

Mr. Chairman, Elders, Chiefs, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In thinking about speaking to you this morning, I decided to entitle my remarks "Documents of Survival".

The more that I work in Indian Education, the more I realize how little I know. I think about when we started out as teachers, I'm sure many of you here, were in the same boat. We knew there was something wrong with the system but we weren't too sure what to do about it. We started talking about Indian languages; we started talking about doing something about adapting Social Studies curricula. The more I see when I'm among you people here, the more I'm learning from the actions even more than the words. We could learn so much from the ceremony yesterday and the grand entry and what was happening, so much from the Pow wow last night where the young and the old were gathered together and enjoying a good time, and so much from hearing the elders talk. And think about this, about spiritualism, the more I realize that really when we were talking about Indian languages when we first started this even ten years ago, when we were talking about Indian cultural adaptation of programs, what we were really talking about was Indian spiritualism. Some of us were not as fortunate as some of you people in the West. I always feel in Canada, that our people that are strongest in the traditional way of life are our Western Indians and I know that my Eastern friends won't mind me saying that. The Western Indians are strong in their Culture, in their Religion, in Spiritualism.

Though there are some Indian experiences we didn't really grow up with, our Indianness must have been in us, I really think it's a feeling; it's

a feeling that we have. The one thing that I'm grateful for when I think about Indian language, is the fact that I can speak my language. I ask myself, "Why am I so proud of my language? Why am I so happy to be able to speak Cree?"

One of the things that always comes to mind is that I was fortunate to be able to communicate in Cree with my grandfather. He lived to be 104. His mind remained crystal clear to the end. He could teach me a lot of things. He was a Christian. He had many of the traditional values that we're talking about today.

People like us, people like myself, we have to look, we have yet to seek. I really think we're seeking this spiritualism and as we do we are looking to our elders and I sense this more every year. The other thing we are doing is having to look to books. That may sound very cold, but there's one that I picked up, ladies and gentlemen, I don't know what you think of this book, its called The Gospel of the Redman, written in 1937 first by Ernest Thomas Seton and Julia M. Seton. They wrote it from having counsel with Indians, great Indians, Indians from different nations and they attempted to put down in print what Indians spiritualism is. It's so nice to pick up a book and find things that talk about our people as brave, as clean, as kind, religious, truthful. It's so beautiful to hear that. It's such a far cry from what we've been subjected to over the years in written materials, where the opposite is said, savage, dirty, mean, pagan, etc. You are aware of such contrasts. This book acknowledges that the whiteman has done a great injustice to this North American continent by not recognizing the system of Indians; the way the Indians lived.

I want to bring out a few things again from The Gospel of the Redman. It says that the Redman has the most spiritual civilization the world has ever known. It also says, the Redman's approach to all life and thought was spiritual. The culture of the Redman is fundamentally spiritual; his measure of success is "How much service have I rendered to my people?" His mode of life, his thought, his every day act are given spiritual significance, approached and coloured with complete realization of the spirit world. ¹

One other point, it says, the Redman's religion is not a matter of certain days and set observations, but is a part of his every thought and his daily life.

Let's think back for a while on some of our experiences as we've been going through this system. How many of you heard, particularly in boarding schools; Oh, don't do that its Sunday, you can't sew on that button it's Sunday, you can't play that game, it's a little too wild, it's Sunday. It seems to me that that isn't the Indian way. According to the Gospel of the Redman, the Indian belief is that the Great Spirit is with us every day and all the time. The Indian regrets that the Whiteman's God comes only one day a week.

And in the Gospel of the Redman, we have an Indian Creed. It states that there is one great spirit, the creator and ruler of all things, to whom we are responsible. I thought about that a lot. I told you that my grandfather was a Christian, my family are Christians; I find it really strange at home; maybe I shouldn't say I find it strange, but this is what happens on our reserve. We have several churches. This is what happens on a typical Sunday with my family. In the morning, my mother plays the organ in the Mennonite Church.

In the afternoon, they go to the Pentecostal meeting. She takes her accordian to that because the music is a little livelier there, and in the evening, she goes to the United Church, where she again plays the organ. Some people would look and say, Geez, are they that mixed up? Don't they know what church they belong to? I think that is Christianity adapted to the Indian way. There is only one Great Spirit and they worship that Spirit. There is no United Church God, there's no Mennonite God, there is one God for all.

There's another point in the Creed that says, having arrived on this earth, the first duty of man is the attainment of perfect manhood. Manhood must be achieved in the Body Way, the Mind Way, the Spirit Way and the Service Way.

When I thought about that I was reminded of a visit I made to Rough Rock, Arizona a few years ago. In Rough Rock, they had a program where there was a medicine man or an elder who was teaching several students. I remember very distinctly these four points: The Body Way, Mind Way, Spirit and Service Way; These were the things that were being taught. It takes three years to get a B.A. maybe, four years to get a B. Ed. and so forth and so forth. But you know in the Indian way, when you're going to school to learn to be a medicine man or a spiritual leader this is where learning never ends. They're going to school all their lives. This is something I found really very interesting.

Another point is, having attained manhood, he must consecrate that manhood to the service of his people; and finally they believe the Soul of man is immortal.

Another thing that the Gospel of the Redman, states is that we're supposed to worship daily. I really think we have a long way to come to get

back to the real Indian way. I know many of us have good intentions, I suppose this is where you say, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. For example, coming to the 7^(am.) o'clock ceremonies. These are things that we're going to have to learn to do.

Another thing I'm reminded of is that we're living in a society today where we have meetings, meetings, meetings, upon meetings and I know at many times we wonder whether we are getting anywhere with these meetings. I think if we would stop and put our frame of mind in perspective that we'd achieve more at these meetings.

The Gospel of the Redman says, "When you're assembled in Council, fail not to light in the midst ^a of the fire which is the symbol of the Great Spirit and the sign of his presence. And light the Sacred Pipe which is the symbol of Peace, Brotherhood, Council and Prayer, and smoke first to the Great Spirit in the Heaven above, then to the Four Winds, His messengers and to the Mother Earth through whom he furnishes us our food. And let each Councillor, smoke passing the pipe in a circle like that of the Sun from east, southward to the west. At the opening of Council, let the Chief arise, light the pipe and pray, Great Spirit, by this pipe, the symbol of Peace, Council and Brotherhood, we ask Thee to be with us and bless us tonight."

I know that much more of this is happening and I know personally that that kind of beginning is very helpful to myself. I think that we again have to try to get back to something like that, so that we can achieve more at our meetings.

Okay, so what then is Indian Spiritualism?

I think it is our daily lives, a way of life.

It is our relationship to one another, young and old - it is the feelings that we have as we participate and we watch something like the grand entry, as we participate or watch a powwow going on - I think that is Indian spiritualism.

It is our daily recognition of the Unseen and the Eternal.

It is sharing.

It is the relationship that we have to our land.

I really think that spiritualism is thinking, feeling and perceiving our world.

When I think about this, I think, gee, we have really strayed from the way of our forefathers, the expectations that they had of us. Maybe, one of the reasons for this is how much our languages have deteriorated in our country. How we cannot talk to our older people. This may be one of the reasons. But I want to say, we are here today, there's several hundred of us here, its really wonderful. Why are we here? We are here because we're concerned about our Indian culture; we're concerned about our Indian languages. Through our efforts we have found a way to live in modern society and still maintain and even revive our Indianness.

We are talking and promoting bilingualism and biculturalism.

In fact what impresses me is that just two years ago, we were talking about the general context of things in our NABEC Conference. Two years later, we are able to talk about bilingualism and biculturalism and we are able to relate it to the learning styles of Indian children. They are different, we have to realize this. Indian arts and crafts - we are relating it to early childhood and we are certainly relating it to elders. And I would say, this signifies a great achievement. I would like to suggest to you that this is a document of survival.

Indian characteristics - we might call them culture or values.

What are some of these?

Silence is certainly one of them. You can relate this to learning styles in the school too. Indian children, you know, are not as loud and eager to talk. I wanted to relate to you a little incident of my own that some of you may have heard before. I'd like to ask you first, in your own mind, do you remember when you first left home and you first went into white society and your feeling about it after the fear was gone and you looked around and you ate salads and you had breaded fish, things like that? I wonder how you felt, I know that sometimes I really regret the odd thing that happened to me as I was being processed. I remember one time going home from high school in Teulon. It was Saturday morning and my aunt came over to visit. My mother was busy, she had things to do. So my aunt was there; they chatted a little, my mother just kept on about her business. I was very uncomfortable with this. There I was, saying, "Oh isn't the weather nice," oh, you know all this and that sort of the useless nonsense talk I was doing, but silence was bothering me. I thought my mother is not talking to her, they're not talking to each other, I better keep this going, and I'm going on and on, until I was exhausted. I was really tired and then I thought to myself, gee, you're a fool, you know, this is the way it is at home. You don't have to worry about things like that - there is as much communion in silence, that really stayed with me after that.

The other thing I did too, was I taught my mother how to make salad so we'd be impressive when some non-Indians came to visit us!!

So another Indian characteristic or culture is not interrupting. There are a lot of times when people just hear somebody out. Somebody from Indian Affairs comes out and talks and you let them talk on and on and on and on. Oftentimes, you don't agree with them but we just hear them out, we're getting smart, and when they're finished, we just say, "No."

Another characteristic, I think we have is teasing. I was just talking to a lady this morning, and she said, "You know, I just feel like I know everybody here, I'm from Nova Scotia and I've never been to one of these conferences and I feel really good, I feel like I know everybody and can talk to them." These are things that are not explainable. And teasing, I find that at times we don't even know a person well, but we feel akin to them and tease them. I think teasing is one of our greatest ways to get to know each other, humour, cheerfulness.

I think the bus driver thought we were clean out of our minds when the Mohawks and the Crees and everybody arrived from the East, and we were laughing are heads off on the bus. I don't know what about - baskets or something, but we had a good time, and I really think this is something.

In spite of various influences that we have had, we still have these characteristics that haven't left us, and again, I suggest that this is a "document of our survival."

About Indian Languages. Interest among Indian people for retention and revival of Indian languages is really very recent. For many years, we allowed ourselves to be brainwashed and to believe that retaining our languages was not important. But this conference here today, indicates that we have awakened to some very significant facts about our languages. Our language is

vital to the development of our people. Language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared and transmitted from generation to generation. And when a language dies, much of the vitality of a way of living and thinking dies with it.

Okay, today after years of being brainwashed, after years of government policies denying us a place for our languages in school, we are here, discussing various language programs. And if I'd soon finish talking you're going to be hearing the different sessions on Cree, Objivay, Micmac, Oneida, Mohawk, Dakota, Stoney, Inuit, Pueblo, Navajo, Choctaw, Memominee, Seminole, etc.

Here in Canada, we're not only reviving our languages, in many cases, we have to rediscover them. We are proud in our country to have set a policy of Indian Control of Indian Education. Because when Indians control education, we are able to set our policies and we are able to set our priorities. Governments no longer can stand in our way. As Indians we are determining what we want for our children, and there is a very clear statement of how we think of usage and instruction of Native language. All I'm saying is, there is no way that we're going to be stopped from learning our Indian languages and reviving them and going forward. There's just no way we're going to fall back anymore. We've come so far in ten years and this is what I feel is a "document of survival."

I was going to attempt in a lighter vein to do some Indian body language for you. I know it is common to us to point with the mouth and I'm doing that all the time yet. I met a friend of mine from B.C. here the other day, and she asked me something, and I said ... (over there). Or else you're talking to somebody and you're kind of ... anyway, I won't go any further with that.

Love of our language and our desire to retain them does not mean a rejection of English or French. I think over the years our people have made great effort to understand English. I can think of some funny instances, where my parents or grandparents try to understand English.

I recall an incident I was told about involving my grandmother, years ago, when all they had was the mail order to Eaton's. My mother came home from boarding school and my grandmother asked her to order something from Eaton's. My grandmother said, "Tell Eaton that I can't read or write and I'm really very sorry about that." Another thing, she said was, "I'm not going to use Eaton's anymore, I don't think really Eaton's is very good, I prefer COD because they give credit."

I want to give you some good tidbits about Indian languages. Did you know that Cree was used to transmit intelligence information to Allied Armies during World War II, because when scrambled, Cree was virtually impossible to crack as a code?

Cree is reputed to have the third most complex verb system of languages in the world. I'm not saying this because I'm a Cree, but I couldn't find anything about the other languages.

Did you know that in North America, Canada and the U.S. there are a greater variety of languages than those found in Europe. The greater number in North America is due to the large number of Indian languages.

And last, did you know, that North American Indian languages can and do represent all grammatical categories to be found in the world. I only say that, because lot of people say, oh, you know, you have a primitive language and that just irks me because all languages are complex. There are so many myths about Indian languages.

So ladies and gentlemen, in closing, I would like to read a poem to you. Many of you know Chief Dan George, "My Heart Soars" is his book and I think the poem is really reminiscent of by-gone days and of Indian spiritualism.

I have known you when you're forests were mine,

When they gave me my meat and clothing

I have known you in your streams and rivers

When you fish flashed and danced in the Sun

Where the water, said, come,

Come and eat of my abundance.

I have known you, when the freedom of your wind

And my Spirit, like the Winds, once roamed your good land.

For thousands of years, I have spoken the language of

the land and listened to its many voices

I took what I needed and found there was plenty

for everyone

The rivers were clear and thick with life

The air was pure and gave way to the thrashing

of countless wings

On land a profusion of creatures

I walk tall and proud, knowing the resourcefulness of
my people,

Feeling the blessing of the Supreme Spirit

I lived in the Brotherhood of all Being

I measured the Day by the Sun's journey across the Sky

The passing of the year was told by the return of the Salmon

Or the birds pairing off to nest

Between the first campfire and the last of each day
I searched for food, made shelter, clothing and
Weapons and always found time for Prayer.

The wisdom and eloquence of my father
I passed on to my children so they too acquire faith,
courage, generosity, understanding and knowledge in the
proper way of living.

Such are the memories of yesterday
Today, harmony still lives in nature
Though we have left wilderness
Left variety of creatures.

Fewer people know the Cougars den in the hills
Nor have their eyes followed as he rides endless
circles in the warm air
The wild beauty of the coast line
And the taste of sea fog remains hidden on the windows
of passing cars.

When the last bear skin has been taken
and the last rams head has been mounted
and fitted with glass eyes
We may find in them the reflection of today's memories
Take care or soon our years will strain in vain
To hear the creator's song.

I really believe in this poem. We are being told to heed the ways of our forefathers to ensure spiritual survival. This is our mission not only during these three days but in the months and years to come. By restoration of our languages and cultures, we must ensure that our endeavours can be recorded as "documents of survival".

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen!