yeah but that's, that digging up again, whatever... 'we can't do that', we can't do that, you know that's digging up, that's putting a hole in Mother Earth" (M. Trudeau, personal communication, December 9, 1999).

Seeing with an Ojibwe eye also entails the formation and pursuit of those familial relationships with teachers and Elders in a respectful way. One of the greatest teachers that I have had the pleasure of knowing during the course of this human experience has been my grandmother. She is a feisty old lady who is very opinionated about the world. She loves to laugh and has a keen sense of humour. My *Nookmis* is Madonna Toulouse and she is our family matriarch. We were sitting around in the living room of her home talking about the declining water levels and the changes in the environment when she says,

I think ah, ah those ah [pause] intellect people are spoiling the air, sending things up into the sky, if we were made to, to be, we would have had wings, if we were supposed to be travelling, and all those gases and everything up in the air that's spoiling the system, the environment, that's what I think, and all those bombs that went, everything that goes up, yeah, they have no business going to Mars or the Moon, we're put on Earth here and should be satisfied. (M. Toulouse, personal communication, November 3, 1999)

The significance of her statements are important because they represent a universal concept in Ojibwe cosmology that "humans do not have any special power or authority over other life forms" (Johnson, 1992, p. 74). This concept is further extended into meaning that the universe is a mystery and that as people we should accept it as such. The universe has not been created for human dominance and is a place where mystery exists. My grandmother's comments were a prime example of the Ojibwe notion of living in harmony with our relations on the earth.

Historically the people of Sagamok have demonstrated their concern and regard for Mother Earth in various ways. Even though the creation of reserves depleted our land base we still treated what little we had with respect. It has been shown in various figures that the resistance of the people of Sagamok to further encroachment in their territories was strong. My ancestors utilized that three hundred sixty degree vision in order to make the best decisions for those generations yet unborn. The battles of the people who came before me are a constant reminder of the strength of our Nation. In Figure 2.3 we are introduced to a situation where the Department of Indian Affairs issued a timber licence to the Spanish Company allowing them to cut on reserve territory. The Chief and Council of Sagamok First Nation then issue a BCR to the Department of Indian Affairs demanding that they do not allow the Spanish Company to cut any more timber. The grounds for this demand are based on the fact that the Spanish Company's logging practices were wasteful and disrespectful. The other grounds for this demand were that the people of Sagamok had very little timber for their own personal use.

#### Returning to the 360 degree vision

I believe that, together, we can begin the journey back to find what many of our people left by the trail. This will be a journey to rediscover a way of life that is centered on the respect for all living things. It will be a journey to find the center of ourselves so that we can know the peace that comes from living in harmony with the powers of the universe. I do not believe in isolating myself in the memories of the past. I do believe that with the teachings of yesterday we can better prepare ourselves for the uncertainties of tomorrow. (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 2)

During all my visits and conversations with different teachers and Elders from my home community of Sagamok Anishnawbek, the main concept that permeates through is the necessity to maintain our three hundred and sixty degree vision of the world. All the stories and teachings told to us are meant to assist in our life journey and personal paths. These

Figure 2.3 – Sagamok Chief and Council Band Council Resolutions (BCR's) dated January 20, 1911 Regarding the Immediate Cancellation of a Timber Licence

TRANSCRIPTION FROM ORIGINAL

Copy

General Meeting of Spanish River Bands Nos. 1 & 2 called by Chiefs and Councillors.

Held in Council Chamber, Monday, Jany, 20<sup>th</sup>, 1911.

Present Chiefs Geugutch & Woyseshkung, Councillors L. Barney & Louis Solomons, Members I. Sissinah, C. Toulouse, Aebetung, Showanaguan, A. Solomon, P. Solomon, C. Bowyer, Naaoniquette, A. Toulouse, Kaabenotui, I. Nawaygeezick, Louis Oak, Geegis P. Sago, W. Toulouse, John Mious, Musquanoniquot, Joe Bob, Alec Bob, Notchelgeezickwet, David Payhance, O. Peltier, John Cockodish, W. Solomon, Southwind.

2<sup>nd</sup> resolved in reply to the Department letter of Feby 6<sup>th</sup> re renewal of Spanish Co. Licence, we would ask why (if the Licence renewal does not come into force until May 1<sup>st</sup> 1911) has the Spanish Co. or their Agent taken out this winter 300 white pine, red pine & spruce piles. We were distinctly told that the Licence was cancelled from April 30<sup>th</sup> 1909 and as we know the amount of damage done by logs being left in the bush & undersized trees cut, we think the damage paid by the Company 567-66 (deducting ground rent & fee) to be absurd.

We do not think this to be to the best interests of the Indians, as you claim to be empowered to manage their business.

3<sup>rd</sup> resolved

That we petition the Department to cancel any Licence given to any party to cut timber on our reserve & to leave what little is left for our own use. Please send reply addressed to Massey Station, Ont. and not to Spanish as former is our P.O

Sgn. Chief Francis Gegwetch

Chief James Waseshkang

Thomas Barney Councillors

Louis Solomon

Note. Chief and Council issued this BCR questioning the wasteful timber practices of the Spanish Company and demanding the accountability of the Department of Indian Affairs in this matter. (RG 10. Volume 2360. File 72, 745-4)

living messages are meant to broaden and expand our own understandings of this human experience. Seeing with an Ojibwe eye is a process where one does not stagnate in the events of the past, but utilizes this knowledge to best tackle the unknown in the present and future. Our unique way of perceiving and understanding the world involves relying on our ancestors and trusting that our “teachings were always there, it was just one big circle, whether it was here or whether it was in a community miles away, all this information was there” (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 2000).

A Mide shaman expressed this...In the beginning, while the races still lived together as one, each of the races had to come to a decision as to what direction he would choose. During this time White Man and Red Man found themselves walking together along the same road. At some point in their journey they came to a division in their path. One of the two possible roads before them offered knowledge and growth through accumulation and mounting of all that could be seen ahead (a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree-vision). This is what the White Man chose and he has developed in this ‘linear’ and accumulative fashion ever since. The other road appeared less attractive materially and quantitatively, but offered a whole and comprehensive vision that entailed not only wisdom before but also vision behind (a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree-vision). This was a circular vision that sought to perceive and understand the whole nature of an object or event – its physical reality as well as its soul. The Red Man chose this road and he has developed this way ever since. (Dumont, 1992, p. 76)

This story was relayed to Jim Dumont by an Elder from Minnesota. This Elder is a respected medicine person among the Anishinabe people. This story brings understanding to the origins of the human race as we Anishinabe understand it and bridges the present reality and progression of our human condition. The use of the word three hundred sixty degree vision is a mathematical construct and has been viewed as an external concept that has been imposed. The most important thing to note is that the use of these words is to offer an explanation in present day terms. The original story would not have included the use of one hundred eighty degrees or three hundred sixty degrees, but like all cultures we are evolving. The language evolves in order to transmit understanding. Certainly the English

language has evolved over the course of time. Language changes in order to accommodate societal and technological change. The story speaks to two states of the human condition, the linear and the material and the holistic and the spiritual. Both paths are reflected in the realities and cultures of our world.

One of the main teachings that I have learned about the cosmology of Ojibwe people, specific to my community, is the understanding that in life there exists a duality in the universe. I often recount *Mide* teacher Eddie Benton-Banai talking about the experience of walking the red road as being infused with much loneliness and trials. He often reminds us in the original teachings of the Ojibwe that it is important to understand that with darkness comes light. That in our pursuit of *bimaadziwin* (the goodlife) we will be tempted by the lure of an illusory path that is at the core an Ojibwe badlife. I am often reminded of this notion in my conversations with Elder Martin Assinewe who speaks of the trials one must endure to achieve a good change,

Cause all of us have fear in the sense of losing something or whatever it is... fear, there won't be another, so something is gonna come about, the thing is the spirit is already looking at you, you, so when you go there he will put you in the right place, the right, right clan or whatever it is, something is going to come to you, come to you... could be a bird, could be a squirrel, could be a fox, or anything, or it could be a bear, and that's it, that's your Indian name and then what you can do is ah you have a little feast, make a little feast afterward. (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000)

Our Elder's comments are significant in terms of his reference to our fears associated with loss and the unknown. The important thing to remember about this quote is that any change in life or rite of passage will require much discipline and trials, but the end result is always rewarded with a gift, teaching, or lesson.

The Ojibwa are an example of how a people living in a harsh physical environment and equipped with simple technology not only met the ecological and sociological requirements for survival, but created a viable world of their own conceptualization.

This world had pragmatic value for them; it was a world in which they could think, dream, feel, and act. (Hallowell, 1992, p. 98)

The worldview and cosmology of Ojibwe people has survived relatively intact, even though the wheel of colonizing forces impacting First Nations peoples continues to turn. The members of my community Sagamok Anishnawbek have survived and thrived throughout these past 150 years since the signing of the pre-confederation Robinson-Huron Treaty. They have survived the creation of reserves that have subjugated our people into small parcels of land and dispossessed them of their traditional way of life. Although the cogs of cultural genocide continue to move about we see the strength of our people in adapting to the changes in the world around them and still being able to dream and tell the stories that embody our sense of self. I'm always amazed by the inner power of our people and the beauty that they possess in the telling of our cosmology. The stories and experiences of the people are living breathing examples of our worldview.

In one of my many wonderful experiences Elder and master ash basket maker Irene Makedebin recounts this tale of an Ojibwe/Iroquoian meeting,

They [the old ones] used to travel all the way to ah [pause] around Little Current [Manitoulin Island], around way on the far side of the island there, just to go fish, and ah she says 'there's no houses there', just cedar wood I guess, so there's no houses at all and the way he used to talk about those Iroquois...one time we were ah we were going to be fishing and that when she first got back, same with the old man I guess, like we were gone fishing and we used to get whole bunch, canoes [pause] that when coming home, just passing Little Current on this side, an old man says 'dock, you better, you better hurry up, someone coming behind us', and that was the Iroquois, and we're known as straighten, straighten his mind out, and 'I'll ask him, the sturgeon' and then he [the sturgeon] went really fast on that [to find out where the Iroquois were], I guess the sturgeon doesn't go too far eh, but I guess he's, he fast...they could feel the paddles [of the Iroquois], and ah so I guess that his clan, we asked them, we asked them fish [pickerel] to take off and tell and already there was people their waiting for us [around Toulouse Bay] on the shore. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

The importance of this story to seeing with an Ojibwe eye is the spiritual connection to nature and the land. There was a time when the Ojibwe people and the animals of the land could talk to each other as we do now. It is believed that when clan families were in trouble they could call on the natural forces to assist them in their problems. In this case a group from Sagamok has gone fishing only to come upon an Iroquoian war party, the clan family asks their brother the pickerel to go ahead quickly and warn the others on the shore. The connection to the animals was strong because the language of the people was strong. It is said that because we speak mostly English and have adopted foreign ways that we have weakened that link to the animal world.

The root of our knowing is embedded in the teachings of our Elders. The full context of seeing with an Ojibwe eye involves developing and maintaining those relationships with the ones 'who know'. I've been fortunate to have had the guidance and assistance of many of our respected teachers, but it has not been an easy journey. It has been a difficult and sometimes agonizing experience and yet in the same breath it has been the most rewarding and fruitful journey. Within my community of Sagamok First Nation the "Elders are [especially] important for their symbolic connection to the past, and for their knowledge of traditional ways, teachings, stories and ceremonies" (Stiegelbauer, 1996, p. 37). Each time an Elder passes on to the Spirit World a whole body of knowledge passes on with that person. If younger people do not take the time to sit with grandparents, uncles and aunties to learn about our origins and thought world, then we are at a loss and a great disadvantage. The Elders are the core transmitters of our unique way of seeing and perceiving the world. They are our guides in this life journey.

Thor Conway in his paper The Conjuror's Lodge: Celestial Narratives from Algonkian Shamans explores the process by which specific types of Ojibwe knowledge are passed between medicine men and their apprentices. Conway's research focus has been on the medicine people of my area and in fact I have recognized the many names that he has listed. The core of Conway's (1992) research attempts to understand the "transmission of private shamanic knowledge...[through] family lines among the northern Algonkians" (p. 237). Seeing with an Ojibwe eye has its own specially defined types of knowledge and holders of that knowledge. Although Conway has made attempts to understand this process his presentation of the subject is reminiscent of an outsider looking in. The transference of specialized knowledge and the process through which a person goes through is widely perceived in my community as a private act. The stories of our own medicine men and their lives are discussed only in community circles. One of the best known medicine people within Sagamok Anishnawbek has been Johnny Waseshkung, an interesting man that has occupied the memories of many.

Johnny Waseshkung and men like himself did not publicly announce that they were holders of medicinal knowledge. The majority of known medicine people in our area are known by reputation and often carry a low profile that has been the result of years of going underground (by necessity). The medicine people that are living and fulfilling their inherent role are in the opinion of our community members not to be discussed in a public arena. Those medicine people that have passed on to the Spirit World however are talked about with much fondness and mystery. The topic of Johnny Waseshkung is approached and dealt with in the most respectful manner possible. Johnny was a man that was respected and is best described by my father Nelson Toulouse,

Ah there wasn't a whole lot of vehicles ah around those days, Johnny had a vehicle [pause] and ah him and my dad always had ah good relationship, so I always thought of him as being ah knowledgeable, there seem to be a lot of respect, ah and because I knew that he ah maybe he possessed certain qualities that ordinary people, Anishinabe people have, ah that he respected my dad ah was something else, I'm not sure what it is but cause I know even my dad could borrow his ah vehicle, at the time cause my dad didn't have one, so that was it...he possessed something that I respected, he, the way he carried himself with people. (N. Toulouse, personal communication, July 15, 1999)

Johnny Waseshkung and the people of our communities that possessed these special gifts given to them from the Creator were ordinary people that carried with them a presence that was extraordinary. Our medicine people were not the often romanticized shaman figures that popular culture has created and distorted.

Seeing with an Ojibwe eye is the complex worldview of our people, but like most indigenous peoples the expression of our worldview is often told in stories of humour. The following is a tale about Johnny Waseshkung's father Jim and respected community patriarch Louis Toulouse who is now in the Spirit World (Louis is also the brother of my grandfather William who is also in the Spirit World) as told by my father Nelson,

Ah but none the less Johnny had sort of I guess you can call ESP, but so did Jim [Johnny's dad], and Uncle Louis told, Uncle Louis [Toulouse] used to have all kinds of stories uh, and he's telling me this one story ah for some reason Uncle Louis would hang around with Jim, but I guess they were going different places on the reserve, different parts of the community with, with dances, like if somebody's home they would put up a dance eh, so people would go there and ah either you, you made your own alcohol, because it was illegal to purchase it, you weren't allowed, you're also not allowed to make it...in this case ah, ah Louis was talking about a bottle, I guess maybe it sounded like whiskey, a big bottle of whiskey that Jim had bought and ah I guess he had been down towards the river and that's where the dance was, there was a trail, somewhere along that trail Jim had left his bottle of whiskey, I guess Louis ah was ah either working for him or something but anyway I guess they were pretty good friends and ah so Jim told Louis where he had stashed the bottle, so he's going to the dance you know, you could have a drink and ah told him where it was but he said 'just make sure you know you take only what you need and put it back', and Louis ah went there I guess he stopped and had a drink but he didn't put it back he sort of I think ah he decided to take some with him eh, but anyway the end, the end, ah part of that story is ah Louis took the whole thing and never gave it back

and he didn't tell Jim, so I guess that was the following week ah Jim had asked him what ah how ah the dance was and Louis was telling him everything was good, and ah Jim asked him about the bottle and did he find it ok, he stopped and told him hush hush and he put it back, and Louis lied eh, so Jim said 'yeah yeah, well I don't find it, I went', somebody must of found it and took, you know somebody must be drunk, I guess they talked about it for a little while...so I guess I don't know either a little bit of time went by maybe a little too, we saw Jim uh working, so this Jim told him [uncle Louis] he said 'you know that, that bottle I can almost see this person going there and taking that bottle and not putting it back' he said 'the more I see him the more he looks like you', so anyway I guess Louis laughed eh, so I guess he just owned up to this ah you know he lied and he took the bottle so that, then he replaced it or whatever. (N. Toulouse, personal communication, July 15, 1999)

Often it is stated that humour is a coping mechanism for people that have endured trauma and pain. That may be true of the people of Sagamok First Nation, but I have recognized a pattern amongst Anishinabe people that would suggest that humour has and continues to be a necessary part of seeing with an Ojibwe eye. Humour and laughter are a vital expression and extension of the living stories and teachings of Native people.

This brings us to the end of our chapter on Looking Through an Ojibwe Eye. The next chapter titled Ojibwe Traditions, Culture and Behaviour will examine the revitalization of traditional practices in my home community and in broader terms. This chapter will also explore the behaviour and healing strategies at the local First Nation and larger levels.

### CHAPTER THREE: OJIBWE TRADITIONS, CULTURE AND BEHAVIOUR

#### Introduction

This chapter examines the revitalization of traditional cultural practices in the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. It begins with the importance of the role of grandparents in the transmission of goodlife teachings, moves to the significance of storytelling as critical to understanding customs, flows into a discussion of Anishinabe identity as rooted in the clan system, presents Ojibwe culture as a way of life and concludes with the necessity of looking back to the past in order to look ahead to the future.

#### Teachings of Nookmis and Mishomis

For the American Indians themselves, striving to adjust to new patterns of thinking and living, it is of crucial importance to rediscover and reaffirm their own heritage, for people cannot cut themselves off from what they really are without becoming as a tree without either roots or nourishment. (Brown, 1982, p. 30)

The role and significance of grandparents in relaying Ojibwe traditions and culture in the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek is great. The heart of understanding our own ways and behaviours is found in the relationships and expressions between grandparents and grandchildren. It is important to note that the term grandparent does not limit itself to only biological relationships, but encompasses a far greater interpretation. To speak of our grandparents in the most respectful manner we use the Ojibwe terms *Nookmis* (grandmother) and *Mishomis* (grandfather). Often people within our home community have developed familial and special bonds with various 'old folks' in Sagamok which results in the adoption of that individual as his/her grandchild. These *Nookmis* and *Mishomis* bonds

are strong and become the process by which traditions, customs, mores, and protocols are transmitted.

The impact that our *Nookmis* and *Mishomis* have on our lives will carry us on into the next world. The memories of the people of Sagamok have demonstrated the scope of meaning behind these familial relationships. Here is an example of a particular type of lesson passed on from *Nookmis* to granddaughter,

Like um, she [her grandmother] used to say that she never like hummingbirds coming into the house eh, you hear something, someone getting sick or someone passing away...we were playing outside and we were pushing this small animal around and it's a mouse and she seen us eh, and she came out and she looked at it, she said 'that's no good', she said 'you go play somewhere', she said 'we're gonna hear something, someone's gonna leave us again'...yeah it was after seven days after that we did hear someone passing away...the birds bouncing off and falling off the window, they were bringing a message eh. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

The lesson taught to Sandra about the messages that animals represent is based on a common understanding in my home community. My own grandmother has often relayed to us that to see nocturnal animals (especially owls) in a public place during the daytime is often a sign of 'bad medicine' occurring.<sup>8</sup> Animals represent the local lessons, cautions and red flags to be cognizant of in our daily lives.

Joseph Brown in his book titled The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian discusses core concepts that are universal to Native culture and traditions. Brown reflects on the teachings that non-native people could have learned from Natives if the historical relationship had been framed differently. Brown (1982) states, "If we can understand...the truths the Indians find in their relationships to nature, and the profound values reflected by their many rites and symbols, then we...[too should] become enriched" (p. 46). I agree with

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<sup>8</sup> Bad medicine is a local term that refers to the misuse of the Creator's gifts for deviant purposes. Bad medicine is often perceived as being used to hurt others or get revenge. It is used for dark reasons.

Brown on this point and would emphasize this position further with the words of my *Nookmis* when she says “everybody wants to keep their culture alive...distinct society... everybody has their traditions, every ah [pause] every tribe of people have something different, the black people, the white people have traditions, yeah everybody has their traditions” (M. Toulouse, personal communication, November 3, 1999).

The grandparents within our community all possessed specific types of teachings and lessons. Each *Nookmis* and *Mishomis* was entrusted with this knowledge and would pass this on when the timing of this process was appropriate. Dolphus McGregor, a war veteran and respected Fire keeper, speaks of his grandfather on two separate occasions. The first describes his *Mishomis*’ ability to predict weather and the second discusses his *Mishomis*’ relationship with the little people,<sup>9</sup>

And he [his grandfather] used to predict weather very good, his sky and ah the way the wind blowing and the sound of the birds...cause he used to...plant potatoes he gotta go in the morning there when it’s when the leaves are damp. (D. McGregor, personal communication, April 30, 2000)

Yeah my grandfather used to talk about those little people, he claimed that he found a little axe one time and he used to claim that these little guys use to cut a big tree down with that...like if you got a lunch just leave it beside the tree or on the foot of a tree stump eh, or whatever you figure they could use. (D. McGregor, personal communication, April 30, 2000)

The significance of Dolphus McGregor’s statements about his grandfather are critical to understanding how local Ojibwe traditions, customs and folklore were passed on. The grandparents each had particular niches of their own and were recognized for it and these same grandparents passed on specific teachings to their grandchildren. The teachings about the little people are common in my community. The main lesson is that in the spring and in

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<sup>9</sup> The little people are discussed further in Basil Johnston’s book *Ojibway Heritage and Ojibway Ceremonies*. The little people are believed by the community to live at particular geographical points in Sagamok. They are respected beings that are meant to be left alone.

the fall we are told to leave food and survival items (rope, gun powder) for them in the bush.

It is our way of nurturing and maintaining our unique relationship with our other-than-human relations.

The Ojibwa are a dream-conscious people. For an understanding of their cognitive orientation it is as necessary to appreciate their attitude towards dreams as it is to understand their attitude towards the characters in the myths. For them, there is an inner connection which is as integral to their outlook as it is foreign to ours. (Hallowell, 1975, p. 164)

Language teacher Sandra Corbiere has been crucial to my own understanding of Ojibwe women's responsibility in the passing on of our traditions and culture. She has been very candid and honest in the sharing of her own experiences and that of her own *Nookmis* and *Mishomis*. In this particular instance Sandra recalls two things, this memory of her grandmother and a memory of her own,

Lodges out here, um sacred lodges, to help Anishinabe, like sometimes something would happen to someone ah they'd get sick [pause] and ah they'd travel all the way to Sagamok here, they had traditional people here [pause] and ah with the shaking tent and ah like they come, they helped them. Show them what medicine to take and to drink that medicine and they would be okay...and then ah I think a great great grandfather of mine used to work like that too, he used to be a traditional person...used to help [pause] and ah he also entered my dreams and I was in a ceremony. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

The significance of these memories are important in terms of transmitting the cultural experiences and historical traditions of our people. Sandra recalls her *Nookmis*' experience with the medicine people of her time and also recalls her own experience with her ancestor who she interacts with in a dream. These tellings are quite important because facets of our culture are based in recounting past events and presenting our dreams as integral to present reality.

Ojibwe culture, like many other indigenous nations, are known for their love of food. I do not recall any meeting, celebration, wake (for mourning), ceremony or meeting where

food was not involved and available. It's customary for our people to share food as a sign of respect for one another and the earth around us. It is also custom in our traditional gatherings that food also be set aside and burned for the spirits that are lingering near. Food is an expression of Ojibwe tradition and specific types of food are reflective of our culture. The Anishinabe people of my community celebrate certain types of food according to when they are in season. Historically our people would travel long distances to access the best blueberries, strawberries and cranberries. The nurturers of this process were always our grandmothers, those many *Nookmis* from times past that have sustained our people with the fruits of the land. These familiar and shared thoughts are illuminated in the words of Virginia Assinabe,

Every summer she [great grandma] would take us strawberry pickin' and blueberry pickin' [pause] she taught us how to fish [pause] she made good scone, she had a wood stove, she never did learn how to cook on 'lectric stove but she could make good scone in the wood stove and apple pie, oh you could smell that when you were outside. (V. Assinabe, personal communication, May 1, 2000)

In his book The Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island: Their Social and Religious Life, Diamond Jenness carefully explicates the role that women have in preserving the culture and traditions of the Anishinabek nation. Jenness (1935) states,

There are two strands in this line or chain, a right and a left, a male and a female; and they are joined but loosely. It is woman's duty, therefore, to preserve the line intact, to bear many children lest the family, the clan and the whole human race itself perish. Just as a tree has many branches, some of which flourish and some die, so it is with the clan and family; if all the branches die, the tree, the family or the clan perishes (p. 90)

Although Jenness can be criticized for taking a strong procreation viewpoint the emphasis I believe is more symbolic in terms of women being the main bearers of Ojibwe tradition and culture. The role of women and especially that of the grandmothers bears much responsibility. Our grandmothers have always been the foundations of our culture and are

fondly remembered as having many roles to fulfill. Virginia Assinabe recalls this about her great grandmother,

My great grandmother didn't uh I don't really find that she showed me too much [medicines], I know she knew some native medicines, and ah I was too little to uh to know which plants she used for certain things, I do remember there's a, it looks like a little fern, its not too high, maybe six inches and it's a, it's a green, its and she used it to stop bleeding noses, and uh because I had trouble with asthma so much she would go out to the bush, pick out certain barks and make this wicked brew for me to drink, it helped but I don't remember what she used... she'd be a herbologist or something today, I don't know, but she knew, she knew things like that. (V. Assinabe, personal communication, May 1, 2000)

Our people have always practiced the tradition of seeking ways to assist and help one another and constantly embraced the notion of the extended family. Even through the hardest times the people of Sagamok reached within their hearts and spirits to find the courage to help one another. In the following Figures 3.0 & 3.1 we are introduced to two separate Band Council Resolutions that provide examples of my community's priority with family. The first figure addresses our Chief and Council's openness to transferring families to our First Nation and the second figure demonstrates the honesty that our past leaders possessed in requesting help for members. Despite the current turmoil over membership issues related to the Corbiere decision regarding off-reserve voting rights, we can see that historically our people always cared for each other. We have always been open to welcoming other people into our communities and have embraced the opportunity to do so.

#### On the importance of stories to customs

Throughout the information given by the older Chippewa we note the elements of gentleness and tact, combined with an emphasis on such things as were essential to the well-being of the child. Fear was often used to induce obedience, but not to an extent which injured the child. (Densmore, 1970, p. 58)

I remember growing up on the reserve as a child and being told many stories about *Giigii* (the boogeyman) which could be considered our Ojibwe version of the all-encompassing

Figure 3.0 – Sagamok Anishnawbek BCR dated April 26, 1939 regarding Acceptance of Membership Transfers

R. P. G. Laurence,  
(Indian Agent)  
Sault, Ste. Marie, Ont.

Spanish, River, Ind, Res,  
Massey, Ont,

Dear Sir:-

April, 26 th /39.

Inclosed please find Resolutions, Moved, Seconded, and Carried, by the members of the Spanish River Indian Reserve Band, that Six Members of the Spanish River Res Band no 3, be Adopted into membership of Spanish River Res Band no 1, and to be on the Spanish River Band no 1, pay List this year, those Resolutions were Passed in the year of 1937.

.....  
(Names of those to be Transferred)

Tom Assinaway & Family.  
~~xxxxxx~~ Alfred Eshkakogan & Family.  
Antoine Eshkakogan & Family.  
Angus Trudeau & Family.  
Peter Trudeau & Family.  
Joseph Trudeau & Family.

.....  
a Band meeting which has been called by the Chief & Councillors of the Spanish River Indian Reserve Band, on Sept 6 th /37. and the Following Resolution was passed through the Band Meeting.  
Motion Moved By Joe Bennett.

Seconded By John Joe. that Two Members of the Serpent River Reserve Band, be Adopted into Membership into the Spanish River Res Band, # I.

as they had requested the Band to be Adopted, those two men have been living on this Spanish River Res nearly all their life, they wish to be on the Spanish River Indian Reserve Band Pay-list for this year.

.....  
Names of those to be Transferred

Joseph Jacobs & Family.  
Arthur Jones & Family.

(Motion was Carried)

Signed By the Chief W. A. Toulouse,

Spanish, River, Indian, Res,  
Massey Ont.

Note. Although the Indian Act requires the official transferring of members on Indian Reserves through this format and process, the Anishinabek have historically always welcomed individuals and families into their Nations. The Marten Clan is of critical importance here because this is the place where most outside members would be inducted into insider status. (RG 10. Volume 11326. File 6-33)

Figure 3.1 - Sagamok Anishnawbek BCR dated June 1941 regarding Relief and Assistance to Members

TRANSCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL

June 1941

Resolution

Motion

Moved by Joe Bennett

Seconded by John Meawesegezhik, that we Members of the Spanish River Indian Reserve Band, Adopt into Membership of the Said Band, the Two Adopted Children of Louis Solomons, Both Their Parents members of this Band.

(Carried)

Motion Moved By, John Meawesegezhik Seconded by Tom Owl, that we Request the Department of Indian Affairs that John Sego be paid for looking after, Joseph, C, Bebomcowe, as he is Destitute Unable to help himself in anyway, he's a Cripple besides he suddenly took sick and was found Lying on the Ground out-side of his place by John Sego.

(Carried)

Motion Moved by Joe Bennett, Seconded By Eli Kadbushi, that widow Mary Beaudry, be paid for looking after, (Nanweshkung no, 48) as he is getting worse this poor old lady has to be there all the time taking care of him.

(Carried)

Signed

Acting Chief Douglas Sissenah

Councillor Tom Owl

Note. The people of Sagamok Anishnawbek always cared for each other. This BCR and the preceding one were made during hard times in the Depression and World War Two. This particular BCR reflects the honesty and simplicity in spirit that our people had when caring for others. The BCR's are simply stated as to the reasons for requested assistance. (RG 10. Volume 11326. File 6-33)

urban legend. The use of stories in the education of Ojibwe children has historically been and continues to be a vital tool in behaviour management. The function of stories as told to our children was also key methods in which the local traditions and customs of Sagamok Anishnawbek were transmitted. There were many stories told and each story performed a certain purpose and duty. The recall of those stories can be as vivid for adults in stirring the many of our memories of childhood. Raymond Owl recalls the following,

There's a lot of stories like that you know it'll all come back, it comes back now and again, sometimes I'll tell the kids or somebody that's there, cause whatever you hear when you were young at the time it might not mean nothing to you, but all of a sudden you know you remember the story, remember just like it was yours so just like you're hearing it now, so that's how it happens when you get old, your memory recall goes way back. (R. Owl, personal communication, January 21, 2000)

The stories of our people in Sagamok First Nation are very much a part of Ojibwe tradition and culture. These stories provide rich and meaningful insight into the unique motivations and behaviour of our people as well as documenting the changes that have occurred throughout various periods in our lives. Many of the stories throughout this text are "reveal the artful structure of everyday Ojibwe narrative" (Nichols, 1991, p. x). The core principles of the culture of our Ojibwe people have remained relatively intact throughout this extended period of colonization. Those forces responsible for the genocide of Sagamok First Nation peoples have been represented in the many archival documents presented throughout this text. Our survival as Anishinabek people is a testament to our strength and as long as our stories continue to be told, our traditions, mores, customs and protocols will live on.

One of the interesting facets of our local culture surrounds the teachings and customs associated with death and dying. Our veteran Dolphus McGregor recalls this teaching that specifically came from women in our community,

Sometimes the women they come from someplace and there's teachings eh...well they then dream...for awhile they are lost eh...and ah after the persons gone [somebody dies] if you keep something that ah was his favourite thing eh, he'll come back for those things...like there used to be ah something ah he used to wear all the time, his favourite clothes eh, if they're hanging in the closet he'll come back for those and that's where they get those like they're getting haunted eh...so you got to burn those eh...but they say that's where they claim at first they don't know where to go eh. (D. McGregor, personal communication, April 30, 2000)

When people pass on to the Spirit World in our community it is local custom to always feast for that person. The other custom is that our wakes (visitations) last for a full three (3) days and involves the participation of the whole community. In Sagamok the local First Nation services will close on the day of the funeral and our local school kids will attend the wake and funeral. Death is only a stage in our lives and it is believed that our sadness and tears are for ourselves. Upon the passing of that person the family within one year will burn key personal belongings of that person. To hang onto that person can result in that spirit being stopped from making its good journey to the next world.

I remember the time that my mom died. I was completely engaged in grief and sadness. The thought of not having her in my world for the rest of my life consumed my life with a sadness and emptiness that only few can comprehend. I remember being so confused with the thoughts and images of death and the afterlife. I remember thinking 'where is she' and 'will I see her again'. Upon much reflection about the fog in which I was trying to see through in that most terrible time of loss, I know that the constant source of my comfort and pain was religion. I tried to live my life in the traditions of the good red road and tried to understand this loss from that perspective, but I did not realize how my own Catholic upbringing had raised so much doubt in me as to the final destination of my mom's soul. The thought that she had to make that journey and pay for her worldly sins in purgatory made me less spiritually complete. And for a long time after she died I would go to her

church every Sunday to try to make meaning and sense of her leaving. The confusion that I experienced is the same that many have undergone. One of our community Elders Hubert Eshkakogan elaborates on this point,

It took me a long time to get into that eh...the only reason uh I guess I got into it cause um I, I had a conflict with the church and I couldn't go to church and then I used to go out with this uh medicine man Johnny Waseshkung...he taught me all these ah traditional things...to me he was kind of ah like a holy man to me cause uh he knew everything eh...he couldn't read that much and he couldn't write that much eh. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

Much of our own traditions and culture have been altered through the presence of Christianity on our First Nations. While historically the sacred and secular were united into an 'Ojibwe way of life', being conditioned with their conceptual separation after European contact has had serious consequences. These changes in my community have divided the members into various camps, the traditionalists, the Christians (there are three distinct faiths in the community) and the agnostics. The culture of the Ojibwe has been altered and the likelihood of returning to its full context is not likely. What is unique about our cultural situation in Sagamok is the fact that the basic principles of an 'Ojibwe goodlife' are still intact. The identification of the commonality between one way of life and the religious life of another is also being considered. Elder Hubert Eshkakogan provides his own complex analysis of this situation when he states,

A lot of people don't even know that ah, that the thunderbird is mentioned in the bible...so a lot of things like all the Indian symbols were whatever the Native spirituality is talking about, it's all in the bible and I found out after...all the teachings he [Johnny Waseshkung, a traditional medicine man] taught me were all in there...there was never any animals or anything mentioned in there [the bible] except that they sacrifice the sheep or something like that eh, but um, like John [Waseshkung] said you know he says 'the sacrifice the [pause] like they put a plate in the fire eh before you eat'. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

Every fall my community looks forward to *Tasehwung* (the Feast of the Dead), which is a time when all of our people honour those that have passed on before us. It was often thought that this feast was an extension of the Christian All Soul's Day, but it has in recent years become apparent that this celebration reaches into time immemorial Ojibwe practices. Diamond Jenness (1967) in his chapter Spirits of the Dead in Saulteaux Life and Thought reaffirms this claim when he states "In the fall of the year...the Indians erected a large wigwam and celebrated their annual Festival to the Dead...First they threw a little food into the fire for the shadows of the dead relatives" (p. 106). This celebration as described by Jenness is quite similar to the one in my community. Our feast for the dead is described here by my uncle Paul Toulouse when he states,

Yeah we burn, burn the food out there, well that's ah for the ones that die there, so you put some food in a dish, everything that's on the table, a little bit, not too much, just a little bit, eat for them, when you burn that then they say they receive it down there then they eat, that's one day for them for what we call for one year ourselves, that's what I was told anyways, so I don't know, I won't find out until I die too. (P. Toulouse, personal communication, June 18, 2000)

At many of our local celebrations, feasts and gatherings I have noticed a change that signifies the rekindling of our time immemorial traditions. Our culture has gone full circle as we see the people moving towards the lighting of the seventh fire.<sup>10</sup> I make it a point in my home community to attend most social functions, it is an unwritten rule that is understood by all to maintain a good level of visibility. Our community events provide the membership an opportunity to see how and what each other is doing. When one participates in these community gatherings you are demonstrating your commitment to the goodlife of all. A fairly consistent pattern at these gatherings has been the return to personal

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<sup>10</sup> The seventh fire is symbolic of the *Mide* teaching signifying the return of Ojibwe people to the original teachings and customs. It symbolizes a cultural shift from the plight of the colonized to the renewal of the Anishinabek goodlife way. The seventh fire is about returning to and walking that red road.

introductions by Anishinabe name, *dodem* (clan), and finally our GST (goods and services tax) government names last. When we enter into discussions with each other we usually begin with this respectful process. Many of our own dispossessed people have begun this identity search and this concept is best described through the eloquence of my clan uncle Eddie Benton-Banai (1988),

Their steps will take them to the elders who they ask to guide them on their journey. But many of the elders will have fallen asleep. They will awaken to this new time with nothing to offer. Some of the elders will be silent out of fear. Some of the elders will be silent because no one will ask anything of them. The New People will have to be careful in how they approach the elders. The task of the New People will not be easy. (p. 93)

Our people have rekindled what we thought was lost. Our community life is infused with a return to the original teachings.

A good teacher and respected war veteran from Sagamok shared this teaching,

The way when you drop a feather eh, when you drop it you got to pass it on eh, and that's hard to do but you're always you admire people with the feathers eh...I had two of them, somehow ah one slipped out of the case...I dropped one, they told me as they know told me 'I know you hate to give that away, you got to pass it on...don't worry about it there will be another one on the way'...and then a few days later I got fifteen of them [eagle feathers]. (D. McGregor, personal communication, April 30, 2000)

The traditions and customs of the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek are complex, sacred and unique. There are protocols to most celebrations that occur in our community and they are equally complex and engaging. The following Figure 3.2 are photos of our community powwow that is a key source to understanding our own time immemorial practices of the Ojibwe goodlife. There was a dark time not so long ago when our celebrations like the one in the photos were made illegal and forced our traditions to go underground. Now we are in a time of rebirth where we see our young people returning to the drum, language, songs and dances. Our community powwow is an annual event that compounds the significance of our

Figure 3.2 – Photographs of Sagamok Anishnawbek Honouring Our Water Powwow during the Summer of 1999.



Note. This powwow was a celebration of our water. This is quite significant considering the recent teachings of the Anishinabe that tell us we are headed for a seven (7) year water crisis. The crisis is the result of our mistreatment and disrespect of Mother Earth.

cultural life. The spiritual lives and existences of our people and the ceremonies in which they engage continue on a daily basis.

### Anishinabe clans

Each grand family is known by a badge or symbol, taken from nature; being generally a quadruped, bird, fish, or reptile. The badge or Dodaim (Totem, as it has been most commonly written), descends invariably in the male line; marriage is strictly forbidden between individuals of the same symbol. This is one of the greatest sins that can be committed in the Ojibway code of moral laws, and tradition says that in former times it was punishable with death. (Warren, 1984, p. 42)

I remember sitting in the lobby of the Delta Chelsea hotel in downtown Toronto during one of our Union of Ontario Indians Annual Assemblies (AGA). It was May of 1992 and I sat patiently awaiting the arrival of my father who was participating in this AGA. I was reading the paper when an Elder stopped and said, "*Ahnee*" (hello in Ojibwe). The Elder was Ernie Debassige from the community of M'Chigeeng on Manitoulin Island. He asked me in Ojibwe where I was from and I told him that I was from Sagamok First Nation. He sat down and said that he just came from the AGA and that it would be concluding soon. We chatted for a few minutes about who we were, when Ernie in his own unique style began telling me about what he knew about the origins of my family. Ernie told me that the original Toulouse families came from Drummond Island and that our original dodem was *Genozhe* (Pike people). I didn't really think too much about the importance of what he just told me. The issue of my clan would not arise again until the following summer when an Elder, at a gathering of the Three Fires Confederacy, talked about the Toulouse families being the Pike People. Again I would not think too much about it and it would take an additional two years and an additional two Elders to stir within me an inner voice that these teachings would be symbolic for the rest of my life. I am forever thankful to Ernie

Debassige (now in the Spirit World) for planting that first seed of my traditional identity that has steadily grown within the reaches of my mind.

The clan system was historically the order in which the Anishinabek people organized themselves in terms of roles and responsibilities. My own clan family had the task of being the philosophers, mediators and teachers of our Nation. The original seven (7) clan families had within them sub-groupings and each had a specific niche that was to be fulfilled in order to keep the complex web of socio-cultural survival intact. The clan system was a powerful grouping that possessed a unique ordering of information and knowledge. For Anishinabek people the connection to your clan is your instant connection to our ancestors and the earth. It is as language teacher Sandra Corbiere describes,

Ah, I'm the deer, the deer clan eh...my ah *dodem* is ah the deer and ah umm [pause] ah my spirit helpers is the eagle and ah the turtle, snapping turtle...for me the responsibility of your clan is [pause] um it could mean in different ways like the spirits walking the path and then some of the teachings I received in that was ah [pause] you know with the clans you have the responsibility of relationships... and um when you enter in the final ceremonies, sweat lodge, the ah, any other traditional ceremonies that's where your *dodem* comes in [pause] you're mentioning your clan, your spirit helpers and your name...so if you're able to speak in the language then you're able to tell those spirits that who you are. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

The importance of knowing our original clans are crucial to the culture and well-being of the Anishinabe person. When you know your clan you feel as though a large void in your life has been filled, the ironic thing about this situation is that you never knew how deep the void was until your clan has been identified. Your clan fills a space that has been a part of the experiences of the colonized.

Our clans were given to us from the Creator and reflect the very essence of the land in which we live. Good teacher Eddie Benton-Banai (1988) recalls this teaching about our *dodems* from our oral traditions,

While the Clan System was in power, the Ojibway suffered no famine, sickness, or epidemics. There was said to be no wars and very little violence in these days when the Clan System was strong. In the Clan System was built equal justice, voice, law and order. It reinforced by its very nature the teachings and principles of a sacred way of life. (p. 78)

Each clan family had a specific role that emphasized the natural talents of the group. The development and success of each clan member was integral to the development and success of the entire nation. The clan system was as intricate in design as a spider's web and functioned in such a manner that the activities in one part of the web could be felt throughout its entirety. The clan system was created on foundations that encouraged the respectful existence of all.

In my community the clan system is re-emerging. I had spoken earlier about community functions where the announcing of ourselves by clan is not uncommon. The knowledge of the clan system is still alive in our community and all one needs to do is seek out the appropriate teachers entrusted with this information. I've taken many opportunities to sit with respected clan teacher and historian Peter Owl. I've learned many good things about the examples of *bimaadziwin* (the goodlife) existent in our people's history. The complexity and necessity of our clans is demonstrated in this excerpt,

That information is given to all the clan members of that area, then they'll separate again...where are we gonna harvest? Where not to harvest and all this? Where are we gonna get that fresh meat during the, when the, winter months are really bad?...all that harvesting that has taken place, there's individuals have dried fish, they've dried fish bones, they've dried apples, they've dried all the different fruits, they've gathered nuts...have these caches, all these caches are identified, within this clan system the caches, the food sources are there, they might be underground somewhere, so everybody has access to this information. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

Although one may criticize that the clan system is not required for physical survival as described in these times, the point is that our clans are required for spiritual and cultural

survival as unique peoples. The clan system is our link with the history and knowledge of our ancestors. The clans possess the teachings of the goodlife that are our traditional measurement of appropriate behaviour. The clans also reflect a way of knowing the world that is based upon the knowledge of the land, which is also a key component of Anishinabek culture.

When I spoke earlier of our sources of knowing being intimately connected to the land I want to emphasize its importance to the roots of Ojibwe culture. Although Native people throughout Northern Ontario have undergone a process of colonization and dispossession of traditional land, the focal point for our collective healing will be through a cyclical process of decolonization. This means that each person and nation will need to revisit those places that our ancestors walked and reconnect to the land that is inherent within our hearts, spirits and minds. The land is integral to re-establishing our cultural connection and is best described by Virginia Assinabe when she states,

I think it is important if [pause] if there's family connections to it, like if you knew that this is where [pause] your ancestors strolled or did something [pause] it has a, you feel more connected to it. (V. Assinabe, personal communication, May 1, 2000)

We have undergone such dark times where our culture has undergone radical changes where we have incorporated much of the dominant society's norms and customs into our world. The negative effects of this assimilation are seen in the activities of Ojibwe people when the colonized takes on the role of the colonizer. We have seen many instances in Anishinabe territory where neo-colonialism possesses a red face embracing the culture of another and dismissing their own.

The roles of the traditional clans were disbanded when the creation of Indian Reserves was in full effect. No longer could the Native people of Northern Ontario travel to

their seasonal homes and engage in time immemorial knowledge sharing practices. The goodlife of our people had been fragmented by the continual creation and imposition of foreign laws and policies. No longer could our Native people travel freely throughout Turtle Island, which had been divided and renamed. The distant echoes of the People had been subjugated by their White Brother. The silencing of the Anishinabe would force the fragile clan system to go underground. It is as good teacher Peter Owl describes,

They have a ceremony someplace here...all these clan members are there, whether there gonna be dancing in this circle [pause] there's gonna be a group over there to exchange information eh, and I think that, those are some of the values, the values that are there...there was this other group of people from the clan members who were able to take this story, we sit in one lodge, we listen to every word, every, every motion of the hand...this guy that's gonna be transferring this information there is listening, he's recording all this, and when he gets [pause] all of maybe three, four days journey...he's gonna be sharing that information...its critical that he himself is able to bring every word, every word that has been mentioned there eh, he's got, he's got to be able to ah, do the same thing as this other individual does, if he's gonna wave his hands, this significant eh, to when they would wave their hand eh, or how fast they would move it, the tone of voice is there, so these guys are specialists also in communication eh. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

The resurgence of the clan system in Sagamok Anishnawbek is of particular significance because it suggests that our cultural return is symbolic of our healing. Many of our spiritual wounds call for a very different approach to healing that the Western community cannot offer. Our healing is founded in the traditions of our ancestors.

*Mide* teacher Eddie Benton-Banai has become a familiar face in our territory. The presence of his traditional teachings has ignited a spark and fire within the people of our Nation. Eddie Benton-Banai has been instrumental in deconstructing those old notions of knowledge that are rooted in a foreign way of seeing the world. His personal dedication to the cultural and spiritual wellness of the People is great and it is this spirit of hope that has helped me in this path of life. The clan system of the Anishinabe is our link to the great

legacy that our ancestors lived and this will continue to live on as long as the People learn to embrace those roles. In Figure 3.3 we are presented with the seven (7) original clans of the Anishinabe People. The main roles of those clans are briefly stated in one term. It is of course understood that each of the clans has several sub-groupings within it that are particular to a given geographical area. For example I belong to the Fish *Dodem* but my clan is called *Genozhe* (Pike people) and we had the specific task of mediation and teaching. It is a complex system of social, cultural and spiritual ordering that regards each clan with respect and kindness. Our clans are our identities.

#### Our way of life

The way of life which is handed down as the social heritage of every people does more than supply a set of skills for making a living and a set of blueprints for human relations. Each different way of life makes assumptions (and usually different assumptions) about the ends and purposes of human existence, about what human beings have a right to expect from one another and from the gods, about what constitutes fulfillment or frustration. (Kluckhohn & Leighton, 1962, p. 295)

Our social heritage is our spiritual heritage. Many of the Elders from the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek have often discussed that the traditional way of life of our People is the road we must follow. We must embrace the old ways and celebrate those rites of passage that helped our People walk in a good way. The sacred and the secular must be rejoined to bring about balance and a new/old way of seeing the world. As long as our People try to walk and think within a worldview that is not their own, they will distance themselves from a true heart/spirit/mind connection. The resurgence of those old rites of passage suggests that our Elders will be positioned within a larger role of cultural responsibility. It also means that Elders like Martin Assinewe who embody this knowledge will be drawn upon by the People to conduct these rites of passage. The importance and

Figure 3.3 – The Seven (7) Original Clans of the Anishinabek People as Identified by *Mide* Teacher Eddie Benton-Banai

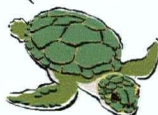
Crane – Chieftainship



Loon – Chieftainship



Fish – Intellectuals (Turtle is King of Fish Clan)



Bear – Police and Herbal Medicine People



Martin – Warriors



Deer – Gentle People and Artists



Bird – Spiritual Leaders



Note. This excerpt is adapted from Eddie Benton-Banai's text The Mishomis Book, The Voice of the Ojibway, which are teachings from the oral tradition of the Anishinabek People and belong to us all. Please refer to the book to view the original illustrations (not presented here) of Mr. Joe Liles (trusted friend to Eddie). Joe is an annual participant in the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation powwow, which is Eddie's home. Joe is a frequent visitor to this territory. Mr. Liles is known for his love of that Ojibway fry bread.

philosophy that drive this Elder to leading and facilitating our People to repossessing their Ojibwe identity is captured in this thought, “and so ah that’s, that’s the beginning, that’s the, that’s the base like you know, you have to get to base first so, a ground life, that your ground life” (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000).

The base for the People of Sagamok Anishnawbek is first understanding that our way of life is not inferior. We must reposition our way of seeing the world in such a manner that recognizes how the colonial process has affected our worldview and framed our sense of ourselves. The base for Ojibwe people is being able to interrogate those very forces in our community that have altered the way in which we see our culture. This process will be a long and arduous task of getting to the heart of an innate need to decolonize ourselves and regain what we thought was lost. This repositioning of ourselves may also entail returning to those teachings of the goodlife by beginning a path of Anishinabe ritual. This may mean seeking out your original clan family and seeking out your Spirit Name. All these rites may lead an individual on their life journey, but it will not be an easy one considering the many layers of historical and colonial coding that our People have endured. It is as our Elder Martin Assinewe describes,

What happens sometimes you know they [community members] ask if you have time and they, you want, you want to have an Indian name and there’s nobody around and ah you can tell somebody there’s, ask somebody that knows who can help...the old ways is much stronger though you know, somehow you know. (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000)

In Kluckhohn & Leighton’s paper The Navajo View of Life they tackle the difficulty and confusion that the colonized experiences when torn between the old ways and the current ways of the dominant society. They (1962) explain that when the “People are in a transitional stage...[they] are confused by the conflicting precepts of their elders and their

white models that they tend [to]...reject the whole problem of morality as meaningless and insoluble" (p. 295). I have often observed this in my own community when our people position themselves in a place of apathy and refute an attempt to regaining our traditional ways. In other cases our people have tried to make sense and meaning from the imposition of foreign ways and can become acculturated. The process of acculturation is not necessarily negative in the sense that it helps our People come to terms with a history based in daily attacks on our identity. Hubert Eshkakogan eloquently analyses the colonial history of Sagamok in regards to the impact of religion and modern medicine,

Well I, they're all the same thing like those prophets they in the bible eh...same thing, the Native people were given, their prophets that could heal eh...if you used it right I guess...they still have prophets coming out you know...but...they don't believe in them too much eh...too much religion I guess...I guess we rely too much on uh aspirin and all uh these uh drugs that come out eh...if we get sick you know we used to go say our prayers and well they go see an Indian doctor... but nowadays nobody doesn't go and get some aspirin or some kind of a pill that, that's supposed to cure you eh. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

Our traditional way of life as Ojibwe People is to be celebrated and embraced. There were times prior to fast food outlets, processed foods, cigarettes and alcohol when the health and strength of our people dominated. There were times when health concerns like diabetes were not regular terms within our society. I have watched my own grandmother on my mother's side succumb to this disease in the worst way. She did not have a quiet or painless way of leaving this world. I have also seen my uncles on my father's side become daily users of insulin and make attempts to control their blood sugar. It's as though the war against diabetes is being lost in our community with each new person that is diagnosed, goes on dialysis, or dies from this disease. Our traditional way of life would not have seen the slow death of our people happen in this way. Through the displacing of our People from their land and traditional way of life we have entered a time of spiritual decay that

eventually led to physical decay. Our Elder Irene Makedebin remembers a time not so long ago when healthy living off the land and animals was not a rare occurrence,

We fished out there, we put our nets out just past the dock, we didn't have to go anywhere to set, to set my net, we used to tie my net right from the dock and out, that how ah maybe that's why we're so healthy now...I just ate fish, you know Fred [her husband] he used to hunt, only moose and deer and we had fun, we eat salt pork or bologna and that's it, that's all we eat...now they say that ah say there no, no vitamin, no vitamin in ah [pause] animal like deer, moose and rabbit, and that they'll kill you if you don't eat what they eat...it's all in them, you eat that, that cures your, your insides eh and all of that...moose they dig in the swamp, they go dive in and get the roots, they know what's good. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

There was a time when I naively thought the 'early to rise' concept was entirely based on a Christian work ethic. There was a time when I naively bought into the pan-Indian idea that our Ojibwe People moved according to the natural cycles and did not consider such things as time. As I went about my community I noticed that the ethic surrounding work is not only a contemporary component of our way of life but has its traditional roots as well. Since many Indigenous Nations share some universals in their worldview I found that the Navajo concept of work and life mirrored ours. Kluckhohn and Leighton (1962) describe this Navajo value in this way,

Industry is enormously valued...a family must arise and be about their tasks early, for if someone goes by and sees no smoke drifting out of the smokehole it will be thought that there is something wrong...If you are poor or a beggar, people will make fun of you...if you are lazy, people will make fun of you. (p. 299)

The myth of the lazy Indian is a colonial by-product and a constant reminder of the human effects and costs of colonization. In my community our traditional way of life and sustenance was replaced with the welfare system, which has become the inheritance of many generations. The price of genocide has not only resulted in the loss of life but a dispossession of our ourselves and a forced acceptance of social dependence.

Hard work has always been our way of life. Although types of work varied according to the seasons, our people always made the most of our days. Memories of childhood in Sagamok is remembered in these two instances by veteran Hubert Eshkakogan and *Nokomis* Madonna Toulouse,

I was eight years old I guess...after school uh like they used to cut up wood on the reserve...you were able to cut about three or four cords after school you know...I was about ten years old when I bought my first horse...young guys owned horses on the reserve cuz uh we used them for riding eh. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

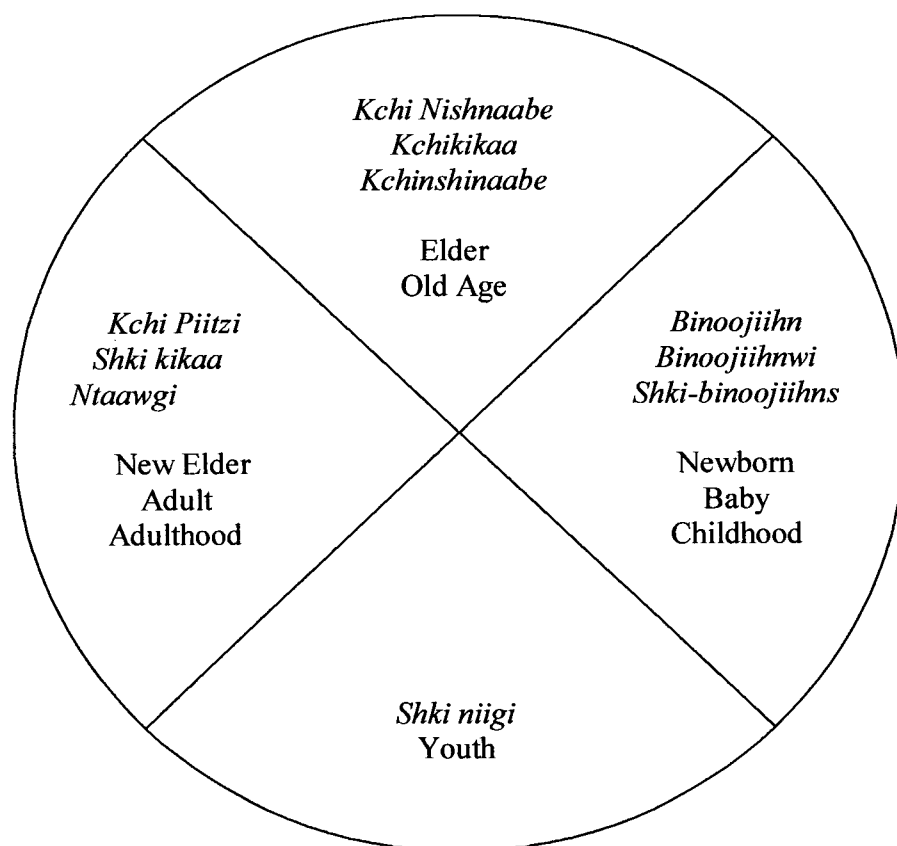
My husband used to make sugar [pause] and syrup years ago, I guess they, they used to store a lot of, they made brown sugar and they'd store it in birch bark boxes eh, they'd make it maybe last it through the year, they use it for making jams [pause] they make sugar cakes, and that's what the kids had for sweet stuff, making candy sugar cakes, I still have some sugar cakes that must 30 years old, so that is something that the entire family did was work at the sugar bush, years ago yeah, entire families left to go to the sugar camps, years ago, they even took the kids out of school, a long time ago when ah everybody helped out that could help out. (M. Toulouse, personal communication, November 3, 1999)

Our way of life in Sagamok has always been about emulating the virtues of work and making the most of time. It took me awhile to take those old romantic images of our people as casually going about their lives and replacing that with a new understanding. What I have learned from those old pan-Indian images is the extent to which my own perception of our culture had been framed by another culture's conception of who we are.

At the root of Native American aboriginal concepts is the belief that the road conveys an eternal return. There is no end. At death one returns in some way to the beginning. On the path of life, when one has reached old age, one knows what one knew when one was born, but only realizes and acknowledges it for the first time. (Beck & Walters, 1979, p. 197)

The concept of the circle and that our lives run in a cyclical process is very much a part of understanding the traditional way of life of Ojibwe people. In my community of Sagamok it was understood that our path in life occurs in a circle. In [Figure 3.4](#) we are introduced to

Figure 3.4 – Ngo Bemaadziwin – Life Stages – One Aspect on the Teachings of the Medicine Wheel



Note. This is only one aspect of *Nishnaabe Bimaadziwin Kinoomaadwinan* (Teachings of the Medicine Wheel). The complexity and depth associated with Ojibwe tradition and culture is only vaguely represented here. The core principle is based on the continuity and cyclical nature of life. Adapted from the resource book of the same name. (Ojibwe Cultural Foundation, 1992, p. 21)

one of the teachings of our people regarding life stages. If we think about the state of our Elders as they age we may notice that in some ways they may exhibit the behaviours of children. Also, our Elders as they come nearer to making that journey to the Spirit World they tend to sleep more and require more care by the families (need to be fed and sometimes adult diapers). In Western society there exists this notion that the quality of life of Elders who require this type of care is no quality of life at all. But, according to our traditional teachings we see that the Elder stage flows into the Newborn stage of life. Meaning that the aging process and care required for our aged is a natural stage in life. It is symbolic of that Elder returning and being borne into the Spirit World.

#### Looking back, looking ahead

A mistaken Christopher Columbus...is generally credited with discovering America in 1492 and labelling the indigenous people as Indian because he thought he had landed in India. News of the so-called discovery of the Indians and their strange societies and ways was greeted with profound interest in Europe. The discovery altered their concept of the world and of peoples different from themselves. Columbus' misnomer and the subsequent European cultural misunderstanding and interpretation of the American Indian has been an extremely troublesome burden to the American Indian people. (Emerson, 1987, p. 37)

The relations between Natives and Non-Natives on Turtle Island (North America) has been framed within a discourse that distances the People from being considered as legitimate human beings. The perception of the culture of American Indians is frozen in spaghetti westerns or distorted to such a point that only a cartoonish one-dimensional Indian exists. The culture of the American Indian has not been allowed to change and the millions of visitors to Turtle Island are content within that 'tourist' position. The perception of Indian culture is permanently cast in buckskins and feathers and equally regarded as an extinct species that no longer exists. My points may seem harsh but all one needs to do is view the media reporting back on the Canadian conception of Native issues. There still exists this

arrogant superiority that 'what happened in the past is in the past' and I'm always left thinking 'pretty easy to say when the holocaust didn't happen to your people in their own country'.

Our struggle "to maintain cultural integrity and to survive as indigenous people is a predominant issue and an everyday reality" (Emerson, 1987, p. 37). Throughout the various attempts of government after government attempting to eradicate the 'Indian problem', our People have survived. I'm never content with the word survive because it suggests that something is barely alive. I wonder if there will ever be a day when we can use words like thrive, flourish, prosper and succeed without having the identity of our People being dissolved into 'whiteness'. On Turtle Island the culture of Native People is under attack everyday, so much so that Native People are often publicly viewed as the intruders and visitors to North America. In many cases the imposition of dominant cultures on Native society has resulted in our own people adopting those ways. The value systems become so entrenched in the way of thinking of the colonized and as a result of this we see continual conflict and clashing. Growing up as kid on the 'rez' I never really knew what 'poverty' or 'being poor' meant, but I sure learned what it was when I started public school in the neighbouring town of Massey.<sup>11</sup> Non-native kids were pretty quick in asserting their conception of the social position of Natives as being poor.

The adoption of foreign values can have both negative and positive effects. It is quite easy to identify the negative effects that these values have on Native behaviour and not as easy to identify the positive aspects. In the following quote from Raymond Owl, who is a

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<sup>11</sup> The 'rez' is a slang term used by members of the Native community who have lived on an Indian Reserve. It is the language of insiders and is only used by insiders. The 'rez' is a familial term that identifies your kinship and status to the community being discussed. It also asserts your place in the discussion.

member and Councillor in my community of Sagamok Anishnawbek, he speaks to the issue of material goods,

You know there the guys that are starving because they got too much, they bought too much stuff, you living over means, you know that's the trouble with today world, back then we, you know as long as you had tea and sugar [pause] that's all that mattered, coal oil for the lamp, that didn't matter either cause you could still ah light your house with animal oil eh. (R. Owl, personal communication, January 21, 2000)

There is definitely a consensus within the Elders of my community that it is important to learn the ways of the *Zhaagnaash* (whiteman), but it is more important to retain the ways of the *Nishnaabe* (native). The people of Sagamok recognize the importance of taking the best aspects of the *Zhaagnaash* world and infusing it into our own. The people of Sagamok also recognize the importance of education that ensures our people access to the world. The emphasis on learning *Zhaagnaash* ways must involve the objective of using these ways to help your own people. The achievement and accomplishments of one person in the community signifies the achievement and accomplishment of all the people in the community.

We are of the whole Earth, spiritually plugged into her every process—we hear her every cry. If we lose our ability to hear, we cannot flow in harmony with her, and we will vanish with the invaders when she resolves this dissonance with a great convulsive shudder. If we shrink in fear of whiteness, we will indeed shrink and be swept along with them—because we have been retreating from the Earth and the Way of life. (High Pine, 1973, p. 39)

Sitting with the many Elders and respected teachers from my community has been the most spirit calming experience. When considering any questions associated with the traditions, culture and behaviour of Native people you need to go to the source, which is our Elders who are the keepers of our ancestral knowledge. I've sat with my uncle Martin Assinewe and listened to the stories and teachings that he has to share. He is a brilliant man that provides us with deep insight into the connections that Ojibwes have with the Earth. Martin

also provides us with a humorous view on the intelligence and teachings that Mother Earth's other children (four-leggeds, those that swim, those that fly, those that crawl) have to share,

Ah lots a blueberries there just like this eh...what I did when I was going up the hill there's a long I don't know camp in the way, you know like when the old days and there was um water coming down like you know, not very much water, anyways, see this um beaver dam and I saw a fish there about this size, and I thought to myself I'm gonna corner this fish you know, this is my fish, there was another beaver dam there, I ran over there right away like you know trying to catch it and he just jumped, you know [laugh] I was having a heck of a time eh, you know I tried to outsmart you know the unsmartened. (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000)

His story illustrates the closeness that Ojibwes continue to have with the Earth. His story also shows the laughter that one experiences as part of Mother Earth's gentle lessons.

Gayle High Pine in her paper The Non-Progressive Great Spirit speaks to the need for all Native people to embrace the old ways of our ancestors. She illustrates for us a picture of wind-like Indian consciousness flowing through the People, which will become their guide for sacred behaviour. She is a beautiful speaker and orator for her Iroquoian Nation. High Pine (1973) emulates the universality of all Natives experiences in attempting to regain their traditions and culture when she states,

What we are now enduring demands far greater spiritual participation than ever before. It is painful. We hear our Mother's screams for sorrow for exterminated species and her shrieks of agony as her heart is torn by strip-mining. Our ordeal is not just ours, but of our Mother and all her children, including the white two-leggeds, and what is now demanded is not intertribal but interspecies solidarity. We cannot protect the Old Ways by cringing and huddling and retreating into our Indianness. (p. 39)

I think that High Pine is calling for all people to come together and find ways to establish harmony on Mother Earth. It certainly is an idealistic vision for a world torn apart by war, famine, environmental, human and universal destruction. The prophecies of our People state

that to ignore the cries of Mother Earth will result in our own destruction. That destruction, according to Ojibwe prophecy is the actual physical annihilation of the world.<sup>12</sup>

The traditions, culture and behaviour of Ojibwe people have undergone much change during these past 500 years. At a local level in my community of Sagamok First Nation we experience the impact of those changes on a daily basis. My home has survived the onslaught of the colonial project. Our Elders continue to tell the stories of our ancestors and the heart of our Nation does not grow silent. Each time our young people sit with the Elders, learn to speak their language, sing the songs of the people, dance in the traditions of our ancestors and express themselves in their own 'Ojibwe way' that heartbeat grows stronger. The spirit of the People in my community will continue to grow so long as our people seek out their identities. The pursuit of knowing ourselves in a different manner will be a long and difficult journey, but that pursuit will be the renewal and rebirth of our Ojibwe goodlife. In closing we turn to the words of Language Teacher MaryAnn Trudeau who emulates the theme of this chapter when she states, "*Bimaadziwin?* Life, living, very strong word...its, its all, its all about medicine, its all about living" (M. Trudeau, personal communication, December 9, 1999).

The next chapter is titled In the Olden Days which examines the educational and daily life experiences of the people of Sagamok First Nation. It is a collection of stories about how schools affected the cultural lives of our People. It also examines the uniqueness of experience in the daily life of the people of Sagamok.

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<sup>12</sup> There exists a *Mide* teaching that we are in the time of the Seventh Fire when the Native People will go back and seek out their original traditions. During that time our white brother will be given the chance to select the path of peace or the path of materialism. If our white brother continues on the road of material goods then that decision will signal the end of all humanity.

## CHAPTER FOUR: IN THE OLDEN DAYS

### Introduction

This chapter examines the educational experiences and daily life of the people from the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. It begins with a brief history of the educational system, followed by a presentation of residential school survivor testimonies, moves on to the significance of nature (particularly the river system) for families survival, flows into a discussion on changing childhoods and concludes with the importance of laughter and humour to community cohesion.

### A his/story in Ojibwe education

How does one define the holocaust? How does one come to terms with the ongoing effects of that holocaust? One of the most difficult living stories that has and will continue to be told is that of the school experiences of our People. As I sat with various individuals from my community I soon realized that the extent of this holocaust had become the core of our history. The dehumanization of a people did not happen in another First Nation, neighbouring town or foreign country, it took place and continues to take place here at home. In our home, my dad has always been representative of this heroic figure in our lives. I watch him spend countless days away from our family as he dedicates himself to his political work. He has always acted from a stern and good set of principles that is based in our Anishinabek culture, traditions and behaviour. One day we were sitting at his house on the 'rez' when we entered into this conversation about his memories of school. This is what my dad told me,

He [Roman Catholic priest] would come in and just sort of dictate things and probably assume, assume ah, ah things that you knew he wasn't aware of and kids were terrified, ah nobody would, everybody had a fear of being wrong cause being wrong was, you know, punishment, ah another scary part would be when the school

inspector came in ah I don't know specifically what his role was other than to terrorize kids, and I guess ah but he would come around every so often and it was just to hear [pause] and they would come in and walk around with one of this big yard sticks, and ah just grill kids you know, I mean what's a kids most terrifying crime, something that's out ah physically you, you're punished, there was never any ah, they had no recourse, there was no defence, all somebody had to do was ah identify you as being, doing something wrong, that was it, plead guilty and you took your punishment...well usually they were strapped. (N. Toulouse, personal communication, July 15, 1999)

After his story I felt an overwhelming sadness combined with raw anger. For a long time afterward all I could do was cry. I cried for that little boy who had to face those living monsters in his childhood days. I cried for that little boy that would one day become my father.

Another form of ongoing trauma is through the forced acculturation of Native American people. Native American people are constantly under extreme pressure to assimilate [into] the lifeworld of the perpetrators of the Holocaust. (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 32)

The holocaust became my inheritance from the day that I was born as a Native woman. I am the embodiment of my parents and ancestors. Their history, pain and joy is also my pain and joy. All of our experiences are shared. The stories of my family with relation to the schooling system has been primarily about shame, terror, fear and humiliation combined with rare moments of release and happiness. My father attended a federal day school on our First Nation of Sagamok Anishnawbek. The stories that he and many others tell are reminiscent of the abuses that took place in the residential school system. No one has ever spoken about the physical, mental and emotional abuses that took place in the federal day schools. You rarely hear these stories being told. The adverse effects of these schools resulted in the loss of language, loss of culture and loss of self. The sick irony of the situation is that this project of genocide took place right beneath our noses as the federal day schools were situated on our First Nations.

Duran and Duran (1995) in their book Native American Postcolonial Psychology explore the notion of the *soul wound* in discussing Native people and their need for more culturally relevant holistic therapies. The concept *soul wound* represents the worldview of Ojibwe people in terms of individuals existing as primarily spiritual beings. There is a teaching in the Anishinabek Nation that all Anishinabe people were spirits in the Spirit World and we decided to be born into this human existence. As spirits we chose the parents that would care for us and had seen how our human life may occur. We entered this world as babies with the understanding that as spirits we will one day return to that Spirit World. With this understanding, when an Ojibwe person is subjected to trauma as a result of genocide, the wounds are compounded with a time immemorial history of the holocaust. The understanding is that our survivors of the holocaust need to be healed at all levels, especially at a spiritual one, since that soul has been wounded. The healing will have to address "the tremendous suffering that the people have undergone since the collective soul wound was inflicted half a millennium ago." (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 45)

The concept of the *soul wound* is certainly applicable in my own community. Every person that lives in Sagamok carries the burden of being affected by the abuses that took place in the schooling system. The denial of culture was done through teachers, resident priests and school inspectors publicly denouncing the 'Ojibwe way' as heathen. An example of this is told by my father,

And ah if you were given a list of instructions in school which basically tell ya that ah our own tradition and culture is evil and yet here is ah my parent telling me certain things that happened in the past, and if you overcome some of the certain things now you know this is the way, way to deal with it...ah teachers and all those sisters that talk about it was bad, I didn't see it being bad, I didn't feel it being bad, and the people that they, they caught up, I didn't see it as being bad, ah if anything was scary its only those things you didn't know about, ah [pause] people were punished for not speaking their language, and I, I never could I don't care how, I

mean at some point in time you got to think about 'how?, why?', I mean that's, that doesn't seem right. (N. Toulouse, personal communication, July 15, 1999)

What is significant about this story is how my father always managed to analyze the depth of the situation. Even as a young boy, he tells me, that he knew that the doctrine in the schools and church that preached against our Ojibwe ways was wrong. In my father's young mind he questioned and continues to question the impact and nature of those forces.

I've been in the most privileged position in being able to sit with the many Elders and respected teachers within my community. Their experiences demonstrate how the strength and hope of a people can thrive in the worst of times. In these two excerpts we will be hearing from Veteran Dolphus McGregor and Good Teacher Hubert Eshkakogan who will be discussing their experiences in the federal day schools,

There used to be big school there and where Barbara [Southwind] lives now that, that used to be ah a lower grade kids school, and I think the school went up to grade nine [pause] and after they finish grade nine they used to send them to Garnier College [Spanish Residential School] and fortunately I didn't end up there the way I hear it now. (D. McGregor, personal communication, April 30, 2000)

[In 1947] my own Native language eh, yeah, but we were still we were still taught not to speak the Native language in, inside the schoolyard eh...you couldn't play with the girls either eh...kind of segregated...well we did talk to each other as long the teacher didn't see it, didn't see or hear us eh. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

Both stories are crucial to understanding the impact that the educational system has had on our people. It had been used as a historical and political tool to either segregate, assimilate or annihilate Native people; completely dependent upon the agenda and consciousness of the government of the day. The confidence of Native people to rely on the good faith of the Crown and her children has been eroded. Although, this is not a fresh version of the history that has occurred and continues to occur, the reality of that his/story is lived by the People everyday.

Once a group of people have been assaulted in a genocidal fashion, there are psychological ramifications. With the victim's complete loss of power comes despair, and the psyche reacts by internalizing what appears to be genuine power-the power of the oppressor...At this point, the self-worth of the individual and/or group has sunk to a level of despair tantamount to self-hatred. This self-hatred can be internalized or externalized. (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 29)

The incidence of alcoholism and drug dependency is staggering in my community. The rate of mortality is also quite high in comparison to the rest of society. We still have many incidences of domestic violence in our communities and I've often questioned why this was the situation. How can so much dysfunction exist in a small area? I'm content with understanding this situation from the position of Duran and Duran when they explore the notion of internalized oppression. When a colonized people have been subjected to years of daily attacks on their identity the will of that individual or group deteriorates and turns inward. This process is self-deprecating and becomes the state and reality of the People. One of the constant sources of our subjugation has been the imposition of the educational system of our colonizers. My own experience in the public school system has not been positive and my own experiences within higher education at various universities have been equally negative. I have had the daily chore of tackling the ignorance of fellow students in their vague understandings of aboriginal identity and issues.

My first memories of going to grade two in the town of Massey are frightening. I remember our small yellow bus from the 'rez' coming into the drop-off area at S. Geiger Elementary School while the town kids corralled around us and put their palms over their mouths mimicking the Disney version of an Indian war chant. I remember going to French class for the first time and having the French teacher scold us for not being able to respond to her. My days of experiencing racism from teachers and students did not end there and nor do I expect to see it end in my lifetime. But, racism and ignorance has been the foundation

of my experience and the experiences of others. Language teacher Sandra Corbiere relays this story,

Mostly when I went to school, when I went to school in Espanola and ah Sacred Heart in there was a lot like [pause] um even with the high school...mostly that was why I didn't go back to school cause there too much there [racism]...mmm, students, some teachers, some teachers were ah like [pause] already prejudiced against the Anishinabe I think. It was quite hard for us too, keep going to school daily. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

The human costs of that ignorance and racism not only resulted in high drop out rates and low graduation rates, but it resulted in a people internalizing that hatred. And until our own Native people begin to understand the his/story that affected our way of seeing the world, our children's inheritance will continue to be the effects of that oppression.

The stories of our people regarding their experiences in the federal day school system and in the public school system are important testimonies needed for our healing. Native people need to have their voice tell their versions of the events that occurred. Too many spaces in the world have been occupied with one version of the Native American story and a new one needs to be told. Even in my territory the voice of the Ojibwe is but a whisper in the public forum. Our issues and our experiences are either ignored or reframed to avoid any accountability on the part of those colonizing institutions. The schooling system itself is juxtaposed in a position that has been historically a limiting force to one that is seen as tool for empowerment. Although in my community we have local control of our own elementary school, we are still in a position that forces our children to attend a secondary school in the neighbouring town. I've often asked my younger sister what the Native situation is like and she rarely has any comments. I've asked her if she has been given the opportunity to learn about Anishinabek history, culture and traditions in her high

school and she has no comments. At this point I can only take her silence to mean that we are still occupying a marginalized position in terms of curricular content and pedagogy.

In Figure 4.0 we are introduced to a Department memorandum that is addressing the relevance of the book Neepawa of the North Woods to Native children. The letter suggests that this book is not suitable for Natives because it deals specifically with wild life and the environment and that a book in hygiene might be more suitable. The significance of this letter reflects the historical orientation of educational systems designed for the assimilation of Native children. Eric Acland is convinced that his one-dimensional view of Natives renders him an expert on deciding what literature would be best for them. His equally appalling suggestion that books dealing with hygiene and modern transportation speaks to his ignorance. In 1946, Eric Acland spoke to the views of most bureaucrats regarding the educational policy on Indians. The philosophy was based upon the need to civilize the uncivilized. This form of cultural imperialism I do believe still exists today as our schools in Ontario are forced into a position by the provincial government to make our kids recite an oath of citizenship. This forceful act is a further humiliation of Native people who now must endure an oath to a system that has historically imprisoned them.

#### Our days in residential school

[On Spanish] the little girls had their beds like in the centre aisle, and it, it was one, it is one big dormitory [pause] and I woke up in the morning and I could see something white there in the aisle, standing, and [pause] kids used to always you know frighten the other ones, *Giibi* [Ojibwe for ghost], I see, so I see this white form eh, I was just shivering, like frightened, cover my head [pause] scrambled in my little bed, after awhile I looked again [pause] see if that thing was still there, it was still there, I never realized until later what that was, it was ah kids that wet the bed, and I guess they were made to get up early in the morning, if they had wet already they had to cover themselves with that sheet eh, wet sheet, from the head eh, I don't know what that was supposed to do [pause] covering that white sheet with their wet sheet didn't help any, they were standing in the aisle you know. (*Nokomis* M. Toulouse, personal communication, November 3, 1999)

Figure 4.0 – Departmental Memorandum dated December 20, 1946 regarding Appropriate Literature for Indian Students

TRANSCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL

150-83 (EA)

Ottawa, December 20, 1946.

**MEMORANDUM**

COL. NEARY

“Neepawa of the North Woods”

Reference your 150-83 (wr) of 18<sup>th</sup> December regarding the m/n manuscript.

I agree with your views set forth in Paras. one to four of draft letter to Dr. Alderwood. In fact I doubt very much if any publisher would accept this manuscript at this time and the only alternative would be Departmental publication which I take it, you are not considering.

The manuscript is, in my opinion, better than the average of its kind submitted to publishers. However, it might be more suitable for white children of that age rather than Indian children who it is submitted will come to know more about wild life in the natural course of events than they could ever learn about school. Something on the same style dealing with hygiene or modern transportation, etc. etc., might be more useful for Indian youngsters.

My final suggestion is that the last para. of your draft letter be deleted. Budding authors are very sensitive and, if the manuscript is accepted such minor points are corrected by the publishers' editorial staff and if the work is not accepted it doesn't matter anyway! Just a suggestion for what it is worth.

Eric Acland,

Executive Assistant

EA/ITH

Note. The significance of this letter reflects how the relations between Indians and white people were framed (drawing upon the language of the letter). The philosophy of the day aimed at civilizing the Indian is reflected in the literature on approved Indian Day School lists, which positioned the Indian as uncivilized and the white person as civilized. (RG 10. Volume 6035. File 150-83, 2)

Many times I have driven over the bridge that connects the road of Sagamok First Nation to the town of Massey. The Spanish River has represented more than a body of water that had sustained our people, but is also symbolic of a greater metaphor for the separation between Natives and non-natives. If you keep driving down the road to the 'rez' you will follow that river and that river will take you to the end of our community to a place called Hayes farm. Looking directly from our Native land across the river stands the infamous Spanish Residential School. The old structures still stand today, skeletal, looming and dark. Many of the people from my community of Sagamok Anishnawbek attended there and those memories are as vivid today as they were back then. Nearly every person in my community that has shared their life with me has spoken about their attendance at these schools or how their lives have been affected by them. In the beginning I started with my father's story and I have begun this section with my grandmother's (*Nokomis*) story about her days in Spanish. To know our story in Sagamok is to become personally familiar with the people and the writer/creator of this journey.

Residential schools were intentional forms of genocide where the root of "its policies [were] geared towards [the] displacement and elimination of indigenous culture" (R. Fred in Haig-Brown, 1988, p. 15). Many people in Sagamok have attended Spanish or Shingwauk Residential School in Sault Ste. Marie (Ontario). Those individuals in my community that have shared their residential school stories demonstrate the resistance that they possessed in being assimilated into a foreign world. Many of our people were lost to this system, but a great majority came home with the root of their *Anishinableness* intact. All of our people that have survived these oppressive systems are symbolic of the strength and hope that runs deep within our people's hearts. The commentaries of these residential school survivors

from Sagamok Anishnawbek represent “the power to resist and to maintain a sense of culture despite all odds” (Haig-Brown, 1988, p. 11).

My grandmother’s experience as presented at the beginning of the preceding page reflects the fear that a seven year old girl endured in her first nights at Spanish. Her story also mirrors the experiences of many of our people who were subjected to terror, hunger, isolation, and loneliness as a result of this incarceration. Many of our community members from Sagamok have gone to places like Spanish. In this particular instance my uncle Paul recalls this memory,

[On attending Spanish Residential School at age nine] well, when I was at Spanish there we um, we never had ah, we never had a decent meal to be honest with you, um, if we had potatoes eh, there was nothing in it, no, we never got no butter or even a lard would a been, would a been just nice to have, and then the salt, what the salt we got it was a coarse salt, it was something like one they use on the highway now. (P. Toulouse, personal communication, June 18, 2000)

One of the most common stories amongst these survivors is about hunger. Although they were given three meals a day the common theme has been about the lack of food. As a result of their confinement, bartering systems within residential schools were created by the occupants in order to survive. Many stories talk about the boys and girls trading favours with each other in order to get an extra piece of bread or candy (often sugar cubes) if it was available. Many of our people that worked in the kitchen would take food in exchange for protection from the older residential mates. These exchanges of favours resemble the same system that is utilized by inmates who occupy our jails. The residential school system is therefore comparable in structure to prisons.

[On taking part in healing ceremonies for Residential School Survivors] yeah in the winter we were sleeping one time ah in Wiky, in Wikwemikong now...they had ceremonies for people that were with in the Spanish school and other Spanish schools [residential schools]...and it was so sad, it was really sad...our Elders ah [pause] they went through healing [pause] it’s just like listening to ah little babies

crying, they cried and cried and we were hopeless [pause] I never knew the stuff that they [pause] that they go through when they were in that school...like a lot of Native people go in there I guess used to have really long hair and they'd cut the hair and [pause] then they used this [pause] ah it's not gas but it is kerosene so that one's bugs it won't spread...and ah they used to put that on their hair, on their heads and ah rinse it. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

One of the most sacred parts of our bodies is the hair. According to our traditional Anishinabek teachings our hair embodies the memories, struggles and hope that is existent in our path of life. When men and women wore their hair in braids the three strands symbolized our spirit, mind and body. The hair of Anishinabe people was revered and no person would just throw their hair away. When people combed their hair it was collected in a safe area and returned to the earth in a ceremony. It was believed that if you threw your hair away, then a bird would pick up that hair, use it for their nest and the natural consequence would be a lifetime of head troubles for that person. When an Ojibwe person cut their hair it symbolized a great loss had occurred. Persons would cut their hair in order to signify the end of an event or the beginning of a new one. The cutting of hair was a ceremonial process that involved the family of that individual. At residential schools the sacredness of these Anishinabe rituals were blasphemed. Our children's hair was ferociously cut and thrown away. These acts took away the identity and sanctity of those individuals.

Celia Haig-Brown (1988) in her book Resistance and Renewal, Surviving the Indian Residential School describes how resistance became the foundation to which Native people found strength and hope. It is this same resistance that is found in the stories of the people of Sagamok who persevered and survived. The experiences of our people in residential schools are similar and reflect the findings of Celia Haig-Brown (1988) when she states,

Aspects of their family cultures persisted, enough to build on, enough to feed the renewal process which continues through constitutional restructuring, setbacks in land claims negotiations, and the myriad of other struggles between governments and First Nations people. The gains are significant; there is no going back. (p. 11)

The stories about places like Spanish and Shingwauk ultimately exposed the government and churches as responsible for the well planned genocide of a nation. Although there have been constant apologies and statements of reconciliation, there will always be the continual cycle of that forcible dysfunction alive in our communities. How can one ever repay or make amends to the survivors of the holocaust? How can one ever put a price on the loss of language, culture and tradition? How can anyone ever rationalize and apologize for the kidnapping of our Anishinabek children? I'm told that this healing can only begin when the stories of all of our people have been told. The healing will be a long process of learning to deal with his/story.

She grabbed my arm again and hustled me down, down this hallway, and there was a big room there, there was beds and were in lines, and ah, it must a been at least a hundred beds maybe more, and she starts stripping my clothes off, took my coat off, my, my hat, took everything off me, and threw them in a bag and the next things she, she had this big tub being filled up in water eh...and she ah put these other clothes on me, totally different type of clothing eh, and she led me down the row of beds, she assign me to one bed [pause] I couldn't understand what she was saying, I, I got the impression that, that would be where I was going to be sleeping, and from there it, it just became ah [pause] devastated to be, because I was taken away from the family very abruptly...there was nobody to explain to me that I was going to be going there, nobody explain that when I got there that I'd be separated from my sister, wouldn't be able to see her, nobody told me that I'd be sharing this big room with one hundred other kids. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

Peter Owl has been a fundamental source of information. He has talked very openly about his experiences and has shared a great deal of his traditional clan knowledge. Peter Owl is a noted historian recognized by our community and many others for being an expert in 'ourstory'. Peter's experiences in the residential school system were very difficult. He encapsulates the trauma that a young boy endured from being thrown into a foreign situation

and an unknown world. Peter's home life embraced family and freedom. His memories of his childhood surround the good life that his parents provided. His life on the 'rez' in comparison to life at Shingwauk are at opposite ends of the spectrum. The residential school system may have broken the spirits of many of our people, but the hope that lived within the people of Sagamok is ever present today. Peter Owl and the many other survivors within our community all stand for "the strength of the human spirit—grown, changed [and] developed...[while remaining] conscious of their ancestry" (Haig-Brown, 1988, p. 125).

Celia Haig-Brown (1988) had previously revealed the unique bartering system that was developed by the Native students in residential schools. The stories told to me confirmed this was a common theme apparent in the day to day reality of our children. Peter Owl recalls this instance as an example of this system,

I don't know if it was butter, or, or it might have been lard or something like this eh, it was on a separate container, so the bigger boys would um, when we were making deals if there was toys to be exchanged or if there's favours to be done then, or, or if somebody took his side in the fight, you had to pay this bigger boy, you know for standing up for you...if there was protection it had to be paid for. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

The group culture of the residential schools formed into a system of bargaining and camaraderie based on that notion. Alliances were made to ensure the balance and safety of all the young children. Older boys would take younger ones under their wing and would settle disputes accordingly. This system established the boundaries for behaviour, payment for protection and social status within the residential schools.

The experiences of our people that attended residential schools are as complex and diverse as indigenous cultures themselves. Many of our people tell horrific stories of the abuses that took place in Spanish and Shingwauk and then there are others that perceived

their experience differently. In this instance, Band Councillor Raymond Owl discusses his view on the reality of life at Shingwauk,

I went to school in Shingwauk I think I was started school at about six [pause]...they sent me to Shingwauk, it wasn't bad or good, a lot of people there's negative...nine years I was in there, it wasn't bad...it was routine, everything routine, you get three meals a day [pause] you know exactly what was going on everyday...we handle all the chores in school, we run the school like ourselves eh, besides supervisors tell you what to do eh, but we ran the school...I came back when I was fifteen [to Sagamok] fifteen, my mother died, and well I didn't want to go to school anymore. (R. Owl, personal communication, January 21, 2000)

Raymond Owl is a self-sustaining and strong individual that is known for his principles of hard work. Raymond talks very candidly about Shingwauk and is a survivor of that system. He attended at a very young age and spent his formative years in the hold of that residential school. Raymond is very vocal in the fact that his time at Shingwauk was primarily about establishing routines and work ethics, these very things are what defines his character today.

One of the interesting findings of this research has been the residential school system being equated with big business and economic gain. Many of the local doctors and dentists in our area that serviced the Spanish Residential School became quite wealthy at the expense of our Anishinabek children's bodies and teeth. Many of the goods produced by our children at these residential schools were also sold for profit, of which our children saw nothing. And many of our young boys were hired out as farm hands to the local farmers as cheap labour. In [Figure 4.1](#) we are introduced to a letter by a local doctor requesting a new and more effective solution to our Native children's problem with incontinence. The distressing aspect of this letter is the unwritten notion that 'peeing the bed' is a child's response to extreme trauma and often this trauma in the majority of cases is related to sexual and physical abuse.

Figure 4.1 – Letter to the Department of Indian Affairs dated November 8, 1935 from Dr. H. H. Harvie.

TRANSCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL

OFFICE HOURS 1 – 3, 7 – 9 P. M.

And by Appointment

Dr. H. H. Harvie

Espanola, Ont.

November 8, 1935.

Department of Indian Affairs,

Ottawa.

Dear Sirs:-

There are several boys at the Spanish Residential School who have nocturnal incontinence that does not respond to incontinence tablets. I thought if a supply of Potassium Citrate and Tincture of Hyascyamus were sent by the department I would prescribe a mixture that might act better.

Yours truly,

Dr. H. H. Harvie

HHH/AC

Note. This letter was common in any request to the Department of Indian Affairs regarding payment for services, procedures and medication regarding Indian children in Residential Schools. (RG 10. Volume 6219. File 471-13, Part 2)

The history of the residential school system will always represent one of the many dark periods that forcibly occurred in aboriginal history. The abuses that took place as a result of the many racist policies against Native people, I believe, exposed the Canadian government for its active participation in the dehumanization of the People. Canada has prided itself in being a country based in 'peacekeeping' efforts around the world and has yet to 'keep the peace' in its own backyard. As a Native person, I see the current Canadian consciousness shifting into a state of denial and indifference when issues surrounding the injustices against its humble hosts arise. At a local level I experience the ignorance of a well-staged plan to eradicate the presence of Natives from the front page of Northern Ontario life to the margins. The his/story of Canada has not been an honourable one. The wealth and prosperity of this Nation was bought at the human and spiritual expense of Native people.

The schooling experiences of the people of Sagamok First Nation have not been of a positive nature. Whether one attended a federal day school, public school, separate school, secondary school, residential school or post-secondary school, the majority of stories resonate with the same voice reflecting fear, humiliation and loneliness. Even through the worst of these times our people garnered the strength and perseverance to arise from these negative experiences. As a conclusion to this section on educational stories we end with the words of clan teacher Peter Owl,

They had this great big pipe, and that's where all the garbage was burned, but before they burned it, you know they, there's boxes thrown in, people would go there, they'd find bread...you know they'd bring the bread back and they'd find fruit, fruit baskets you know, and they'd bring that back to the little guys, and the little guys would you know eat the bread, have the fruits, and the intermediates would ah sometimes cook up a chicken eh, but there was a price to everything eh. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

In the not so olden days

What makes a community unique? What stories do our lives want to tell? What changes have altered the social fabric of a community? What dreams and visions guide a nation of people? What makes the lives of ordinary people extraordinary? The daily life of the people of Sagamok First Nation may exist in a different frame as a result of race based Indian policies and legislation, but the day to day and year to year reality of our community members has much to tell. Our daily lives are infused with struggle, change, hope, grief and love. Our daily lives remind us of the fragility and humanness of our lives co-existing in an equally sensitive environment. In this particular instance community member Hubert Eshkakogan talks about the death of the Spanish River,

We're surrounded by pollution, we're surrounded by pollution from the sawmills or whatever comes down the river eh...I remember [pause] 77, 78 or something like that, dead fish coming out of the river eh [Spanish River]...so we're surrounded by contaminated water at the time it was in 77, they were dumping [E.B. Eddy Pulp & Paper Company]...and you couldn't eat the fish in there [pause] they cook fish from that river eh, you, you'd think you had an open gas tank in the house...it stunk really bad...and ah the gills, they, they just fall apart [pause] so they were practically rotting in the river...we got the government officials to come in there eh, and they were very reluctant to do anything. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

This particular river was at one time the source of life for our people in Sagamok. We travelled the river to get to our winter camps in Biscotasing. We fished the river for sturgeon and pickerel. We gathered wild rice along the river as it was in abundance. Big business and the forestry industry killed the river and nobody did a thing about it. The sounds of ducks along the shore were silenced. The death of the river signified the death of an important element of our daily cultural lives.

The non-Indian citizens of these countries [Canada & USA] must cease their relentless cultural warfare against the Indian people and become as we are, the children of the land. (Deloria, 1974, p. xii)

The Spanish River has always been positioned as symbol of the cultural divide between Sagamok First Nation and the neighbouring non-native communities. I spoke earlier about the experience of crossing the bridge over the river to access the road that leads to our First Nation. The community of Sagamok is located away from the main highway. You must pass through the town of Massey in order to gain access. I really believe that the principle 'out of sight, out of mind' had been the original intention of establishing this First Nation when Indian reserves were first created. The location of Sagamok certainly has deepened the division between Natives and non-natives. When the river died, compensation was only offered to the non-native farmers and businessmen to make up for their loss. The offer to the Natives in my community was an informal agreement that the company (E.B. Eddy) would make the effort to purchase more Native cut timber. The government officials of the day did not respond to this environmental atrocity and the media reports shifted the issue from 'death of a river' to 'angry Indians revolt'. The environmental costs associated with the pollution of the Spanish River was not just an issue for Natives, it should have been a point for all Nations to come together in order to protect our Mother Earth.

The stories and memories of the people of Sagamok illuminate the extraordinary events that have embraced the lives of ordinary people. The river is only one example of a battle that has been lost which resulted in the forcible shift of an indigenous culture. Our living stories are the platforms to understanding the uniqueness of the daily life of the People. The people of Sagamok have always been self-sustaining. It was only until the introduction of the social welfare system into our communities that we see a dramatic change in the dynamics of daily life. The Elders and teachers from my home always talk about those 'olden days', which in reality were not that long ago (approximately time

immemorial to the late 1940s). The key values that embodied our daily lives were the sense of community and definitions of family roles and responsibilities. We lived in harmony with the land and our life practices did not mutate or pervert the world around us.

The sugar bush has always signified the strong cultural connection that our people had with the land. We call that time of the maple syrup run *Ziisbaakdoke Giizis* which means 'Sugar Moon'. This was a time for the entire family to go out to their respective sugar bushes. The sugar bush was a time for the transference of family values and gathering/disseminating of environmental knowledge. In these two excerpts we will be hearing from Elders Angeline Stoneypoint and Irene Makedebin about their sugar bush stories,

My grandma use to teach us many great ways of surviving through the Indian way...the one I was interest was, we used to follow them around the maple sugar bush, haul dry wood, pails of sap cedar branches, salt pork...we stayed in the bush all day, toward the end of the evening, we had a treat of maybe sugar candy. (A. Stoneypoint, personal communication, July 7, 2000)

[On the sugar bush] a lot sugar there, the, we used to make a lots of money...I ah father in law used to make, he used to make, he used to tap 300 trees, they were really full like trying to drink all the sap eh, and it flows over...and then they make those cedar spouts, that's what they put on there and its stayed there [laughs] once it ah that cedar swells I guess...you can't see that now. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

The experience of going out to the sugar bush in traditional family groupings had seen a large decline in the past 30 years, but I am glad to say that that decline is now shifting as we see the sugar bush becoming an increased reality in our yearly life plan. The stories of our children are now including the seasonal lifestyle that our people enjoyed.

There is a social and psychological security not incompatible with personal freedom in many an Indian life-way, which cannot be matched even by the atmosphere of the most progressive American homes. The Indian's security was rooted, first and foremost, in the certainty that each individual is valued and protected. (Devereux, 1951, p. 99)

The community of Sagamok Anishnawbek is currently in a process of reconstruction. The kinship and family ties within our nation are being rebuilt within the tensions of grasping the old ways and embracing the new ways. This process of community and cultural reconstruction is one of the most difficult and rewarding processes that we are engaged in. Our stories and experiences that deal specifically with our daily lives are reflective of this reconstruction. We are constantly moving from the colonial notion of individuality to the community based understanding of the collective. Our relations with one another are shifting to a more communal appreciation of our traditions. Our veteran and respected Fire keeper Dolpus McGregor relays these experiences of our community norms,

And ah they never bought anything in the store eh...everything was preserved, and my grandmother she knew ah certain berries that you didn't need sugar to ah [pause] make jam out of it...we used to store everything, potatoes, corn...and my grandpa used to make his own cornmeal [pause]...and make like brown sugar at the sugar camp, those hard candies, make his own brown sugar...and they used to make there own, ah, not using coffee cans eh...we used to make them out of birch bark...and they used to make rope out of cedar, ah bark strips...they used to make ah rope out of that and [pause] even long enough to tie up a horse with it...and ah I used to make ground basements in the house...and that place was just loaded with pickles and ah preserved jam and all that. (D. McGregor, personal communication, April 30, 2000)

I see within Sagamok First Nation that our reconstruction of culture is making a brave return to those original ways that sustained our people. The conversations of many of our community members talk about the return to our principle based in sharing.

As part of the racist policies regarding Indian people, agriculture and farming was naively introduced as a means of eradicating traditional Native lifestyles. As part of this ignorance it was assumed that since Native people were supposedly nomadic they could not have had the opportunities to farm. Contrary to this ignorance is the fact that Native people have always farmed and been quite successful at it. Our survival as a nation prior to contact was dependent upon our ability to hunt, trap and grow the necessary dietary staples.

Farming was just a natural extension of our ability to live off the land. The Ojibwe people of my area made flour from the local fauna. They planted and harvested various plants in order to contribute to the sustenance of the family groupings. In this particular quote we listen to my uncle Paul Toulouse discussing this life way,

We used to have a garden all the time...you know have a garden and then we'd plant potatoes and carrots and turnips and beans and [pause] you name it, we ah we put everything in it...I put the um a root house, inside it was about six by six I believe, its something like that anyway, and fill that up with sand all the way around, so that's where we kept our vegetables and potatoes an everything that we had, and during the winter well we used to go over there and just get enough potatoes for to do us maybe a day or two, and probably want maybe a couple turnips, or carrots, and we we're doing all right. (P. Toulouse, personal communication, June 18, 2000)

The notion that Ojibwe people existed as nomads is a lie. This notion rationalized the ignorance that assumed an agricultural life would keep Native people rooted and tied to one area. The word nomadic equated with the Anishinabek wrongly assumes the nature of our people. We knew exactly where we were going and for what purpose. We were not nomads in the imperialistic sense that we just wandered around with no particular place or destination in mind.

In Figure 4.2 we are presented with two pictures of the garden of Elder Martin Assinewe. His sister and my *Nookmis* Madonna Toulouse are checking out his harvest. The season is fall, which represents a spiritual time of reflection and a physical time where the leaves and animals return to the earth. The significance of these pictures are multi-fold. Martin is known for his garden, but he is also known for his sharing of these goods. He often gives away what he has worked at producing. The importance of this act in the lives of our people in Sagamok represents a return to our traditional values and teachings. Elder Martin Assinewe embodies that hope that a community in cultural reconstruction requires.

Figure 4.2 – Photos of *Nookmis* Madonna Toulouse and Elder Martin Assinewe at his garden in the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek



Note. The seasons represent a core element in the traditional worldview of the Ojibwe people. Our daily lives were dependent upon the cycles and teachings of the seasons. people who lived in accordance with the teachings inherent in the seasons.

My grandmother is equally important here because she is also known for her garden and preservatives. She takes ample opportunity to share her efforts with our family. The products from these gardens will also be served on our *Tasehwung* (Feast for the Dead) tables. This particular celebration is part of the daily lives of our people.

### Family life and childhood

[On his job as cook at 13 years old in the logging camps] I was up in Wawa, I was in cooking for one year and then the year after I was a second cook on the camp, 224 people in there, now then, then the third year I was the head cook, I worked in the kitchen, use to get up 3:30, 3:00 in the morning start...we make pancakes and we had two big woodstoves, then we take the big grill there sometime we want to make pancakes, we would make 50 pancakes at once, yeah, then you just one guy that just turn them over, there was seven cooks mind you, the other guys are there working on the table they get everything all put up. (P. Toulouse, personal communication, June 18, 2000)

Many of the Elders that I spoke to in my community have been quite vocal about the state of our Native children and families today. Many of our Elders believe that our kids have it too easy and that our parenting skills as a community have succumbed to a non-caring and often apathetic state. The clear division between childhood and adolescence is also viewed as an invention of a post-industrial age. Traditional child rearing was the responsibility "divided among many members of the community and no single individual was overburdened with the care, discipline or feeding of a child" (Cross, 1986, p. 284). We recognize that our traditional family groupings have been disbanded through the multitude of forces aimed at colonizing our people, but the Elders have concluded that it is our time and within our power to make that shift to the basic principles of raising children traditionally and respectfully.

What is childhood? What is adolescence? Did adolescence exist in traditional Ojibwe family groupings? There have been many arguments as to whether the notion of the 'teenager' is in fact a creation of the modern age. Many of the good teachers in my

community have stated that the 'adolescent' is a creation and perversion of this post-industrial society. The Elders from Sagamok recall a time when the responsibility of every community member, regardless of age or status, to fulfill his or her role was integral to the survival of our Nation. No one person was exempt from the duties required for the sustenance of our people. From the smallest child to the oldest of our Elders, each person was entrusted with a particular community niche. The tasks were not measured in terms of more or less, each job was viewed as meaningful and a necessity in the social/cultural functioning of the Anishinabek people.

My uncle Paul, like many other young men his age from the earliest of times to the late 1950s, worked in logging camps. The timber industry sustained many of our families when our traditional way of life was limited by the creation of Indian Reserves. My uncle Paul Toulouse spent his time as a cook in a logging camp near Wawa, Ontario. He began when he was 13 years old and was entrusted with the responsibility of cooking for hundreds of bushmen. The year is around the late 1930s and this is what he had to say about the responsibilities of a young Ojibwe man,

It's a lot of work in the kitchen alright but I'd really enjoyed myself, so then I got to Sault [Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario] I got my cheque went over and cashed it, and I put some money over there in the bank, it was a Bank of Montreal, so I put a \$1000.00, no I put a \$1200.00 and then I kept a \$1000.00, so umm gonna come home I gonna ah buy me a car or a truck, small, whatever I can get...that truck there is worth \$35.00, he says you can see yourself there no hardly mileage on it eh, you can give me \$35.00, you can have it and we'll put the license on it...I was well ok I was already 15 when I got my first vehicle, finally I decided to get the chauffeurs licence, so the OPP [Ontario Provincial Police] had to sign a form for me. (P. Toulouse, personal communication, June 18, 2000)

The significance of this excerpt demonstrates the responsibility that my Uncle Paul and men like him possessed. He worked hard for a living. He was given adult responsibility, accepted it and enjoyed the many luxuries and rights that came with being an adult. The

occurrence of 15 year olds these days working and being in the same situation today is highly unlikely. Our 15 year olds of today's time are not treated or respected in an adult fashion and therefore do not act accordingly.

The breakdown of the Ojibwe family occurred in parallel to the "traditional structures [becoming] lost or fragmented...[and with] the destruction of the traditional ways of life, many Indian groups could not maintain their cultures in the forms in which they had existed" (Cross, 1986, p. 286). Children were always embraced in our Native communities as gifts from the Creator and the rearing of all children was done by the entire family. The foundations for behaviour were laid down in the earliest years of our children's lives. The familial patterns and social norms were entrenched from birth and throughout the child's formative years. The child was gradually introduced to adulthood through various rites of passage, male and female, that welcomed them into their natural and transitional roles. The responsibility of a natural adulthood is demonstrated in these two passages by Hubert Eshkakogan and Raymond Owl,

I was bout eleven, I guess and twelve. And I look at ah ten, twelve year old now. And I look at them. I just can't believe that I had my own car when I was twelve...you didn't have to have insurance eh, no policemen to be afraid of then. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

Everybody used to hunt muskrats, my dad used to get two, three hundred every spring, that's how we use to live, mother used to make baskets, she use to sell them, of course those were hard times, oh you know she was into quill boxes, mostly ash baskets and ah birch bark stuff you know, sweet grass and stuff like that, she made lots of those back then anyways, we didn't know what hard times were because that just living, we existed, you, you never went hungry, yeah today's standards I guess when your wages is lower than everybody else, they think you little below the poverty line, actually you could be living better then the guys that making all you know all kinds of money. (R. Owl, personal communication, January 21, 2000)

The importance of these quotes is rooted in the historical changes in the concepts of childhood and adulthood and the creation of a phase called adolescence. The immense

responsibility that both men had when they were twelve represented the standard way of life that was required for Native survival. All members of the family had to work in order to sustain themselves.

The significance of the extended family in the raising of Native children was undermined through the forcible introduction of child welfare legislation that legally rationalized the kidnapping and relocating of thousands of our Native children throughout the 1950s. We have witnessed in our community the return of many of those children that were a part of the Children's Aid '50s scoop' as they make their return back home to Sagamok Anishnawbek. The concept of the extended family was based in the understanding that it takes a whole community to raise a child. The root of our cultural transformation was based in the principle that "an aboriginal child may be cared for by several households of an extended family with the natural parents' understanding that the child would receive the same love and care which they would provide" (Sinclair, Phillips & Bala, 1991, p. 177).

This notion is best understood through these stories about the daily family life of our people,

I ended up at my grandparents and ah [pause] I guess they wanted the company of a little boy eh...and I liked it there so I stayed there and worked for, with my grandfather on the farm ah that used to treat me like a real son...always, always used to tag around behind him like a little puppy, every time he went somewhere or do something he always had me go with him. (D. McGregor, personal communication, April 30, 2000)

[On her grandmother] me and her did a lot of travelling, walking, walking, talking, walk in the bush and by the water or going fishing. So all my memories of my grandmother are pretty good...I guess she used to teach me about ah plants, what you would use eh, help [pause] healing your body when you were sick...she used to drag em out and put them away so that they'd be there when ah someone needs them...um between, my grandmother and ah another grandmother that lives within the reserve here they used to talk to each other all the time...she used to go back and forth. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

The grandparents, uncles, aunties and cousins were integral to the overall development of the child. The good relations between all caretakers was required in order to demonstrate the social mores and customs that were necessary for Ojibwe survival and sustenance.

The role of the grandmothers and of women in our community has traditionally been of great significance to our cultural and linguistic survival. It is our women that have led the renewal of our traditions that have now become part of the daily lives of our people. The memories of the past are now the reality of the present. In this particular instance MaryAnn Trudeau recalls time spent with her grandmothers,

They only had those little lamps and when it was night we'd hop into bed with one of them, and she, and both of them would be sitting up visiting a little bit or telling me stories, but I can't remember you know, it hasn't come back to me some of the stories, because um most of the time I fell asleep anyways, but they would be sitting there, the one, the one thing I could remember is them sitting there with their pipes, and the smell, and sometimes I could smell that eh, the aroma of the, of the tobacco, or their medicines. (M. Trudeau, personal communication, December 9, 1999)

The stories of our people today now reflect a recovery of our past as many return to the Elders in search of their identity. The stories of our children in our local school reflect the seasonal practices, like the Sugar Bush, that were integral to our traditional Ojibwe family lives. Our children are currently existing in a community that is reconstructing itself. We are healing and part of this healing is a return to the teachings as led by our cultural and spiritual guides, which is our grandmothers, grandfathers, aunties, uncles, sisters, brothers, mothers and fathers.

#### Laughter and humour

A key difference in discipline is the use of teasing in many tribal to shame and humour a child into good behaviour. This is often interpreted as psychological abuse by those unfamiliar with aboriginal ways. Also, since aboriginal children are considered by their elders to be at one with nature, they are allowed great freedom to search for enlightenment. (Sinclair, Phillips & Bala, 1991, p. 177)

Growing up as a kid on the rez meant being surrounded by many cousins and neighbours. Life was never boring. Our family get-togethers were common and always centred around the home of my grandma and grandpa. Our times together were always laughter filled and food based. My uncle Darcy would be telling his usual funny stories in his own unique way. Everybody would listen in and his stories would always end in a group burst of laughter. He has always had the gift of making people laugh. All of us kids would be playing or talking. We'd head out on adventures, play games and did not experience the concept of 'boring'. Our lives were always busy. As kids we'd often get into mischief and the common pattern was that the matriarchs in our family dealt with us. Often to curb our inappropriate behaviour the child involved would be teased by the family, not in anyway to harm him or her, but to make the point that 'being bad' was not acceptable. Our families revealed much about ourselves. Our families and especially our women revealed how discipline was handled.

Teasing is often viewed and perceived as a negative attribute in most human relations. The teasing of children in western society is seen as an attack on the child's sense of worth and self-esteem. In aboriginal society, teasing in a good way is utilized as a tool in the behaviour modification of our people. Humour and laughter have always been the Ojibwe way of diffusing difficult situations or embellishing in a certain moment. The teasing of community members was never done in such a manner that shamed them in a harmful way. The humour of our people has permeated every aspect of our lives. You always know that a group of aboriginal women are together and nearby through the sound and echoes of their laughter. Laughter in our society had many social functions and its

purposes were complex, diverse and situational. In this particular instance my father Nelson Toulouse recalls this familial memory about his grandmother Mary Oak,

Ah Mary Oak was ah was ah very caring person, she we call her her *Nokomis* [endearing Ojibwe word for grandma] and ah if I was going to describe a grandmother she definitely would you know ah fit you know the description, she virtually cared for us time and time again, ah she would come down to the house and ah for different things sometimes it was to help in butchering the animals, and they would make us blood sausages and stuff like that, it was also, it was different times when ah I think some of her friends and so her daughters would get together and make quilts and stuff like this, and they would be down and ah she was always laughing. (N. Toulouse, personal communication, July 15, 1999)

The significance of this passage reveals our most familial memories being enwrapped in family and laughter. The Native sense of humour has always been one of the key features of our people. Our ability to laugh and utilize laughter in the confirmation of acceptable norms continues to be our non-threatening approach to socialization.

Our matriarchs have always played a key role in the sustenance of our families. I previously stated that the women and men had the responsibility of carrying and transmitting our traditions and teachings. Our focus throughout this section will be on our Anishinabe women, who have led the resurgence of our cultural and traditional practices back into the public domain. The strength of our women has always been the strong foundation for our families' survival. The women are always remembered for their continued presence and leadership in our cultural renewal. Our community of Sagamok Anishnawbek is in a state of reconstruction; only through revisiting the past, drawing upon the strength of our matriarchs and utilizing laughter as a healing tool, we can overcome the attempted annihilation of our people. In this instance Peter Owl recalls this memory about his mother,

She was a, she was a big influence I guess to a family, in ah, teaching, teaching the children, you know all the, the important things in life, I remember I was quite young, remember my sisters they were able to ah control the horses and everything, they did milking of the cows, ah they ah, even helped with ah cutting up timber,

hauling out you know, they'd drive the horses, skidding...and my mom stayed close to the house and ah she took care of the home, and she was um I she, she was I guess the individual in the family that was in control of the family, kinda a stabilizing the family, she was able to ah [pause] the things that she practiced to were she was a very caring person, she very ah unique, a humble, very humble person, and ah she always ah, if there was anything that might have been of use, if there was potatoes that they had planted, you know turnips, carrots, and all the other good stuff you know, beans and you know she was able to ah store all this stuff away and ah [pause] she ah, she never failed to share with ah individuals that were along the river there. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

The mother of Peter Owl is a prime example of how women played a significant role in the transformation of our people. Our Anishinabe women kept the priorities of family, culture and language intact.

Our ability to laugh even during the hardest of times has been the strength of our nation. Our ability to rely upon each other as a community has also been the strength of our nation. In the not so olden days our First Nations survived the constant attacks of colonization and genocide. In our community we have had many unlikely heroes that have been remembered for making a mockery of those systems that would imprison us. In Figure 4.3 we are introduced to a community member from Sagamok Anishnawbek who was arrested on three separate occasions for stealing fish. The individual, named only as Caibaisai No. 77, broke out of jail each time and made a mockery of those forces that repeatedly abused our people. An unlikely hero, but certainly a story that was told in each home within our community. Caibaisai No. 77 represented the classic underdog that defied a system that encouraged non-native commercial gain in the fishing industry and attempted to prohibit our rights to Native fishing for survival.

In conclusion to this chapter titled In the olden days I would like to close with the words of language teacher Sandra Corbiere who so eloquently states,

Figure 4.3 – Letter dated July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1935 from the Indian Agent regarding Caibaisai No. 77, an Indian who escaped police custody three times.

TRANSCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL

Secretary

Thessalon, Ont.

July 3<sup>rd</sup>/35

64-36 June 26<sup>th</sup>/35

Dear Sir:

A complaint was laid by Mr. MacDonald, fisherman of Blind River that an Indian of Spanish River Reserve named Cockerdish or Caibaisai No 77 was stealing fish out of their Found nets and selling same, Constable Bessaw arrested him and took him to Massey to wait trial, he broke jail and fled with his family. He arrived at his home on the reserve about the time Treaty money was paid, but he did not appear. The game warden and constable arrested him on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June and while awaiting trial has escaped again.

Have not had any request from Mrs. Cockadish for relief but told the constable to get her \$5.00 if she was out of food when he made the arrest.

Received a letter today from Magistrate Arthurs of Espanola stating that Cockadish has made his escape again.

Your obedient servant,

Agent.

Note. The story of Caibaisai No. 77 was told in many homes in the community. He is an unlikely hero that was accused of stealing fish from a commercial fisherman's nets. His family during his escapes were taken care of by the community. This is a prime example of the notion 'extended family'. Caibaisai No. 77 made a mockery of the often dangerous provincial police force. (RG 10. Volume 11386. File SSM District, Assistance to Indians 1932-37)

It's ah that dream all showed me to see my grandmother and that she was fine and happy, and I'm about to see my grandfather [both in the spirit world] , I don't know what he looked like but ah my grandmother was with a man that was very tall and I asked my father what he looked like, he said 'did you know this was your grandpa', and I said 'see' and he says 'um wherever they are they're happy'. I just keep holding on to that and every once in awhile I used to have a hard time and so I was really close to my grandmother and so I think they're happy where they are and that's life out there so...I hang onto my dream. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

Sandra represents the vision of our people in their view that our memories, stories and dreams be examples of that goodlife that is rightfully ours on Turtle Island. It is the hope of our Nation that the stories our children tell will be different from the ones of the past and present that directly reflect our subjugation. We hope that our children's lives and memories of school can embody that renewal and reconnection to tradition that was denied to many of us. Hopefully, the stories of our people will shift to a representation of reality based in the harmonious relations with our non-native brothers and sisters.

The next chapter is titled Anishinaabemowin (speaking our Native language), which will examine the changes in our language that resulted in the changes of our culture. Also to be discussed is the necessity of language renewal in understanding the worldview and cosmology of the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek.

## CHAPTER FIVE: ANISHINAABEMOWIN (SPEAKING OUR NATIVE LANGUAGE)

### Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between changes in culture and changes in language within the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. We begin with a look at the language as being embedded with cultural meaning, moving on to the language as being reflective of identity, revisiting the notion of language/land connections and concluding with a return to language as central to healing and cultural survival.

### Language = Meaning

Well if we don't speak our language we, we gonna be just lost people and, lost uh [pause] how do you say that?...we'll be, wouldn't be, existent anymore as an Indian...recognized Indian...you'd still be Indian but you would not be recognized as a Native if you lost all your language. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

Our languages represent a connection to our ancestors. Speaking and knowing our Ojibwe language provides an individual with insight into a world that is more meaningful and symbolic. The language of our people is the language of our heart and it is our original languages that have been recognized as our gift from the Creator. To know the world within the fullness of our languages represents a comprehension of the world from our true spirits. Indigenous languages originate from the earth and "have a unique status in this land...they are the only languages originating from here" (Corbiere & Spielmann, 1998, p. 6). The Ojibwe language is the key to our past. It represents a way of seeing the world that our relatives from generations ago conceived of it. Our language is our link to the original breadth of our culture. When we have lost our Native languages then our identities as

original peoples will also change and shift. We will move further away from our authentic selves.

Each day I make an attempt to learn a phrase or word in the Ojibwe language. I have a fairly good grasp of the flow of conversations when Anishinabe speakers are together. I can usually figure out what is being said and who or what is being talked about. I have a good understanding of the basic commands and questions but the scope of my language ends there. It is always a difficult thing to not know your own language. In some ways you experience a feeling of loss that is unlike any other feeling in your spirit. It is as Corbiere and Spielmann (1998) describe when they state, "Many aboriginal Anglophones agree that not being able to speak their languages prevents them from obtaining...a complete...understanding of themselves and their people" (p. 12). I have always felt that without my language, my existence will be reminiscent of a shell. My language is my inherent right to know the world as it was intended.

My grandmother has been quite instrumental in her efforts to teach me Ojibwe. Her devotion to *Anishinaabemowin* is great and is equated by her abilities to teach her grandchildren the basics in language survival. I do believe that my grandmothers' vision is vast in her hopes that her grandkids will someday be fluent speakers. Many of us in our community are working hard towards being able to enjoy our inheritance of the language. We see in our community a resurgence of the traditional activities and that is compounded by a resurgence in *Anishinaabemowin*. Our people are learning to speak with the language of our heart and spirit. It is good to hear our young kids in the school using Ojibwe phrases to introduce themselves or describe naturally occurring events. The language is being embraced and nurtured. It is as our Elder Angeline Stonepoint emphasizes when she states,

“we have the right to protect and use our language which will be recognized being a true Indian” (A. Stonepoint, personal communication, July 7, 2000). Our genuine selves are rooted in our ability to fully understand the language.

The oral tradition continues to convey knowledge and information about very ordinary concerns: the environment and its use and protection, plants, animals, weather, history, community, cultural values, and so on. These culture specific perspectives are rooted in the past and in knowledge that has been passed down for centuries, and it is imperative for those interested in revitalizing and preserving Aboriginal languages to be aware of these perspectives. (Corbiere & Spielmann, 1998, p. 7)

During my discussions with various Elders and good teachers from my community, I have learned that the importance of language acquisition is equated with being a ‘real Indian’. Many individuals may read that statement and be angered by the definitions of ‘real’ and ‘true’. The statement is not meant to be a judgemental one. What I have learned is that our Elders’ perception of ‘truly knowing yourself as an Ojibwe’ can only occur when your ‘comprehension of the world’ is fully based in your language. The language is in the land and represents a deep connection to those many ancestors that walked and lived here. Our Elders remind us that the importance of *Anishinaabemowin* is a key component in our definitions of ‘cultural uniqueness’. Without our languages we are subjugated to a position that homogenizes our world. Our language goes beyond just “helps[ing] with your identity of who you are” (V. Assinabe, personal communication. May 1, 2000). Our language is who we are.

My grandmother went to Spanish residential school. By now, you know that she spent most of her formative years in the confines of that system. My grandma never lost her language and I do believe that this strength is what guides her philosophy on Ojibwe identity as being rooted in the practice of *Anishinaabemowin*. She states,

To make yourself different eh, you have to have a language [pause] so that's what I always say 'if god gave us this language we should cherish it', and not, and not you know be ashamed of it, sometimes I think people are ashamed of their language [pause] I don't know, not speaking it doesn't mean you're white [pause] or English, you are what you are, if you're born Indian, you're Indian...the colour of your skin doesn't change if you just speak English. (M. Toulouse, personal communication, November 3, 1999)

The significance of her words provides us with an Elder's perception of Ojibwe people giving in to the notion that the 'white way' is the 'only way'. My grandma always assumes that if one really wants to learn the language then he or she will do everything to speak it. It is understood amongst the Elders that since our language is the voice of our heart, then the individual seeking to be fluent, will be, if she or he has the truest desire from within his/her spirit. If one is not pure in their intentions, then the outcome of their desires will always result in failure.

The transmission of our culture in Sagamok First Nation is still based in our oral traditions. The primary method of "passing along cultural knowledge, history, and wisdom is via word-of-mouth—[along with our] traditional teachings, stories, legends, myths, songs, [and] ceremonies" (Corbiere & Spielmann, 1998, p. 7). The majority of this work has been framed within the living stories and experiences of the People. I sat with our Elders and good teachers, talked with them, and they shared what they knew. From that point I recognized some key patterns emerging from our discussions, which became the foundation for organizing this work. The chapters have evolved from the exchanges that took place between myself and our many speakers. Their voices guide and direct this work. This is a prime example of Ojibwe research and methodologies. The oral tradition is integral not only to understanding ourselves and the world around us, but provides a space for others to begin to understand us beyond the colonial gaze.

When we come to assess the state of a language and take a sober look at its chances of survival in the future, we should realize that we are dealing not simply with grammatical patterns but with ways of experiencing and thinking about the world. Amerindian languages present us with an untold richness of the human spirit, built up piece by piece over thousands of years. (Foster, 1982, p. 11)

The Ojibwe language has been rated as possessing an excellent chance for survival. The problem I have is with the word survival itself. Our people have never been allowed to flourish, grow, increase or prosper in anything within our homeland. Every effort of our nation to thrive has been thwarted by governmental policy and attempts to eradicate us. Our language may survive, but the reality in the communities is that the full acquisition of our original voices is overwhelmed by the use and worldview existent in English. Many of our Elders and teachers have a difficult time relaying the knowledge of our People when they have to bounce between Ojibwe and the language of dominance. The message and the full meaning of our stories gets lost in the translation to a colonial language that does not possess the range of metaphors and images available in Ojibwe. The Ojibwe language may survive, but to what extent will it remain true to the form in which the Creator gave it to us. The language has already been bastardized in terms of our words and phrases being shortened in order to accommodate a growing consumer and Anglocized Ojibwe public.

As for myself our Elders and me from our First Nation has a strong voice, mostly everybody are speaking in their own way, I've also seen adults on the rez who have spoken English all their lives going back to learning and speaking the language, as the Elders are saying, it should be alright to speak, read and write Ojibway, sometimes it brings tears to my eyes for not knowing our language. (A. Stoneypoint, personal communication, July 7, 2000)

The language is the key to our past and understanding the origins of our knowledge. The language came from the land. Our descriptions of the world around us accurately depict our landscape and the connection we have to it. The history of our people is reflected in the Ojibwe place names of our territory. There is no other place like it. When our ancestors

said that they were going to *Sagamok*, they meant they were headed to the ‘place of two points joining’, which also represented a location in which the sturgeon were plentiful. *Sagamok* was a description of a place that our people would be going to for part of the summer months. Just as *Bawating* was ‘a meeting place’ for our people, all our words for places signified a description of the activities that would take place there. Our place names were not limited by words like commercial and residential zoning. Our place names were sacred and reflected the culture and language of our people. Language is our connection to our ancestors.

In Figure 5.0 we are presented with pictures of McBean Harbour and McBean Mountain, which is locally known as *Nadaue* (Iroquois) Lake. This particular location is called ‘place of the floating Iroquois’ in our Ojibwe language and represented a time in our history of the on-going conflict with our Southern brothers and sisters. When you ask an Elder about this location many can recount the story of the battles at McBean harbour that resulted in the death of many. It is said that the bodies of the Iroquois warriors floated from the bay through an underground passage that led directly to the top of the mountains lake. This mountain is known for this presence and the site of our historical relations with the Iroquois. The stories our Elders tell us recount the visions that our medicine people had in combating these attacks. The stories talk of our use of medicines and the ability of our people engaged in battles. These places are a part of who we are and the legacy to which we are born into. There is no other place like this and all community members know the story of this location.

#### Language and identity

As our people one by one are learning to feel better about themselves, let us not inadvertently hold them back by laying on a guilt trip on those who were not

Figure 5.0 – Picture of McBean Harbour and McBean Mountain, locally known as *Nadaue* (Iroquois) Lake.



Note. These pictures were taken in the springtime during the annual burn. It is part of our traditional Ojibwe science to conduct control burns in an area to ensure greener and fuller growth of particular flora and fauna (especially areas of berries and medicines).

fortunate enough to have had their languages passed on to them. By all means, give them a glimpse of that wonderful thought world that once flourished and that still flourishes in some communities. But leave it to them to decide in what manner and to what depth they wish to enter it. (Corbiere & Spielmann, 1998, p. 11)

We are a community that is reconstructing itself. Sagamok First Nation is undergoing the growing pains of a community that is in a process of decolonization. In some senses the social and cultural status of my First Nation is full of tensions where we bounce between deviance being the acceptable norm on one day and then not on the next. These same tensions are reflected in discussions surrounding our Ojibwe language. Our Elders suggest that without the language we cease to exist as beings that perceive the world in a fully Ojibwe manner. Meanwhile our collective consciousness and reality demonstrates that the hold of the English language and accompanying worldview runs very deep. Our people are struggling with the relevance of the old ways (language included) being applicable in these consumerism times. The importance of language is a constant point of conflict, but the path towards decolonization and reconciliation with each other, can only succeed if the resurgence of *Anishinaabemowin* grows in a blameless, healthy and respectful society.

Michael Foster in his paper Canada's first languages explores the concepts of the culture/language connection as being integral to identity. Foster (1982) states that, "Although language is often discussed apart from culture, it must be remembered that language is the principal means by which the members of a society communicate and exchange information about their culture" (p. 11). This same notion is clearly expressed in the testimonies of our Elders who emphasize the importance of language as core to the Ojibwe 'being'. Our Elders quietly guide us in a direction that suggests to us that we need to move beyond the philosophy of thinking as Ojibwes, but begin living as Ojibwe people. An example of these thoughts are found in the words of Sandra Corbiere when she affirms,

It is important to try and get back what we've lost...because ah [pause] when we have those ceremonies we have those ah sweat lodges we have the language...it's, it's just to preserve us [pause] it helps the Anishinabe people. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

The recovery of language is important. Inherent in our Ojibwe language is a sacred way of seeing and perceiving the world. The path to our healing will be found in the pain and joy of *Anishinaabemowin*.

Master ash basket maker Irene Makedebin lives closely to the land. She is known for her skilful artistry in making baskets, quill boxes and leather goods. Irene always makes the time to talk with people when she is approached. She is a carrier of many of our traditional Ojibwe stories. She is also an individual that was reared completely in the Ojibwe language and did not learn English until later in life. On this occasion, Irene recounts this recent experience of her son moving back home to stay with her,

He says [her son] 'well, I don't understand' and here you are [Irene states] 'you have to understand me if you're going to stay with me' [laughs]...but I'm used to talking Indian eh...and ah when you talk Indian you talk to, you speak to another ah another Indian so plainly, nothing like when you're trying to sneak away [laugh] just like that, just as I always tell my kids, my grandkids it sounds better when you talk to another Indian. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

The importance of her statements provides us with a primary Ojibwe speaker's insight into the function and philosophy of our Native languages. Irene stresses that speaking Ojibwe occurs naturally and plainly, there are no hidden or twisted undertones to the discussions. She also emphasizes that our cultural uniqueness as Ojibwe people is rooted in our ability to address each other in *Anishinaabemowin*. The language is vital to our status of an indigenous consciousness.

English speakers, on the other hand, seem to feel an obligation to come to judgments about things and to express them at every available opportunity. With many aboriginal people there seems to be an opposite obligation—where coming to judgmental conclusions is seen as either wrong or, as I now suspect, largely a waste

of time. Further, announcing such conclusions at every opportunity seems to be regarded as a display of immaturity, if not arrogance. (Ross, 1996, p. 108)

The notion that language has within it an inherent way of seeing and knowing the world is made apparent in my everyday contact with society. When I spend time with the Elders and good teachers of my community I am relaxed and engaged in our discussions. Often times we sit in silence for long periods and there exists a comfort in our private reflections. In opposition to this when I spend time with others that do not live closely to the land or in the lived reality of our language, there seems to exist a level of stress that is perceived and sensed at a very spiritual level. Examples of this in my own life are best exhibited in these two examples. The first example brings me to a time that I remember sitting at Fort Lacloche during an Elder's Gathering, listening to *Mide* teacher Eddie Benton-Banai telling the Ojibwe Creation Story. Eddie told the story completely in Ojibwe. Although I could only pick up a bare understanding of the story I knew within myself the beauty and calmness of our language. People were in awe and listened carefully to the images that Eddie conveyed. I felt a peace and harmony as he told the story. The second example best describes the daily reality that we all face in an Anglocized world. In the majority of my relations with people who are not close to the land (often in my experience with non-natives) I am confronted by their on-going necessity to argue judgments and opinions, often beating the receiver into a defeatist position. It is as though the need to be right all the time or to be heard is central to daily existence. Rarely is there a time of comfortable silence, instead silence is seen as a sign of discomfort and wasted space.

I'd like to go back to that earlier quotation from Sakej Henderson, the one where he said that the function of language was not to become another pair of eyes, but was to 'speak to the ear, and speak to the heart.' What did he mean by this? (Ross, 1996, p. 117)

Language embodies knowledge and values. The globalization of the English language is matched by the continual need for more material goods. Globalization is equated with consumerism. The loss of our language as Ojibwe people also positions us in a place where we will be at risk of losing the full understanding of our lifeways. All one needs to do is spend time with our Elders to recognize the importance of language as central to our collective Ojibwe identity. Our Elders perceive the world in a way that is rooted in our ancestors. The language is central to knowing and healing ourselves. The intent of language renewal is not meant to position our people in state of shame and blame, it is quite the opposite in its intent of positioning our people in a state of reclamation as we regain the inherent gift of *Anishinaabemowin*. Relearning our language will not be an easy task and the common experiences of Native people around the world are best expressed in these words, "I think all Natives are, are similar wherever you go...their way of life, everybody has to struggle for their way of life right, no matter what, what breed you are, nothing comes easy" (M. Toulouse, personal communication, November 3, 1999).

Our languages embody deeper meanings of understanding the world around us. The Ojibwe language is rich with metaphors and descriptions of places, people and events. *Anishinaabemowin* is the voice of our heart and spirit. It is the voice of our Creator speaking to us. The impact that our Native language has on comprehending the depth of our lives is described in this moving excerpt by Virginia Assinabe,

[On her mother dying when she was three] I remember the, I could hear policeman talking, it was a deep voice, and my great grandfather talking, and I remember my great grandmother had went over and bein' the mischievous kid that I was I remember eavesdropping, going open the living room door and eavesdroppin', and then she came [her grandmother] and uh [pause] told me I shouldn't be doin' that and then she sat me down with me on the uh, on the couch and she told me my mother had died, but the concept of 'died' didn't really, it didn't mean anything to

me, I didn't, and then she told me in Ojibway 'she's not coming back' and that was pretty devastating. (V. Assinabe, personal communication, May 1, 2000)

This passage reveals many things. It reveals the trauma of a young girl losing her mother. It also reveals the impact of this trauma as being more meaningfully understood in the breadth of our Ojibwe language. This experience reflects the level of connection that our language has to our emotional/spiritual conceptions of the world.

*Anishinaabemowin* is integral to our survival and identity as Ojibwe people. Our connection to our Elders and fluent speakers must be maintained and nurtured in order to preserve our language and traditional knowledge. Our Elders are getting older and many of our Elders have already made that journey to the Spirit World. When they die, so does the knowledge that they carried if it is not passed on. This all too common situation in Indian Country is experienced everywhere and its' devastating impacts are described by author Basil Johnston (1991),

When these elders passed away, so did a portion of the tribal language come to an end as a tree disintegrates by degrees and in stages until it is no more; and, though infants were born to replenish the loss of life, not any one of them will learn the language of their grandfathers or grandmothers to keep it alive and to pass it on to their descendents. Thus language dies. (p. 10)

The importance of learning our language goes beyond our identity. We must reconnect with our language and culture through visiting and learning from those Elders that are the holders of our knowledge. We must make the effort to go to those places where our language and culture is vibrantly alive.

In Figure 5.1 we are presented with pictures of the Garden River Healing Lodge, language teacher Sandra Corbiere, hand drummer Donna Sault and Sagamok youth Jamie Fournier. On this particular occasion a group of youth from my community are attending a youth weekend aimed at celebrating the recovery of Native traditions. This weekend was

Figure 5.1 – Outside and Inside Photos of the Garden River Healing Lodge



Note. The Garden River Healing Lodge is the material reality of the dream of Chief Dan Pine. He conceived of a place where the People would gather, learn and practice the old ways. Chief Dan Pine is now in the Spirit World, but his vision lives on as more of our People gather at this lodge to be reunited with our Anishinabe ways.

organized by youth workers Josephine Toulouse and Juanita Skruibis, who work for the Sagamok Health and Social Services Department. These two women are known to work long hours in implementing their youth activities focused on healing and wellness. They also have many volunteers that offer their time to assist them in their plans with the youth. On this weekend at the Healing Lodge Donna and Sandra were chaperones, as I was, with many others. Our Health and Social Services Unit is devoted to the recovery of Ojibwe language, culture and traditions as the foundation for community health and makes plans with that philosophy at the core.

#### Language in the land

As rich and full of meaning as may be individual words and expression, they embody only a small portion of the entire stock and potential of tribal knowledge, wisdom, and intellectual attainment, the greater part is deposited in myths, legends, stories, and in the lyrics of chants that make up the tribe's literature. Therein will be found the essence and the substance of tribal ideas, concepts, insights, attitudes, values, beliefs, theories, notions, sentiments, and accounts of their institutions and rituals and ceremonies. (Johnston, 1991, p. 13)

The Elders and good teachers from my community are the holders of our tribal knowledge. They possess within them a vast library of stories and life experiences that represent our connection to the past and certainly that of our future. Many of our discussions have surrounded certain places within our land that signify a particular teaching or event. Each place that is discussed has a certain story, the oral history, connected to that area. I am told that when a certain location is identified and described in our language, there is no other place like it, and this knowledge represents a common and familial connection to that area. Basil Johnston (1991) in his paper One Generation From Extinction highlights the importance of indigenous languages as the source of our kinship to the earth. Basil asserts that although the Ojibwe language is currently listed as a prime candidate for linguistic

survival, the rate of transference and fluency between the generations suggests otherwise.

When the language dies, so does our true affinity to the land and the universe.

My grandmother emphasizes the importance of *Anishinaabemowin* at nearly every visit I have with her. She'll make it a point to familiarize her grandchildren with the daily conversational starting points, responses and situational norms. Her teaching of the language is sometimes subtle and sometimes harsh, we all know that it depends upon her patience with us on that day. My grandmother's view is that our Ojibwe language constitutes the fullness of our Ojibwe being. She often refers to the fact that the English language does not possess the same richness and meaning that our language does. My grandmother emphasizes that our stories, myths and experiences are best represented and told in our Ojibwe language. It is difficult with a limited understanding of the language to fully grasp the humour of our jokes and my grandmother refers to the equally harsh problem of attempting to translate the joke without losing its funniness. She also asserts that our language is our connection to the land and embraces this point,

That is what you have, land, land is very important [pause] when you walk, walking around on the ground you know this is Indian land [pause] I shouldn't say Indian, Anishinabe land would be more better to say maybe. (M. Toulouse, personal communication, November 3, 1999)

The language and the land are intertwined in a relationship that began at the time of Creation. When we lose our language, we lose centuries of an ancestral bond with the earth and her children.

Our celebration of *Tasehwung* (Feast for the Dead) involves many stages of preparation and protocol. *Tasehwung* begins with the creation of wreaths utilizing the local flora and fauna. There are teachings within teachings when we begin this sacred event. This process especially demonstrates the many teachings that we can learn from the land.

To make our wreaths one must begin by picking princess pine. There are only certain locations in our community that have the right type of pine necessary to make these wreaths. In order to pick this princess pine in a good way the individual must place down their *semaa* (tobacco) as a sign of respect. That pine is giving up its life to be transformed beyond a material object necessary for *Tasehwung*. The pine becomes a wreath and that wreath becomes the other-than-human tool used by the spirits of our dead to travel on the earth for that day. The decorative features for our wreaths are often taken from the local grasses, berries, flowers, boughs and leaves. The process of respect for the earth is repeated with our gift and offering of *semaa*. Our wreaths are placed at the locations where our loved ones physical bodies lay. The earth and our return to her are celebrated in this way. The earth and her children are celebrated for their teachings. Our feasts on that day always begin with the burning of our *spirit dish* and the prayers for our people are done in the language.<sup>13</sup> The land and language are integral to the sacredness of this event, they cannot be separated or *Tasehwung* as a sacred celebration in the true form of our People will cease to exist.

Basil Johnston, a fluent speaker of *Anishinaabemowin*, grieves the impending loss of our languages. Like many of our Elders, Basil emphasizes that our original voices as given to us from the Creator, signify our deep connection to *GitcheManitou*.<sup>14</sup> Johnston (1991) states that Ojibwe people who do not speak their Native language will,

No longer think or feel Indian. And although they may wear Indian jewellery and take part in pow-wows, they can never capture that...reverence for the sun and the moon...no longer are the wolf, the bear and the caribou elder brothers but beasts,

<sup>13</sup> The spirit dish is made up of all the food being served at a feast. The dish is filled with food and then burned in our sacred fire. The burning of the spirit dish is always the protocol at our feasts, but especially *Tasehwung*, and no one is allowed to eat before this is done. The spirits of our ancestors are regarded with such respect that they eat first before any of us can. The spirit dish is usually prepared and burned by an individual in the family that possesses the skills and knowledge to do so. The spirit dish is accompanied by remembrances and words in the Ojibwe language.

<sup>14</sup> The Great Mystery. The Creator of all things. Neither male nor female. Beyond our comprehension.

resources to be killed and sold. They will have lost their identity which no amount of reading can restore. (p. 10)

This understanding of the language is extended into our connections with the land in which we occupy. If we do not understand our location and the stories of our places in the spirit of our language, then we are at a loss of truly comprehending the significance of that place. The landscape of our areas will no longer embody the meaning and symbolism that our ancestors gave to them. The teachings of that area will be lost or distorted in our Anglocized versions and accounts.

Peter Owl is a respected clan teacher and historian for Ojibwe people. If you need to know the origins and legacy of the Anishinabek of our community and the North Shore, he is the one who knows. Peter is a fluent speaker and possesses an intimate and detailed knowledge of the land and area. He is an excellent storyteller and captivates his audience every time. Peter demonstrates the concept of the language/land connection in this quote,

Well these, these groups are, are Ojibway speakers and their talking about a certain area within this large ah, large area along the North Shore, you talk about, well lets say historically, there's ah, Sagamok was known as a place of two points joining, there's no other name to it, it, that was the name that identified Sagamok ...and all this, even along the, the North Shore, there are certain areas there that individuals, there was names and when people were talking about where they were or where they were gonna go, the name of the place was used and what you're gonna do there, so it ah information, the information system was sort of locked in there, there's no way to change it. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

Peter Owl currently works as the Membership, Lands and Estates Officer for our First Nation of Sagamok Anishnawbek. Peter is always engaged in Ojibwe research. He is currently completing a map of the area that documents cultural, ceremonial, seasonal and historical use of the People. This map provides the original names of our land in Ojibwe and plots out community based land values (medicines, animals, sugar bushes, sacred

places, etc). This is an on-going project and is integral to our community in presenting our membership with the cosmological landscape of our people.

When a language dies, the world it described is dismantled too—place name by place name, custom by custom, saga by saga. (Wright, 1988, p. 39)

The importance of the language in understanding our connection to the land has been emphasized time and time again. The acquisition of our language is a difficult task but a necessary one to the survival of our spiritual and cultural legacy. Our Elders possess that tribal knowledge that is unique to the Anishinabek Nation. When one of our Elders dies, their particular wisdom and language goes also. If our efforts to learn the language continues to be railroaded by the emphasis on mastering English, then we are at a great loss and disadvantage as Ojibwe people. We need to sit respectfully within the circle of those Elders and re-establish our link to time immemorial ways of knowing the world. The Creator gave us a voice that is a sacred form of speaking from our hearts. The language is in the land and our stories and experiences are locked within it. When we lose our ability to comprehend the world in *Anishinaabemowin*, then we have severed our ancestral link to the land. There will always be a void in our authentic understanding of the land. The landscapes of our Ojibwe origins will become strange and unfamiliar.

In Figure 5.2 we are introduced to two places within the territory of Sagamok Anishnawbek that are representative of our Ojibwe myths. Both locations are in close proximity of each other and their significance is rooted in our community stories. The stories of the Indian Head and Devil's Lake serve the function of providing warnings to our children to act in a responsible manner. These stories are also a source of constant entertainment for our people and are meant to be scary. The Indian Head is a natural rock formation that represents the profile of a Chief in a feathered headdress. Directly behind the

Figure 5.2 - The Indian Head and Devil's Lake – Two Places within close Geographical Proximity – Sources of our Ojibwe Myths.



Note. The first picture is a natural rock formation. The profile of the Chief is engaged in a cry. This area has also been known for many sightings of other mythological and other-than-human creatures. The second picture has been taken at the western end of the lake. One of the many stories surrounding this area tells of a great creature (similar to the Loch Ness) that lives here and travels in an underground passage from the Spanish River to this lake. One of the more recent stories includes our ancestors coming to this lake when they were ready to die and jumping in. The stories of this lake are primarily meant to serve and promote our social boundaries for children and youth.

Indian Head is a trail that leads to Devil's Lake. This lake is known as being bottomless. The children of our area do not throw rocks in the lake for fear of being taken away by some mythological creature. The importance of this area is its provision of the necessary teachings for our children to be respectful of all animate and inanimate things and to never travel alone. The stories of the Indian Head and Devil's Lake promote and affirm our social norms and customs.

### Language and healing

Permanent mental and even physical scars were left on parents and grandparents in Canada particularly by those who attended residential schools... Years of being denied the use of their own language in such institutions, and by being punished when the language was spoken, definitely has a lasting effect... parents deliberately did not teach their children their aboriginal languages. They were determined to teach them English only. In this way, they felt their children would not have to endure the same difficulties and punishments that they did. (Kirkness, 1989, p. 98)

My mother attended a Catholic Boarding School. She was quite young when she began and was a young woman when she graduated. My mother would tell me stories about this school. Some of her memories were good and some were not so good. She valued education and recognized her diploma from this school as the source of her economic independence. She always reminded us, her children that without an education we would have limited options in life. My mom encouraged schooling and the mastery of this system. She was fluent in the Ojibwe language, but rarely spoke it in our home. I often questioned the root of this situation and finally found the courage to ask her about it. My mother relayed that if we truly wanted to learn *Anishinaabemowin* then she believed that someday we would ask her. I always believed that the source of her thinking ran deeper. My analysis regarding the lack of language transference from my mom to her children was deeply ingrained in her schooling experiences. Like many of our people that attended federal day

schools and boarding schools, the language was not encouraged. My mom expressed to me the humiliation she endured in a federal day school when the teacher made her read aloud in class. My mom's first language was Ojibwe and she could not enunciate certain words and sounds in the English language. She was often ridiculed for this. My mom's experience in boarding school was harsh and involved the physical whipping of young women who spoke the Ojibwe language. For whatever reason my mother did not speak Ojibwe in our household and reflecting on her life I can surely understand why she was positioned in this way.

Language acquisition can only happen when the destructive cycle of blame has been broken. Even though my mother did not teach us the language, she taught us the value of perseverance and goal attainment. My mom was a good woman. If there is anything that we her children can do to make her proud, that would be to get a quality education in mainstream society and embrace the Creator's education of learning the Ojibwe language. I do not carry any blame regarding my current inability to speak Ojibwe. This does not mean that those institutions responsible walk away without being held accountable, but it means that at my own stage of healing I have learned to deal with those structures and the legacy that has been left behind. My own healing began when all those negative feelings and thoughts were replaced within a consciousness of hope, renewal and rebirth. These same sentiments are expressed in the words of Peter Owl as he describes the experience of regaining the Ojibwe language,

I was able to use, to use the language, so now I was able to speak English and I was also speaking the Ojibway language, there at that time I ah, I was different [on returning to Shingwauk at 8 years of age], I had a different outlook on ah, on the system, the school system eh, even though all the, the grounds were familiar to me, the play areas were familiar and there's little bit, a little bit a difference in it, the

Ojibway language was with me now, I was able to speak. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

The significance of this passage reflects the confidence that Peter found when he was able to speak Ojibwe again. He had lost the language during his confinement at Shingwauk residential school and after a summer at home in Sagamok he found his voice of the Creator speaking. *Anishinaabemowin* became the source of his strength.

Ronald Wright (1988) in his article Beyond Words explores the cultural and spiritual impacts that the loss of language has on Native communities. He surveys the damage that was done by the forces of residential schools and summarizes the purpose of their existence in this statement,

The aim was to break the continuity with one way of life and then imprint another. The teachers knew little about the subtleties of culture, but they understood that language was the key. If the language could be broken, then the culture enshrined and transmitted by language could be smothered in its infancy. (p. 40)

The long-term effects of these schools are still being felt in our communities. The impacts of residential schools have affected every Native person directly or indirectly. In my First Nation of Sagamok Anishnawbek there are entire generations of people that attended Spanish or Shingwauk. Yet, we have never really discussed how these systems contribute to the dysfunction existent in our homes. We've yet to ask questions about the relationship between residential schools, neo-colonization and the health of our Ojibwe culture. I am not suggesting that we proceed in a manner that isolates our people in a position of blame or victimization, but what I am suggesting is that we need to find the space to explore our dysfunction as framed within a socio-historical understanding. I am also suggesting that these critical discussions take place at the very heart of our experiences, our homes.

My father Nelson Toulouse has much to say on the subject of schooling. His mother, my grandmother, went to Spanish residential school. My father attended a federal day school and was subjected to daily terror, humiliation and shame. He is a very reflective person and has learned to address those childhood experiences that affected the quality of his young life. Nelson recalls,

I guess the unique thing about being born in a time when, that I was [pause] and ah maybe having ah had the experience of ah going through the whole indoctrination, and also going through an education system which ah you know the policy was to, was to take your language away...ah all those things I mean [pause] if you can if you have the ability to sort a think ah freely you question those things at a young age and as you as you grow up and, and in your own mind you sort ah rationalize ah you know well what's right and what isn't right [pause] and when you see and hear ah um people that should be responsible and that not act responsible, and ah in your mind you sort of rationalize those things, I mean what, what's, what's right and what isn't, ah so you make that decision yourself then well I need to question things. (N. Toulouse, personal communication, July 15, 1999)

One of the key points that my father discusses is related to the Ojibwe language. He was very cognizant at a young age that the purpose of schooling was to eradicate the use of our indigenous voices. He also was very aware of the plans and policy of the churches and government to denigrate and abolish our Ojibwe culture and traditions. Nelson is still fluent in *Anishinaabemowin* and speaks our Native language at every opportunity. Although, we his children do not perform at the same level, he knows that he has a great responsibility to ensure that one day we will speak and hopefully think in the language.

Verna Kirkness in her paper Aboriginal Languages in Canada: From Confusion to Certainty explores the debate over language education in our schools. These same arguments take place in my home community over the idea of Ojibwe immersion in the primary school division. There is one group that feels language immersion will place our kids at a disadvantage in terms of competing and excelling in the provincial schools. The

other group feels that language immersion is the key to identity and self-esteem and will position our kids at an advantage in the greater society. Both arguments are valid. The impacts of language immersion may have their positive and negative effects, but if there is not a greater emphasis and support on the importance of language then our future generations will suffer the greater loss. Verna Kirkness (1989) provides this insight,

These parents, many of whom have lost their language, do not see the aboriginal language as being a viable means of communication. They tend to view English as the only important language. It took years of brainwashing to achieve this attitude in some aboriginal people, but it has, over time, become ingrained in those people. (p. 98)

I am sure that Verna Kirkness is not locating anyone in a position of blame, but what I do believe she is trying to do is deliberately point out how the colonial project has affected our own perceptions of the value of our language, culture and traditions.

Language is a part of the healing process. I've heard from many of our Elders that the source of our healing will not be found in textbooks or in the ways that are foreign to us. The true source of our healing will be found in the strength of our culture and language. Language is about healing and has that effect to soothe our minds and spirits. Our Ojibwe language is about laughter and utilizing humour to overcome the greatest abuses that have taken place in our lives. We have everything to gain from learning our language and everything to lose if we don't. Our Native languages embody that healing power given to us from the Creator. The language is our connection to the earth and her children. It is the teachings of our people that when we return to the Spirit World our ancestors only know us by our Ojibwe names. The acquisition of language reaches further than our present and future cultural survival, but has implications for our spiritual lives (here and after) as well. *Anishinaabemowin* is fundamental to the health and well being of our communities. A

culturally specific definition of healing must include traditional approaches supported by the power of our Ojibwe voices.

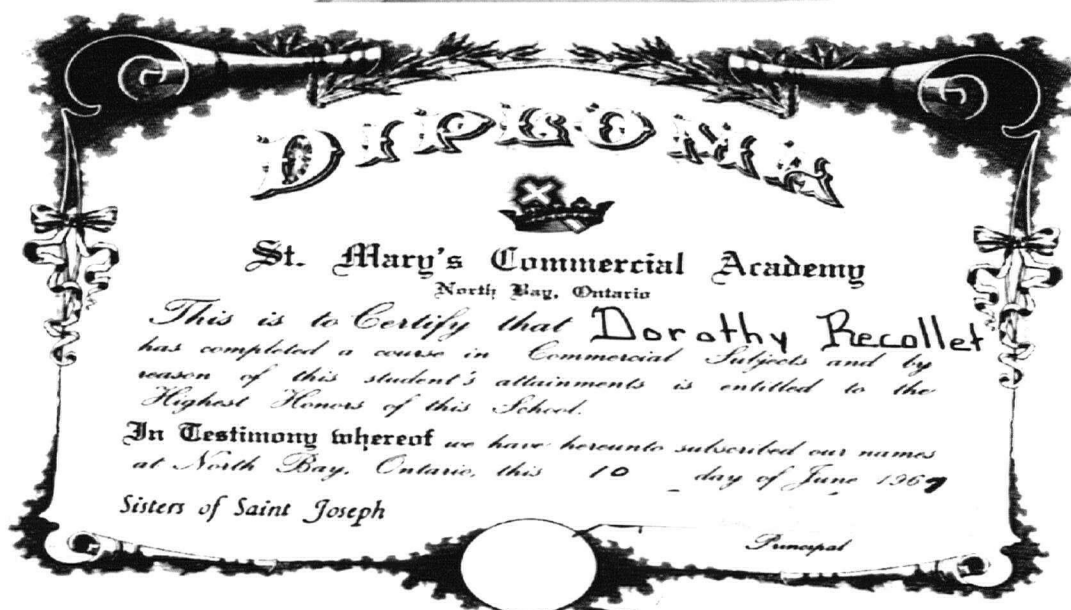
In Figure 5.3 we return to the subject of my mother. She was born in Wiky on Manitoulin Island and came from a large family. Her dad Chi-Dominic was a master fisherman, as was his sons, and he spoke fluent Ojibwe. On our visits as children to her home community we were often surprised by the quantity of language being spoken. Our visits to Wikwemikong were always met with amazement as our younger cousins would respond clearly in Ojibwe. We were fortunate to spend time with my grandfather when we could. He didn't speak very much English, but that did not inhibit our ability to communicate and have fun. My mom grew up happily. She often expressed to us the love that she had for her parents and siblings. She often talked about her childhood and the happiness that went along with it. By current social conditions, my mom's family would have been categorized as 'living in poverty', but my definition of the concept of 'poverty' is relegated to the mind of the definer. Who really was living in poverty? What type of poverty? I feel as though I've been living in a spiritual poverty by not being able to speak my language and I fully believe that this type of poverty is the greatest of all.

#### Returning to the language

My Aboriginal friends talk a great deal about what it's like to have to use English all day, and they generally describe it as a strain. If we truly recognized that we occupy a universe of constantly transforming things, people and relationships, they suggest, then we would have no choice but to discard our heavy reliance on nouns to capture and describe it. (Ross, 1996, p. 119)

Embedded in language is the worldview of the people. *Anishinaabemowin* is the practice by which the Anishinabe people come to know their world in close relation to the time immemorial conceptions of their ancestors. The recovery of our Native languages is key to

Figure 5.3 – Picture of my mother Dorothy Hope Toulouse (Recollet) and a copy of her diploma from St. Mary's Commercial Academy.



Note. The first picture is my mom at her prom and graduation. The second shows the academy from where she graduated and received her diploma.

our survival as a People. Within our language exists the tribal codes, norms, mores, symbols, teachings, concepts, ideals, views, beliefs, models and theories that were formulated throughout centuries of living in harmony with the land. Our return to the language signifies our return, full circle, to the ways of our Creator. *Anishinaabemowin* represents a descriptive way of knowing the world. Being raised in an Anglocized society I have become aware of the deadening of objects in our endless pursuit to name and categorize 'things'. In contrast to this, with my limited understanding of Ojibwe and with great help from my fluent family members, I have become more aware of the symbolic nature of our Native language. For example when naming birds in Ojibwe, there is not one bird or a single name that is coded for that creature, the name usually describes an aspect of that bird that makes it unique. It may describe the way in which its feather span out or the way in which its breast fills up with air during the fall season. The fact is that the our language is intimately connected to the land in which we originate and speaks to that relationship we have with that land. Without the language our tie with that crucial dimension of our Anishinabe worldview is broken.

Robert Leavitt in his article Confronting Language Ambivalence and Language Death: The Role of the University in Native Communities explores the notion of the fear (real and perceived) associated with the extinction of aboriginal languages. He raises some key questions about the problem of teaching/learning an indigenous language in an alleged view that it is a hopeless battle. Leavitt (1985) states,

People are fascinated by the death—real or feared—of a language. Is it true that switching over to English will erase Native culture? Is it true that writing an oral language down will petrify it in, at best, an unreliable, non-Indian form?...Even when spoken by fewer and fewer members of a community, the indigenous language is an inexhaustible source of information about what its speakers think, how they act and make decisions. (p. 6)

The significance of his statements contradicts those apathetic arguments that the pursuit of learning Native languages is basically a wasted effort. There have been countless studies conducted that restate the position that indigenous languages are dying and becoming extinct forms of communication. We are presented with broad ranges of data that would suggest the rise in the declining number of fluent speakers and the rise in lower rates of intergenerational fluency transference. And I'm thinking what else is new. The only way for Native people to learn the language is to learn it on our own as guided by the pureness of our hearts. It is as our Elders have alluded to when they state that our languages is the voice given to us by the Creator. If we want to speak it, we will. There is no amount of money that substitutes an innate need and desire to speak in the language of our hearts, minds and spirits.

I've had the privilege of sitting with sacred Fire keeper, veteran and respected Elder Dolphus McGregor. He is an interesting man who is quick with Ojibwe humour and wit. A visit with him is bound to be a time of laughter as he recalls stories, tales and experiences that demonstrate the frailties and strength of the human character. His stories about his animals are always funny and he possesses a special bond with his surroundings. On this particular occasion Dolphus is speaking about his children who are not fluent in

*Anishinaabemowin,*

Now they don't speak it and now I speak it fluent and ah and they don't and now they're in the reserve and hearing other people talk and now they wish they could talk like that eh. (D. McGregor, personal communication, April 30, 2000)

I certainly can relate to the feelings and experiences of his children. There are still a lot of fluent speakers in my community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. This is a good thing. The hardest part about being in a group of fluent speakers, when you are not, is the inability to

understand the breadth and scope of the conversation. When they laugh, you laugh too, but you're really unsure of what it is you're laughing at. When they nod their heads in confirmation of the speaker's story, you nod your head too, unsure of why you're doing it but you know that it is important and appropriate to do so. Although I can usually pick up the gist of the discussions I feel at a disadvantage when I cannot fully participate in the laughter, sadness or hope of the group. Living in my community is my living education. My full participation as a member means that I will have to make those daily attempts to utilize the language. Not because of reasons related to blame, shame or forcible causes, but because I have a personal responsibility to ensure that our language lives and thrives. The responsibility of *Anishinaabemowin* is the responsibility of all.

It was good, it was good to hear people a long time ago [pause] talking Indian eh, yeah, like ah [pause] my brother in law from Mississauga he used to come down here, first time they come down they come down by ah if they hired a car, and there was a road here to McBean and ah he stopped those kids by the church over there, little boys, he asked 'Where does Irene and Fred live?' [in English], the kids just shrugged their shoulders like they didn't know, he says '*Aapish Fred endaah?*' [in Ojibwe], 'oh oh' said the boys and told my brother in law where we lived...it would be nice to hear about people talking Indian again, just try their best and do their talking. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

Speaking the language has to happen in an environment that is non-threatening. In my home community many of our people are quite open and receptive to assisting those people seeking to learn *Anishinaabemowin*. The process of learning the language is a difficult task, but certainly the road of its acquisition is filled with much laughter. The language of our people has to be viewed as a priority in our lives. We cannot argue for it based entirely in the view of cosmological survival, but need to demonstrate the practical and social applications of the language. Ojibwe fluency should be a requirement for positions in areas that are concentrated with Three Fires (Ojibwe, Odawa, Pottawatomi) Peoples (on-reserve &

off-reserve).<sup>15</sup> And if the applicants for these positions are not fluent they should present a plan of how they will become fluent in the language. This is not meant to scare our people into learning the language, but it is conceptualized in the terms of Elder Gordon Waindubence (2000) when he states, "I look at job postings and its says 'Anishinabe language is an asset'. That should be at the top of the page. If we were to go to Quebec and look for a job. I would have to learn French. Perhaps we should expect the same" (p. 7). Perhaps we should expect more of ourselves. Perhaps we should regard our language as important enough to take these steps.

Our Native language embodies that sense of the spirit working within us. Our greatest authentic educators will continue to be our grandparents and the land with her many teachers and teachings. In Figure 5.4 we are presented with the final set of pictures in this chapter that show my grandmother relaxing at Toulouse Bay and directly below her is our sacred grounds where the passing on of our traditions and language take place. We have witnessed a resurgence of the circles in our area where our youth, men and women gather to learn the ways of our People. This site is also the place that represents the heart of our language embodied in the earth. Our language signifies that sacred process of understanding the good relations, balance and connection to the land, our fellow two-leggeds, four-leggeds, things that crawl, things that swim, things that fly and those other-than-human teachers. In closing to this chapter I offer this teaching of our *semaa* as told through language teacher Sandra Corbiere,

I grew up in the language and some of the Native teachings that come along with it [pause] and my mom always ah and father always put tobacco down in the spring time eh, in the waters, the waters will be safe during the summer to travel on. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

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<sup>15</sup> The Ojibwe were the holders of culture, the Odawa of language and the Pottawatomi protectors of both.

Figure 5.4 – *Nokomis* Madonna Toulouse at Toulouse Bay and the Sagamok Anishnawbek Spiritual Grounds



Note. The sources of *Anishinaabemowin* are our grandparents and the land. The first picture is of my grandmother sitting at Toulouse Bay. On this occasion we were out taking a walk and she was telling me about the genealogy of this area. The second picture is of our sacred grounds. The sacred circle is strong here. There is a teaching lodge to the back of the photo that is the area where our circles (youth, men and women) take place. This represents the heart of our language and culture.

The significance of her statement once again reflects the language, culture, tradition and meaning connection. The key to our survival is unlocking those binds (historical, social, political, personal) that silence our ability to communicate in *Anishinaabemowin*. The key to our survival is in speaking our Native languages.

The next chapter titled the Daily Effects of Colonization offers insight into the impacts that federal and provincial legislation has had on the lives, experiences and existence of the People. There are specific stories presented here as told from the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek that illustrate the real and often horrific nature of genocide.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE DAILY EFFECTS OF COLONIZATION

### Introduction

This chapter offers insight into the impacts that colonial federal and provincial legislation has had on the lives of the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek. We begin with an exploration of the impact of religion, to the protection of land areas, moving into the brutality of government agents, then surveying the long-term effects of subjugation and concluding with a need to return to our original values.

### The impact of religion

Colonialist domination has exerted an overwhelmingly negative effect on aboriginal peoples. In some cases, government policies deliberately undermined the viability of aboriginal communities in the never-ending quest to eliminate the 'Indian problem' once and for all. In others, however, this decline came about through less obtrusive yet equally powerful measures pertaining to education, bureaucracy, and missionary endeavours. (Fleras & Elliot, 1992, p. 16)

We are a divided people and what divides us is religion. Embedded in the doctrine of our many churches is the fundamental belief of members emphasizing religious and spiritual imperialism. This type of thinking forced many of our traditional people within the community of Sagamok First Nation to go underground. The situation had reached such fevered tensions throughout the early 1900s to the 1970s that churches and their representatives would name community members as alleged traditionalists, therefore allowing the congregation to treat them badly and regard them as outcasts. Throughout the late 1800s and into the 1930s we see the beginning of this dysfunction as the three communities (Spanish River, Sagamok Point and Toulouse Bay) become separated by their allegiances with certain churches. Members are pitted against one another in their efforts to have their church regarded as the primary form of religious celebration. The public

arguments between the People are taken to the Indian Agent as each community vies for dollars to be used in the building and maintaining of their places of worship. This separation and bastardization of the sacred from the secular as present in our daily lives devastated our relations with one another.

Even though traditional Anishinabek life ways were subjugated as forms that were pagan and evil, members of Sagamok First Nation during times of great sickness and darkness would turn to our medicine people for their guidance. My father Nelson Toulouse recounts this situation that elaborates on the tensions of the preceding point,

They [Catholics] made it so that it [traditionalism] looked really dark but what I discovered that I didn't see anything dark about it, I got to meet ah quite a few I guess ah people not directly open about their traditions, but none the less they practice them and ah they're almost shunned by the members of the church or if they participate in anything it was strictly on their own outside of the main community, so there was always a darkness about or ah an unknown about those people, yet when it came time for dealing with physical illness or whatever ah usually they were the ones that were sought out. (N. Toulouse, personal communication, July 15, 1999)

Our healers, men like Johnny Waseshkung and others, were clouded in a blanket of secrecy and fear. They had become the unknown and their practices had soon become estranged from the people. The ideology of spiritual and religious domination being preached within our first churches had rendered the traditions as abominations. And therefore anyone associated with tradition was abominable as well. Yet, in times of great need and sadness the People privately turned from the church and embraced our original life ways. This was never done publicly, as families avoided the public consequences of their affiliation with our medicine people.

Fleras and Elliot in their paper The Social Context explicate the link between the impact of colonial forces and their effect of internalized hatred in aboriginal peoples. The devastation that various institutions have had on the well being of aboriginal communities is

tremendous. We see this destruction in the many examples of human, cultural and spiritual loss at the First Nations level. In Sagamok Anishnawbek there still exists an underlying conflict between Christianity and traditionalism. The only difference is that the targeting of each other is silenced in a form of cultural hegemony. The indoctrination and public support of the banishment of Anishinabe people for spiritual and religious reasons has been replaced by a more private consciousness. The historical legacy and ideas behind religious imperialism in Sagamok Anishnawbek is voiced in this excerpt by Sandra Corbiere,

I find that the religion they, that, they had the distraction eh, all the different divisions of ah religion have ah entered in ah all the reserves, all the nations eh, so they let go of the traditional ways and they go on to going into churches and [pause] ah so they like [pause] learned that [pause] it was bad to learn about those certain and to do those certain things and just ah, now what the Anishinabe come back and they listen to the Elders...so its slowly coming back again and ah same of the language ah, is ah there's a big gap there and and parents now, the grandparents now they don't speak the language in, so they have to bring it back. They have to learn. (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999)

Our people are in a process of reconstruction. You can imagine the challenges that our families will face as they seek to understand the past in order to secure a better future. The struggles that our people will confront in terms of defining religion and tradition is far from over. We will continue to live with these questions and tensions for quite some time to come.

Now there exists, among others, two great conceptions of social order today. One, which is more homocentric, takes the path of respect for the rights of man. The other, more cosmocentric, which in its specific nature has nothing to do with these rights and which takes the path of what could be called: corresponding to the cosmic order. (Vachon, 1982, p. 2)

One of the products of religion is social order. What one must ask is what form of social order is being promoted and instilled? How is religious life affecting cultural and daily life? What ethics are being promoted as part of that religious order? What social dynamics are

being determined by the doctrine of the church? The philosophies underlying our churches in Sagamok First Nation have historically placed man at the centre of all things. Man was positioned here in dominion over all the land and creatures. God was removed in the sense that he watched and judged all persons and activities. This type of order is homocentric and fuelled the division between members of the community into polarized camps: traditionalists and Christians. Traditionalists were viewed as pagan because they were regarded as having no formal place of worship, no building to house their activities and rituals. If you were a traditionalist then you were condemned. The clashing of worldviews embedded in religious doctrine is seen within the social relations of our people. Once man was positioned in a hierarchal view of the world, power and domination in relations soon came about.

Robert Vachon (1982) in his paper Traditional Legal Ways of Native Peoples and Struggle for Native Rights explores the notion of homocentric and cosmocentric worldviews in determining social order. He investigates the various colonial institutions that were used in promoting certain imperial worldviews as tools to dismantle and conquer Native peoples. Religion and the churches abuse of power was a constant force in the lives of the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek. The impact of colonization through religious institutions is best described in these words by Nelson Toulouse,

Ah, so growing up ah I was totally different...it was, it was tough [pause] religion played a big part, ah it was pretty well there everyday, they dictated your, your institutional learning in school, you, you basically burned your knees I guess for the first hour, still being indoctrinated with catechism, and ah the one things that was frowned upon by, by church and every other kind of authority that I'm aware of is being Anishinabe or Indian in those days, ah those things were sort of underground, and even within your own home ah if any of your parents ah was sort of indoctrinated by way of you know...were pretty well brain washed to think that ah they think traditional was evil, ah so I sort of grow up in, in two, in two worlds that way ah one was knowing that tradition in fact exists. (N. Toulouse, personal communication, July 15, 1999)

Entrenched in religion are the philosophies, values and codes for behaviour of its membership. Often, the intent of religion is to promote harmony and community, but has evolved into a bastardized form that was used to marginalize the cosmocentric world of the Anishinabek people. Our subjugation has been perpetuated in a continual cycle of neo-colonialism; an internalized system where the colonized takes on the forms and role of the colonizer. The introduction of formal religion to the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek altered our conceptions of spirituality as a way of life. Formal religion has played a key role in the division and displacement of our People.

The other day I did my regular respectful duty as a daughter and went to my mother's grave. I go there on occasion to make sure that it is clean and not subject to vandalism. I also go there because her earthly remains are situated here. In some senses I recognize that spiritually she is not here, but has already made that journey in her return to the Spirit World. But nonetheless I go and visit her often. Our cemeteries are built on the tops of hills overlooking our community. Each cemetery is divided by religious affiliation. I never really thought about the impact that those fences had on our people, but those steel wires truly represented that colonial divide. In this particular excerpt, MaryAnn Trudeau explores the personal tensions of religion,

And still till this day I, I still do um I believe in that [Catholicism], I believe in, in, in cause it's all the same god anyway, ah I would go to church in, in, in any church really, and I'm always thinking, I'm thinking about the graveyards here, it's fenced in, shouldn't be fenced in like that, that's dividing us you know, I never really understood why they did that, why they still, they're still fenced in like that, separate, separating the people. (M. Trudeau, personal communication, December 9, 1999)

Her comments are significant and reflect the frustration that religious division has on the members of Sagamok Anishnawbek. Our community is at a stage where we grow tired of those old barriers that separate our people from living harmoniously. We are in a continual

state of understanding and coming to terms with the effects of the many 'religious walls and boundaries' existent in our homeland. It is an aggravating and stressful process.

In Figure 6.0 we return full circle to the roots of our religious division in the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. This particular letter is addressed to the Indian Agent stationed at Manitowaning on Manitoulin Island. It is a petition from some of the members of Sagamok to take possession of a house on reserve to be used for religious purposes. This group of people are affiliated with the Catholic Church. If you look closely to the margins of the letter you will see small notes written beside the names of the petitioners. These notes were written by the local Anglican minister in an attempt to refute the Catholic membership of these people. The Indian Agent employed the services of this minister to investigate the membership of this Catholic Order. This was a deliberate attempt to sabotage their efforts. The most significant point of this letter is the fact that organized religion has been used as tool of cultural domination. It has been an instrumental force in the division of our People.

#### Protection of our land

Water is our bodies; water is life. Fresh water is maintained by the thundering Grandfathers who bring rain to renew the springs, streams, rivers, lakes and oceans. We are nourished by our Mother the Earth from whom all life springs. We must understand our dependence, and protect her with our love, respect and ceremonies. The faces of our future generations are looking up to us from the earth, and we step with great care not to disturb our grandchildren. (Seventh Annual Elders Council, 1982, p. 1)

The creation of Indian Reserves was an attempt of the federal government to sever Native peoples connection to the land. The Crown and her children saw the wealth in this nation and through the power of manifest destiny claimed it as their own. The only barrier to the full acquisition of Turtle Island has and continues to be 'Indian people'; hence regarded as

Figure 6.0 – Letter to the Indian Agent dated March 9, 1897 from individuals of Sagamok claiming Catholic Church membership

TRANSCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL

184468

Massey March 9/97

Mr. R. W. Ross, Superintendent

Manitowaning, Ont.

Dear Sir

We the undersigned Catholic Indians of the Spanish River Indian Band No 2, --- ask your Department that we should be allowed to buy John Beshinanib's house which this Indian is willing to let us have for the sum of \$20.00 in --- that we should use it as a Catholic Church. We are not calling upon your Department for any money, but simply for the permission of buying and using the above mentioned houses as a church. Hoping that you will grant us our humble request – We remain, Dear Sir, Respectfully yours.

<u>Notes in Margin</u>	Naokwegabo, Gebinodin's father.
These people --- are	Peter Gebinodin, who signed for his daughter
Church of England. I	Catherine Gebinodin
baptized five children.	Antoine Gebinodin, son of Peter Gebinodin
Fr. F.	John Gebinodin, son of Peter Gebinodin
	Angelique, wife of Peter Gebinodin
This girl is Ch. Of	Mary Jobigigig, who signed for her brothers and sister
England and the boys I	Joseph Jobigigig
baptized. They are at	Alfred Jobigigig
Shingwauk home.	Catherine Jobigigig
Fr. F.	John Beshinanib, who signed also for his two children
The Indian Children --	Isaac Beshinanib
- baptized myself.	Christine Beshinanib
F. F.	Annie Espagnol, widow of late Charles Minissino who signed also
I don't know these	on behalf of her four children (over)
people at all.	Andrew Minissino

Figure 6.0Continued

These do not live in the village boundaries	Emma Minissino	
	Angus Minissino	
	Alexander Minissino	
	Helena Assinabe, John Badwewidang's wife	
These are not Indians	Theresa Naganassowekwe, wife of Levi Fournier	
They are the children of a Frenchman.	Joseph Fournier	Children of Theresa
F. F.	Philomena Fournier	Naganassowekwe
	Louis Fournier	
	Stephen Fournier	
	Agnes Fournier	
They do not live on the reserve.	Angus Matthew Fournier	
F. F.	Josette Fournier, wife of Louis McGregor and daughter of Theresa	
	Naganassowekwe	
I have never heard of these people. F. F.	Louisa Delia	grand daughters of Theresa
	Mary Aurelia	Naganassowekwe
	Theresa, widow of Awanigigig	
	Joseph Andrew	Children of late Awanigigig
	Paganisse	
	Atagweji	
These are R. C. but they do not live at the village. F. F.	Gabriel Assinabe	
	Mary Beshinanib, wife of Gabriel Assinabe	
	Joseph Assinabe	Children of Gabriel Assinabe
	Louis Assinabe	
	John Assinabe	
	Maggie Assinabe	
	Magdalen Assinabe	
	Catherine Assinabe	
	Harriett Assinabe	
	Stephen Assinabe	

Figure 6.0Continued

These live 4 miles	Jane Omimins, widow of late John Omimins
down the river. F. F.	Harriett Omimins, daughter of John Omimins
	George Omimins, brother of John Omimins, in whose behalf Jane Omimins signed
	Joseph Assiniwe
	Marie Thibault
	Angelique Assiniwe
	Henrietta Assiniwe
	Alexander Assiniwe
These are French	Widow Charles Boyer
down the River. F. F.	Charles Boyer jun.
	Catherine Naokwegabo
	Mary Boyer
	Alexander Boyer
	Dominique Boyer
	Charlie Boyer
These are Roman	Angus Boyer
Catholics but they ---	Widow Joseph Osawanimiki
F. F.	George Osawanimiki
	Jane Osawanimiki
	Louisa Osawanimiki
	Angus Osawanimiki
	John Papineau
--- do not belong to	Philomena Osawanimiki
the place. F. F.	Charlie Papineau
	Gabriel Osawanimiki

Note. The significance of this letter is multi-fold. It demonstrates the tactics used by the government in utilizing churches to pit Natives against Natives. It also shows the names of some of our original community members, some of which are still in their Ojibwe form, prior to being assigned Anglocized designations. (RG 10. Volume 6606. File 4013-8RC)

the 'Indian problem'. Reserves were created with the intent of locating Natives away from the public view. The defining philosophy that guided the creation of Indian Reserves was similar to the creation of game reserves for animals. Since Natives were regarded as less-than-human by the colonial powers, their living conditions should be of the same character. Tucked away from Canadian society within the boundaries of governmental creation, Natives were soon removed from the visibility of Canadian consciousness. If they can't be seen, they can't exist, therefore occupying Native lands has no consequences. It is this type of thinking that rationalizes the continual stealing and destruction of our environment. Natives were forced from the gaze of the colonizers, only to reappear when the colonizers required entertainment in the forms of feathers, beads and buckskins.

The community of Sagamok Anishnawbek, my home, was identified as Spanish River #5 during the many times of governmental renaming of our territories. When Indian Reserves were first being surveyed and mapped out, my First Nation was given an Anglocized name based upon the non-native myth of a Spanish explorer travelling in our area. The river that this explorer was rumoured to have travelled was renamed the Spanish River and to honour that mythological explorer our First Nation was called Spanish River #5. The government and surrounding townspeople in our home territory were content with Anglocizing our rivers, lands, lakes, mountains and sacred places. The Canadian government through the power of their Indian Agents were also content to obliterate our time immemorial place names with foreign ones. These attempts to erase our existence and attachments to the land were unsuccessful. At this time our community is currently engaged in a research project that is identifying and renaming the landscape, via *Anishinaabemowin*.

The creation of reserves had their impacts on the People. These impacts are voiced in the words of Hubert Eshkakogan,

We should have more land [pause] like we should never gave up any part of the land, cause right now we've native people don't have land eh, cause it's crown land that we call the reserve, so we don't own it [pause] it's just reserved for Indians, just like a parking lot you know [pause]...it's not our land. It's the government land. The way I understand, the way I understand it anyway, cause we can't do nothing, we can't go anywhere. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

The ghetto mentality of the Canadian government in their attempts to erase the memories of our Elders and ancestors has failed. Each community along the North Shore of Lake Huron is in a process of repossessing their original Anishinabe names.

Dr. Newbery in his article Law and Order, Native Style reflects on the philosophy and teachings that Native people have lived by in their intimate relationship to the land. Dr. Newbery is a familiar name in Anishinabek territory and has been instrumental in the formation of the Department of Native Studies at Laurentian University. He is a good friend to the People. The idea that Newbery communicates is the relationship between Native people and the practice of natural law. Man is not positioned at the centre of the universe, but is located as a part of it. Hence, Native people traditionally viewed their role as the caretakers and stewards of the earth. The earth was to be protected, cared for and respected. Newbery cites this example as a demonstration of this lived philosophy,

An...Elder has said, the farther we get from nature the harder our hearts become. The harder our hearts become the more it will be necessary, as we live with others (all our relations), for some external authority to direct and restrain us. But if we can recover the traditional world view and remember the sacred hoop of life, we will have little need for someone to impose laws upon us. Then we will be truly free. (Newbery, 1982, p. 28)

The significance of these statements reifies the importance of natural law to be practiced and lived by the People. When Natives are forced into tiny parcels of land and removed from

their traditional areas, that connection to the earth is displaced. When our relations to the earth are weakened we see a negative shift in the social and cultural order of our people. We become ghettoized, distorted and the imposition of more foreign laws and boundaries furthers this course of cyclical damage.

The Spanish River was once abundant with *manomin* (wild rice). The river was healthy and plentiful with fish, birds and other wild animals. The river represented the living road of our people who travelled up the river to the winter camps at Biscotasing. The river represented our people's connection to the land and the stories our Elders tell us strengthen that bond. This river has been a witness to the history of our people. If you travel up the river towards Benny (short for Biscotasing) you will come across many sacred sites where the stories of our people are alive. The rock faces at various points are etched and painted with the visions and dreams of our Anishinabe ancestors. Those rocks were also witnesses to the history of our people and have many tales to tell. My uncle Martin Assinewe speaks fondly of this river as he often recounts his experiences on the trapping and hunting trail. He tells the stories of our old people and the teachings that they have left for us to learn from. Our grandparents of long ago, in times of hard and hungry winters, would sacrifice themselves in order to open up a place for their grandchildren to eat. Martin has relayed that on the river up to Benny are sites where our ancestors rest, those grandparents that woke in the middle of the night as their family slept at camp and walked into the winter bush never to be seen again. Our ancestors were the embodiment of humility and sacrifice. What have we done as a people to honour those people of long ago? What teachings from them have we imparted in our daily lives? Unfortunately as the logging industry grew in our area, the river became the highway for masses of cut logs making their way down the river

to the local pulp and paper mills. As logging became the main source of economic life, the river died and our connections to it died also.

Throughout the early 1950s we see the catastrophic effects of the pulp mill industry on the Spanish River,<sup>16</sup>

In the early fifties before I went to school anyway, oh the mill was already there far as I remember anyways, first time was, trapping muskrats in the springtime, the ice just gone off the river, about three days before [pause] and we were checking muskrat traps and we seen a whole bunch of fish floating all over the place, everyplace we went along the river there, fish just floating there, as soon as you touch em they just swim away and you know up, up to the surface, just about every kind of fish you can you know imagine there is, and after that we were told not to eat fish and not to swim in the river...the old ones said 'there something bad in that water now'. (R. Owl, personal communication, January 21, 2000)

This was not the only incident where the multitudes of fish turned belly up and washed up on the rivers bank. Hubert Eshkakogan recalls a period in the 1970s when the same incident occurred. Each time government officials were reluctant to intervene and the media downplayed the severity of loss. The majority of local townspeople ignored this travesty against the environment so as not to aggravate the bread and butter of their homes, the paper mill. The only people that had the courage to speak on behalf of the river and her inhabitants were the Natives of Sagamok Anishnawbek and their voices were silenced in a media and governmental blackout. Each time the pulp and paper company responsible offered 'compensation' to the Natives by suggesting that they buy some Native wood at a reasonable price. Each time the offer of the companies was a lie.

The earth is our responsibility. Our natural laws given to us by the Creator guide us in that sacred spirit of protecting her. The waters and lifeblood of Mother Earth are sick and dying. We are all in time of decisions, those that can make the difference or lack of it in our

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<sup>16</sup> The pulp and paper mill located in our area has evolved from KVP (Kalamazoo Vegetable Products) to E.B. Eddy to Domtar. This industry has been the foundation for the local towns' economic existence. Of note, there are very few Native people working at this pulp and paper mill, presently and historically.

caring of the land. We need to make more conscientious efforts in our contributing to the health of our lakes, rivers and streams. Our connections to the waters are our connections to our ancestors. Especially in my community of Sagamok, we need to restore that connection to the river and embrace the teachings and stories that run within her. The memories of people like Raymond Owl need to be preserved and retold,

Everybody that lived along the river depended on it eh...but after that people just dropped off [pause] I guess fish all die you know...muskrats were gone too, ducks [pause] there use to be all kinds of wild rice on the river, oh yeah, all the whole shoreline was rice, cause in the summertime you go you know you go fishing or something all you hear is ducks in the rice, yeah ah all kinds of lots of wild rice, ducks, muskrats, now nothing. (R. Owl, personal communication, January 21, 2000)

The river is slowly getting healthy. The people of my community are coming back to the river. The link to ourstory is within our reach. As I drive along the road to my home community I wind with the river. I look out and see a few boats cruising along her. Coming back around the Indian Head I can see some of our members standing off the rivers edge along the rocks, casting their fishing lines out in the hopes of catching a pickerel or two. I am happy. The longer I drive and see life on the river I know that she is gaining strength steadily. The health of her represents the health of our culture.

In Figure 6.1 we are introduced to two photos of our living customs, those water bodies regarded as important by our community, the Spanish River and Fort Lacloche Falls. Both places represent intimate connections to our ancestors and the history of our people. Each location has specific teachings and medicines available there. There still are high bush cranberries growing along the river, which serve as a good heart remedy. Fort Lacloche falls and the surrounding area is one of the sites of our original villages. There have been many archaeological excavations in this area. Many of the artifacts taken from the ground have yet to be returned to the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek. Fort Lacloche is also the

Figure 6.1 – Picture of the Spanish River and Fort Lacloche Falls



Note. Both places are significant to the living culture of Sagamok First Nation. The 2<sup>nd</sup> photo of Fort Lacloche Falls is the place where the first Hudson Bay post was situated. This area is also known for its abundance of red willow, which is a medicine and used for our *Tasehwung* wreaths. Both water bodies are sacred and have powerful medicinal qualities. Both water bodies were known for their quantity and quality of fish and other wildlife.

site of our original land claim. In the late 1980s, led by then Chief Nelson Toulouse our community walked down the Fort Laclouche road and reclaimed our land from the Ministry of Natural Resources. This represented the beginning of our lands claims process. This event was a good time for our people and represented our renewal of strength and self-determination.

### Brutality of agents

The conquerors of America glorified the devastation they wrought in visions of righteousness, and their descendants have been reluctant to peer through the aura. Decent men...no longer overtly espouse delusions of peculiar grandeur, but the myths created by the cant of conquest endure in many forms to mask the terrible tragedy that was Europe's glory. (Jennings, 1975, p. 6)

Divide and conquer. Conquer and divide. The story of colonization echoes similarities across the world. Dispossession indigenous peoples of their land. Dispossession indigenous peoples of their children. Corral them in small parcels of land. Impose laws and forces to ensure their defeat. In my community of Sagamok Anishnawbek our people tell the living story of the brutality of conquest. Our experiences are real. The stories of our people expose the injustices and horror of conquest. Those forces, Indian Agents, Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), were representatives of the federal and provincial governments entrusted with the care and protection of the People. But as the living experiences of our community members reveal, this situation was quite the opposite. This is not a new story. Some may say it is an old story. Yet in my home of Sagamok we still live with the effects of that trauma inflicted by these agents of law and legislation. The story of these atrocities has been locked within a sphere of privacy and shame. Our hope is that these stories will be the starting point for

others to address that pain associated with the abuse of power and the dehumanization of our people.

Francis Jennings in his article Crusader Ideology and an Alternative maps out the notion of conquest as the philosophical foundation for settlement in North America. He furthers this idea by tracing the origins of conquest as based in the feudal system. This master/servant way of thinking materialized in the institutions and structures that have evolved in North America. Jennings goes on to state that the notion of conquest is still alive today and has become a part of the North American consciousness. Conquest is perceived as a rational course of actions in the colonizers' dominion over the land. This mindset is alive and well in the descendents of those frontiersmen and pioneers. Agents of the law and agents of the government have been at the frontline of the conquest. It has transformed itself over the course of history, but the core of the conquest remains the same. The experiences of Native people tell its pitiful and tragic story,

Oh I'd say about 54, 53 that's when they [police] started, we had an Indian constable in the reserve and they'd still come on...the Mounties used to come in if special constable call them eh...so I don't know maybe 55, 56 somewhere around there that's when the OPP started coming in, they were bad, I remember one time were there was a party up on right across from Felix [Stoneypoint] house there...there was all these young and older guys you know drinking...cops stopped there...everybody took off you know...then the police started shooting, bang, bang, bang, you know...and Isaac Toulouse says 'okay stop, stop, don't shoot'...they thought they were really gonna shoot them you know...I don't know if they would of or not but [laughs] they were bad. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

This scenario was all too common in our community of Sagamok First Nation. Not only did we have to deal with the many other colonizing forces existent in our home, but had to deal with corrupt, irresponsible and irrational police forces.<sup>17</sup>

Of all the ideas churned up during the early tumultuous years of American history, none had a more dramatic application than the attempts made to apply to the natives

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<sup>17</sup> The word for police in the Ojibwe language does not distinguish between OPP and RCMP.

there the doctrine of natural slavery: that one part of mankind is set aside by nature to be slaves in the service of masters. (Hanke, 1975, p. 13)

The invasion of North America was settled on the principle that her Native inhabitants were less-than-human. They were not rational or civilized beings and therefore could be enslaved by whatever means possible. It was deemed lawful and just for the colonizers to impart force in the civilization and christianization of these heathens. I fully believe that these thoughts have become the root of systemic and societal racism against Native people. In fact, I would take this further to state that this type of thinking has become a part of the hegemony and commonsense way of dealing with Native people. I am certain that the doctrine of natural slavery was alive and well in police dealings with our people in Sagamok First Nation. Good helper Hubert Eshkakogan recounts this experience,

[In the 1950s] how do you argue with them? They had that much power. Just to pick up anybody on the road...you know put you in a cell and you had to go to court the next day and then walk home...they have no, nothing, nobody [lawyers] that's why they have fun anyways [police] on the weekend oh about twenty, twenty people would be picked up [from Sagamok] and they start taking them to Blind River [jail]...the judge was really mean too eh...he should have known something was going on if he was seeing twenty men, twenty, thirty Nishnabes from Sagamok. I guess they just like [pause] let's go and show our authority on to those Indians or something like that you know...they broke my nose, yeah, they just want to flaunt one of those long flashlights and bopped me right in the nose and broke it...well that was the end of it you know. The police win. I asked them to take me to a doctor in Blind River and I don't know what kind of ah pills, he never gave me none...the police just threw that away. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

The significance of this story reifies the abuse of power that the police, and in this case a judge, exerted against our people. The brutal acts perpetuated against the members of Sagamok did not end there. They only got worse.

I first heard the story of Helen Betty Osborne in my Sociology of Law class at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. I remember the passionate discussion of

good professor Dr. Minore as he recounted the travesty and failure of the judicial system in dealing with the rape and death of Osborne. Her rapists and killers had gotten away with this brutal crime. And the saddest part about this whole case was that the entire town in The Pas (Manitoba) knew her killers. This was not the first time I had heard a story of this nature and nor would it be the last. Native women have always been exoticized and framed within an erotic picture. They have been regarded and portrayed as sexual beings that have been placed here for others' earthly pleasure. All one needs to do is review the images of Native women in popular culture. 'I can see her now, long flowing black hair waving in the wind, full lips, bedroom eyes, clad in tight buckskins that reveal the tautness of her breasts.' This image is on every postcard, picture, mug and t-shirt and is readily available for purchase at your local pan-Indian trading post. This image has become so powerful in the dehumanization of Native women that Disney's Pocahontas becomes the definitive real Indian. Our women are beautiful. But the perpetuation of this one-dimensional cartoonish figure has contributed to our women being viewed as less-than-human. Therefore, rationalizing the less-than-human treatment of them.

Rape is defined as forcible "sexual intercourse carried out against a person's will by the use or threat of physical force" (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia, 2000). Sexual assault of an individual has traumatic lifelong effects. Most raped women are assaulted by people that they know and trust. In fact acquaintance rape has reached all time highs in society as the availability of date rape drugs becomes readily accessible. The majority of sexual assaults happen against women and often women will not report these incidents. They do not report on the basis of fear, shame and mistrust of the system (judicial and social welfare). What happens then when those very forces entrusted with power are the

perpetrators? What happens when those individuals with the power of the law become the ones that violate it? This scenario has been repeated time and time again in my home community. There is a history of stories that reflect that abuse of power. This story still lives on today as we bear witness to the many (now dead) Saskatchewan Natives that were left miles out of town in below zero weather by police. These same activities have taken place in our area and the worst of these types of activities have taken place as well,

I remember we use to hear girls talking and they had been hit by ah those OPPs...yeah the police would come in and pick them up and then ah ah you know [rape]...there's quite a few girls, well they're women now. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

This topic is a difficult one. The women from my community that were violated would be in their late 60s to early 70s now. They were assaulted by the very people that were supposed to be protecting them. I would like to remind all readers of this text that this is not a story. This is the truth. These are the living experiences of our people in Sagamok First Nation. Their pain is our pain.

The Anishinabek Police Services (APS) was established in the late 1980s as an alternative to the current OPP law enforcement agency and as a critical step towards self-determination. It was initially set up based upon the philosophy that our police were 'peacekeepers' entrusted with the well being of our First Nations membership. They were to be community-based individuals that epitomized the Anishinabe principles of respect, harmony and truth. APS was initiated and implemented in order to combat the inequitable treatment of Native people in their dealings with the law. Our peacekeepers are quite aware of the responsibility that they have taken on. Their private lives affect their public lives. They are constantly in the view of our membership and it is our hope that the quality of our peacekeepers provides hope for our Nation. In Figure 6.2 we are presented with three

Figure 6.2 – The Comics of Brilliant Artists Lindsay Cote and Perry McLeod-Shabogesic



*The only cell phone my cousin "Sticky Fingers" ever had was the one he shared with the guys in D Block!*

[www.rrts.net](http://www.rrts.net)

**Note.** The social commentaries of these artists through their comic strips shed humour and light on contemporary Native issues. They manage to find laughter in very serious situations. They poke fun at popular culture and at those forces that seek to colonize Native people further. This is an excellent forum to illustrate those injustices perpetrated by the legal system against Natives. (Anishinabek News, October 2000)

comics by artists Lindsay Cote and Perry McLeod-Shabogesic that poke fun and humour at police agents and the judicial system. Both artists are well known within the Anishinabek Nation. They are creative and brilliant individuals whose poignant laughter pieces reflect the inequity of those colonial forces that seek to imprison us. I look forward to their comics, which expose those structures in their active delivery and participation of the cultural genocide of our People. For these reasons and more it is imperative that our APS be different, better and more honourable than its predecessors (OPP & RCMP). Our Anishinabek peacekeepers must embody and represent the spirit of our culture and traditions.

#### Long-term effects of our subjugation

I guess he [the game warden] come and set a trap net...it looks like a great big basket...and ah they couldn't ah get it because the, the ice was eh, and all the fish that was there was all rotten, so ah [pause] ah we, we pulled it out and ah that game warden come there and we're just getting to Oak Bay from Perch Bay [by boat] going back home and ah the game warden come there and 'ah who was here?' he says, 'no one, we're just getting here, just getting home' I said...he says 'there was a net in the bay there, it's gone'...well we hid it in the bush, and I says 'who, who had the net there?', 'well that's just for testing' he says, 'well that, that's not good' I said 'you ain't supposed to set net in here, this is three miles out, you can't set no net, no white man can set no net here'...they wasted all those fish, yeah, and they blame the Indians for it [laughs] the Indian will take fish but [pause] not, not waste it. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

We are a community in a process of reconstruction. The pain associated with finding new ways to conceptualize ourselves beyond the frame of the colonized and the other has become our greatest teacher. The people of my First Nation are reaching back into the traditions and the teachings of our ancestors as the foundation for our healing. The stories and experiences of our people become the platform from which our discussions surrounding our well being take place. The living voice of our Elders (like that of Irene Makedebin above) becomes that source of our resistance in the homogenization and silencing of our

people. The story of Elder Irene and the game warden is of particular importance because it demonstrates our constant refusal to surrender and abandon our principles as a sovereign nation. When Irene tells this story of her outwitting the game warden you feel a sense of victory and triumph. For years game wardens have imposed foreign laws within our territories that limited our traditional practices related to fishing and hunting. These same game wardens would flaunt and abuse their power by going right into the homes of our people and stealing their beavers and muskrats. The story of Irene asserting our inherent right as self-determining peoples offers our community hope and inspiration.

Khan and Talal in their paper Invasions illuminates the resistance of indigenous peoples in the assaults of their traditional land territories. Khan and Talal provide the historical landscape in which the exploitation of Native lands has occurred. They state,

Since the Second World War the number of incursions into indigenous peoples' lands has escalated worldwide. Once thought of as barren wastelands have now been identified as areas of vital national and even international importance. The last frontiers of forest, desert, mountain and tundra are now being opened up like so many pearl oysters. The riches are torn out, the land taken over and the ideological conflicts between alien powers and the nationalism of governments brought in to bloody the people. (Khan et al., 1987, p. 23)

The development of our territories under the false guise of co-management between our First Nations and the federal government, provincial government or private industries has been exposed time and time again. Defining co-management on the part of outside forces relegates First Nations to positions of marginalized participation. Co-management of the forests, lands and animals forces our communities to abandon their political and spiritual 'nation to nation' status. Often development means assimilation and degradation of our traditional lifeways. The current controversy over the Lands For Life project in Ontario is a prime example of the falsity of co-management. The province of Ontario is exercising

jurisdiction over certain crown land areas that they have identified as parks and habitats. The land in question is located within our Anishinabe treaty areas. The province has brought in many partners like the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH), which historically have been opposed to aboriginal sovereignty in fishing and hunting. Co-management is really just a legislative bullying tactic and a legally accepted extension aimed at securing and taking the lands of aboriginal peoples.

The long-term effects of colonization on our people have positioned us in a cycle of shame, destruction, apathy and greed. The confinement of our children, the robbing of our lands and the exploitation of our people in Sagamok has kept our community in a circle of sadness. The constant infringement on our rights as humans possessing an intimate and time immemorial connection to Turtle Island is attacked and refuted by schools, media and popular culture. The long-term effects are reflected in the voices of our children as they begin to question their own subjugation,

This young girl [pause] was asking the Elders to do do something, you know she was complaining bout this and complaining bout that, oh, and I started to burn up you know, I wanted to yell at her 'you got everything I didn't have when I was growing up eh', I didn't have an indoor toilet, I had to go outside, go freeze, freeze my bottom out and all that, I had to haul water for to have water in the house, I had to cut wood in at night to keep warm, I had to walk to school, I didn't have a school bus to pick me up in the morning. We didn't have welfare. We didn't have welfare in those days. Parents had to work if you wanted something...we has something that these these young people don't have now...they don't have the love of good parents eh. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

The dialogue between this young woman and this Elder is retold through the words of Hubert Eshkakogan. This passage reveals many things about the state of our people. It reveals the effects of loss in traditional parenting. It also reveals the tensions between the generations as the youth return to our Elders with questions about our current state. These conversations are important because they provide the space for our people to discuss those

things that have been negative forces in our lives. This also provides our people with the space to identify solutions and strategies to break that destructive cycle we are in.

Alcohol abuse. Drug abuse. Alcoholics. Drug addicts. Many of our people from Sagamok Anishnawbek have been lost to these 'strong spirits'.<sup>18</sup> They drink and drug to forget. They drink and drug to numb themselves. They drink and drug under the illusion that they are having a good time. Every day that I pass through the town of Massey (which is a necessity to get to my home community) I am confronted with a group of *Nish* from Sagamok that make the streets their daily home.<sup>19</sup> They are always drunk and do so within the public view. The town of Massey is situated on Highway 17 and is the venue for large quantities of traffic. The boys from Sagamok are usually lined up on Highway 17 in front of the local businesses or sitting on the park bench directly adjacent to the traffic lights that control the flow of vehicles on the busy highway. This group of drunk *Nish* are a constant reminder of the human costs as a result of genocide. It is no coincidence in the eyes of our people that the majority of these men attended residential schools. Our Elder Dolphus McGregor makes these comments,

I know one guy that's trying to quit drinking but he still hangs around those guys and then he ends up drinking...boredom, bored, they get bored and ah. I guess if you finally get high, I guess may even feel better...I was sitting in the restaurant with my son the one from Toronto in a restaurant across at the coffee shop, and all those guys were over there digging in pockets for coin...you know my son he's looking at them and he looked at me you know with tears coming down his eyes [pause] and he probably figured if I didn't quit [drinking] I'd probably be one of them. (D. McGregor, personal communication, April 30, 2000)

The stories of our people are similar. There was a time when Natives could not legally purchase alcohol. There was a time when Natives could not legally sit in a bar. There was a

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<sup>18</sup> Alcohol and drugs have been referred to as strong and evil spirits that seek to possess our people. Many of the Elders in our community personify alcohol and drugs and state that treatment of them should reflect this nature. We are not just dealing with a substance, but with a dark entity.

<sup>19</sup> *Nish* is an insider's term for Native. It identifies your cultural alliance.

time when the OPP and RCMP policed our reserve to ensure there was no liquor on it. Then there was a time when Natives could buy liquor, but could not bring it onto the reserve.

Laws for Natives changed at the whim of empty governmental agendas.

The powers of the Indian Act are real. Created in 1876 as a form of legislation to control the activities and lives of Native people, it has become an effective measure used as the legal basis for the indoctrination and fragmentation of a nation of people. The power of this Act is revealed in these comments by good helper Hubert Eshkakogan,

At that time you, you couldn't have liquor on the reserves, you're not even suppose to sell anything off the reserve without oh permission from the Indian Agent...they even, they have these signs and it was a federal offence to take up native crafts off the reserve [pause, laughs] they used to have these notice signs you know, this is an Indian reserve you know. And that's exactly what it says 'Purchasing Indian Crafts is a federal offence'. If you took a blade of grass off the reserve that was a federal offence. (H. Eshkakogan, personal communication, March 29, 2000)

The effects of the Indian Act and those agents that abused their power are still alive in the experiences of our people today. The stories we tell reflect our resistance and condemnation of our forcible subjugation. I am not suggesting that anyone would think that we were only passive recipients in this process of colonization, but what I am stating is that these experiences offer our community a better understanding into that cycle of sadness. We were not passive. We are not passive. I do believe that the living voices of our people from shores of Miramichi Bay to the landscapes of the Wetsuweten Nation in British Columbia tell a different story. I know that our stories in the small community of Sagamok Anishnawbek speak of our resistance and those heroes that rose above it.

In Figure 6.3 we are presented with a letter from the Lands and Timber Branch to the Deputy Minister requesting the right to occupy a portion of the lands on the Spanish River Reserve. The Lands and Timber Branch wants the use of Shoepack Bay, which is the

Figure 6.3 – Letter dated December 14, 1922 to the Deputy Minister from the Lands and Timber Branch regarding Shoepack Bay.

TRANSCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL

File No...32,036/3

Department of Indian Affairs

Canada

Lands and Timber Branch

Ottawa December 14, 1922

Memo.

The Deputy Minister, -

In the attached letter the Deputy Minister of Public Works inquires whether this Department would be willing to grant a free site for a wharf at Shoepack Bay, Ontario, which is located at the mouth of the Spanish River. The land required forms part of the Spanish River Reserve.

The location of the wharf at this point would undoubtedly be a great convenience, as indicated in memo with Mr. Hunter's letter, but as the Spanish River reserve has not been surrendered, I would suggest that instead of either granting, leasing or selling a site, this Department give permission to occupy during pleasure. This should be satisfactory for the purpose, as the proposed wharf would in any event not be an expensive structure, and we would scarcely be warranted in submitting a surrender for the purpose.

If you approve, I will draft a letter to Mr. Hunter, presenting our suggestion in the matter.

Officer in Charge.

(Notes – Approved)

Note. The invasion of our territories was rationalized through the various pieces of legislation created through the federal and provincial governments. Their flagrant abuse of the legislation provided them with legal access in their exploitation of our already small parcels of land. The laws and legislation were designed for the benefit of those already in power. (RG 10. Volume 8042. File 493/8-10-4-5)

traditional fishing territory of our community members. In this particular case, a surrender of territory from our community was not necessary, the Lands and Timber Branch used existent legislation by having the right to occupy under 'use of pleasure'. This situation was another example of governmental hypocrisy. Not only did the Lands and Timber Branch want access to Native Lands, but they wanted the Deputy Minister to approve the building of a wharf at Shoepack Bay with Native dollars. Of course, this plan was approved. The expenses of this project were taken from dollars set aside for the people of Sagamok First Nation.

#### The changing and return of our values

Well some of them [our youth], most of them use as that as an excuse 'nothing to do' eh when there's lots to do...cause there, when, if you want booze there, there's always an excuse...when they when they get caught those guys then ah then they use it as an excuse 'nothing to do'...they give them something good and then they'll abuse it and just wreck it or they can put up a nice building and they'll just wreck it, and then after they go out partying and somebody gets get heck and then 'ah we got nothing to do'. (D. McGregor, personal communication, April 30, 2000)

The outlawing of our traditional practices by the federal government continues to have effects in our community. Even though this decision has been reversed and we now have the right to practice our culture that history has resulted in the largest price being paid by our youth. Our traditional rites of passage for young girls and young boys were a sacred event in which the entire community participated in their transition from childhood to adulthood. Our grandmothers would prepare our girls for their first fast by helping them create their grandmother bags. The contents of which would contain all the ceremonial items that they eventually would earn throughout their lifetime. The fast of our young women would be monitored by our Elders and when she was finished the community would have prepared a feast for her. Our young women would begin their journey by learning their role through

our grandmothers' teachings. Our young boys would also be put out on the land to fast. The grandfathers would watch them closely to ensure their physical and spiritual safety. It was during this time that our young men would receive their spirit helpers. Once the fast was completed our young boys were now considered young men and entrusted with all the responsibilities of honourable men. When these practices were forced to go underground many of our people lost these ways. When our people lost these ways this tradition was not passed on to our youth. Now our youth's rites of passage are obtaining a drivers licence, taking that first drink, taking that first drug or 'doing it' for the first time. Hence, the colonial project weakened and often severed that critical transition for our youth to be welcomed into adulthood.

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) released a position paper titled A Threatened Future, which speaks to the adverse effects of materialism and consumerism on Native peoples. One of the key statements that stand out and best represents the current state of all our relations is,

The Earth is one but the world is not. We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives. Yet each community, each country, strives for survival and prosperity with little regard for its impact on others. Some consume the Earth's resources at a rate that would leave little for future generations. Others, many more in number, consume far too little and live with the prospect of hunger, squalor, disease, and early death. (WCED, 1987, p. 27)

One of the greatest teachings that the Anishinabe people have traditionally promoted is *Naagdiwendaamaan Gii Geyaaba Waa Bimmaadzigig* (taking care of those yet unborn). It has always been our way to live in a manner for the benefit and well being of the seven generations yet to come. This means that each community member in Sagamok First Nation had the prime responsibility to take care of the earth and the land ensuring that our future children had a place to occupy. We live our life so our future generations can live a better

one. But, as Indian reserves were created in our traditional areas and we were forced into small parcels of land we see a dramatic shift in this thinking. Forced into ghettoized situations, the past 130 years has effectively ghettoized the thinking of many of our people. An example of this is our logging practices. Many of our members own skidders and other heavy equipment. When you drive around our reserve or take a walk in the bush you'll come across areas that have been entirely clear-cutted. Our old hardwood populations no longer exist and we have had to resort to designating some of our land as protected areas. The lure of the quick dollar has replaced our concern for our grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-great-grandchildren.

The change and loss of our traditional Anishinabe values did not happen in a voluntary manner. As we are well aware, the Native situation in Canada was the result of forcible colonization and genocide. Our confinement into land the size of parking lots has placed a lot of pressure and stress on our people. Our breakdown in relations was predictable. Our abuse of our territory was also predictable. But, the reality is that the effects of caging the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek could have been avoidable. The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) surveys the problems associated with the continuing encroachment of Native lands and territories,

Environmental stress has often been seen as the result of the growing demand on scarce resources and the pollution generated by the rising living standards of the relatively affluent. But poverty itself pollutes the environment, creating environmental stress in a different way. Those who are poor and hungry will often destroy their immediate environment in order to survive: They will cut down forests...they will overuse marginal land. (p. 28)

Throughout colonial history often the colonized take on the role of the colonizer. More often than not, our people internalize that oppression and displace those feelings by dealing with them in negative ways. The results are never good. We have high rates of multiple

addictions, spousal abuse, suicide, crime and the decline of health in a high proportion of our people. The story is not good. But the story can change. The lives of our people in Sagamok can be different and the future well-being of our children can be better. If we embrace those principles that our ancestors lived by, then we can continue our life's path in harmony with all our relations. We need to deconstruct the frame in which we have been placed and this can only be done through a greater understanding of the colonial history into which we have been born. It is through our stories that we can break that cycle that has silenced our people for too long.

Eddie Benton-Benton in his *goodlife* book offers all people insight into the direction that we need to take in order for *bimaadziwin* (life to the fullest) to be fulfilled. Good *Mide* teacher Eddie (1988) states,

If we natural people of the Earth could just wear the face of brotherhood, we might be able to deliver our society from the road to destruction. Could we make the two roads that today represent two clashing world views come together to form a mighty nation? Could a nation be formed that is guided by respect for all living things? Are we the New People of the Seventh Fire? (p. 93)

The teachings of our Elders tell us that we are in a time of great change. Our decisions of today will affect the course of our story in many ways. In my community of Sagamok Anishnawbek we are now faced with the greatest challenges of all time. We need to find healthy ways to preserve our culture and traditions without abandoning their original intents. We need to discover unique approaches that ensure our current structures and institutions are based upon our original principles and values. We need to emulate our lives in honour of those that were before us and those yet to come after us.

One of the teachings that have been talked about time and time again by our Elders is that of procreation, marriage and intimate relationships. Traditionally, our people never

became romantically linked with a fellow clan member or a fellow blood relation. The Elders condemned this type of behaviour and the community did not accept these unions. To be intimately joined with a clan member or blood relation in my community was a great disrespect to our nation. But, as the reserve system was put in place and limited our peoples access to other areas and other people; the predictable happened and intermarriage between clan members and blood family occurred. The effects are far-reaching and best described by good teacher Raymond Owl,

I never known anybody to get sick really sick you know, never heard of diabetes, never, well we knew there was certain families you know we were told to stay away from them, like you know for intermarriage and stuff like that eh, cause pass on in your gene pool eh and your family...we're always told never to [pause] we're told never to marry your cousin when you think about it...but why? because I said you, you know we're told a lot of ah could be problems, that's all we're told just problems, health problems, but if you persist 'why's' then they [Elders] tell, tell you the truth, he said you'll have all kinds of problems with ah the children in that life...sometimes it wasn't nice to hear what they told you, but if you just listened don't do it you know, yeah [pause] its hard to identify who listens to what eh? (R. Owl, personal communication, January 21, 2000)

Part of our own healing as a nation will be to deal with the relevance and consequences of this teaching regarding intermarriages. We cannot undo what was done in the past but we can certainly deal with what happens today and tomorrow. The role of our Elders in providing that guidance to our people will be a large burden and responsibility. But as a community we need to address the issue of intermarriages in a culture of respect, safety and acceptance. Our healing cannot succeed in a culture of blame and shame, it needs to occur in a balanced and truthful manner.

The daily effects of colonization are still being dealt with today. My community does not live in the illusion that the effects will end soon, but we are finding constructive methods in order to heal from that oppressive process. Colonization has and continues to

have tremendous human costs for the members of Sagamok Anishnawbek, but we will achieve wellness through the telling of our personal stories and experiences. Through our own voices and through our own teachings we will find the strength to heal. There is no other place to begin.

The next chapter titled Moving Towards Anishinabe Education is the conclusion of our journey together. It is a discussion of the history of education and the need for schools and curriculum to reflect the culture of the community. This chapter surveys alternative pedagogical approaches to learning as based in Anishinabe philosophies.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: MOVING TOWARDS ANISHINABE EDUCATION

### Introduction

This final chapter is a discussion of the history of education and the need for schools and curriculum to reflect the culture of the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. We begin with a brief history of colonial education, to explaining the importance of traditional learning systems, driving forward to an exploration of the impacts of technology on Anishinabe education, then entering into a discussion of the need to honour 'our knowledge' in our schools and concluding with the presentation of implementing a locally facilitated curriculum process aimed at preserving the living teachings.

### His/story of Anishinabe education

I had a good fortune to have a father and was very stubborn, very forceful in his views, and that he was Nishnaabe, he wasn't formally educated and very little formal education, but he always maintained control, was the most important thing, now he might not of been as articulate as ah some people, but his views were strong and he just determined to see things, ah that education was important, control of that education was important, the fact ah it should be all education should be held in the control of our community, he always maintained that view and I always respected him for that. (N. Toulouse, personal communication, July 15, 1999)

The history of Native education in Canada has not been a pleasant one. The intent of education has always been about segregation, isolation and/or assimilation. Schools have been used as tools to separate Native people from their culture, language and ultimately their identity. We all know the horrific stories from the sensationalized tales of sexual and physical abuse to the daily reality of humiliation and shame. The stories are never ending and the experiences of our people with the federal, public and separate school systems resonate with the same negativity. My grandfather was a good man. He has been in the Spirit World for a number of years. My father often tells me stories about my grandfather

standing up to the Indian Agent and the school inspector. My grandfather William Toulouse was not afraid of the RCMP or the OPP and stood for what was right. He was a man of principle and was admired for that. When my father received a beating by the school inspector in our federal day school my grandfather immediately confronted this monster. Of course the cowardly school inspector told my grandfather that he was going to call the RCMP on him, but my grandpa didn't care because he would deal with them too. My grandfather William was a strong man and I have the privilege of knowing his tales of resistance. His stories, as is the stories of all my family members, offer inspiration and hope for our younger generations.

Eber Hampton in his article Towards a Redefinition of Indian Education surveys the challenges Native people face in contemporary educational settings. Hampton (1995) states that "Native education cannot be understood without the concepts of oppression and resistance...[and that] Cultural genocide is the open but unacknowledged policy" (p. 35). Education is not neutral. Teachers are not neutral. Administrators and school boards are certainly not neutral. Even today as our children occupy the halls of public, separate and secondary schools they are faced with program content and teaching practices that are structurally hostile. The evidence is reflected in our continually low graduation rates and high attrition rates. The evidence is reflected in our limited and low participation in places of higher education. The evidence is also made more real in the devaluing of the quality of education in our First Nations Schools. In my home of Sagamok Anishnawbek we are fortunate to have our own band-controlled and operated school. Our elementary school is called *Beedaban*, which is an Ojibway word meaning that 'first light that appears on the earth at dawn'. Our school faces many challenges, but the greatest challenge of all is the

stigma attached to it. I've heard many nicknames for our First Nations School, but the one that stands out the most is Be-dum Elementary. There is an assumption on the part of our non-native neighbours and often many of our own Native members that our standard of education is lower, inferior and subordinate to that of the province of Ontario.

Education is not ahistorical. In my community there is still a need to educate ourselves about the processes that have subjugated our people. We are still in a stage of healing that reveals our slow progress towards belief in our traditions, language and culture. This is seen in the resistance to the incorporation of our Anishinabek ways in the schooling of our children. There are many reasons behind our people rationalizing the marginalization of our culture in our First Nations School. One of the core reasons being that our community does not want our children at a competitive disadvantage in the non-native schools. This is fair reasoning, but I'm often confused myself about these positions when our history with non-native run schools has been less than positive. I'm reminded of those tensions in a discussion that I had with language teacher MaryAnn Trudeau when she spoke of her teaching experiences in our community,

From my experience [teaching Ojibwe at the federal day school in the mid 1970s], and um, we used to do the language, it wasn't allowed at that time, and when she said [her principal/supervisor] 'we won't, we don't have to tell'...it was not ah part of the, you know curriculum, um, they really didn't recognize it, um, she said 'we'll, we'll do it anyway, you an I' and she said 'I'm not gonna, I don't have to report this'. (M. Trudeau, personal communication, December 9, 1999)

MaryAnn was one of my teachers at that little old school house. My best memories are of her and the other Anishinabe teachers who taught there. I really enjoyed learning the language in the company and laughter of my family and friends. There was a space of encouragement, friendliness and safety created by teachers like MaryAnn and others like

her. She was a silent hero for our people that went out on a limb to teach the language by defying those oppressive educational policies that sought to eliminate our Nativeness.

Teachers bring with them not only their fund of knowledge but also their culturally patterned ways of organizing and passing on that knowledge. Even more fundamentally, they bring the value systems of their communities concerning what is important to learn and how most appropriately to learn it. (Stairs, 1995, p. 146)

Education is a lifelong process. Our Anishinabe children will have experienced many teachers throughout their lifetime. Learning never ends. Our greatest teachers will come from both formalized settings (classes) and informal settings (life, environment). I have had the benefit of both and what I have learned is that all good teachers contribute to the well being of self. Teachers encourage and validate the expression of your authentic self. My primary teachers have always been my family members and the land. They have challenged my understanding of the world and they have caused me to ask questions about the nature of things. This is what makes a good teacher in my mind. My formal education has been of equal importance because it has given me the tools necessary to compete in a non-native world. It has also given me the opportunity to understand the systems and structures into which the colonial process began. It has also provided me with a forum to dialogue with my non-native brothers and sisters in the hope of breaking that frame that positioned us in opposite spectrums. Some of my greatest teachers in the formal system have possessed qualities similar to that of my traditional teachers. The best of those teachers have encouraged the use of my own voice, opened up the space for me to speak and supported my efforts to articulate my thoughts and feelings. All teachers represent the living embodiments of their culture. Neutrality does not exist.

My father has been one of the key teachers in my life. He has helped me to understand the effects of the marginalization of our people as being the source of our

dysfunction today. He has also provided me with grass roots insight into the current construction of relations between Natives and non-natives in our area. My father has been instrumental in my own understanding of the need to deconstruct the power embedded in 'Whiteness'. My dad Nelson Toulouse states,

The whole thing was based on not being proud of who you were, rather the, rather you be proud of something that you can be which is not yourself, and in my mind that's not, that doesn't make any sense, and you feel if you're Anishinabe in those days, if you went to town, if you went outside your own community, you're very, you're very, very aware who you were, yes I mean definitely stood out and the people that were there I think made you quite aware that you were Anishinabe, almost like ah put down [pause] and then any kind of authority that would encounter out of the community was white, police were white, teachers were white, the priests were white you know, so any kind of authority that you saw or encountered was white. (N. Toulouse, personal communication, July 15, 1999)

My father continues to make his peace with the notion of 'Whiteness' and the domination exerted on our people. His healing becomes the basis for our own healing. The spirit of his words resonates in similar terms within the discussions of myself, my siblings and my cousins. Not a lot has changed in these years, but our ability to dialogue on 'Whiteness' and 'Nativity' has. It has reached a level of understanding that focuses on the history of those relations and how that history manipulated our ability to relate with each other. Often our stories are infused with humour as we laugh about our experiences in school. This is one of the origins we draw upon to understand the past and the tensions that are still occurring within the halls of education.

Eber Hampton reifies the notion that Native education and Native schooling must reflect our traditions and culture. He so eloquently states (1995),

It is an Indian tradition-it is a deeply human tradition-to pray for future generations. Those traditions-those prayers, hopes, and dreams of our Old Ones-mark us as much as, perhaps more than, their defeats, their fears, and their errors. To educate ourselves and our children, we must start with who we are, with the traditions, the

values and the ways of life that we absorbed as children of the people...The identity of Indian people is that which links our history and our future to this day. (p. 22)

It is the dream of our people in Sagamok Anishnawbek that our children are provided with opportunities that were once unavailable to us. It is the hope of our people that our children go to a place of learning that builds up their self-esteem and gives them access to both the Native and non-native worlds. It is the hope of our people that the horrific history of schooling for Natives is not repeated in the form that it has occurred. Our children's education has to be different. It should provide them with a foundation where they can possess these principles, "to be really confident with each, within themselves, to be happy in who they are, and to be proud to be that Anishinabe" (S. Corbiere, personal communication, October 26, 1999). It is the hope of our people that our schools educate our children in a holistic way, in a total human being approach that operates spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically. We need to deconstruct those systemic inequities that relegated our people as less-than-human. In Figure 7.0 we are presented with the nominal roll of girls attending Spanish Residential School. Of particular importance are the categories to the right of the margins that identify our girls. These particular categories are dehumanizing as this chart bears significant resemblance to the charts of local farmers cataloguing their cattle. This nominal roll represents the dehumanizing approach that was taken when dealing with Native people and schooling.

#### Looking back: revisiting traditional Anishinabe education

The Anishinabe had laws (kekinonouizhiwet) and these laws worked to benefit the Anishinabe and others that chose to live within Anishinabe territory. The Anishinabe recognized a Supreme Power, one that controlled the universe (natural law). The Anishinabe used the elements of nature, the seasons, the animals and plant life to promote this relationship with nature. The Anishinabe did not deny, but rather taught that all things are connected to Mother Earth. (Owl, 2000, p. 9)

Figure 7.0 – Nominal Roll of Native Girls attending the Spanish Residential School

## TRANSCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL

## Spanish Indian Residential School – Girls 36-0-13

Name	Agency	Age	Weight	Height	Tonsils	Vision	Teeth Fillings	Vacc.	Remarks
	Golden Lake	16	118 ½	60 ½			2		Goitre
	North Bay	14	125	63			4		
	Manitowaning	14	116	63			2		Goitre
	Caughnawaga	16	126	62	out	DEF			Glasses
	Sturgeon Falls	13	109	60	out				Broke
	Soo	15	146	65			4		
	Thessalon	14	134	61 ½	out	DEF	1		Goitre
	Manitowaning	15	130	65 ½	out		1		Goitre
	Golden Lake	16	128	62					
	Manitowaning	15	104	62	out	DEF	1		Goitre
	Rama	14	95	61	out		1		Eyes
	Manitowaning	12	88	58	out				Sore
	Caughnawaga	13	110	54	out		1		
	Maniwaki	13	92	62	out		1	No	
	Manitowaning	15	102	61					Goitre
	Manitowaning	15	120	62	out				Goitre
	Caughnawaga	14	141	64	out			No	
	Manitowaning	13	97	61	out		4		
	St. Regis	15	107	62 ½	out	DEF		No	Goitre
	Manitowaning	14	98	62	out	DEF			Sore
	Manitowaning	15	108	60 ½		DEF			Eyes
	Manitowaning	14	106	61	out	DEF			
	North Bay	14	105	61 ½					
	Gore Bay	14	105	59 ½					Goitre
	Caughnawaga	13	104	59 ½			1		Goitre
	Thessalon	13	106	63	out	DEF			
	North Bay	12	83	62	out		1		
	Manitowaning	13	108	60			1		Goitre
	St. Regis	13	101	58	en		2	No	
	Caughnawaga	12	94	58		DEF			
	Thessalon	11	85	58			3		

Note. The names of the girls and the year of this nominal roll have been omitted for obvious reasons. Many of the names listed came from my community and surrounding First Nations. The significance of this nominal role shows the categorization of our children that attended these schools. It demonstrates the dehumanizing treatment of our people. (RG 10. Volume 6219. File 471-13 Part 2)

The traditional education of our Anishinabe children was a year round and community-rooted process. The classroom was the family, the earth and the animals. The teachers of our children came in many forms; the two-leggeds, the four-leggeds, those that swim, those that crawl, those that fly and those other-than-human beings. The education of our children was built upon principles of respect, love, humility, honesty, bravery, wisdom and truth.<sup>20</sup> Our children in Anishinabe territory were taught their appropriate roles through the teachings of our clan leaders. Our learning style was primarily observation embodied in a culture that was accepting of trial and error. Our children were taught the human journey of progressing through the seven stages of life.<sup>21</sup> This type of education and learning was a lifelong process that all Anishinabe were engaged in and it occurred in a naturally flowing transition. Our traditional forms of education were sacred and were integral to our spiritual, cultural, emotional, mental, social, physical, and communal survival as Anishinabek peoples (Ojibwe, Odawa & Pottawatomi).

Our Elders in Sagamok Anishnawbek envision the education of our Anishinabe children as infusing the best of both the Native and non-native cultures. This integrated approach is viewed as vital to our survival in this technological world. Our Elders want our children to have access to a multitude of jobs and prosperity, but our children's participation in an economic material life cannot override the equally important cultural one. The core of our education and life must include the teachings of our ancestors as lived in our daily

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<sup>20</sup> These teachings are known as the Seven Grandfathers and are the fundamental principles by which the Anishinabek are to live. The story of the Seven Grandfathers is told in Eddie Benton-Banai's The Mishomis Book. This story is alive within the oral culture of our people.

<sup>21</sup> The Seven Stages of Life: Good Life (0-7), Wondering Life (7-14), Wandering Life (14-21), Balancing Life (21-28), Planting Life (28-35), Harvest Life (35-42), Teaching Life (42-Death). These are the oral teachings of the Anishinabek people. These stages are not fixed.

reality. Our schools need to reflect this goal and its importance is exemplified in the words of Elder Martin Assinewe,

See we had our system eh, that why I say, I say it's very important to go back to our system, that's where our smarts are, that's where our knowledge is eh...we have to have our system in there and if we don't have our system, we forever going to be proceeding as we are eh...and ah we have to find a spiritual values...feed our spirit...but they got to be healthy, if our spirit is healthy in our hearts like you know the rest of it be healthy. (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000)

Education and culture are intimately connected. Our schools are microcosms of our society and should represent the vision of that particular community. There was a time when our Elders played a key role in the direction of our people. Although our colonial history had momentarily removed the authority of our Elders, we are now on the path back to the beginning where our Elders are leading the way. The Elders of Sagamok Anishnawbek have their own vision of education and it is rooted in the preservation of our Native language and culture.

Arlene Stairs in her paper Learning Processes and Teaching Roles in Native Education: Cultural Base and Cultural Brokerage examines the challenges and successes of incorporating indigenous languages and culture as the basis for school curriculum. She (1995) presents two models for learning as based in the philosophies and traditions of the North Baffin Inuit people; the *isumaqsayuq* (the passing of knowledge through observation and imitation in natural social environments) and the *ilisayuq* (high level of abstract mediation in a setting removed from daily life, develops skills for a future specialized occupation) (p. 140). These two models for education are also points of tension in our Anishinabe community surrounding the teaching of language and culture. As an example the *isumaqsayuq* in our community is the daily use of language in our day to day activities. The Ojibwe language has a performative function in relaying our culture. When the

language is utilized daily our children recognize its importance. On the other hand the issue of *ilisayug* education arises when our language teachers attempt to teach *Anishinaabemowin* separate from daily life. They teach the language through categories that are removed from their living situations. We are taught universal groupings like “insects, fish, mammals,... science, philosophy, art” that isolates these topics from daily reality (Stairs, 1995, p. 145). These two very different approaches to learning are also key points of tension in our community. The solution offered in many discussions surrounding our First Nations School is to have a balance between formal (classroom based) and informal learning (experiential and situation based).

By several days time, the young people then were really enthused about getting out on a hunt eh, really gung ho I'm ready to go out and hunt, after a couple of days of listening to exchanging information they get sort of bored eh, they get lax, laxed in their ah, so the segment sort of ah dies down eh, so they start instead of getting up before the sun to ah get ready for the hunt and you know, it's just gonna, these guys are just gonna be talking, talking again over there, these young guys may wake up one morning, may get one morning to find out the whole camps gone eh. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

Situation based learning was the primary vehicle in which traditional Anishinabe education took place. In the preceding excerpt clan teacher Peter Owl is describing a situation in which our young men are being prepared for their first hunt. Our traditional forms of hunting involved much preparation, especially that of a spiritual nature. Our Elders and master hunters would tell stories about previous hunts, the land in which the hunt took place and other important information. This preparation could go on for days and would end when the group collectively decided that they were ready to engage in respectful hunting. Often our young men would begin the hunting process with much enthusiasm, but would disengage and slack off (sleep in) when they got bored of hearing the old ones talk. Many of our young men would awake on a morning to find the entire camp had left for the hunt. The

primary lesson for the young men emphasized that the preparation for the journey was just as important as the act (hunting) of the journey itself. These types of lessons taught our people the values of patience, listening and respect for the protocols in life.

I've learned a lot about our people's conceptions into education and schooling. When you sit with an Elder or a good teacher from my community and ask them a direct question you may not get the answer you thought you were looking for, but with much post-reflection it's the insight that you needed and were meant to have. I was sitting with Elder Martin Assinewe talking about the history of our people. He told me story after story and we laughed about some of the things that have gone on in our community. We were on the topic of the influence of religion in our schools when he stated,

Naturally the bad things are gonna be right along, right side by side all the time, it doesn't matter what you do, Christian non-Christian, that's it that's all, and some days you know this one looks very good...you, you proceed to go that way, meanwhile, you know you're so far, like you, you kind of notice this is not the right things, see ah, sometimes it takes awhile like you know, maybe two, three years is gone down the road, the you got to visit the road, start to get noticed, this is not, not the one. (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000)

In my mind his words were prolific and our Elder provided me with an understanding of the cycle in which our people occupy. His words represented the colonial journey of our community. His words were a deeper metaphor for the struggles that our people have endured in their definitions of our First Nations based school. We bounce from one vision to the next and do not have that balance. Dealing with our own tensions and issues surrounding education has led us down a road that is faced with many challenges. At this time we deny a more meaningful inclusion of our culture and language in our school. At this time we feel that we are doing our children the best that we can do. But maybe down

that road we will recognize that returning full circle to the teachings of our ancestors is the path we need to follow.

Local control is a defining characteristic of Indian education, not just a philosophical or political good. There can be no true Indian education without Indian control. Anything else is white education applied to Indians. Indian control is dependent on a specific Indian community. (Hampton, 1995, p. 24)

We have within the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek our own elementary school. We are fortunate in that our children can attend junior kindergarten through to grade eight right at home. The majority of our teachers are from the community. We have local control, but like most First Nations with schools are still addressing the tensions between standards of a provincial education and the standards of an Anishinabe education. We will continue to deal with these challenges, but I really believe that our efforts are paying off as we move closer and closer towards a balancing of the two. Our children have the benefit of learning in our community in both formal and informal settings. The children have their structured class times, but also participate in activities that are community based. One of the many examples is our celebration of *Tasehwung* where our kids create traditional wreaths and go the graveyards ensuring that each person there has a wreath. The wreath is the symbolic and spiritual tool that allows our people in the Spirit World to enter this one for that time period. Our children also participate in our treaty day celebrations and any other community events that are significant. The teachings associated with these times are delivered in both informal and formal contexts.

In Figure 7.1 we are presented with two photos that depict an event (our treaty day) and a place (our historical portage trail) that are sites for both informal and formal learning for our students at Beedaban Elementary School. Our children are certainly at an advantage

Figure 7.1 – Photos of our Robinson-Huron Treaty Day Celebrations and our Historical Portage Trail branching off from the Spanish River.



Note. This event and place are forums in which our formal and informal learning takes place. Our children in Beedaban Elementary School have the advantage of access to a variety of human, physical, social and cultural resources.

in terms of a true community-based education as the celebrations, places and people are available right at home. We have access to a multitude of rich resources.

[Generationgap/rez/acceleratedchange.com](http://Generationgap/rez/acceleratedchange.com)

It was real freaky, how different kids are today, I was telling my friends that I was walking down the river from my house, and there were these kids arguing, they were yelling at each other and stuff, I kept walking, they were yelling and the kids started going back and forth 'oh yeah well your websites name should be dumhead.com', and that kid went off crying, I freaked out, we never argued like that when we were kids, I mean with the computer stuff and things like that. (W. Toulouse, personal communication, June 16, 2000)

The influence of technology and the super information highway has had a tremendous impact on the language and experiences of our children in Sagamok Anishnawbek. The above story was told to me by my 23 year old brother William Toulouse. We really laughed over the nature of the arguing between this group of 8 to 11 year old children. We weren't laughing at these children, rather we were amused by the extraordinary impact that technology had on the discourse of our young ones. My brother was really only one generation away from these children and he couldn't believe how the childhood dialogue had changed so quickly. When William was a young boy, which is only ten to fifteen years ago, the onslaught of the computer age was just beginning. Now, our kids are immersed in the lingo of ICQ, homepages, email addresses, Napster, burning, zip discs, digits and much more. The movement of technology in our communities has been so rapid that we as a First Nation have not been prepared for the effects. Our children are the experts of this technology. Many parents have yet to grasp on to the age of Microsoft and many have yet to break that fear associated with this relatively young mode of communication. Our kids at Beedaban School have mastered the many educational software programs available to them by grade one, they are scanning images into word programs by grade three and by grade four

they are expert web surfers equipped with the tools necessary to find whatever is needed.

Anishinabe childhood surely has changed and accelerated with the advances in technology.<sup>22</sup>

What is the best way for our kids to learn? How do our kids retain and show what they have learnt? In what ways can we empower our children to have access to the best of all worlds (Anishinabe and non-Anishinabe)? Robert Leavitt (1995) in his paper Language and Cultural Content in Native Education offers this insight,

When instructing Native children in English, teachers often strive to create a cultural curriculum, one which takes into account both the mainstream culture and that of the community. The purposes of the bicultural curriculum are to help students feel that the school program is a natural part of their lives and to help them move smoothly back and forth between one culture and the other. (p. 134)

There are many arguments that are for and against a bicultural education, but I would rather call the direction that our community is going in terms of our school as a process of reconstruction in education. The foundation of our community school has to be based in the Anishinabek culture and language. This is the key to our identity and serves as the necessary therapeutic tool for our collective healing. But, we do not live in isolation from the world and the influence of technology on our children is reshaping our youth culture as we speak. What we need to do is harness that technology and draw upon it to strengthen our children's access to a variety of knowledge. Our children in Sagamok First Nation are naturals on the keyboard. Every time that I go in to the school their breadth of computer use and knowledge of these applications amaze me. There are many fears surrounding the globalization of the English language through the increased use of this form of communication, but I see its use as being a method to transform our own community in a good way. There are many sites available to our students that can link them with other schools and children from other First Nations. There are also many sites that host a range of

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<sup>22</sup> Each child in Beedaban Elementary School has structured access to computers from 2 to 4 hours weekly.

information on the history of Indigenous peoples across the world. If we embrace this technology, then we can use it as a tool in the decolonization of our people. If we don't embrace this technology, then it will continue to shape our youth and children without our input or influence.

Native learners typically develop concepts and skills by repeating tasks in many different situations, such as hunting under varying conditions of weather and animal movement and with various types of equipment. They do not traditionally make explicit verbal formations of basic ideas or rules for success, but rather recount what they have experienced and listen to stories which present concepts and principles implicitly. (Stairs, 1995, p. 141)

Both formal and informal learning situations can offer our children in Sagamok First Nation a balanced and community based education. Our kids need to be provided with a multitude of learning opportunities both in and out of school. The value of a diverse education must be emphasized. We have access to a range of resources in our home and have to fully take advantage of this situation. Currently, myself (as facilitator) and the staff at Beedaban Elementary are involved in a Curriculum Development Project. The teachers are divided into three teams; primary/early literacy – junior kindergarten to grade 2, junior – grades 3 to 5 and intermediate – grades 6 to 8. The purpose of our team meetings is identify the current resources being used across the curriculum, collaborate on best practices, utilize the internet to access ideas for lessons/units/evaluation and create opportunities for the Anishinabek language and culture to be infused throughout the curriculum. One of the most interesting aspects of this project has been the resource directory that we have created that lists the human and physical resources in our First Nation. We have compiled a list of names of our people in Sagamok that are noted experts in certain areas (fishing, beadwork, hunting, traditional teachings, quillwork, basket making, sugar bushes, medicine). We have also extended this directory to include geographical places that bear particular significance to the

history of the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek. This process has been an excellent forum to identify the potential formal and informal learning opportunities, thereby enriching our children's educational experiences.

The communication gaps between the generations in our community can be shortened through the joining of the old ways with the new. The prospects are limitless. The education of our children in the community can be the education of all. We need to encourage a culturally relevant approach that is respectful of our traditions. One of our Elders in Sagamok is invited quite regularly to the school for differing reasons. Irene Makedebin is an expert in ash basket making, quillwork and leatherwork. She possesses the teachings and protocol required in creating handicrafts in a respectful way,

Long time ago they never used to have no baskets...they used to make the wash baskets, well I still make them but ah its so hard for me now ah, takes so much of that ash...in the winter time you got to thaw it out first, for a week anyway, and then, but in the summer time you can get it anytime...you just pick the birch bark, you get it in the spring when its peel off eh and you keep it in sweet grass if you have to pat it up and dry it...sweet grass, I do it in the summer, yeah, around June, July...porcupine [for quills] in ah in late around June, not April, May and ah after around September...and ah the sweet grass well I got that from my mother and she used to take those mats [sweet grass mats] for art you know they used to sell and to have and pay well [on non native buyers]. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

One of the difficulties that our school has experienced in bringing in our Elders has to do with the school environment itself. The spirit of learning in terms of our Elders and good teachers storytelling or creating our handicrafts in the classroom has been lessened. One of the suggestions that our teams have proposed is that this type of learning needs to happen within its natural context. Therefore, if our Elders are creating the ash baskets then it would be most respectful to have the kids involved in the total process of going to the marsh, pounding out the ash, creating strips and so on. The other suggestion has been that this

activity can be extended in the forms of journals or art or online searches of designs/patterns for the baskets. This is only one example of how we perceive joining the old with the new. Hence, a reconstructionist approach that honours both the formal and informal modes of education.

Eber Hampton identifies eleven standards that are necessary in Indian Education. Of the most relevant to our community the final standard of place takes precedence for us. Hampton (1995) states,

Indian education recognizes the importance of an Indian sense of place, land, and territory. From this point of view, it is clear that a uniquely Indian place promotes involvement rather than isolation or segregation. (p. 40)

Involvement for us means the development of a community based school that reflects and embodies the vision and dreams of our people. Involvement also means that our definition of education includes the preparation of our children for continued success in both Native and non-native worlds. Our community is in a process of reconstruction and this means that our school will reflect that reconstruction. Beedaban Elementary School is a microcosm of the state of our community. Our children and their stories represent the health and well being of our people. The way our children handle conflict or express themselves is a clear indicator of family life in Sagamok. There is a still a long way to go before balance is restored but we are working on it together.

In Figure 7.2 we return full circle towards an understanding of the colonial cycle in which our people have been placed. One of the key elements in our healing is taking back our schools that have been historically positioned as tools of cultural genocide. The gaps between our generations were deepened and widened for obvious reasons. In my community of Sagamok Anishnawbek, schools and religion have divided our people and our

Figure 7.2 – Memorandum dated March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1897 regarding the conflict between the Anglican Church and Roman Catholic Church run schools on Sagamok First Nation

TRANSCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL

183, 619

**MEMORANDUM FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE MINISTER**

Letters from Agent Ross on attached file, of 22<sup>nd</sup> ultimo and 6<sup>th</sup> instant respectively, report complaints from ----- of Spanish River Reserve, and Rev. E. Frost, Church of England Missionary, that a Roman Catholic Priest is trying to purchase an Indian house on the Reserve to use as a church and school.

According to statements of the complainants it would appear that the Church of England has had a school in operation for years, and the Bishop only consented, in view of the limited nature of the field, to establish a mission and school on the Indians undertaking that all would support them: that on the division of the Reserve concerned there are only 14 children of school age; that 43 souls belong to Church of England; and that of three families originally belonging to the Roman Catholic faith only one continues to do so.

The Agent says that according to last year's census there were 119 souls belonging to the division of the Reserve, 878 resident and the balance itinerant; of these 119 souls 43 are Protestants, 31 Roman Catholics, 10 pagans, and 32 whose religious persuasion he does not know.

He is quite confident that a large majority of resident Indians belong, as stated by the Missionary and Chief, to the Church of England.

The Department pays \$200 per annum towards maintenance of existing school.

The policy pursued by the Department in the past has been to maintain a position of strict neutrality with regard to mission work.

Figure 7.2

Continued

But as to schools, when the number of children only justify the provision of a single school for a Reserve, it has been given to the denomination whose numbers are in the majority, but no attempt has been made to interfere with the right of the minority to have a school, the Department refusing to contribute until numbers can show to justify its maintenance.

Will the Minister kindly state whether he desires the policy just described to be adhered to.

Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs

March 19<sup>th</sup>, '97.

(notes – strict non intervention)

Note. Upon receipt and review of this letter the Minister has written the note non-intervention on this matter. The rationale behind this is certainly questionable. An assumption can be made that non-intervention means a displacement of responsibility. The government utilized churches as a means of cultural genocide and paid for the schools that they ran for our children. (RG 10. Volume 6606. File 4013-8RC)

relations henceforth were continually based in conflict. The imposed gaps between the generations and our members are still being affected by that history. The divisions in our community were forcibly created by the introduction of organized religion into Sagamok First Nation. Churches wielded their power in perverted forms of social control on our people and this is demonstrated in this letter to the Minister. The nature of the letter reflects the opposition of the Anglican Church to the establishment of a Roman Catholic Church and school. The argument is extended into definitions of the division of 'souls'. This is a prime example of the continued categorization of our people that operated on the colonial premise of divide and conquer.

Moving forward in Anishinabe education: honouring 'our knowledge' in the curriculum

Too often we try to insert various kinds of tribal knowledge into the format of modern science and the result is that we have a few points for having a historical relationship to the problem area but the beliefs and practices which our ancestors held about certain things are believed to be merely ad hoc resolutions to the problem or lucky guesses, and they do not receive credit which is theirs by right. (Deloria, 1991, p. 26)

Our science curriculum in First Nations Schools is heavily dependent upon outside sources that remove the joy of inquiry and relevance from the student's experiences. We focus on textbooks, paper pushing and the implementation of science experiments that do not complement our indigenous way of life. Often, in our schools we cite that our science programs are weak because of a lack of material, equipment and space for it to run effectively. Meanwhile, in our community of Sagamok Anishnawbek the science classroom is a door away, a short walk away, a brief bus ride away or a phone call away. Science education has been the very source of our ancestor's survival. Utilizing our knowledge and understanding of the land can be the foundation for a successful science program on our First Nation. Drawing upon those local human and physical resources can offer our children

a holistic science education that has applications throughout their lives. A locally developed science curriculum will also embody the values, culture and knowledge of the People.

Oscar Kawagley in A Yupiaq Worldview – A Pathway to Ecology and Spirit offers educators options in utilizing the ways of our aboriginal ancestors as the basis for science inquiry and demonstration of science principles. Kawagley presents examples from his own people where the science of fishing, tracking caribou and building sleds can be incorporated into the science curriculum of local schools. He also reaffirms the notion that indigenous languages are imperative when teaching indigenous science, because within the language itself is that ecological knowledge existent in our people from time immemorial. In my community of Sagamok Anishnawbek we have a wealth of people and places that can be the foundation for our science curriculum at Beedaban School. We have canoe makers, medicine people, basket makers, hunters, fisherman and good teachers of the many seasons (maple sugar, berries, spring burn, medicine, weather predictors, animal trackers). We have places within our immediate territory that possess certain land values (migratory patterns, hardwood populations, minerals, medicines, water, swamps, marshes, fields, etc.) that have significant importance to our people. We have an abundance of science education opportunities available to us. Our curriculum can be planned as either experiential or formal learning experiences. Either way our children can be provided with a different and ancestral lens of the world around them.

My grandfathers, both William Toulouse and Chi-Dominic Recollet, were Ojibwe scientists. My grandfather William was able to tell if the Sugar Bush season was going to be good one just by the way the branches hung in late winter. My grandfather William was also a master farmer and maple syrup maker. He was also known for his ability to brew up

homemade poison ivy remedies. My other grandfather Dominic Recollet was a master fisherman. He knew the patterns of various types of fish and possessed an intimate knowledge of the waters surrounding Manitoulin Island. My grandpa Dominic also knew where the best blueberries would manifest themselves in late summer. Both men were scientists. Both men were immersed in our language and related this knowledge in the words of their ancestors before them. We have our own Ojibwe science that is based in the philosophy of the interconnectedness of all things. Clan teacher Peter Owl offers us this example of that science,

In the spring when, when they're first visited by the I guess fish, we had smelts coming in, we had suckers coming in, pike coming in and, this Anishinabe, they'd harvest fish and inside the suckers mouth they cook their heads, and when the heads were cooked, everybody was you know, it was a delicacy, so everybody ate sucker heads, but there was this person, within this one group who could read the, the teeth eh, you didn't say the sucker may, doesn't have teeth but they look in there and they look at the inside the mouth if there's a lotta marks in there, there's gonna be an abundance, abundance in blueberries, and they would pretty well know where the blueberries gonna be. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

Our ability to understand nature was not a fluke or a lucky guess. Our people had specialized skills that rendered them as experts in the science of certain things.

Many of our women, especially the grandmothers, were our ecologists. They knew where the best medicines would grow. They knew the protocols required in order to pick those medicines ensuring that more would grow the following year. They also created certain material objects (baskets, boxes, clothes, mats) that were necessary for our survival. They did all of these things without damaging or destroying the world around us. They approached their roles as ecologists with the utmost respect for the earth and her children. Elder Irene Makedebin offers us this insight,

I help my ah my auntie go snaring, we used to go, we use to make ah maple syrup this time of year, used to walk from ah you know where ah [pause] Gloria Owl used

to live eh, used to walk from there, take a short break come in just about Perch Bay [pause] ever long [laugh] yeah we use to ah [pause] that's how I come to know about ah baskets and ah northern ah sap baskets...and she used to teach me all those things eh....birch bark you pull off in the, in the spring eh, and then use cedar, cedar string, yeah you ah pull the bark off and cook it and then you'd string out and that's okay...use for sap baskets. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

The scientific knowledge of our people was precise. Each person was entrusted with specific teachings and roles that ensured the collective survival of the people. Each niche was important and vital. It was an intricate, delicate, but strong web that reflected the culture and traditions of the Anishinabe people. Can you imagine the richness of a science curriculum that is based in the knowledge of our people? Can you imagine the positive impacts of utilizing our own people and places as the foundation for science in schools? Can you imagine the learning effects that this type of education would have on our children?

Vine Deloria in his book Indian Education in America emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and honouring indigenous knowledge as a valid science. He is often quite critical of the dominant institutions and structures that relegate the demonstration of our cosmology as primitive and naïve. Vine Deloria refutes the colonial discourse that positions our indigenous science as inferior and subservient to that of the western canon; that standard of measurement that posits itself as the determiner of relevant knowledge. I support the position of Vine Deloria and his conceptions of indigenous science as being complex and specific. His thoughts are reiterated in this passage by one of our community members,

If you didn't know how to fish, or if you didn't know where a certain species of fish were, and individuals were aware that you didn't know this, the Elders would take it upon themselves to [pause] look for an opportunity to ah, exchange information with you...and of course, you sit down and the Elder would start talking, and that Elder then would start to paint the picture for you eh, talk about this certain species of fish, start describing the depth of the water, which direction ah the wind was gonna be blowing from, and maybe use the landscape if there was a pine tree at the far point of this body of water...you know they'd tell the story, and all these individuals would

just [pause] it was [pause] everything was precise, there was no guess work. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

Clan teacher Peter Owl offers us a prime example of the science education of our Anishinabe people. He demonstrates to us the protocol and process that people were required to be engaged in when seeking information. Our science was embedded in our ability to sit patiently and listen. We were required to remember every detail that was told to us. This is a traditional science education in the fishing activities of our People. It was based in the complex relationships of Elder/knower, teacher/learner, speaker/listener and transmitter/receiver.

The role of the teacher in the success of a community based science education program will determine its effectiveness or lack thereof. Oscar Kawagley has explored these thoughts in the application of science curriculum in Yupiaq concentrated schools. Kawagley (1995) states that "Teachers very often feel that they must have control over the classroom, an attitude that can interfere with the kind of learning that can happen when the community, teachers, and students work together" (p. 100). This is also true of our First Nations School, Beedaban Elementary, in Sagamok Anishnawbek. There is still some hesitancy to modify the current science education programs by moving away from the over reliance on textbooks to incorporating more community resource people and places. This hesitancy can be rooted to a variety of factors. But I believe that the main problem area has to do with a collective understanding that education occurs within the confines of a building. There is the occasional fieldtrip or outing, but none that would have lasting impacts on the student's experiences. So how can this be changed? How can we provide opportunities for curriculum development? Through offering release time to school staff to be involved in this process is the best way to start. Fortunately in my community our Education Director

and Education Committee have endorsed this approach and support these initiatives. Our staff at Beedaban Elementary are currently involved in a comprehensive curriculum project that involves dialoguing and sharing best practices for Anishinabe culture inclusion.

In Figure 7.3 we are presented with two photographs of the waters of the North Channel, which is directly connected to Lake Huron. The first photo is taken of the small bay at my aunt Vicky Pereira's family camp. It shows the unnatural decline of the water level. The second photo is taken from the southern end of Sagamok Point. It shows one of the main access points to the channel. In the distance are the many islands in which our people camped and picked berries. The teachings of these areas signify the scientific knowledge of the Anishinabek. These areas would have been discussion points for our Elders and clans people. They would have offered their precise understanding of why the water was low and what fish or berries were available here. Each place possessed a specific teaching and was demonstrative of an understanding based in Native ecology and science principles.

#### Teacher as researcher: a locally facilitated curriculum process

As stated previously I am currently facilitating a comprehensive curriculum process for our First Nation's school in my community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. The focus of the project is to provide space for the teaching staff to share best practices, dialogue over educational challenges, assess the achievability of Ministry of Education guidelines for our school, learn new researching and resourcing skills and identify ways to incorporate the Anishinabek culture and language at a more meaningful level. One of the major obstacles identified by the teaching staff in terms of cultural and language resources is the lack of pre-packaged materials, lack of known expertise and comfort levels or moreover discomfort

Figure 7.3 – Water bodies of the North Channel as connected to Lake Huron



Note. Both places are excellent sources for hands on science education. They can be presented in such a way that offers opportunities for inquiry and observation. Both places also serve as supports for Anishinabe culture and tradition.

levels with the teaching of culture. The problem is not the staff's reluctance to incorporating Anishinabek culture and language, the challenge has always been where do we begin and what tools do we require to tackle this issue. The focus of this curriculum project continues to be process based as opposed to solely product based.

The curriculum project is organized into nine areas:

1. Orientation to the Process
2. Language Arts Programming
3. Social Studies (History and Geography in the Grades 7 & 8) Programming
4. The Arts Programming
5. Mathematics Programming
6. Science and Technology Programming
7. Health and Technology Programming
8. Anishinabe Studies Programming
9. Special Education Modifications

The process runs throughout the school year and ends in June 2001. There are three curriculum teams that have been organized through teaching divisions. The first team is the early learners group, which is the junior kindergarten teacher, senior kindergarten teacher, grade one teacher and grade two teacher. The second team is the junior group, which is the grade three teacher, grade four teacher and grade five teacher. The third team is the intermediate group, which is the grade six teacher, grade seven teacher and grade eight teacher. Our Native language teachers always accompany one of the teams. The majority of our teaching staff are community members with the appropriate teacher training. Every team meets once a month to address one of the nine areas.

One of the main accomplishments of this project has been the beginning of the creation of a resource directory of community people and places. Each team brainstormed names of people that possessed certain expertise in our community (fishing, hunting, basket making, quill work, leather work, weather predicting, canoe making, oral historians, herbologists, and so on). From that point I organized the information with the names of those individuals and their particular skills and knowledge. I also added the names of people that I knew who possessed natural skills and cultural teachings. As a group we discussed the appropriate protocol to approach these individuals from our community when inviting them as teachers/facilitators (tobacco giving and seeing the person at their home). As a group we also discussed the possible necessity of moving the learning from the limits of the school walls to a more appropriate learning environment (example: if we are going on a medicine walk with an Elder then it is appropriate for the class to be in the bush with that Elder). We also discussed the additional arrangements and safety factors associated with an education outdoors that is culturally based. For every possible problem our groups would brainstorm a possible solution. There was also much discussion over parental, guardian and extended family involvement. The school has often been criticized for its apparent lack of community based education and these learning opportunities could be seen as a step towards a holistic community education. This type of learning would not only be the education of our children but could be the education of our people. Recognized as a definite step towards collective healing and education for decolonization.

The resource directory also included the physical places and spaces that have the history or teachings of our people in that area. This is where I came into the picture as someone who possessed a certain amount of knowledge about these areas. We would

brainstorm the many places, the teachings or history of that area and who would be the best resource person for that area. The connection to land and space was truly important so one of the techniques that I used with one of the groups was a historical ride. In the fall of 2000 I took the intermediate group (of which only one resides in Sagamok and none are members) on an expedition of the community and showed them the historical places and significant land spaces. We talked about the stories located in those places and the many teaching opportunities that could be planned for that area. I also gave them names of community people who possessed the knowledge of that area. We travelled for two hours to seven (7) sites and discussed the importance of student's learning 'ourstory' in an interactive and relevant manner. We also discussed the impact of inviting the families to come out on school learning experiences with their children. Many parents, guardians, uncles, aunties and so on are hesitant to attend activities in the school but have in the past proven to be very supportive of excursions such as these. One of the most successful learning opportunities in the school has been the visit of our children to one of the communities' sugar bushes. There is an entire language, culture, science, social studies and math education right there. It is an all-encompassing holistic education that supports Anishinabe culture and identity.

The curriculum project is on going and our resource directory continues to grow as new names and places are added. The other interesting element of this project has been the mastery of the Internet for resource ideas and program planning. Many of the staff do not use the Internet as a source to support their classroom programs. One of the key tasks that I facilitate with the school staff is computer training specific to the Internet. I have shown staff step-by-step how to access the Internet and conduct searches that are specific to class programs. We have as a group developed another resource directory of web addresses

where there is an abundance of resources for various subjects. We have compiled a list of sites that have been useful and easily accessible. Each site is accompanied with a brief description of what is available there. The creation of this resource directory has been a process unto itself. Many of our staff were quite uncomfortable with technology and did not work with a computer period. This process involved teaching the staff the basics from 'how to turn on the computer' and eventually evolving to 'how to get to my selected Internet site'. The underlying philosophy of this curriculum project has always been teacher as researcher. We have as a group learned ways to be more resourceful and plan our class programs in ways that support Anishinabek language and culture. Each photo throughout this body of research is an example of those places and spaces that are identified as potential learning opportunities for our children in Sagamok. Each photo represents a place that is part of that resource directory. Each person throughout this body of research is listed as a respected resource for our school. The project continues to reflect the need for a locally developed curriculum process that honours the knowledge of our Anishinabe people.

#### Conclusion – living teachings of the native people

[On her drum] 'take your drum' she says [her daughter] 'somebody over there smudges that thing'...so we and got it put in the bag and took it up there, ah we went and ah we were in a circle, oh and I got up and talked a little bit and I guess I took the drum out of the bag and ah give it to him [the Elder] and he was talking he says 'this drum [pause] is meant for you, come this is meant for you, you don't give this away, you keep this', and that's the way it is. (I. Makedebin, personal communication, September 19, 1999)

This research journey has been my drum. It has become for my community and myself the drum that tells the stories and experiences of our people and ancestors. The sound that our drum makes resonates with the sadness and hope of our nation as we strive to heal those spirits that have been wounded. The drum has always been symbolic of our Mother Earth

and when we play that drum it is said that that sound is the beat of her heart. What we take from these living experiences is what each was meant to take and remember. Just as the power and effect of a drum song is personal for everyone, so is the power and effect of this book. This research is Anishinabe research. It has become a meaningful exploration into the meanings of *bimaadziwin* for our people. It is the sharing of our life so that one may live life to the fullest. Our community drum, these living stories are the expression of our *bimaadziwin*. They are one.

Moving towards Anishinabe education means that all members in Sagamok Anishnawbek have the responsibility of teaching, educating and supporting our children and youth. It means living that goodlife and demonstrating to our children that our lives can change and heal. Anishinabe education means taking the best of our non-native brothers and sisters world and balancing that with our language, culture and traditions. Our education will have to include a respectful presentation of the stories that tell of our subjugation. Our kids have the right to know the his/story that they have been born into. The colonization of the people of Sagamok has had tremendous human costs. This history is not in the past but occurs in the present as the cycle of systemic dysfunction continues to turn. Our teachers, whether in the schools or at home, have the greatest opportunity to facilitate this needed process of healing. It will require enough discipline and faith for the many generations yet unborn. We can learn from our past and teach our children in the spirit of the old ways of our ancestors,

[On his father] He practiced the old ways, the way the Ojibway I guess lived I'm not sure, he was pretty um [pause] his belief in it was strong, and all the children were required to ah learn all the teachings and exposed children to the different teachers [pause] all the, all the young guys that were there were required to go through the fast, you know, everything else [pause] some of them made it, some of them didn't... ah there's teachings and that, strict teachings...how clear that came to my father

during that fast [pause] ah the thunder bird, and ah, that was, who came and ah paid a visit to my father, that would be his teacher, helper all through his life. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

We can embrace and emulate the pedagogy of our People by ensuring that the education of our children is community driven and community rooted. Our curriculum needs to reflect the collective *bimaadziwin* of our people.

The expression of our identity and the experiences of our people is the basis for an Anishinabe education. This process will represent a key force in the decolonization of our nation as we revisit those difficult places that we have occupied and continue to occupy. This education will help us to comprehend the impact that the colonial gaze has had on our current reality. Therefore a definition of Native education for our people in Sagamok First Nation needs to be revisited and explored. The intent of our educational structures and systems can begin to be analyzed through a critical exploration of these questions and statements by our community members,

The most important thing is to be Anishinabe, maybe on the other end maybe try to understand what Anishinabe is. (N. Toulouse, personal communication, July 15, 1999)

[On a message to her grandchildren] I don't want them to be lost and [pause] I guess in a way I feel like it, I'm still trying to, trying to find out I guess [pause] who I am. (M. Trudeau, personal communication, December 9, 1999)

Is that for me? [on the tobacco] I take this back to, so you know I have to thank the spirit for what we said already you know, because for you, for people to learn...use things wisely, that's the whole thing eh. (M. Assinewe, personal communication, February 7, 2000)

[On learning] live, living a big life...so much to learn not enough time, you know you can learn for the rest of your life. (M. Trudeau, personal communication, December 9, 1999)

The emphasis is on the comprehension of what constitutes our culture, what forces have led us there, what is most important to us, what is the purpose of learning and what principles our educational systems will be constructed upon.

In conclusion to our journey together I offer this summary of the research (Figure 7.4), the base in which our discussions have taken place and emerged. Consider this textual and symbolic work your own insight into the struggles of a people trying to live a good life. Let this story and the experiences of the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek be your own personal drum for a healthier way of approaching the world.

I guess what I would like to add is if you're ever exchanging information and um you're telling somebody the spirituality of *bimaadziwin*, its interconnected eh, the spirit, the spirit itself is what, it gives life, motivates this individual to ah, function, in a best, the best possible way for this individual. (P. Owl, personal communication, August 13, 1999)

*Gwaabmin* (until later). *Meegwetch* (thank you).

Figure 7.4 – Themes and Patterns in the Research

***Comprehending the Anishinabek Ourstory***

aboriginal sovereignty  
a good visit  
worldview=bimaadziwin  
orality + material documents  
other-than-human experiences  
sources of knowledge and research protocols  
story/telling/s and the nature of this research  
this is the way and why we do things  
tools in the formation of landscape  
profile of Sagamok

***Looking Through an Ojibwe Eye***

inspiration and aspiration  
time immemorial meaning in the land  
cycles of life  
teachings in life  
returning to the 360 degree vision

***Ojibwe Traditions, Culture and Behaviour***

teachings of nookmis and mishomis  
on the importance of stories to customs  
anishinabe clans  
our way of life  
looking back, looking ahead

***In the Olden Days***

a his/story in ojibwe education  
our days in residential school  
in the not so olden days  
family life and childhood  
laughter and humour

***Anishinaabemowin – Speaking our Native Language***

language=meaning  
language=identity  
language in the land  
language and healing  
returning to the language

***Daily Effects of Colonization***

the impact of religion  
protection of our land  
brutality of agents  
long-term effects of our subjugation  
the changing and return of our values

***Moving Towards Anishinabe Education***

his/story of anishinabe education  
revisiting traditional anishinabe education  
generationgap/rez/acceleratedchange.com  
moving forward – honouring our knowledge  
teacher as researcher  
living teachings of the native people

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