# LIFE STAGES AND NORTHERN ALGONQUIAN WOMEN, 1930-1960: THE ELDERS REMEMBER

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

of

The University of Guelph

by

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In partial fulfilment of requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

April, 2010

*Your file Votre référence*
*ISBN:* 978-0-494-81528-1
*Our file Notre référence*
*ISBN:* 978-0-494-81528-1

ABSTRACT

**LIFE STAGES AND NORTHERN ALGONQUIAN WOMEN, 1930-1960: THE ELDERS REMEMBER**

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This thesis is an investigation of how life stage roles and responsibilities of women were integral to the health and well-being of northern Algonquian peoples during the twentieth century. Theoretical underpinnings for the work come from Anishinaabek life stage "teachings," which stress that health and well-being are dependent on how well community members fulfill life stage roles and responsibilities. The thesis argues that knowledge about how these stages were experienced historically can help Indigenous peoples to decolonize and construct healthier futures. The content of the work is based on oral history with fourteen northern Algonquian elders from the prairies and Ontario, who shared stories about the girls and women of their childhood communities at mid-century (1930 – 1960). Chapter One introduces the thesis and secondary source material, which included historical and ethnographic literature about Algonquian peoples. Chapter Two covers some of the theoretical considerations involved in oral history and Indigenous historiography. Chapters Three to Six analyze life stages as follows: Conception to Walking; "Walking Out" to Puberty; Puberty to Grandmother Years; and Elder life experiences. The dissertation concludes with considering how Anishinaabek life stage theories fit within Indigenous historiography and how they apply to the experiences of northern Algonquian girls and women at mid century.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most acknowledgements leave the thanking of their families to the last, but there is no question here that my immediate family deserves an upfront acknowledgment, as they have sacrificed the most so that I could take on a PhD.

First, there is David, who makes everything possible. In addition to the single parenting during my absences, the added domestic work that fell to him, the vacation time spent following me around on the research trail, the booking of flights, managing computer issues and generally acting as the executive assistant I really need, Dave offered many valuable insights into my intellectual work, as he so often does. After all the above-mentioned tasks, he still managed to listen to me and respond with remarkable acuity as I rattled on during one of the late nights or early mornings when we found some time to talk. My first debt of gratitude goes to Dave.

Almost fifteen years ago, Dave and I began a family, and it is this monumental undertaking that guides my work. The birth of our first child, Rajan, launched a desire in me to learn about how I could raise a healthy community member, and a curiosity about how Aboriginal societies might have done this in the past. I felt a duty to see this child through a series of life passages; to celebrate him and honour him at each stage of his life; to find a way to build community for him and to instil responsibility. The birth of our girl child, Denia, inspired a need for more knowledge about the lives of girls and women in the past, and her unrelenting feminine spirit has given me joy by witnessing the power of the feminine every day. Denia has also taught me how this PhD has represented a certain

amount of "fasting" on the part of the family. To Dave, Rajan and Denia: I love you. Thank you for being so patient.

My extended family also stand behind this work. My dad passed away the spring before I started my PhD, but he always encouraged education and would have been so proud. My mom, who always worked while raising children and who changed career a number of times, continues to inspire me with her spirit of engagement and perseverance. Thanks to David's parents, Barb and Dwaine Dornan for their support, and for providing a much needed vehicle for the field work in Saskatchewan.

In the Aboriginal community we often talk about "families of the heart." Through the course of the ten years since I first approached Maria Campbell about collaborating with me on a life stages book project, Maria has become an older sister, auntie, teacher, friend, and grandmother to me and my family. Our work is ongoing and is grounded in the love and kinship that have grown out of what we have done together. Maria, I am so grateful.

I have gained other relatives in the course of this project, and would like to acknowledge the generosity of each of the participant historians:

To Môsom/Danny and now Noos (dad) to me, I feel blessed that you gave me so much time and were always open to do "one more interview" each time I called. I am rich from our time together in that space of knowledge and story.

Elsie, I could talk to you forever, you are so insightful. I enjoyed the candied salmon and blueberries and can't wait to get together for more visiting.

Gertie, I keep coming back to you because your stories, experiences and insights set off countless "aha" moments in me. Thank you again, my longtime friend.

Hilary, I so appreciate your email messages of encouragement about my work overall. I loved your little girl stories and value the time we have spent together.

June, thank you for trusting me and letting me share your experiences. They will go a long way towards helping our women.

Madeleine, my friend, mentor, and co-woman warrior in the health sector, thank you for working with me again. I have your words of encouragement pinned on my bulletin board.

Marie, your storytelling is magnificent. I look forward to hearing more over a cup of coffee soon.

Olive, I hold onto the blessing you gave me one sunny day as I left your apartment in Saskatoon. I knew, then, that it was going to be okay.

Rebecca, I always feel like a special niece in your presence. Thanks for adorning me with beautiful things, for treating me to sumptuous meals (where "we always have desert"), and for being such a steadfast supporter of my work over the years.

To Rene, our "akiwenzie" and uncle in Guelph, thanks for teaching Anishinaabemowin through story. We are blessed to have you in our community. And thanks to Joan for helping!

Grandma Rose, you have taught me many things about the generosity and love of a grandmother. Your energy and drive is astonishing; you show us granddaughters across the country how, truly, a woman's work is never done.

Rosella, I greatly appreciate your open nature, and your beautiful artwork that you gifted to me. I will see you on the land!

Sylvia, you were a great "mom" to me; feeding me, making a cozy room so I could rest when I really needed it, showing me jigging and teaching me to bead. I'll be back!

In addition to these new relatives, I have one more "other mother" to thank for this project. It was my friend Linda Crawford Teasdale who first conceived of the idea of doing some kind of book on life stages of women according to Anishinaabek teachings. Linda passed away in 2000, but she never abandoned me or the project. Wherever you are, Linda, here's my final tobacco for this one. Thanks and Chi Meegwetch. (I DID IT!!)

Of course, this kind of work would never get done if it were not for financial support. My first thought in terms of this kind of support goes out to Bill and Anne Brock. In addition to generously providing the funding for the University of Guelph Brock Doctoral Scholarship which has seen me through this degree, they have also offered their company and friendship at our dinners throughout the years. It has been a pleasure getting to know them, for they, too, are storytellers. I have also been financially supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council, the Indigenous Peoples Health Research Centre out of the University of Saskatchewan, the Indigenous Health Research Development Program at McMaster University/University of Toronto and the Centre for Research in Inner City Health, St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto. Early funding from the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women allowed me to get started thinking on this topic.

Other friends who have helped include Danielle Terbenche, my "sister" in the PhD program, the Sorsdahl family who often hosted me in Saskatoon, and Liza Brown and Leah Dorion who hosted me and helped me find historian participants in northern Saskatchewan. Lila Tabobondung and Dave Munroe hosted me and helped me find

research participants around Wasauksing, and Dave came to Guelph and spent several days painting my office just the right shade of yellow at the beginning of this endeavour. I am very sad that he died suddenly a month before the defense.

The Aboriginal Resource Centre at the University of Guelph is a special place that provided me with an office for five years. It has been my alternate home and family. A special thanks to Dr. Jaime Mishibinijima-Miller and Dr. Cara Wehkamp, sisters on the academic journey. I am so proud of you women!

My thanks to academic mentors begin with my supervisor, Terry Crowley. As a senior academic, he was able to both appreciate and encourage some of my (perhaps unorthodox) methods, and to shepherd me through the requirements of completing this PhD in history. I am also thankful to Terry for teaching me how to improve my narrative writing style and how to better integrate voice into the text.

I was grateful to have enlisted the assistance of Winona Wheeler, first as a course instructor and then as a member of my dissertation and defense committees. In addition to being a mentor as an Indigenous scholar, she brought invaluable expertise in oral history and in community based research with Algonquian peoples.

Wendy Mitchinson, my other committee member, brought wisdom, curiosity and encouragement throughout the course of my degree. Finally, thanks to Jennifer Brown for her careful and insightful work as my external examiner, and to Linda Mahood for being so encouraging as my internal/external examiner.

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION: DIGGING UP THE MEDICINES

> We never had any doubt that women were the centre and core of our community and our nation. No nation ever existed without the fortitude of our grandmothers, and all of those teachings have to be somehow recovered. And it will be up to these young people -- well, like yourself -- young women that are just digging up and going around -- they've got to *dig up the medicines*, to heal the people. And the medicines in this case are the teachings. They've got to dig them up! You've got to find them.
>
> Mosôm Danny Musqua

There's probably a point in every PhD student's course of study where she or he begins to wonder what it was they set out to discover, and why. I begin with this quote from Saulteaux Elder[1] Danny Musqua because this is what he said to me during the summer of 2007, just as I was beginning to feel despair over the murky relationship I had developed with my dissertation research. Mosôm[2] (Grandfather) Danny didn't know about my anxieties; these words came up in the middle of an interview we were doing for another piece of work.[3] But what he said could not have been more fitting as a reminder of why I had chosen to do a PhD on life stages of northern Algonquian women through oral history. I offer Mosôm's words as a point of entry into my dissertation, as this thesis is based on medicines that I have dug up through interviews with Michif (Métis),

Nēhiyawak (Cree) and Anishinaabek (Ojibway and Saulteaux)[4] elders; medicines that I hope will contribute to the healing process we call decolonization.

In this thesis I argue that life stage roles and responsibilities were integral to the health and well-being of northern Algonquian peoples in the past, and that knowledge about the way in which northern Algonquian women experienced these stages will help us to decolonize and construct healthier futures. Without examination of the ways in which life moved between periods there can be no firm grasp of gender emergence, gender identity or gender relations among northern Algonquian peoples, and this knowledge is critical in terms of rebuilding our communities. Life stages are equally vital to other societies, but this thesis concentrates on the Anishinaabek, Nēhiyawak and Michif in the prairies and Ontario.

My work draws on oral history to examine how life stages were experienced by Aboriginal[5] girls and women in Saskatchewan and Ontario during the mid-twentieth century (1930-1960). Theoretical underpinnings for the work come from Anishinaabek life stage 'teachings,'[6] which stress that health and well-being is dependent on how well we fulfil life stage roles and responsibilities. I use these teachings to explore how life stage-related roles, responsibilities and practices contributed to the health of Aboriginal women and girls in "traditional" (i.e. land-based)[7] communities, and to look at how gendered and age-related responsibilities contributed to the overall health and well-being of the collective. My hope is that the stories I have assembled here will generate dialogue about how healthy communities were created and sustained in the past. This knowledge might then be used as we decolonize and envision ways to build strong communities into the future.

I am motivated to do this work because, like Mosôm, I believe that the recovery of our peoples is linked to "digging up the medicines" of our past. Knowing our history is an integral part of recovery for Indigenous peoples and their communities in general, and is in keeping with the adage that one often hears in "Indian country": "You have to know where you are coming from to know where you are going." We know that the more we understand about Aboriginal experiences in the past, the better we will be able to shape our future; the more we understand about colonization, the better we will be at decolonizing ourselves and our communities.[8] It also means learning about the genius of our traditional cultures, the medicines that can inspire us as we reconstruct. When it comes to addressing issues related to Aboriginal women, this process involves understanding how gendered and intergenerational relations worked in the societies of our ancestors; about how our foremothers and grandmothers defined and then lived their identities, roles and authorities,[9] and about how much of this was lost.

My interest in Aboriginal women's history in particular is driven by a curiosity about the non-patriarchal and non hierarchical social structures of "traditional" northern Algonquian societies. We live in a world where it is hard to imagine a society without patriarchy, but the study of Indigenous cultures in the past can offer glimpses of this kind of world. This is the world that Mosôm speaks of when he encourages us to dig up medicines about 'the fortitude of our grandmothers.' On numerous occasions he has expressed concern to me about the subjugation of Aboriginal women, noting that it is the direct result of colonization. He has also talked about how this subjugation stands behind much of the social disorder and ill health we see in our communities today. Cherokee scholar Andrea Smith has written extensively on this subject, asserting that the

introduction of patriarchy, gendered violence and social hierarchy were colonial responses to the "threat to counter imperial order" that Indigenous women represented, coming from the societies that we did.[10] I have often wondered about the kind of fortitude, counter imperial positions and egalitarian roles our ancestor-grandmothers held, and this thesis goes some way towards answering my questions. Although the twentieth-century period I write about certainly manifested many of the social ills that Mosôm and Smith refer to, vestiges of the traditional power of women were also still operational. I will write more about the complexities of this world when I introduce the oral history-tellers in Chapter II.

I first started thinking about the significance of life stages and Indigenous women while writing the book *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (2000).[11] In that work I explored Aboriginal female identity based on life histories I had recorded from forty women across Canada. Because of my longstanding interest in gender equity, the first section of *A Recognition of Being* included an exploration of how pre-colonial systems of gender roles, responsibilities and relations were dismantled through colonization. My intention was to map the movement from gender equity, to the subjugation of Aboriginal women, to resistance and recovery, and I wanted to show how the recovery of gender equity is essential to the recovery of Indigenous societies overall. The book was about decolonization through "reconstructing Native womanhood," a process which involves identity formation at the individual level as well as collective thinking about restructuring social relations in our contemporary societies.

As I was finishing *A Recognition of Being* I began to think about how Indigenous identities are defined by life stage as well as gender. Although this could be said of any

society, I was curious about the distinct way in which life stage responsibilities played into the organization of Indigenous societies. If roles and responsibilities, privileges and authorities were determined according to gender as well as age, the way in which these elements worked together factored into a person's purpose as well as their position in society. I was intrigued by how the well-being of a community was apparently linked to interdependency and how well people worked and interacted across the life stage continuum. This project thus explores life stage roles of girls and women as part of my ongoing inquiry into "reconstructing Native womanhood," and, by association, reconstructing our families and communities.

**Framing the Questions: The Life Cycle Approach**

My inquiry into life stages of northern Algonquian women began with some basic questions about "how it was"[12] during the childhood years of our current generation of elders. In an annotated bibliography about American family history, I found three objectives for using the life cycle approach which I found fitting. These objectives, as identified by Steven Mintz were as follows: "to understand the differing ways that Americans have understood the life stages; to examine the changing experience of the stages of infancy, childhood, youth, early adulthood, middle age and old age; and to explore the changing rituals of family life, such as courtship and marriage."[13] I knew my work could easily be defined by these objectives. First, there is intrinsic value in providing information on how northern Algonquian women understood and experienced life stages at any point in history, and there is very little in historical or other types of literature that is directly concerned with life stages of Indigenous women. The second objective, which referred to change, could be achieved by looking at literature that covers

the period preceding the lives of the oral history participants, and by analyzing the changes they talked about in their own lives. Mintz's third objective also appealed to me, as I had long been interested in the ceremonies, practices and protocols that accompanied transitions between life stages.

These objectives gave me a general direction for inquiry, and set the basic framework for documenting the life stages of the research participants. But as I have mentioned, I was also intrigued by further questions; questions about how life stage roles and responsibilities were part of defining identity and citizenship.[14] I wondered how this fostered the creation of "mino pimaatsiwin," the good life.[15] These questions were rooted in years of listening to both Anishinaabek and Haudenosaunee Elders give teachings on the life cycle continuum. I was fascinated by the way these teachers spoke to the value accorded to each life stage, and by descriptions of how different generations worked interdependently to uphold the spiritual, social, economic and political order of Aboriginal societies. Framed in this way, life stage identities and practices defined individual purpose as well as community responsibility, and were critical to the health and well-being of both individual and society. These teachings provide a theoretical framework for my study, and for this reason I will offer some introductory information about them here.

**Life Stage Teachings Framework**

As the knowledge keepers of our societies, Elders will point out that Aboriginal teachings related to life stages are complex, and can take many years to master. In order to learn, and especially to become a teacher of this knowledge, one must engage in

multiple practices of Indigenous knowledge transfer. This can involve doing 'sweats,'[16] fasting, and/or being adopted into families that carry the knowledge, along with learning the protocols around sharing the knowledge. I have not lived long enough, nor have I done all of the work that is necessary to carry this knowledge; however, I can impart what I understand of the teachings as they have been shared in community settings and through literature. Most of this information comes from Anishinaabek peoples.

Among the Anishinaabek, life stages are typically described in either four or seven levels. In *Ojibway Heritage*, Anishinaabe author and ethnologist Basil Johnston describes the stages as "the four hills of life," which progress from infancy, to youth, to adulthood, to old age.[17] These physical life stages have corresponding moral stages of development, which are preparation, quest, vision and fulfillment of vision.[18] Johnston's teachings emphasize the difficulties involved in physical survival and highlight the challenges presented by undertaking a moral journey through life. Whereas the physical challenges can be formidable, Johnston points out that it is the moral journey that gives meaning to human life. Moral development through fulfilling one's personal vision marks the difference between merely existing and fully living.

In this teaching, infants and children are portrayed as "frail and helpless," but their traditional role was to bring "happiness and hope to all," because they represented potential and the future.[19] Infancy and childhood was a time of preparation for the vision quest, which took place in youth. Youth was defined by the quest; it could begin early (among those "hardly out of infancy")[20] and end late, taking as long as necessary. Johnston points out that a person could not proceed to the adult stage until he or she had received a vision particular to their life's purpose.[21] Visions were achieved through

fasting and isolation, where the individual had the opportunity to seek communion with his or her inner self.[22]

With relation to physical survival, youth was a time to acquire skills such as hunting and fishing, sewing and cooking.[23] Adults were then responsible for ensuring survival through caregiving and providing,[24] but they also had a moral responsibility for living out the vision that was given to them in their youth.[25] Johnston describes how the principle of non-interference was key: individuals were to live out their vision according to "the laws of the world and the customs of the community,"[26]but at the same time, no one was entitled to interfere with the vision of another. In old age, individuals took on a teaching role, because "by living through all the stages and living out the visions, men and women know something of human nature and living and life."[27] Their wisdom was respected and adhered to, providing they had lived out their vision.

In *The Seven Fires: Teachings of the Bear Clan as Told by Dr. Danny Musqua*, human development according to Saulteaux oral tradition is described as the progression through seven fires: conception and life in the womb; birth to walking; walking to seven years of age; little men and little women; young adults; adult development; and old age and death.[28] This model also includes three types of elders: "community elders, ceremonial elders and earth elders," categories which are "based on the specific areas of knowledge that have been attained."[29] Mosôm teaches about life as a learning journey in which one's spirit strives to learn about the physical state of existence in this world. He describes how the spirit is more conscious in the earliest stages of life, particularly when in utero and to some extent during infancy. Because of the shock of arrival in the physical world, the spirit enters a subconscious state early in our lifetimes, and from there we

progress through our remaining life stages in pursuit of awakening the spirit.[30] Mosôm notes that ceremonies are an important part of this learning journey, as they acknowledge the spirit and mark important milestones in the life of an individual.[31]

As with Johnston's teaching, this framework describes life as a journey through various stages of consciousness; stages which are both facilitated and celebrated through ceremony. Mosôm's teachings also define certain roles and responsibilities for the different stages. Infancy and early childhood involved nurturing, dependence on others and the development of trust.[32] As children grew older, they learned about discipline and taking up responsibilities. Youth was a time when individuals began to assume adult responsibilities, and were charged with caregiving duties for the young and old in the community. As Mosôm puts it, this was a time when there was plenty of "volunteer work."[33] Adults carried responsibilities of providing for family, and elders were the teachers and keepers of knowledge, law and ceremony.[34]

Life cycle teachings of the Midewiwin, a spiritual society of the Anishinaabek, also define roles and responsibilities according to seven stages. These stages include: infancy and childhood ("the good life" or "spirit life"); youth ("the fast life"); young adulthood ("wondering/wandering life"); middle adulthood ("planning/planting life"); mature adulthood ("doing life"); and elder years ("elder life").[35] As with the teachings already presented, this model shows a progression from being the recipient of care and teaching, to seeking one's purpose, to fulfilling one's purpose, to becoming the teacher. Odawa Elder Liza Mosher describes how one can get stuck at any stage, as she herself remained in the "wandering and wondering" stage well into middle age.[36] Each stage must therefore be completed in order to successfully achieve the next, and there are many

who reach their senior years without achieving elder hood because they have not done the necessary work.[37]

The Midewiwin framework also defines privileges and responsibilities for each life stage. I am most familiar with the way these stages have been adapted and are currently applied in health and healing work for Aboriginal peoples in Ontario. In my work as a community-based educator, I have facilitated workshops using a model developed by the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres.[38] This life cycle framework includes eight stages (infants, toddlers, children, youth, young adults, parents, grandparents, and elders). As both a participant and facilitator in workshops about life stages, I have seen how this model lends itself to healing by re-introducing concepts of individual purpose and community cohesion. The intent of this work has been to help us mitigate the violence and disease that are the legacy of colonial interference.

Within the teachings about responsibilities as I have used them, one learns that infants are responsible for bringing joy to the family; that is their job. Because of their proclivity to curiosity and the need to explore, toddlers remind us of the importance of maintaining a safe environment. Children bring truth because their honesty demands it, and youth offer challenge to the precepts of the community. Young adults are responsible for doing the "work of the people"; they can be called upon to do whatever labour is necessary to ensure community survival. Parents are providers, and grandparents are life teachers. Elders are highly regarded, because they are the "spirit teachers."

The various models that I have described here inspired me to research life stages through oral history because these teachings speak to life stage roles and responsibilities, ceremonies, and interdependency. These models also demonstrate how elements within a

teaching can change over time or depending on the audience, as they are responsive to the needs of the people and the times they serve. Johnston's emphasis on the frailty of young children, for example, likely comes from his teachers who had lived in times when families were suffering from high rates of infant mortality due to tuberculosis. This is evident because there is mention of "the coughing sickness" in Johnston's text.[39] Teachings given in community settings now typically provide more of an emphasis on adolescence, as this stage of life has become more pronounced with modernity and many of our youth are currently struggling. Contemporary teachers work in communities coping with issues such as epidemic rates of adolescent suicide,[40] so teachings about purpose, life stage and belonging are critical. It is important to note, however, that although certain aspects of a teaching can change depending on the context, the core substance and values do not change.

My experience using these teachings in modern settings fostered a curiosity to see how they were manifest in the lives of Aboriginal people in the past. I knew that that our current generation of elders could speak to a time when communities were still largely living off the land, where kinship systems were more intact and communities had to work together to ensure survival. For this reason, I chose to do research with elders who could tell stories about girls and women in their childhood communities, covering the years 1930-1960. The thesis thus looks at the interplay between life stage teachings and the experiences of these elders.

I will explore the meaning of these teachings in more depth as I work through the relevant chapters, as any further information is best divulged on a stage by stage basis. I have divided the findings into chapters based on the teachings, although this division was

also influenced by the amount of information I collected for each stage. The chapters begin after Chapter II (Methodology) and are as follows: Chapter III: Conception to "Walking Out" (pregnancy, newborn life, infancy and toddler years); Chapter IV: "Walking Out" to Puberty (childhood and youth); Chapter V: Puberty to Grandmother Years (young adult and middle adult years); Chapter VI: Elder Years. Although these chapters rely primarily on information provided in the oral histories, they also draw on literature which contains information about life stages of Algonquian women.

**Building on the Literature**

There is no body of literature that speaks to life stages of Aboriginal women and girls in the past, but there is some general work on this topic in Canadian historiography. Wendy Mitchinson has written about birth in the first half of the twentieth century, and there have been a number of monographs that pertain to motherhood.[41] Neil Sutherland is notable for his work on childhood in the first half of the twentieth century, as is Cynthia Comacchio who has produced a seminal work on adolescence.[42] Other books explore the adolescent experiences of the "baby boomer" generation,[43] and James Snell stands out for his work on older adults from 1900-1951.[44] There are a few books that cover the life cycle continuum of women in the early 20th century, namely Veronica Strong-Boag's *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939*, and Denis Lemieux and Lucie Mercier's *Les femmes au tournant du siècle, 1880-1940: ages de la vie, maternité et quotidian.*[45] These works are valuable pieces of Canadian historiography, but Aboriginal peoples, sitting as they were on the margins of Canadian society, tend to be absent in them. Where are the stories of Kohkom (grannie) teaching

the four year-old how to hunt; the depictions of infants in moss bags watching siblings and female relatives pick berries or seneca root; the puberty fasts; the fiddle dances and the Sun Dances; the women's councils; the old woman doctoring with plant medicine? Many of these things were going on in Aboriginal girls and women's lives, even up to the time when mainstream teens danced the jitterbug and their housewife mothers grappled with 'the feminine mystique.'[46]

Some of these Aboriginal stories are available if we look in oral history collections and Aboriginal authored works such as autobiographies. Although the earliest autobiographical work, covering the pre-reserve and early settlement period is written by men, one can mine it for information about women's' lives.[47] Joseph Dion's *My Tribe the Crees* pays particular homage to older women and the roles they played.[48] Later autobiographical works by Aboriginal authors such as Maria Campbell and Jane Willis provide information about mid-century Cree and Métis communities through the eyes of Aboriginal girls.[49] Other Aboriginal voices come through in edited collections of oral history. Freda Ahenakew has been prolific in recording and publishing stories of Nēhiyawak elders.[50] Ahenakew's focus of analysis has always been linguistic, but the interview material offers rich documentation about women's lives in the first half of the twentieth century. In particular, *Kohkominawak Otacimowiniwawa: Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in their own Words* provides information about women's work and the changes that have happened since their girlhoods during the inter-war period.[51] Flora Beardy has also collected stories from elders which depict the work of Cree women at mid-century.[52] It is possible, therefore, to glean historical information about life stages of

Aboriginal women and girls if one looks to many different sources, disciplines and literary genres.

In looking for information about the generations of women that preceded the oral historians I worked with, I first turned to historical literature. It quickly became apparent that there are still only a handful of academic historians who write about Cree, Métis or Ojibway women, and most of this work is about women in western Canada. Although published almost thirty years ago, Jennifer Brown's *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (1980) and Sylvia Van Kirk's *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (1980) continue to be widely cited as core texts on Aboriginal women's history.[53] These books, along with Susan Sleeper Smith's book, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (2002)[54] demonstrate how Native women were central to fur trade economy and society. Their focus on marriage, kinship systems and familial obligations was useful for my purposes, as they showed how interdependencies across the life cycle continuum worked within families. These books also contain significant information about the work and day to day lives of nineteenth-century Native women.

Some of Jennifer Brown's other work is helpful in writing about life stages of women. Information about Ojibway families can be found in a survey article she wrote with Laura Peers,[55] and her paper "A Cree Nurse in a Cradle of Methodism: Little Mary and the Egerton R. Young Family at Norway House and Berens River" contains information about child rearing that is telling about both children's lives and parental roles.[56] With regard to women's authorities, Brown's 2006 paper "Older Persons in Some

Cree and Ojibwe Stories: Gender, Power, and Survival" looks at the roles of older men and women in the stories of Cree Elder Louis Bird.[57] These stories are often cautionary tales which warn of men abusing power and authority. Older women clearly have a role in keeping such men in check, but their advice is often ignored, and at great peril. Brown concludes that there is "no trace of matriarchy in these stories,"[58] but this powerlessness of women to effect change could be interpreted as a warning to communities about the loss of women's traditional authorities. Further examination of older women's roles will help with the interpretation of these stories.

Among historians, Sarah Carter is also notable for the work she has done on Aboriginal women in the prairies. She has written extensively about how negative images of Aboriginal women contributed to their oppression in the early settlement era in western Canada.[59] Carter has also demonstrated how the "traditional" women's work of food procurement, midwifery and doctoring during the early reserve years was critical, as it diversified the economic base and saw people through very lean years.[60] Her work on polygamy in the prairies proved useful to me because it contains information on marriage, kinship systems and the traditional work of Native women.[61] Overall, Carter's work is very effective in documenting how federal policy interfered with gender roles, but as she points out, questions remain as to what extent these roles were altered.[62] This is a query which my thesis will contribute to answering.

Nathalie Kermoal's book *Le passé Métis au feminin* (2006) offers a good overview of "la vie quotidienne" of Red River Métis women in the nineteenth century.[63] Kermoal includes a section on life stages, which is useful in describing the work of women, but less informative on questions related to women's authorities. A more informative piece in

this regard is Rebecca Kugel's article about leadership among Ojibway women in the 1870s and 1880s in Minnesota.[64] Kugel describes how women typically worked in groups, and how these groups were the forum for political discussion.[65] Women's issues arising from this forum were brought forward by women's councils, which met with men's councils to create community policy.[66] In showing how women's authority was lodged in their every day work and social environments, this article helped me to see how roles, responsibilities and authorities were not always blatantly exercised or institutionalized. With this lens, I was able to tease out the more subtle elements of women's authorities from the interview transcripts.

Moving away from historical literature, I learned that the most explicit sources of information about life stages of Algonquian women can be found in ethnographic literature produced out of the "salvage anthropology" years of the early twentieth century. This material must obviously be read with a critical awareness of the problems inherent in early anthropology. Historians are particularly alert to issue of "the ethnographic present" in which cultures are presented as static and unchanging. Much of this literature is lacking in historical context, and it can be difficult to locate dates and track change. What the material does offer, however, is indirect access to at least some Indigenous voices from the past, and this information is usually localized as to place and community. This is significant, as historians often lament the lack of source material that can provide Indigenous perspectives, particularly of women.[67]

While the ethnographies were typically written by outsiders and must be reviewed as such, they are nonetheless built out of interviews with "informants," many of whom were the oral historians of early twentieth century Aboriginal communities.[68] Because of

the urgency to document the cultures they believed to be dying out, these ethnographers often interviewed elders, asking them to speak to "traditional" societies. One must take male bias into consideration, given that many of the anthropologists during this period were males who spoke exclusively to male informants. The information I was seeking, however, involved looking at the work of a number of female ethnographers, and/or included information given to male and female anthropologists by female informants. While not always historically specific, these stories were often based in the childhood and youth of the oral historians, or in stories they had been told by their grandparents and great-grandparents. A lot of this information can be historically located as representing the late pre-reserve and early reserve era.

Although she would not have identified as an ethnographer, Amelia Paget produced "salvage" era work that is interesting and useful to consider because of the author's subject position.[69] Paget (1867 - 1902) was born and raised in the Northwest, as the daughter of a fur trade Scot father and a Métis mother. Growing up around HBC posts, she spoke fluent Cree and Saulteaux, and had a finer appreciation of Aboriginal culture than many of the non-Aboriginal writers of her time.[70] Her work includes information on traditional parenting styles and the value accorded to children,[71] and she challenges some of the stereotypes that were upheld by her white contemporaries, such as the assertion that Aboriginal women were mere beasts of burden.[72] In general, she provides a sympathetic and complimentary portrayal of Aboriginal peoples at the time.

The work of Ruth Landes also provides another good example in considering the author's subject position for a critical review. Landes is the only ethnographer of her generation to produce a book-length manuscript exclusively about Aboriginal women, a

work with the definitive title *The Ojibwa Woman.*[73] It is interesting to consider the multiple outsider perspective of this book, as Landes was a Jewish anthropologist from New York, and her principal informant was not Ojibway but Scots-Cree.[74] My concerns are more related to content, however: because of its graphic portrayals of patriarchal violence, oppression and abuse among northwestern Ontario Ojibwa in the 1930s, I have always found this book extremely hard to read. A product of her time, Landes does not contextualize her depiction of "the Ojibwa woman," nor does she reflect on why her principal informant chose to tell these stories. Rather, the information is presented as definitive of *the* Ojibway woman's experience; patriarchy, violence and abuse are what Ojibwa culture purportedly had to offer its women. Rayna Green and Eleanor Leacock have criticized *The Ojibwa Woman* as flawed, degrading to women and ethnocentric, the work of an outsider who filtered the information through her own cultural lens and experiences of patriarchy.[75] Landes' biographer Sally Cole acknowledges this criticism, but defends the work as valuable because it testifies to "the harsh lives of women in northwestern Ontario in the early years of this century."[76] But as Leacock has demonstrated, *The Ojibwa Woman* warrants a careful read, as it is full of contradictions.[77] While reviewing *The Ojibwa Woman* for information, I often came to the same conclusion as ethnographer Inez Hilger: that much of the book is not in keeping with information found in other contemporary ethnographies of the Anishinaabek.[78] It does, however, remind one to consider not only historical context, but also how experiences can vary between communities and even within families.

There are a number of other ethnographic works from which information about life stages of girls and women can be teased out. Frances Densmore worked with

Anishinaabek of the great lakes in the early 1900s, and Alanson Skinner worked with the James Bay Cree and the Saulteaux during the same period. Their material contains information about marriage, naming, childrearing, puberty rites and menstrual customs.[79] Among those who did field work among the Nēhiyawak and Anishinaabek in the 1930s, Regina Flannery, M. Inez Hilger, Irving Hallowell and David Mandelbaum were the most useful for the purposes of this thesis.[80] The female ethnographers, Flannery and Hilger provide the most direct information about women's lives. Flannery was interested in women's lives and rituals among the James Bay Cree, and her work in documenting the life of Ellen Smallboy, a Moose Factory Cree who lived from 1853-1941 contains significant work on male and female roles, especially with relation to how this was essential to their land based lifestyle.[81] Hilger's ethnography *Chippewa Child Life and its Cultural Background* contains detailed information about ceremonies and practices related to childhood.[82]

Mandelbaum's work is interesting as he documented plains culture before the end of the buffalo and the signing of treaties by interviewing oral historians such as Kamiokisihkwew (Fine Day). Mandelbaum also used female informants, including Kopiecicimit (Many-birds), Askihkowikit (Lives-in-a-bear-den) and Mrs. John Fine-day.[83] His popular ethnography, *Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historic and Comparative Study* contains abundant information related to my topic, including birth practices and protocols, childrearing, and ceremonies related to life stages of birth (i.e. re naval cord, naming) and puberty (menstrual seclusion).[84] Hallowell's *Ojibwa of the Berens River*, based on field work from the 1930s, was also valuable to me for the information it provides on kinship as a determining factor in social relations.[85]

I drew on all of this information to piece together details about the practices, experiences and ceremonies connected to each life stage, primarily as they were lived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A lot of my secondary sources thus covered the lives of women who came the generations that immediately preceded the elders I interviewed. This allowed me to consider both change and continuity in how life stages were experienced across these generations.

Much of the information from the literature related to the work that women did in land-based societies, with depictions of "women's work" forming the majority of material I coded about middle-aged women. There was also a fair amount of information related to marriage, family structure and kinship obligations, and some information about the roles of older women. These roles included working as herbalists and midwives, looking after children and being teachers of the younger generations. Information about children concerned their contributions to community in terms of work, and about childrearing practices and styles. Finally, there was plenty of information about ceremonies for infants and girls, particularly naming ceremonies and puberty rites.

Reviewing and utilizing the literature helped me to interpret the data I collected from the interviews, and to shape the thesis. It also allowed me to see the value in working more closely with Aboriginal peoples' stories. Although a lot of the information from literary sources was quite detailed, I often found it lacking the liveliness and colour that comes with oral storytelling. Ethnographic work may offer very specific information about how a puberty ceremony was conducted, for example, but it does not tell what the girl felt at the time. For this, we need to turn to oral history, and for those of us who work with text, we must find ways to translate this manner of voice to the page.

This chapter has introduced my intentions, the life stage theories I am working with and the literature that I used as secondary sources. I have devoted the next chapter to discuss theoretical considerations about "doing" Indigenous history. In Chapter II, I look at how Indigenous history work fits (or doesn't) within conventional notions of "history." I then discuss how I drew upon methodologies of oral history to work within Indigenous historiography, and introduce the oral history participants. All of this material is intended to prepare the reader for the layers of meaning that she or he will encounter in the main body of the text. With this, we can move forward together.

## Notes

[1] I use the term "Elder" with a capital to refer to someone who is a recognized spiritual and cultural leader in an Aboriginal community. I use the term "elder" with a small "e" to refer to community members who are seniors but who do not necessarily hold this type of leadership position.
[2] Mosôm is a Cree word meaning "grandfather," and it denotes the role that Danny plays as an Elder to the large community he serves. I prefer the term to Elder, although the two are interchangeable for the purpose they serve in this thesis.
[3] See Kim Anderson, "Native Women, The Body, Land, and Narratives of Contact and Arrival," in *Storied Communities: The Role of Narratives of Contact and Arrival in Constituting Political Community,* eds. Hester Lessard, Jeremy Webber and Rebecca Johnson (Vancouver: UBC Press, in press).
[4] Michif, Nēhiyawak, and Anishinaabek are known as Métis, Cree and Ojibway or Saulteaux in English. In this work, I use both the English and original language terms, as these terms are also used interchangeably at the community level. I also wish to make the distinction between Ojibway and Saulteaux at times, and use the English terms for this purpose.
[5] "Aboriginal" is used to refer to first peoples in Canada, which include First Nations, Inuit and Métis, as recognized in Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution. I use Aboriginal in this work when I am writing generally about First Nations or Métis people in Canada. I use the term "Indigenous" to be inclusive of first peoples internationally, and in particular, Native Americans.
[6] The word "teachings" is commonly used among Aboriginal peoples to describe Indigenous knowledge that is passed on through oral tradition. Stólō educator Joanne Archibald defines teachings as "the cultural values, beliefs, lessons and understandings that are passed from generation to generation. Jo-ann Archibald, Q'um Q'um Xiiem, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2008), 1.
[7] I use the word traditional in quotation marks, because cultures and societies are constantly changing, as are the traditions that belong to them. What I am trying to investigate are northern Algonquian cultures that were operational where people were still living in close connection to the land. In the case of this thesis, this refers to communities up to the early 1960s.
[8] Numerous Indigenous scholars see work on Indigenous knowledge and history as a project in decolonization. As such, historical research should benefit Indigenous communities and serve as a vehicle for change. See Betty Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004); William Ermine, "A Critical Examination of the Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples" (M.A Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2000); Neal McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (Saskatoon: Purich Pub., 2007); Winona Stevenson (Wheeler), "Decolonizing Tribal Histories" (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2000); and Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, *Remember this! : Dakota Decolonization and the Eli Taylor Narratives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).
[9] This study is limited in that I did not examine the distinct identities, roles and responsibilities of two-spirited peoples, those who might be considered in the "third" or "fourth" genders, or trans-gendered peoples. My focus here is on the roles, responsibilities and experiences of girls and women in general.
[10] Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005), 15.
[11] Kim Anderson, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (Toronto: Sumach/Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000).
[12] I have modified this phrase from a quote I found in Winona Stevenson's discussion about "the modern historical paradigm." Stevenson (Wheeler) quotes the German historian Leopold von Ranke who asserted that "the task of the historian was 'simply to show how it really was.'" See Stevenson (Wheeler), "Decolonizing Tribal Histories", 47.
[13] Steven Mintz, "Teaching Family History: An Annotated Bibliography," *OAH Magazine of History* 15, 4 (Summer 2001): 11-18.
[14] I realize that citizenship is a complicated notion that has attracted the attention of many scholars. In this sense, however, I am simply using it in the way it is defined by Merriam Webster, as follows: "the status of

being a citizen;" "membership in a community;" "the quality of an individual's response to membership in a community." Merriam Webster on-line dictionary, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/citizenship
[15] Mino pimaatisiwin is a term that is used to describe holistic health and wellness, including physical, emotional, mental and spiritual states of being. For Cree concepts of mino pimaatsiwin as they relate to health, see Michael Hart, *Seeking Mino-Pimatisiwin: An Aboriginal Approach to Helping* (Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood, 2002); and Naomi Adelson, *'Being Alive Well' : Health and the Politics of Cree Well-being* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).
[16] Sweat lodge ceremonies.
[17] Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 112.
[18] Ibid., 120.
[19] Ibid., 112-113.
[20] Ibid., 113.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 114-115.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 115.
[25] Ibid., 116.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 118.
[28] Diane Knight, ed., *The Seven Fires: Teachings of the Bear Clan as Told by Dr. Danny Musqua* (Muskoday First Nation, SK: Many Worlds Publishing, 2001), 55.
[29] Ibid., 82.
[30] Ibid., 57-58.
[31] Ibid., 56-57.
[32] Ibid., 62-3.
[33] Ibid., 72.
[34] Ibid., 84.
[35] This framework comes from a popular handout copyrighted by the Three Fires Midewiwin, entitled, "The Path of Life – Anishinaabe." The framework is also described by Liza Mosher, in Peter Kulchyski, Don McCaskill and David Newhouse, eds., *In the Words of Elders* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 158-160.
[36] Ibid., 159.
[37] Ibid., 159-160.
[38] Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, *For Generations to Come, the Time is Now: A Strategy for Aboriginal Family Healing* (Toronto, ON: Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, 1993).
[39] Johnston, *Ojibwe Heritage,* 112.
[40] Advisory Group on Suicide Prevention, *Acting on what we Know: Preventing Youth Suicide in First Nations* (Ottawa, ON: Health Canada, 2002).
[41] Wendy Mitchinson, *Giving Birth in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). See also my historiography of books on motherhood in Canada: Kim Anderson, "The Mother Country: Tracing Intersections of Motherhood and the National Story in Recent Canadian Historiography," *Atlantis,* 34.1, 2009: 121-131.
[42] Neil Sutherland, *Growing Up: Childhood in English Canada from the Great War to the Age of Television* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth-Century Consensus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976); Cynthia R. Comacchio, *Nations are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children, 1900-1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); and Cynthia R. Comacchio, *Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of a Modern Canada, 1920-1950* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006).
[43] Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Douglas Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).
[44] James G. Snell, *Citizen's Wage: The State and the Elderly in Canada, 1900-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).
[45] Veronica Jane Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988); Denise Lemieux and Lucie Mercier, *Femmes Au Tournant*

*Du Siècle, 1880-1940: Âges De La Vie, Maternité Et Quotidien* (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1989).
[46] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963).
[47] Edward Ahenakew, *Voices of the Plains Cree* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973); Joseph F. Dion, *My Tribe, the Crees* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1979); Fine Day, *My Cree People: A Tribal Handbook* (Invermere, B.C.: Good Medicine Books, 1973).
[48] Dion, *My Tribe the Crees.*
[49] Maria Campbell, *Halfbreed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973); Jane Willis, *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood* (Toronto: New Press, 1973). For a depiction of an Ojibway girlhood in central Ontario, see R.M. Vanderburgh, *I am Nokomis Too: the Biography of Verna Patronella Johnston.* (Toronto: General Publishing Co., 1977).
[50] Alice Ahenakew, Freda Ahenakew and H. Christoph Wolfart, *Âh-Âyîtaw Isi ê-kî-Kiskêyihtahkik Maskihkiy = They Knew both Sides of Medicine: Cree Tales of Curing and Cursing* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000); Emma Minde, Freda Ahenakew and H. Christoph Wolfart, *Kwayask ê-kî-pê-Kiskinowâpahtihicik = Their Example Showed Me the Way: A Cree Woman's Life Shaped by Two Cultures* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1997); Glecia Bear, Freda Ahenakew and H. Christoph Wolfart, = *Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in their Own Words* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1992).
[51] Bear and Ahenakew, *Kohkominawak Otacimowiniwawa.*
[52] Flora Beardy and Robert Coutts, *Voices from Hudson Bay: Cree Stories from York Factory* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).
[53] Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1980); Sylvia Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Pub. Ltd, 1980).
[54] Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).
[55] Laura Peers and Jennifer S.H. Brown, " 'There is no End to Relationships among the Indians': Ojibway Families and Kinship in Historical Perspective," *Source: The History of the Family* 4 (4 )(1999), 529-555.
[56] Jennifer S. H. Brown, "A Cree Nurse in a Cradle of Methodism: Little Mary and the Egerton R. Young Family at Norway House and Berens River." In *First Days, Fighting Days: Women in Manitoba History*, ed. Mary Kinnear. (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre 1987): 19 - 40.
[57] Jennifer S. H. Brown, "Older Persons in some Cree and Ojibwe Stories: Gender, Power, and Survival." In *Papers of the 37th Algonquian Conference*, 37th edition, ed. H. Christoph Wolfart. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 2006): 439 - 449.
[58] Ibid., 445.
[59] Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); Sarah Carter, "Categories and Terrains of Exclusion: Constructing the 'Indian Woman' in the Early Settlement Era in Western Canada." In *In the Days of our Grandmothers: A Reader in Aboriginal Women's History in Canada*, eds. Mary-Ellen Kelm and Laura Townsend (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2006): 146-169.
[60] Sarah Carter, "First Nations Women of Prairie Canada in the Early Reserve Years, the 1870s to the 1920s: A Preliminary Inquiry" In *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength*, eds. Miller, Christine and Patricia Chuchryk, 1996): 51-75.
[61] Sarah Carter, "Creating 'Semi-Widow' and 'Supernumary Wives': Prohibiting Polygamy in Prairie Canada's Aboriginal Communities to 1900." In *Contact Zones: Aboriginal & Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, eds. Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2005): 131-159. See also A. Irving Hallowell, "The Incidence, Character, and Decline of Polygyny among the Lake Winnipeg Cree and Saulteaux." *American Anthropologist* 40( 2) (April - June 1938): 235-256.
[62] Carter, "First Nations Women", 71.
[63] Nathalie J. Kermoal, *Un Passé Métis Au Feminin* (Quebec: Les Editions GED, 2006).
[64] Rebecca Kugel, "Leadership within the Women's Community: Susie Bonga Wright of the Leech Lake Ojibwe" In *Native Women's History in Eastern North America before 1900: A Guide to Research and Writing*, eds., Rebecca Kugel and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007):166-200.
[65] Ibid., 170-171.
[66] Ibid.

[67]Rebecca Kugel and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *Native Women's History in Eastern North America before 1900: A Guide to Research and Writing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).
[68] One must also be aware of the possibility that not all "informants" were respected oral historians in their communities, nor were informants always telling the "truth." As informants were well paid, surely there were some opportunists at work, and the more they told, the more they got paid. I am also mindful of a story told to me by an Elder friend, who remembers one of her uncles telling wild and fanciful stories to anthropologists – stories that had no grounding in their culture or society. When she asked her uncle why he was doing this, he replied that he was "just having fun." Given the intrusive nature of some of this research, I can see how this would happen.
[69] Amelia M. Paget, *People of the Plains* (Regina: University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Center, 2004).
[70] Ibid., viii.
[71] Ibid., 39.
[72] Ibid., 31.
[73] Ruth Landes, *The Ojibwa Woman.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997 (1938)).
[74] Sally Cole, "Dear Ruth: This is the Story of Maggie Wilson, Ojibwa Ethnologist" In *Great Dames*, eds. Elspeth Cameron and Janice Dickin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 75.
[75] Eleanor Leacock, "Women's Status in Egalitarian Society: Some Implications for Social Evolution," *Current Anthropology* 19, 2 (1978): 247-276; Rayna Green, "Review Essay: Native American Women," *Signs* 6 (1980): 248-267.
[76] Cole, Ibid.
[77] Leacock, 251.
[78] M. Inez Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life and its Cultural Background* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1992 (1951) ), ix.
[79] Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Customs* (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1970); Alanson Skinner, *Notes on the Eastern Cree and Northern Saulteaux, by Alanson Skinner* (New York: The Trustees, 1911).
[80] Regina Flannery, John S. Long and Laura L. Peers, *Ellen Smallboy : Glimpses of a Cree Woman's Life* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Regina Flannery, "Infancy and Childhood among the Indians of the East Coast of James Bay," *Anthropos* 57 (1962): 475-482; Regina Flannery, "The Position of Women among the Eastern Cree," *Primitive Man* 8 (1935): 81-86; Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life;* A. Irving Hallowell and Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Ojibwa of Berens River, Manitoba: Ethnography into History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992); David Goodman Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1979).
[81] Flannery, Long and Peers, *Ellen Smallboy: Glimpses of a Cree Woman's Life.*
[82] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life.*
[83] Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 4.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Hallowell, *Ojibwa of Berens River.*

# CHAPTER II

# THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS IN TELLING INDIGENOUS HISTORIES

> Sometimes [elders] run away [from telling their history], more out of fear that people are going to say, "Oh you are just making things up." I know what that feels like. I was there until I was forty-five years old and I [decided to fast]. [That's when] I found the fire and the desire to do this. Finally I was brave enough. [Now] I don't give a darn what anybody says... I was born to hear these stories and to remind people that they need to be revisited in order to understand the full impact of the loss of our people's way of life. I'm just telling what I heard and that's it. Let them find the rest. [Because] the time is here to put all this information together. With one parcel of information here, and another parcel over here we will put it all back together. Eventually the teachings will be there.
>
> Mosôm Danny Musqua

The opening words for this chapter are taken from a conversation in which Mosôm acknowledged my difficulty in collecting and working with Indigenous oral history for this dissertation. I have used these words as an epigraph because they capture some of the general challenges of oral history, while also pointing to its significance within Indigenous historiography. This chapter is devoted to a discussion of the process involved in researching and writing my thesis because in Indigenous historiography, process is as important as the content of what is produced. In turn, this thesis is an interdisciplinary work that may be considered unorthodox in a department of history, and questions of theoretical movements in the study of

Indigenous histories as well as how Indigenous historiography has its own set of characteristics and expectations need to be addressed before getting into the body of the work.

**Theoretical Movements and the Call for Indigenous Historiography**

> History is not the only way of using the past. The current fascination among historians with myth, public memory, and tradition acknowledges that there are alternative and rival creations of the past. But the response of historians to rivals is imperial. Historians recognize alternative ways of using the past in order to historicize them, domesticate them, and make them part of history itself. Within the academy, other uses of the past have not succeeded in invading the turf history claims, challenging its authority and procedures, and trying to set themselves up as rivals. Or rather, they have not done so except in Native American Studies.
>
> Richard White[1]

Over the last forty years, historians have significantly changed the way they write Indigenous peoples into North American historiography. As historical subjects, we have moved from being represented as one-dimensional and primitive obstacles to "progress" and "civilization"[2] to multi-dimensional, complex and changing subjects who challenge conventional means of representation and even the discipline of history itself. Theoretical movements that question conventional notions of history have been slow to take,[3] but the discipline has nonetheless shifted under pressure from all theoretical sides, including structuralism, post-modernism, post-colonialism and anti-colonialism. American historian Richard White makes the point that this is particularly true when it comes to working with Indigenous history, for "no branch of American history is confronting such explicit challenges to historical understanding itself."[4] A brief review of some of the major theoretical considerations is useful in terms of

positioning myself as an emerging historian in both the academy and my own Indigenous community.

Richard White argues that the study of Native Americans is intimately linked to theory, remarking that "Native Americans have provided ammunition for two of the most influential and sophisticated critiques of history: structuralism and post-modernism." He references the structuralist approach of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who "used Native Americans as a model of peoples who constructed mythic pasts that had not yet descended into history," and to Jean-Francois Lyotard as the post-modernist who "used Native Americans to attack metanarratives of the kind that characterizes most western history."[5]

Kerwin Klein and Melissa Meyer share White's opinion that Lévi-Strauss and *The Savage Mind* (1962) mark the beginning of a structuralist "mythographic" approach to Native American history, and they discuss how this approach appeared decades later in the work of Calvin Martin.[6] In *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (1987) and *In the Spirit of the Earth: Rethinking History and Time* (1992), Martin juxtaposes "people of myth and people of history,"[7] arguing that the linear concept of historical time and "progress" is at odds with the circular, timeless world of "mythic people" (i.e. Native Americans). Meyer and Klein note that Martin has been criticized for reifying "unhappy forms of noble savagism,"[8] but point out that he has nonetheless inspired valuable dialogue about "the verities of history" and has encouraged scholars to engage with questions like "What does it mean to think historically?" and "What does it mean to be in history?"[9] For all its faults, structuralism's antihistorical discourse has been significant in raising questions about the applicability of academic history's "authority and procedures" to Indigenous histories.[10]

With the shift from structuralism to post-structuralism, White argues, the distinction between societies with and societies without history resurrects "in a new form on the level of narrative."[11] Lyotard challenged "universal history" by juxtaposing "metanarratives" with local narratives in *Instructions paiennes* (1977) and *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (1979). According to Kerwin Klein, Lyotard grew to recognize Native Americans as exemplars of local narrative, story and oratory, and to see the suppression of these forms as key to imperial conquest. [12] Klein and White point to Lyotard's influence in the "post-structuralist narrative" of historian James Clifford's work,[13]drawing on the example of an article he wrote about a court case involving the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Council's right to an Indian identity and tribal lands.[14] Klein states, "Clifford's narration of the trial in Mashpee as a collision between history (universal, written, static, and hegemonic) and anthropology (local, oral, fluid, and subaltern) tied into that venerable division of the world into peoples with and without history."[15] As with the *Delgamuukw* case, which raised the issue of using oral history in Canadian courts[16], the Mashpee Wampanoag case involved competing narratives and understandings of history. Richard White recognizes the value of Clifford's approach, in that it is "purposefully narrated to reflect multiple positions," and in so doing, "engages in a radical historicization."[17]

These kinds of theoretical applications have not been as prominent in Canadian historiography,[18] but since the 1990s, themes of local, dialogic or multiple narratives vs. metanarratives, "myth" vs. "history", oral vs. documentary evidence and the need for discourse analysis have appeared in some Canadian work. In 1996, Jennifer Brown and Elizabeth Vibert published the co-edited anthology *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History,*[19] which conveyed the "substance and spirit of current developments" in writing "North American Native history."[20] The sub-headings in their introduction parallel many of the themes that are discussed

here: "Reading Beyond Words" and "Illusions of Objectivity" speak to the need for discourse analysis; "Texts of Many Voices" reinforces the need for Aboriginal sources and voices; "Words and Stories" relates to how new sources and perspectives challenge the imperative to create one coherent narrative; and "Shifting Context"; and "Context as Text" apply to post-structuralist reflexivity.

Outside of the discipline of history, post-colonial theorists have been critical about what constitutes "history," claiming much of it to be Eurocentric. Up until recently, a lot of this work came out of subaltern studies and from South Asian scholars,[21] and whereas the critique of Eurocentricism is useful, Indigenous scholars have expressed that post-colonial theory does not address the particularities of Indigenous experiences.[22] With regard to theory that is suited to the study of Native American History, Nancy Shoemaker refers to the work of Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, saying that "the possibility of something called 'Indigenous theory' is in the air, but at the moment it is not clear what shape these discussions will take or what impact they will have."[23] Tuhiwai Smith's seminal work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999) presents an Indigenous critique of "history" as a "modernist project which has developed alongside imperial beliefs about the Other."[24] She calls for the application of "a theory or approach which helps us to engage with, understand, and then act upon history."[25] This involves both revisiting Indigenous history as it has been produced by "western eyes," as well as engaging in Indigenous methodologies.[26]

Native American scholars Philip J. Deloria and Craig Howe have noted that Indigenous peoples have always had their own historiographies.[27] With reference to Indigenous use of the past,[28] Deloria states that "the historiography that emerges is every bit as complex, if perhaps less easily captured, for native historical traditions are as diverse as tribes themselves."[29] Howe

distinguishes "indigenous tribal perspectives on tribal histories" from the "two distinct avenues of inquiry" that have been typical of the academic discipline of history. Western academic historiography, according to Howe, has been concerned primarily with interactions between Indigenous peoples and immigrants and with tribal histories that are linear, sequential and written.[30] For Howe, the histories of these peoples are different from conventional academic approaches in that they include "spatial, social and experiential dimensions."[31]

Structuralist, post-modern and post-colonial scholars alike have called for the incorporation of "Native perspectives" in history, along with the deconstruction of non-Indigenous sources which have been the mainstay of writing Indigenous peoples into history thus far.[32] Advocates of Indigenous perspectives have also pushed for the incorporation of non-documentary evidence, and oral history in particular. Angela Cavendar Wilson has been a strong proponent of this methodology, [33]and Donald Fixico has suggested that works which do not include non-documentary sources should be considered unbalanced and unethical.[34] Debates about the merits of oral evidence are ongoing, often polarizing scholars who advocate for oral sources against those historians who prefer more "standard" documentary sources.[35] Yet, as I will discuss in the next section, oral history is unquestionably a central component in Indigenous historiography. Whereas Nancy Shoemaker has referred to "the possibility of something called 'Indigenous theory,'" my exploration of Indigenous oral history turned up a number of scholars doing theoretical work in this area. Being mindful of the diversity within Indigenous peoples as noted by Deloria, I have tried to draw on theories from scholars working with Algonquian peoples. Perspectives from other Indigenous peoples are also included as they are helpful towards demonstrating the common threads of "Indigenous theory" as it relates to history.

**Encounters with Purpose, Interdisciplinarity, "Truth" and Subjectivity in Oral History**

> Clearly, Indigenous oral histories do not abide by conventional disciplinary boundaries. They are about relationships and generational continuity, and the package is holistic – they include religious teachings, metaphysical links, cultural insights, history, linguistic structures, literary and aesthetic form, and Indigenous 'truths."
>
> Winona Stevenson (Wheeler)[36]

I have already introduced one of the key components of Indigenous oral history in Chapter I by writing about my intent. As noted, one of my primary goals in writing the dissertation was to contribute to "the healing process" of Indigenous peoples. I have also noted that I share this sense of purpose with a number of other Indigenous scholars who have framed the writing of Indigenous history as a project in decolonization.[37] With reference to how Nēhiyawak oral history works, for example, Neal McLeod writes that "Cree narrative memory is an ongoing attempt to find solutions to the problems we face today, such as breakdown of families, loss of language and general loss of respect for ourselves and others."[38] According to this approach, oral history serves our communities by providing insight and vision and inspiring change for the better.

I'm not sure whether it is foolish or courageous to frame a scholarly work by outlining one's intent. As Cree scholar William Ermine has cautioned, one can run up against a contention that "research that empowers Aboriginal people can lead to anti-intellectualism."[39] In a review of my book, *A Recognition of Being*, for example, Nancy Shoemaker overlooked the Indigenous oral history involved, dismissed its academic value and labelled it "self-help" literature.[40] Academics aren't supposed to have an "agenda," and professional historians have been particularly beholden to producing "unbiased" work. Winona Stevenson (Wheeler) has written

extensively about this dilemma, outlining the tension between Indigenous oral histories and history as it has been defined within the academy. She notes that modern western historiography is based in principles of the nineteenth-century "Rankean" tradition, which emphasizes, among other things, objectivity, fact finding and seeking the "truth."[41] As Wheeler and others have demonstrated, these notions are ill-fitting within traditions of Indigenous oral history.

One of the primary characteristics of oral history is to delineate the worldview of the people it serves.[42] Rather than offering a chronicle of events, Indigenous oral history typically works to confirm identity and remind the listeners of the social and moral code of their society. "History," writes Raymond Fogelson, "is not something that happens to Indians; it might better be conceived as a potent force that they actively utilize to refashion, and manipulate as a survival mechanism."[43] This point is demonstrated by Dakota historian Angela Wilson, who writes that the "mythical" and the "historical" stories alike "provide a sense of identity and belonging, situating community members within their lineage and establishing their relationship to the natural world."[44] Wilson gives the example of how this theory played out in the work she did with Dakota historian/Elder Eli Taylor. Although she originally set out to record a "Dakota historical perspective on specific events transmitted within the oral tradition," it soon became apparent that the material was more significant for the information it provided "about the meaning of being Dakota."[45]

Whereas historians may be reluctant to engage this kind of history-telling, anthropologists have been recognized and rewarded for their theoretical and practical work in this area. Julie Cruikshank is often cited for the work that she did with elders Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith and Annie Ned in the Yukon. Cruikshank wrote about how she originally went looking for narratives about events (in particular, how the Klondike gold rush impacted women's

lives), and was confounded when these elders provided traditional stories instead. She later realized that the Elders' allegorical stories underpinned the narratives and events of their own lives. Their traditional stories provided a code by which one could live a good life, a "life lived like a story."[46] According to Cruikshank, the elders might say that stories "are not even really about facts or events." Rather, "they are about coming to grips with the personal meanings of broadly shared knowledge and converting those meanings to social ends."[47]

In the field of linguistic and cultural anthropology, Keith Basso has also been recognized for his award winning books that explore the function of story among the Apache. Basso documented how Apache stories often "work like arrows," acting as piercing missives, sent out to "make you live right."[48] He demonstrated that many traditional Apache stories are connected to particular places, allowing the land to continuously remind people of social and moral code even when storytellers are absent or deceased.[49] Basso also explored the notion that "what matters most to Apaches is where events occurred, not when."[50]

Literary theorists and scholars of Indigenous epistemology have also engaged in theory around Indigenous oral history, investigating the complexities of translating the oral to the page[51] and the profundity of how story is used in education and healing.[52] As Renée Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod have pointed out, discussions around the "theory, practice and ethics" of oral traditions have involved a number of other disciplines as well. They list "anthropology, education, environmental studies, ethnology, history, law, linguistics, literary studies, musicology, Native studies and sociology" as disciplines which not only study Indigenous oral traditions but "are transformed by the knowledge" within them.[53]

An interdisciplinary approach can help one to avoid the trap of categorizing stories according to western definitions of what is fictive and what is the "truth." Scholars of oral

history in general have spilled a fair amount of ink endeavouring to make distinctions between what is "oral tradition" as opposed to "oral history"; to make definitions of "life history," "personal reminiscences," "oral evidence," and so on.[54] Winona Stevenson (Wheeler) has pointed out that historians have used these categories to determine what is considered legitimate evidence for history. She writes that "in their attempts to distinguish factual from fictional accounts of the past, historians choose to limit oral history to personal reminiscences which provide facts that can be corroborated by existing documentary evidence, and relegate all other oral narratives to oral tradition which is generally perceived as fictive."[55] Wheeler outlines a more useful system of categorization by explaining the various types of Cree stories. There are ātayohkēwina, "stories of the mystical past when the earth was shaped, animal peoples conversed, and Wisakejac transformed the earth and its inhabitants through misadventure and mischief into the world we presently know." Then there are âcimowina, -"stories that have come to pass since Wisakejac's corporeal beingness transformed into spirit presence."[56]

Wheeler points out that in Cree historical traditions, ātayohkēwina and âcimowina stories can overlap and feed one another. She notes that "stories that are of most interest to historians are âcimowina... But unlike the rigid binary categories imposed on ātayohkēwina and âcimowina by anthropologists and Indian-White relations historians, one does not always begin where the other leaves off. Neither is the former exclusively "mythical" and the latter exclusively "historical" in the western historiographical tradition."[57] Within this context, "truth" takes on a meaning that can be problematic when working in conventional historiography. Yet, as Raymond Fogelson writes, the "ethnohistorical approach necessitates taking seriously native theories of history as embedded in cosmology, in narratives, in rituals and ceremonies, and more generally in native

philosophies and worldviews."[58] If we accept Indigenous history on its own terms, we can avoid the need to try and "explain the unexplainable."[59]

Stories that contain spiritual elements "are impossible to verify according to standard historical practices," according to Angela Wilson, but she points out that "they are no less significant in shaping our sense of the past and the place we, as contemporary Dakota people, have in that past."[60] Attention to the spiritual elements of story is important, as it can uncover histories that have been missed. Raymond DeMallie has demonstrated how attention to the supernatural can result in very different Indigenous vs. Euro-western tellings of the same historical events. He uses the example of the story Custer's defeat at Little Big Horn, noting that in the standard (Euro-western) version, "the victory is not attributed to anything the Sioux themselves did; rather, Custer is portrayed as the cause of his own demise."[61] By contrast, Sioux versions of the story focus on the prophetic visions experienced by Sitting Bull prior to the battle. Demallie points to differences in Sioux narratives of the past, noting "the dilemma of creating believable historical narratives about the American Indian past is exacerbated by the fact that Native understandings frequently involve supernatural events that are causal and fundamental to the story but, from western rationalist perspectives, are not acceptable as true.[62] He asks the critical question: "Whose story comprises legitimate history?"[63]

The subjectivity of the storyteller is another area that warrants discussion, for within Indigenous historiography, the legitimacy of the tale relies as much on who is telling as opposed to what is told. As such, there is less concern about the "bias" of the historian in the interest of getting at "the truth." Walter Hildebrandt, Sarah Carter and Dorothy First Rider make the point that "written histories often hide their real purpose and create an illusion of objectivity by avoiding an up-front reference to the significance of the speaker or the ideological context of the

message."[64] They write, "in an oral history these components of the narrative are self-evident,"[65] and "the esteem in which an elder who tells the story is held may outweigh particular facts used in telling of the story."[66] Storytellers often credit where they first heard the story, along with an explanation of their relationship to what has occurred,[67] as this validates both the teller and the story. Whereas the subjectivity of the storyteller has been open to question in some instances where oral history is employed,[68] it is typically understood and accepted in Indigenous historiography.[69]

Although some stories maintain consistency over time,[70] stories are also accepted to be different at different times, and may vary according to the life stage of the participant or what is important to them at the time of telling.[71] As Neal McLeod points out, "the past is not an ossified entity that must be recreated exactly every time."[72] Because the subjectivity of the storyteller is understood, it is without question that stories of the past will reflect needs of the present. One must therefore pay attention to why a storyteller chooses to tell a particular story to a particular audience at a particular time. As noted above, there is a purpose in every telling, and this is not seen to detract from the "truth."

Meaning is further generated through what McLeod calls a "dialogic process with the listener."[73] In an article on his work with Cree Elders, educator Walter C. Lightening describes how "thinking mutually" works between the storyteller and the listener.[74] The position of both the listener and the teller will thus have an impact on what is told, and both parties carry responsibilities to the knowledge. Winona Wheeler notes that "the social relations between a teacher and student, more specifically the degree of commitment on the part of the student determines, to a very large degree, the quality and depth of knowledge the student receives."[75]

The Indigenous story-collector must therefore have an acute awareness of her/his own subjectivity, and on how it will affect the knowledge that is produced.

Because the telling will depend on what the student is ready to hear, each telling will be different, or, as Walter Lightening points out, "Elder's teachings are individualized."[76] Lightening further notes that stories can often be coded, and are structured with multiple layers of metaphor that may unfold over time as the listener is ready to receive the knowledge.[77] Hildebrandt, Carter and First Rider have also remarked on this characteristic of Indigenous oral history, writing that "some stories... need to be absorbed over many tellings before the significance of the message as it relates to the social context provided by the teller and the occasion can be understood: such stories cannot be superficially analysed for meaning."[78] They point out that "oral testimony can not be sifted for "facts" alone. The importance of the speaker and the forum must be appreciated as well."[79]

In working with oral history, one must be cognizant of the protocols that centre around knowledge transfer. This is particularly important when it comes to traditional or sacred knowledge, which typically belongs to the collective. As Winona Wheeler has remarked, "in the Cree world all knowledge is not knowable. Some knowledge is kept in family lines, other kinds of knowledge have to be earned."[80] This is true of a number of Indigenous nations, and there are often protocols around the sharing of stories.[81] Oral history work can also involve taking on responsibilities that carry on long after the project is done. Wheeler makes the point that this puts Indigenous historians in a different position than the typical academic historian. She writes, "conventional historians have little responsibility to their sources other than to treat them with integrity and critically engage them. But in the Cree world our sources are our teacher and the student-teacher relationship prescribes life-long obligations and responsibilities."[82]

My work with the oral history of this project certainly introduced me to life-long responsibilities to Indigenous peoples and bodies of knowledge, some of which I can discuss here and some of which I choose not to. Yet this brief review of some theoretical considerations involved in oral history and Indigenous historiography offers some context to the experiences I had while working on my dissertation. In the next section, I will introduce the oral historian/participants and discuss my understanding of our experiences in "doing" Indigenous history together.

**People, Places and Stories that Work Like Arrows**

> Cree narrative imagination is one way of conceiving Indigenous theory. It is a visionary process of imagining another state of affairs. This does not imply that one is seeking Utopia; one is simply seeking a different possibility, trying to conceive of a different way that people might live together.
>
> Neal McLeod[83]

Given the plethora of theoretical considerations, it can be dizzying to think about how to write a PhD thesis that is true to Indigenous historiography while meeting western academic expectations. It is fair to say that I am, and will indefinitely be, a student of how to write "history" that engages with this conundrum. However, the research and writing I did for this thesis certainly moved me forward in thinking about how to engage with Indigenous history-telling as a Métis woman working in the academy. I could probably write another thesis about the process involved in doing this work, and a textual/contextual and reflexive analysis of the interviews would produce even more layers to the stories that I have not included here. At this point, I will offer a brief reflection on how my work for the dissertation relates to Indigenous

theory and historiography. Before getting how these stories "worked like arrows," I provide an introduction to the oral history participants.

*People and Places*

I worked with fourteen oral history participants for this thesis: twelve women and two men (Danny and Rene). These participants were a mix of Michif (Métis), Nēhiyawak (Cree) and Anishinaabek (Ojibway and Saulteaux) people from the prairies and Ontario (see chart below). I have written about these peoples[84] together because they belong to the same language family (Algonquian) and have shared cultural characteristics and teachings. This is not to dismiss the diversity between, and within Cree, Métis and Ojibway peoples and communities. There are certainly marked differences in experiences related to whether the participants grew up on reserve, in Métis settlements or communities, in 'the bush,' in small towns, in Christian, 'traditional' or mixed spiritual communities, with different economies and so on -- but it is fair to say that all of the participants in this work had a connection to the land of their ancestors and the teachings that come from that connection.[85] I could have included other Algonquian peoples, but I kept to the Michif, Nēhiyawak and Anishinaabek as these are the peoples of my own ancestry.[86]

Many of the participants were from the Treaty Six area because two of the main teachers that I sought out to help me frame this research live in Saskatoon (Maria and Danny, as described below). I spent three years going back and forth to Saskatchewan, basing myself in Saskatoon and at Batoche, building relationships and interviewing those who came from areas north and west of there. Others were from Ontario because that is where I live and where I have connections to various Anishinaabek communities. Although I had known some of the participants previously, others were introduced to me by friends and community members as I went about recruiting.

When I first began the project, I had hoped to find elders who were in their 80s and 90s because I wanted to reach into "history" as far as the interviews would allow. In the end, most of the participants were in their 60s and 70s, as this generation of "aunts and uncles" proved to be more accessible. In a number of cases, these participants started out trying to set me up with their own elder relatives and teachers, but due to a number of illnesses, bad weather, general reluctance and perhaps fear arising from the lateral violence that works to silence our storytellers (as described in the epigraph by Mosôm), these interviews did not come to pass.

Many of the "aunts and uncles" I interviewed can be seen as a translator generation; those that lived land-based "traditional" lives but who are also able to work easily with young people, contemporary realities and the English language. My oldest participants included Grandmothers Rose (born 1926) and Olivia (1930), and on the other end of the spectrum I interviewed some women who were born in the early 1950s (Gertie and Rebecca). Although I made efforts to corral the stories into a specific time period (i.e. the childhood years of participants, including the 1930s, '40s, and '50s), the thesis also includes material in which the participants referred to things that happened "long ago," to ātayohkēwina, or to cultural teachings.

As noted previously, Maria and Danny carried additional roles that were related to the overall framework and direction of the project. I had originally approached Maria in 2000 to see if she wanted to co-write a book on the subject of life stages of women. Due to time and money constraints over the years, the book project turned into a thesis instead. Maria remained intensely involved in all aspects of the project however, providing direction and guidance, teaching, hosting me (and my family) in her home for months at a time during my "field work" in Saskatchewan and providing eleven recorded interviews herself as an oral historian participant.

The student-teacher relationship we developed along the way falls within traditional models of education and oral history, as I will describe in more detail below.

As is evident in looking through the text of the thesis, Danny's contribution was twofold: as an oral historian participant and as the "Mosôm" who provided a theoretical framework for the work. I outlined Anishinaabek life stage teachings in the introductory chapter, which included those shared by Mosôm, and I begin each chapter with an epigraph and some teachings from him. In these introductory/theoretical sections, I typically refer to him as "Mosôm," for he is "the old man" of this project. I also refer to him as "Danny" throughout the body of each of the life stage chapters. As with the other participants (whom I also refer to by first name), Danny provided âcimisowina, life history stories that exemplify the teachings.

As this is a work about women, some might question why I chose a man to provide the theoretical framework, or why Danny and Rene were included as participants. In truth, I had approached a few female elders who might have provided the theoretical framework and spoken to life stage teachings, but was not successful in securing their participation. In the meantime, I had met Danny while I was doing research in Saskatchewan and was both astonished and enraptured by his storytelling ways. I asked if he would help with another project I was working on and he agreed to be interviewed. I soon discovered that he had a wealth of knowledge related to my thesis project, and that he had published on life stages as well. Mosôm shared what he knew with a magnificent and loving generosity of spirit, telling me "this knowledge belongs to you; it belongs to the nation."

The following chart includes at-a-glance information about the participants.[87]

| Name | Canadian Geographic Region | People | Birth Year |
|---|---|---|---|
| Danny/Mosom | Keeseekoose First Nation | Saulteaux | 1957 |
| Elsie | Northwestern Saskatchewan | Cree Metis | 1943 |
| Gertie | Nipissing First Nation | Ojibwa | 1954 |
| Hilary | North Central Saskatchewan | Cree/Metis | 1957 |
| June | Central Ontario | Ojibwa | 1949 |
| Madeleine | Kehewin First Nation | Cree | 1946 |
| Maria | North Central Saskatchewan | Cree Metis | 1940 |
| Marie | Wasauksing First Nation | Ojibwa | 1940 |
| Olive | North Central Saskatchewan | Metis | 1939 |
| Rebecca | Northwestern Saskatchewan | Metis | 1950 |
| Rene | Northwestern Ontario | Ojibwa | 1948 |
| Rose | Duck Lake, Saskatchewan | Metis | 1926 |
| Rosella | North Central Saskatchewan | Cree/Metis | 1943 |
| Sylvia | Red Pheasant First Nation | Cree | 1942 |

*Stories that 'Work Like Arrows.' Theoretical Considerations*

One of the first lessons I learned in "doing" Indigenous oral history was about the depth of relationships that are involved. I had been doing qualitative research with Aboriginal peoples for about fifteen years as a community-based consultant, scholar and researcher prior to beginning my PhD, and was therefore quite familiar with conducting interviews on a variety of subjects Based on this experience, I figured I would need to interview about forty people to do a project the scale of a PhD. When I made this suggestion to Winona Wheeler (who was on my

committee) she responded that "forty is way too many! Try six." Winona then made the distinction between doing grounded theory as opposed to oral history. Whereas the latter can be built out of one-time meetings and interviews, it can take much longer to build the types of relationships that Indigenous oral history requires. Winona did not say much more at the time, leaving room for me to discover this distinction for myself. Yet her words corresponded to what Maria Campbell had also been teaching me over the years; that the quality of oral history is based on the quality of relationship between the teller and the student. Maria had also advised me that it was better to work with fewer people, but do more interviews.

Of course, I didn't listen to my teachers at first, and set off in search of an indefinite but plentiful number of research participants. I was driven by curiosity and a concern for seeking out the "truth." I wanted to find out, for example, how widespread some of the ceremonies had been at mid-century. Because of this I felt compelled to interview a larger sample of people – certainly more than six. But as Trickster would have it I had a hard time finding participants. It may have been as Mosôm suggested; that elders can feel intimidated when asked to play the role of oral historian. I had made contact with a number of participants who agreed to be interviewed but who then cancelled when the time came to do the work (a situation I had run into with my own father over the years in my attempts to do oral history with him about his upbringing in Manitoba). Mosôm's comments and my experiences made me reflect on how elderly Indigenous people can suffer from the traumas and ambiguities of their particular histories. For people who have been colonized and oppressed, "history" is not always a pleasant place to go. Whereas establishing trust is a necessary part of any interview process, it is perhaps even more significant (and difficult) when there are traumas, pressures and expectations from the community around what is shared.

The fourteen participants I worked with in the end resulted in fourteen different types of relationships, histories and experiences. Following on Maria's advice to do multiple interviews with each individual, I tried to interview participants at least twice, and at least half provided four or more interviews. I conducted close to fifty recorded interviews in total, and engaged in plenty of other visiting where discussions were not recorded. In the process I learned that not all of the knowledge one is seeking will come from recorded interviews that speak to the subject matter. For example, I was only able to do two recorded interviews with Sylvia, but I enjoyed a weekend stay with her during which she fed me, looked after me, and gave me my first lesson in beadwork. Together, we beaded the feathers that are part of my "story listening" bundle. As such, Sylvia contributed enormously to the storytelling process, and taught a lot about the "roles and responsibilities" of Cree women. Each storyteller had distinct contributions like this, and I have spoken to these offerings in the acknowledgements.

When it came time to conduct the interviews, I asked general open-ended questions about the childhood communities of the participants. As I have found in previous work, people who have more experience and training as storytellers require less questioning. As a trained oral historian, for example, Mosôm can talk for hours with very little prodding or interruption. This does not mean, however, that the role of the listener is inactive, as the quality of listening will determine what is told. My experiences working with Mosôm taught me about the spiritual nature of knowledge transfer, as this kind of sharing involves work towards what I can only describe as "unlocking the space" between the teller and listener "so story can enter." The success of our history-telling sessions was related both to how I prepared for the interviews, and to Mosôm's facility as a storyteller to move into that space.

Maria is also an experienced storyteller, although the process I undertook with her was different in that it was more long term and involved other types of responsibilities on both of our parts. My experience working with Maria over the ten year period since we first entertained the idea for this project has taught me how a "traditional" student-teacher relationship is built, and the kinds of knowledge that come out of it. On the most basic level of what transpired in the recorded interviews, the time we spent together made it possible to delve into layers of memory and analysis that were not immediately apparent -- even to Maria -- in the first few interviews. We had to work to get there at times, and there were many lessons that happened when we were doing something else with no voice recorder in sight. In turn, Maria and I grew into other types of responsibilities to one another: family responsibilities, student-teacher responsibilities, and responsibilities to community. I wasn't able to get to this level of work with all of the participants, but the work doesn't end with this document as I have gained some new relatives and teachers along the way.

Winona Wheeler has called attention to the responsibilities that come with Indigenous oral history work, and I can now see how this applies because of the sense of duty I feel towards the storytellers. I recently heard Cree elder Pauline Shirt remark that her grandmother would finish telling a story with "now you owe me."[88] Within this tradition, I am indebted for what was provided.

It is perhaps noteworthy that I did not pay these elders for their stories. This is not because I don't appreciate the tremendous value of people's intellect and time; rather, it speaks to the kind of relationship that I was trying to establish. If we think about storytelling as ceremonial work, we need to find appropriate ways to pay what is really owed. A simple fee per interview might make it too easy to close the relationship and drop those lifelong responsibilities

to the knowledge and the knowledge keepers. I prefer to do some work for the storyteller or, depending on the intensity of the work and relationship that evolves, think of them as relatives and treat them accordingly. For this project, I started by bringing gifts, treating to meals and offering tobacco where appropriate-- although the generosity of the elders was such that I was as much the recipient of gifts and meals from them! I also worked for some of the elders, applying the skills that I have as a writer and educator to assist them. In the future, however, I will also look for funding and think about appropriate ways to assist with financial support. Research into Indigenous knowledge has become something of an industry in which the knowledge keepers are the ones who benefit the least, and this is problematic. I am still pondering on how to work with this kind of knowledge and compensate the knowledge keepers "in a good way."

In terms of my responsibility to the knowledge, I have only recently begun to understand what this means. Towards the end of work on the dissertation I began to reflect on a conversation I had with Maria when we first spoke about doing this work together. Maria had agreed to do research and writing about life stages of women with me, but only if we focussed on Cree and Métis women, the people of our mutual heritage.[89] Her reasoning was, "that way you will have something you can teach." At the time I took this to mean that it would be fitting for me to have knowledge of my own people that I could bring to the classroom as well as to the community based types of teaching that I do. Now I realize that there are other applications for this knowledge in terms of the ceremonial and healing responsibilities that I gained as a result of working on this project. Although I do not want to write about these responsibilities here, it is important to note that there is often a parallel track of learning and apprenticeship that goes on for Indigenous academics who engage in a quest for traditional knowledge. The learning and the work that comes with it continue long after the thesis is done.

The relationships and responsibilities I have described here demonstrate the subjectivity of my involvement in the research. My subjectivity is also evident if one considers that I was a listener/student of the individual stories as well as the person engaged in telling/writing the larger story represented by the dissertation. On the most obvious level the individual stories reflected my interests because they were told to me in response to my questions. But as I have learned over the years, people don't always answer the questions you ask! – they choose which stories to tell and how to tell them. I also chose which stories to tell when it came to writing the dissertation. Even though I went through the exercise of coding all of the transcript material, my method in working with the data was not so much about doing grounded theory as it was about using qualitative research software to organize the mass of material I had collected. My "bias" was clear and direct; organizing the material in this way simply assisted me to look at the material in relation to the life stages theory I wanted to investigate.

At a deeper level, I am not sure yet how the "dialogic process with the listener" worked. A fuller textual/reflexive and contextual analysis would be necessary to detail how the storytellers spoke to me specifically as a listener, gauging what I was ready to hear and so on. I also feel that I only got part way into the story telling process with a number of the historian participants, but I had to stop doing interviews in order to get the writing (and degree) done. Then there is the added complexity that I was listening not only for myself, but for a future readership. At this point, it isn't possible to assess how all these elements factored in, nor how lessons or insights from the stories might reveal themselves over time. There were some "mythical" stories, for example, that I did not include because I felt I needed more time with them and a better understanding of how to apply them in this context. These stories and considerations will be part of my story bundle as I work more with the material in the future.

My subjectivity is tied into another main component of Indigenous oral history: the intent to delineate worldview as well as "create a sense of identity and belonging." Judging from the standards of conventional history, some might find both the individuals' stories and my overarching narrative too idyllic. But one must bear in mind that my intent is to create story that "works like an arrow,"[90] or, in Neal McLeod's words, allows us to "conceive of a different way that people might live together."[91] What the reader will find are glimpses and threads of a world in which identity and belonging were fostered and nurtured in childhood; where women had authorities that were rooted in cultures that valued and respected equity; and in which "old ladies" ruled. The reader will not find stories of violence and abuse, although these things were also happening in Aboriginal communities at mid century. As I have noted in the introductory literature review, there are other works that tell this story. In some cases the intent of these tales appears to be to demonstrate how miserable it was to be an Aboriginal woman, and this lens is often applied by outsiders with western feminist inclinations.[92] Ruth Landes' work contains horrific detail about drunken orgies and assault, for example, and to read the work of Poeltzer and Poeltzer, one would think that the life of a Métis woman in Saskatchewan involved nothing but oppression, male dominance and misery.[93] Although such works are important to consider for the truths they tell, this is not the focus of my work.

While trying to sort through the kind of story I wanted to tell, I consulted with Maria. She agreed that, yes, there were ugly things happening in many communities at mid-century, some of which she wrote about in *Halfbreed*. In fact, much has been made of how Maria declined to "make it a happy story," when she first wrote about what happened to her people and how it affected her early life as a Métis woman. Yet when I read (and re-read) *Halfbreed*, I find plenty that is happy -- particularly in the sections that involve Maria's childhood.

Considering the period discussed in *Halfbreed* and in my thesis, it is remarkable that there *are* inspirational stories to tell. First Nations people had endured half a century or more of oppression on reserve, where movement was restricted and economic activity in terms of hunting, fishing and farming was thwarted. Métis people had been run off their traditional lands, and found themselves "squatting" in places such as the road allowance where they had to 'poach' to survive. Several generations of children had already been removed and sent to residential schools, and the child welfare system was moving in to take more. Soldiers were coming home from the war to find they were not respected or given the same rights as white veterans. Women were overwhelmed with large families and were feeling the weight of patriarchy, alcoholism and the violence that their men, powerless to protect and provide for their families, had begun to adopt. Yet Maria and other participants agreed that we need to contextualize these negative experiences and learn how to see (and listen for) what *was* working in the midst of it.

I found that the historian participants for this work were eager to share "happy" stories, perhaps because we too rarely hear about the genius and resilience of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Some of the elders told stories in accordance with the theory that "the past reflected the needs of the present." These stories addressed their concerns about what they see going on in communities today, "working like arrows" to teach us how to better care for our children and establish respectful relations. In the end, and collectively, we have pieced together a world together that demonstrates, if not "life lived like a story," life lived like a theory – the Anishinaabek life stages theory that I outlined in Chapter I.

This section has described how my research and writing on life stages fits into Indigenous oral history, but there are outstanding questions about how it works as a PhD thesis in a

department of history. I hope that I haven't "historicized" or "domesticated" the work, as Richard White suggests. In trying to satisfy some of the demands of the discipline, I tried to follow the example of other academic historians who use interdisciplinary and inter-cultural methods, although they are few in number.

In an exemplary article about "doing Aboriginal history" Jennifer Brown has discussed her research about the interaction between anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell and Chief William Berens of the Berens River during the 1930s. To do this work, Brown worked closely with the Berens family and community, and employed a wide variety of evidence and approaches, including "archival and oral history, anthropology, language study, journalism and photographic research."[94] She had to understand and work with ceremonial protocols related to the 'big drum,' learn how key concepts are embedded in the Ojibway language and conduct textual and self-reflexive analyses of Hallowell's notes. To "do" Indigenous history in 2010, one must therefore have an understanding of western theory and approaches and be grounded in culture-based historiography from the particular "tribal" perspective of one's Indigenous subjects. I used all of these methods, and also fasted and did other ceremonial work that was part of a process towards earning this knowledge. I conducted ongoing "peer review" by sending draft chapters to the historian participants, and did follow up calls and visits to verify that we were creating a mutual "truth." My hope is that all of these efforts have been sufficient to write "history" that works as academic, Indigenous historiography.

## Notes

[1] Richard White, "Using the Past History and Native American Studies," in *Studying Native America Problems and Prospects,* ed Russell Thornton (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 238

[2] For an analysis of how Aboriginal peoples have been represented in romanticized or racist interpretations within Canadian historiography, or treated as part of the "vanishing past," see Bruce Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered*, (Montreal McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), 3, 21-29, 34-44 For a discussion about how history that was written about Aboriginal peoples before the 1960s was primarily a sub-component of fur trade history and/or concerned with how Aboriginal people either enhanced or disrupted political and economic progress, see Keith Thor Carlson, Melinda Marie Jette and Kenichi Matsui, "An Annotated Bibliography of Major Writings in Aboriginal History, 1990-1999," *Canadian Historical Review*, 82, 1 (March, 2001), 123, and Leah Dorion and Darren R Prefontaine, "Deconstructing Metis Historiography Giving Voice to the Métis People," in *Resources for Metis Researchers*, eds Lawrence Barkwell, Leah Dorion and Darren R Prefontaine (Saskatoon Gabriel Dumont Institute, 1999), 3-4

[3] Cole Harris and Daniel Clayton write about the need for theory, lamenting the lack of theoretical approaches in historical writings about Aboriginal peoples in Canada See Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver UBC Press, 1997), xiii, and Daniel Clayton, *Islands of Truth The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island* (Vancouver UBC Press, 2000) See also Jennifer S H Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds , *Reading Beyond Words Contexts for Native History, 2nd Edition,* (Peterborough Broadview Press, 2003), 618, and Nancy Shoemaker, "Introduction," in Nancy Shoemaker, ed , *Clearing a Path Theorizing the Past in Native American Studies* (New York Routledge, 2002), vii

[4] White, "Using the Past,"238

[5]Ibid , 219

[6] Kerwin Klein and Melissa Meyer, "Native American Studies and the End of Ethnohistory," in *Studying Native America Problems and Prospects*, ed Russell Thornton (Madison University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 187, Calvin Martin, *In the Spirit of the Earth Rethinking History and Time* (Baltimore John Hopkins University Press, 1992), Calvin Martin, *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (New York Oxford University Press, 1987)

[7] Martin, *The American Indian and the Problem of History*, 195

[8]Klein and Meyer, "Native American Studies,"188

[9]Ibid ,188

[10] White, "Using the Past," 217

[11] Ibid , 221

[12] See Kerwin Klein's article "In Search of Narrative Mastery Postmodernism and the People without History," *History and Theory*, 34 (1995), 280

[13] White, "Using the Past," 222

[14] James Clifford, "Identity in Mashpee," in *The Predicament of Culture Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1988)

[15] Klein, "In Search of Narrative Mastery," 293

[16] In 1997, the Supreme Court of Canada *Delgamukkw* decision highlighted the significance of Aboriginal testimony in historical research This case involved claims of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people to 58,000 square kilometres of their traditional territories When it was initiated in the British Columbia Supreme Court in the late 1980s, it was the first time a Canadian court had been asked to examine a diverse range of Aboriginal-specific historical evidence, which included oral history, display of crests and regalia and performance, including songs and dances In 1991, Justice Allan McEachern of the BC Supreme Court rejected the oral history as evidence, assigning more weight to documentary evidence left by Hudson's Bay Company traders The Supreme Court of Canada decision of 1997 affirmed the validity of oral history when it found the previous ruling remiss in failing to provide equal weight to documentary and oral evidence *Delgamukkw* determined the necessity of using oral evidence in the telling of Aboriginal history

[17] White, "Using the Past," 222

[18] See Kerry Abel, "Tangled, Lost and Bitter? Current Directions in the Writing of Native History in Canada," *Acadiensis*, 26, 1 (1996), 92 Regarding earlier uptake, and reflecting on the late 1980s, Jennifer Brown has written "My history students and I were provoked at times by the postmodern vocabularies of James Clifford and his like,

but we benefitted from exploring these reflexive dissections by anthropologists of the textural production of their own field and from their applicability to the documentary texts we were studying." Brown adds, "By comparison, Canada at this time seemed relatively inactive in these realms of scholarship." Jennifer S.H. Brown, "Doing Aboriginal History: A View from Winnipeg," *Canadian Historical Review* 84, 4 (December 2003), 618.

[19] Jennifer S.H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds., *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History, 2nd edition* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003). (The first edition of this book was published in 1996).

[20] Brown and Vibert, *Reading Beyond Words,* p. xi

[21] See Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/PostColonialism*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 13, 255-256.

[22] See Lawrence, 2010.

[23] Shoemaker, *Clearing a Path, p.* x.

[24] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (London: Zed Books, Ltd., 1999), p. 30.

[25] Ibid., 34.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Philip Deloria, "Historiography," in *A Companion to American Indian History,* eds. Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002); Craig Howe, "Keep Your Thoughts Above the Trees: Ideas on Developing and Presenting Tribal Histories," in *Clearing a Path,* ed. Shoemaker.

[28] I borrow this phrase from White, as used in the epigraph for this chapter.

[29] Deloria, "Historiography, 15.

[30] Howe, "Keep Your Thoughts Above the Trees,"161.

[31] Ibid., 164.

[32] Daniel K. Richter, "Whose Indian History?" *The William and Mary Quarterly,* 3rd ser., 50, 2 (April, 1993): 379-93.

[33] Angela Cavendar Wilson, "Power of the Spoken Word: Native Oral Traditions in American Indian History," in *Rethinking American Indian History*, ed. Donald Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997); and Angela Cavendar Wilson, "American Indian History or Non-Indian Perceptions of American Indian History?" in *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*, ed. Devon Mihesuah (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

[34] Donald Fixico, "Ethics and Responsibilities in Writing American Indian History," in *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*, ed. Devon Mihesuah. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

[35] In her preface to the anthology *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians* (1998), Devon Mihesuah notes that "the use of oral histories as source material" is one of the "most sensitive areas of discussion." See also Ken Coates, "Writing First Nations into Canadian History: A Review of Recent Scholarly Works, *Canadian Historical Review,* 81,1 (March 2000), 109.

[36] Stevenson (Wheeler), Winona, "Decolonizing Tribal Histories," Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2000, 79.

[37] See Betty Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), 2; William J. Ermine, "A Critical Examination of the Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples," Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2000, 83; Neal McLeod," Cree Narrative Memory," *Oral History Forum,* 19-20 (1999-2000), 91; Stevenson, "Decolonizing Tribal Histories," 170; Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, *Remember This! Dakota Decolonization and the Elis Taylor Narratives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 1; and Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 29.

[38] Neal McLeod," Cree Narrative Memory," 91.

[39] William J. Ermine, "A Critical Examination,"113.

[40] Nancy Shoemaker, "Review of 'Voices of American Indian Assimilation and Resistance: Helen Hunt Jackson, Sarah Winnemucca, and Victoria Howard,' and 'A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood,'" *Signs* 29, 4 (Summer 2004): 1157-1159.

[41] Stevenson, "Decolonizing Tribal Histories," 45-46.

[42] See Kimberly M. Blaeser, "Writing Voices Speaking: Native Authors and an Oral Aesthetic," in *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts*, eds. Laura J. Murray and Keren Rice. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 65; Marlene Brant Castellano, "Updating Aboriginal Traditions of Knowledge," In *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of Our World,* eds. George J. Sefa Dei, Budd L. Hall and Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 23; George L. Cornell, "The Imposition of Western Definitions of Literature on Indian Oral Traditions," in *The Native in Literature: Canadian and Comparative*

*Perspectives,* eds. Thomas King, Cheryl Calver and Helen Hoy (Oakville: ECW Press, 1987), 176.; Kiera Ladner, "Nit-acimonawin oma acimonak ohci: This is My Story About Stories," *Native Studies Review*, 11,2 (1996), 103; and Richard J. Preston, *Cree Narrative: Expressing the Personal Meaning of Events, 2nd Edition,* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 64.

[43] Raymond D. Fogelson, "The Ethnohistory of Events and Nonevents," *Ethnohistory,* 36, 2 (1989), 140.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid, p. 92. See also Harvey Knight's introduction to Saulteaux Elder Alexander Wolfe's collection of stories, which Knight presents as "not merely a presentation of dry material facts of history," but rather, "the deep philosophical and spiritual aspects of history." Harvey Knight, "Introduction," in Alexander Wolfe, *Earth Elder Stories: The Pinayzitt Path*, (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1988), ix.

[46] Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 2,14.

[47] Julie Cruikshank, "The Social Life of Texts: Editing on the Page and In Performance," in *Talking on the Page*, eds. Murray and Rice, 114.

[48] Keith H. Basso, *Western Apache Language and Culture: Essays in Linguistic Anthropology*, (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1990), 100, 117.

[49] Ibid., 117, 126, 148.

[50] Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache,* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 31.

[51] Laura J. Murray and Keren Rice, eds., *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

[52] Jo-ann Archibald – Q'um Q'um Xiiem, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Mind, Body, and Spirit.* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

[53] Renée Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod, eds., *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics.* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008).

[54] See Stevenson, "Decolonizing Tribal Histories," 32-41 and Gwyn Prins, "Oral History," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 126-127.

[55] Stevenson, "Decolonizing Tribal Histories," 38.

[56] Ibid., 259.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Fogelson, "The Ethnohistory of Events," 134-135.

[59] Wilson, *Remember This,* 182.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Raymond J. Demallie, " 'These Have No Ears': Narrative and the Ethnohistorical Method," *Ethnohistory*, 40, 4 (Fall, 1993), 517.

[62] Ibid., 525.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council, with Walter Hildebrandt, Sarah Carter and Dorothy First Rider, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 328.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 327-328.

[67] Wilson, *Remember This,* 96; see also Stevenson, "Decolonizing," 262.

[68] Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?" in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 67-68.

[69] Ermine, "A Critical Examination," 89.

[70] Castellano, "Updating Aboriginal Traditions," 23; McLeod, "Cree NarrrativeMemory," 11; Portelli, "What Makes Oral History," 69; Preston, *Cree Narrative,* 75.

[71] See Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story,* 174.

[72] McLeod, "Cree Narrative," 12. It is interesting to consider an analogy that Mark Wahrus gives in his analysis of Indigenous vs. western maps. He states: "Western maps describe land as an object; their mapping systems use conventions like scale and the coordinate system to "accurately" picture the land and establish boundaries of ownership that define it. Native American oral maps are fluid pictures of a dynamic landscape, a geography in which experience shapes the past and present of the land." See Mark Wahrus, *Another America: Native American Maps and the History of Our Lands* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997), 139.

[73] McLeod, Ibid.

[74] Walter C. Lightening, "Compassionate Mind: Implications of a Text Written by Elder Louis Sunchild," *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 19, 2 (1992), 230.
[75] Stevenson, "Decolonizing," 242.
[76] Lightening, "Compassionate Mind,"230.
[77] Ibid, 229-230.
[78] Treaty 7 Elders, *The True Spirit,* 328.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Winona Stevenson (Wheeler), "Indigenous Voices, Indigenous Histories, Part 3: The Social Relations of Oral History," *Saskatchewan History,* 51, 1 (1999), 33.
[81] Charles E. Trimble, Barbara W. Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan, *The American Indian Oral History Manual: Making Many Voices Heard* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2008), 17; Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, "The Paradox of Talking on the Page: Some Aspects of the Tlingit and Haida Experience," in *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts*, eds. Laura J. Murray and Keren Rice (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 26; Ermine, "A Critical Examination,"118; Wolfe, *Earth Elder Stories,* xiv.
[82] Stevenson, "Decolonizing," 242.
[83] Neal McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2007), 98.
[84] I have used the plural of "people" to denote that there are many distinct groups involved in the populations I am referring to.
[85] I have not made much of the distinction between "First Nations" and "Métis" peoples in this work, as is so commonly the practice since Section 25 of the Canadian Constitution defined Aboriginal peoples according to three categories (First Nations, Métis and Inuit). I have always found these distinctions problematic, as land based Cree and Métis in northern Saskatchewan certainly have more in common than "First Nations" people who might come from different language families, geographies and cultures on either side of the country. Further to this, there are many differences between Métis cultures across the country, such that there is a whole school of debate and scholarship around Métis identity – a debate which I am not prepared to engage in here. In this study, the Métis I worked with were for the most part fluent Cree speakers from northern Saskatchewan. The families and communities that they came from were often fluid – one might be "First Nations" but have a Métis mother, or be Métis but married into a First Nations community and so on. While it is certain that the Cree and Métis in northern Saskatchewan have had different histories because of their ancestral cultures, their legal classification and the policies they were subject to, there are many similarities, and this is what I focussed on. I have tried to cover the differences between individuals and communities in the participant biography section. (Appendix I).
[86] I will discuss the reasons for working with my own people further along in this chapter.
[87] I have included more biographical information about each individual in Appendix I.
[88] Spoken at a meeting of the Indigenous Knowledge Network for Infant, Child and Family Health, Toronto, July 30, 2009.
[89] We opened the research to include Anishinaabek peoples because of the cultural similarity, and because this is one of the main groups in the province where I live. I also have Saulteaux in my heritage.
[90] Basso, *Western Apache Language and Culture,* 100.
[91] Mcleod, *Cree Narrative Memory,* 98.
92 The relationship between Indigenous women and feminism has been contested over time. I have written about how I might be defined as an "Indigenous Feminist." See ""Affirmations of an Indigenous Feminist," in *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*, eds. Jean Barman, Shari Hundorf, Cheryl Suzack, and Jeanne Perreault (Vancouver: UBC Press, forthcoming).
[93] Ruth Landes, *The Ojibwa Woman.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997 (1938)); Dolores T. Poelzer and Irene A. Poelzer, Eds. *In our own Words: Northern Saskatchewan Métis Women Speak Out.* (Saskatoon: Lindenblatt and Hamonic, 1986).
[94] Jennifer S.H. Brown, "Doing Aboriginal History, 626.

# CHAPTER III

# CONCEPTION TO WALKING

A sense of self, a sense of purpose; a sense of being, a sense of community;
you learn that from the womb.

Mosôm Danny Musqua

The Anishinaabek teachings provided by Mosôm, Basil Johnston and others in the introductory chapter speak to how infants and toddlers brought hope, happiness and a sense of potential to communities. They teach that new life was cherished; in this chapter I examine how pregnant women, infants and toddlers were nurtured and cared for in that spirit. All community members had roles to play in preparing for new life and ensuring that the proper care was given, although women had primary responsibilities. As noted in the epigraph above, a sense of identity and belonging was fostered through this kind of care, so that even from the youngest age community members knew their place and developed a sense of trust.

Ceremonies were also important in terms of building the types of relationships (human, animal and spirit) that would be necessary to maintain a lifetime of good health and well-being. Although ceremonies for pregnancy, infancy and the toddler years were not as common as they once had been, some of the historian participants told stories that demonstrated the significance of ceremonies for this first life stage. The joy that new life represented, as well as the care that it involved is also clear from the stories the elders

shared. These stories are supported by what I have been able to draw from literature about Algonquian peoples.

**Preparing for New Life**

Among the Nēhiyawakak, Michif and Anishinaabek of the past, there was an unmistakable reverence for life that defined many cultural norms and practices. Researchers have documented how this was manifest in northern Algonquian hunting societies where great efforts were made to develop relationships of respect with the animals that they depended on for survival.[1] Life, all life, was understood as imbued with spirit, and individuals had responsibilities to demonstrate care for the life forms around them. In keeping with these principles, new life was celebrated because it meant the continuation of the people.

Diamond Jenness documented this ethic among the Wasauksing (Parry Island) Ojibway when he did field research with them in 1929. Jenness observed that "the preservation of a strong life-line was the primary concern of every man and woman in the community."[2] He wrote that "the Milky Way, say the Parry Islanders, is an enormous bucket-handle that holds the earth in place; if it ever breaks the world will come to an end. The "life line" (madjimadzuin: "moving life") is a human Milky Way; it is the chain connecting those who have gone before with those who follow, the line of ancestors and descendents together with all of the inheritance factors they carry with them."[3]

Algonquian peoples also knew that life was precarious, and so from the beginning they took precautions to ensure a long, healthy existence for new members. This applied not only to what happened in the life of the child, but also that of his or her parents.

According to Jenness, the people of Wasauksing considered it important to live "upright" lives, "for a parent who sinned might so shame his infant children that they would refuse to live; or else he might reap some disability that would descend to his children or grandchildren."[4] The health of the young, therefore, was intimately connected to the health of the family and also the community.

Midwives, and older women in general, had a significant role in overseeing how new life came to Algonquian peoples. Although not as valued as they had once been, midwives carried authority into the 1950s until hospital or doctor-assisted births began to take over in Aboriginal communities. All of the elders in this study were delivered by a community midwife, in many cases their grandmother or another female relative. Yet the authority of these women was not simply a question of catching babies. In the greater scheme it was about maintaining *madjimadzuin*, the "moving life" or human Milky Way described by Jenness. This began with responsibilities around family planning.

There is evidence that Indigenous women have historically used fertility medicines as well as contraceptive and abortifacient medicines, although the extent to which these medicines were used is not as clear.[5] In his discussion of traditional Cree life, Joseph Dion wrote that birth control "was not unknown by the Crees," but that it was seldom used "for the simple reason that my people were firm believers in the old adage 'Let nature have its course.' "[6] In her monograph *Chippewa Child Life and its Cultural Background,* Inez Hilger documented the use of "decoctions" that produced sterility and teas that caused abortions, and noted that they were still in use during her research in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan during the 1930s.[7] Regarding the extent of use,

Hilger quoted one participant who commented "I don't think there was much of this since Indians liked children too well."[8]

Hilger also acknowledged the use of contraceptive practices, quoting Anishinaabek women who told her "it was considered a disgrace to have children like steps and stairs," and "if a man had any sense he didn't bother his wife when a child was young."[9] She then posited that "artificial limitation of families was not known to the Chippewa," crediting their slower birth rates to abstinence protocols that were practiced among couples who had young children.[10] It is important to note that Hilger, a Catholic nun and Dion, a fervent Catholic, may have been influenced by their faith in their reporting, and that teachings from the church have made it difficult and at times impossible to discuss family planning openly in some Indigenous communities.[11]

Because of this secrecy we may never have a full picture of how and when family planning medicines were used. As with all societies, family planning measures would have fluctuated according to the needs of the people, the economic and social stresses of the time and cultural and moral values. Prolonged periods of nursing, infant mortality and polygamy certainly influenced the number of children each woman would see to adulthood, but smaller and/or more broadly spaced families also changed as Indigenous people had more contact with settler societies. Writing about the late nineteenth-century Métis, Nathalie Kermoal notes that Cree women usually had four children, whereas in mixed-race families there were usually between eight and twelve, a number which had begun to rise as the buffalo hunt years came to an end.[12] These birth rates appear to be connected with the adoption of Christianity as well as a sedentary lifestyle, and some Métis women claim that these high birth rates were not always so. According to Maria

Campbell, "the old women I have known said that 'long ago' we never had more children than we could grab and run with if there was a battle."[13] By the 1860s, however, Métis women were having more children on average than the settler population.[14]

Nēhiyawakak, Anishinaabek, and some Michif nonetheless held on to notions of family planning well into the twentieth century, and guarded the knowledge that was necessary to implement it. In cases involving fertility, elderly women were known to administer medicines which assisted women wishing to conceive. Hilger documented some of these medicines in *Chippewa Child Life* but this information is limited as participants were generally reluctant to speak about specific "recipes."[15] Knowledge related to fertility was usually kept in families and/or passed on through ceremonies of the Midewiwin. It is interesting to note that in some communities both husband and wife were required to drink medicine in order to increase fertility of the mother.[16] Among the elders I interviewed, Marie recalled that midwives in her community used a tea to help women get pregnant.

Some participants had memories of older women administering contraceptive medicines within their own families. Maria recalled her grandmother imploring her mother, who was getting frailer with each birth, to take medicine that would prevent another pregnancy. She stated:

> My mom had eight children. When she had her fourth child, the doctor told her she would die if she had more, but she did because she was a Catholic and the church said it was a wife's duty to have babies. My grandmother, who was a traditional healer and midwife, told her she would make her some medicine so she would never get pregnant again. My mom wouldn't take it, and she went on to have three more

children. Each one left her weak for months. On her eighth pregnancy my auntie and grandmother pleaded with her to take the medicine. She refused and died, leaving eight children.[17]

Maria finished her story by saying "my grandmother helped many women live to see their grandchildren. She used local plants which were dried and made into tea."[18]

Rebecca, who asked one of her elders in Saskatchewan about family planning in the past and was told that "if there was a young woman in the community that was weak after the birth of a child, older women would come together to help her. They would spend the day with her, offering support and wisdom. At the close of the day they would give her a sealer full of medicine and they would tell her how to take it. That medicine would strengthen her until she was ready to have her next child." In Rebecca's story, the "old ladies" were involved in providing the medicine as well as monitoring the health of the young woman in question.

This story demonstrates how older women managed *madjimadzuin*, "the human Milky Way" through their family planning practices. Rebecca's elder pointed out that special care of the mother was necessary because, as she said, "in those days if a mother died, what happened to her children?" From this, Rebecca concluded that "the older women took responsibility to make sure that the health and strength of young mothers was maintained."

According to Danny, traditional families looked after the health of their members by planning for births on a seasonal basis. "We went by what the animal world and nature taught us" he said. "Mother Earth taught us and taught the animal world that there are

certain seasons that are conducive to healthy offspring." Although his family was large, Danny noted that "over half of my family was born in May and June, and that was on the insistence of my grandmothers!" This allowed for easier care of infants without having to cope with the bitterness of winter. Family planning was undertaken to ensure survival of the people.

In other reflections about new life, Danny shared stories about how healthy communities began with care and celebration of each individual from the earliest stages. He pointed out that pregnancy was generally considered a sacred time; a time to honour the spirit that was coming as well as the mother who carried that spirit. Danny learned this from his grandparents, who told stories about a time when communities used to fully invest in the well-being of pregnant women. "In those days, they had a big celebration when a woman got pregnant," he said. "Everybody knew about it. Everybody wanted to be part and parcel of that child within that womb. [The child] had to have a sense of belonging through the mother, and the woman had to have a sense of pride because she was contributing to the life of the community. She was bringing in new life, and she was treated special."

The sense of belonging, of being part of a family and community, was ideally fostered by taking care of both the mother and the unborn child. Pre-natal care is remembered by many elders as a serious undertaking, with practices and protocols that were common to northern Algonquian peoples. Like Danny, some elders heard stories about the ceremonial elements of pregnancy, practices which were gone by the time they were preparing to have their own children. Olive related a story that her Cree mother-in-law told her when she was a young bride in 1949:

> With the first movement of the baby, my mother-in-law said that's when the midwife used to get an old lady who was a little pipe carrier and two other elderly ladies; four of them. They would take the girl out to a clean place. They used to put her on the ground, just her and the ground; mother earth, so that she's touching nature. And there, two old ladies would sit on one side and the other ones on the other side. "And then," [my mother-in-law] said, "they used to smoke their little pipe, and then pray, meditate and then talk to the mother. Then after that they would put their hands on the mother's stomach. It was a bare tummy, they used to put their hands there and pray for the mother and the baby. That's the time they spoke to the baby.

I was not able to collect more information about ceremonial practices related to pregnancy and prenatal care, but material about pregnancy protocols is abundant both in the literature and in oral history. These practices were based on the understanding that whatever the pregnant mother took in was also ingested by the baby. This applied to what she ate or drank, but also to what she saw, heard, or experienced in any way. Hilger included a section on "food taboos and prescriptions" as well as "conduct taboos and prescriptions" for pregnant women in *Chippewa Child Life*.[19] The list related to food is long and there were specific consequences for each transgression, but in brief Hilger noted that "the violation of these mores at any time during pregnancy affected the physical nature and/or personality of the unborn child."[20]

Although David G. Mandelbaum reported that there were no restrictions imposed during pregnancy among the Plains Cree when he did his field research in the 1930s, Rebecca was taught by her Cree grandmother in-law in the mid 1970s that "during pregnancy, personal discipline was crucial because everything a woman thinks about and

feels would go into the baby." This old lady advised Rebecca "don't fight with your husband or you'll have an angry baby. Walk by water every day and you will have a peaceful child." Pregnancy protocols were also still being taught to some of the participants in this study into the 1970s.[21] During her pregnancies, June was told by her grandmother not to look at animals that were "scary," in accordance with the belief among Anishinaabek peoples that the child could become deformed from the experience.[22] June also wasn't allowed to eat wild animals; only potatoes and soups.[23]

A lot of the pregnancy protocols had to do with protecting and enhancing the emotional, spiritual, mental and physical health of the child. Yet the vigilance that women were expected to observe was also part of the training and discipline that both mother and baby would need to live a long and healthy life. As will be seen in the "walking out to puberty" section (Chapter IV), childrearing customs and ceremonies were largely about creating productive community members that would be equipped to contribute to the survival of the people. As Regina Flannery observed among the James Bay Cree, protocols and ceremonies "connected with success in the food quest were considered of crucial importance in the training of the child."[24] Northern Algonquian people had to be good workers, and so this ethic was instilled from the time of pregnancy.

Hilger and Flannery wrote about how Ojibway and Cree women respectively were expected to keep active during pregnancy.[25] Active pregnancies were thought to have made for easier labour,[26] but as the stories of elders in this study indicate, activity was also related to ensuring a work ethic for the mother-to-be and the child she carried. Rebecca remembered being told by her Cree grandmother-in-law to "work hard while you are pregnant and your child will be a good worker." When June was pregnant, her

grandmother, who was also a midwife, brought her all sorts of things to sew. Hudson Bay Cree elders who worked with Flora Beardy talked about the importance of early rising during pregnancy as part of training for the work ahead for a new mother.[27]

Pre-natal training included protocols for expectant fathers, although there is less information on this subject. Hilger noted that most of her informants denied the existence of food prescriptions for the father, although one of the oldest talked about food transgressions and consequences that were similar to those prescribed for expectant mothers.[28] Regarding conduct, Hilger reported "most informants had never heard that husbands of pregnant wives were in any way either restricted by conduct taboos or hampered by conduct prescriptions except that the husband was strictly forbidden to strike his wife or to speak roughly to her."[29] She relayed a story about how bad omens periodically appeared in animals that twitched or jerked while being dressed by the husband of a pregnant woman. These omens could be offset by feasting and prayer, and the father was to refrain from hunting until the birth of his child.[30] Contemporary elders will sometimes talk about men being required to restrict hunting activity or abstain altogether while their wives were pregnant, noting that the community typically pitched in to help with what was necessary for that family. The regulations around hunting were based on an understanding that the partner of an expectant mother was also carrying life, and therefore could not take life away.[31]

There were no stories about hunting prescriptions among the participants of this study, but some participants talked about other general expectations of the father's conduct. As Mosôm said, men were advised to take special care of their pregnant wives. Olive's Cree mother-in-law told her that pre-natal practices in the past used to involve

discussions with the men: "The midwife used to talk to the husband, to the man. Like, "You be kind to your woman. Don't make her haul water or to stretch and lift heavy things. You do that for her." And also, [my mother-in-law] said, "You make sure that you help her that she doesn't look at anything that will startle her." Olive added that at that time the midwife was highly respected: "No one ever spoke back. You listened to her."

**Birth and the Celebration of New Life**

According to Mosom, birth was welcomed and involved celebration. He approached this topic by saying "Birth! The old mosôms and the old kohkoms were all there. They were always available. They were those holy men and women who blessed you with their praise, when they came and saw a new child." Depending on the circumstances and the resources available, birth involved various members of the community.

Fathers typically did not get involved, although husbands helped their wives if the family was out on the trap line alone.[32] According to Regina Flannery, the James Bay Cree believed that fathers "should be on hand" when their partners went into labour because it was thought to make delivery easier.[33] Both Flannery and Hilger were told that fathers could also be called upon to hold up or support their partners when they gave birth.[34] Some of Hilger's other informants considered it inappropriate and even dangerous to have men present at a birth, as the man could risk losing "something inside of himself" that would diminish his own life force.[35]

There are stories of women in various hunting and trapping societies giving birth alone when necessary. One of Hilger's informants said that her mother-in-law "was out

trapping with her husband when one of her children was born." In this story "she cut the cord herself and continued to work."[36] Glecia Bear has done oral history with Nēhiyawak in Saskatchewan who also used to "midwife themselves," going off to the bush alone to birth their children.[37] These hearty individuals would make their own birth medicines, and stated that "straight away [we] went back to work; we never used to lie down."[38]

Among the participants of this study, Rebecca shared a story told by her ninety year-old uncle. In this instance, Rebecca's maternal grandmother left his birthday meal, went to the bedroom and birthed a baby by herself. She returned an hour later with a newborn baby in her arms. Rebecca asked her uncle if his mother had given birth to all of her children alone. He said that his grandmother was with his mother for the birth of her first child, but she delivered the next eight children alone. In many cases, these types of births were a necessity in the absence of others to provide care. Rose also shared a story of how she had delivered her third child by herself, using skills she had learned as a child from her midwife grandmother.

In other accounts, there were midwives and/or female relatives to assist with the delivery. Many of the participants in this study had midwives in their families, and they remembered people coming to call upon their grandmothers and great-grandmothers for assistance. Aboriginal midwives cared for women within and outside of their communities; as historian Sarah Carter has pointed out, "there are many examples throughout the Canadian West of Aboriginal women midwives assisting the newcomer women."[39] Olive talked about how her grandmother caught babies in northern Saskatchewan into the 1940s: "Indian babies, Métis babies and French babies...Even our

school teacher – whenever his wife had a baby he used to come and get my grandmother and she used to go and stay there and wait for the baby."

When the delivery was a distance from where the midwife lived, it was often necessary for her to move in with the expectant mother. Living with the mother also fostered an extended model of care as described by Olive. "People used to come and get [my grandmother] sometimes, and she would be gone for a month, maybe more," she said. "She used to believe in talking to the new mothers about what it is being a mother, about how the baby's born and what to expect." By moving in with families or being in close proximity, grandmother midwives were able to help with pre-natal and post-natal care, as well as infant care. In many cases, pre-natal care would have involved administering medicines to help offset miscarriages, or to help prepare for an easier labour.[40]

In spite of having midwives in their families, the elders did not have many stories about labour and birth because children were generally not allowed to be present unless they were acting as helpers.[41] Marie explained that she did not attend births with her midwife mother "because it was a sacred thing." It was often her brother who was taken along because he was happy to play outside and wait. Marie noted that he "would play outside all night if you let him. So she'd take him, and if she needed something at home, he would come home and get it for her."

Rose had a more active helping role for her midwife grandmother. As a girl and apprentice she attended births more closely. I was the gopher," she said. "Get the water and everything. She showed me what to do, put everything ready the way she wanted it. I had to be her assistant, to hand her things. Get the clean water and go dump that, and get

the towels, and get the baby blanket and, okay, then you clean the woman, and she was showing me how to do it." Rosella was also brought along with her mother on her midwifery work. This information served her well as a young adult when she was required to catch one of her cousin's babies.

The elders had a number of stories about the elements involved in post-natal care for both mother and baby, including the use of medicines. Olive remembered that her grandmother would administer a tonic that would help with recovery. Maria relayed that women in her community continued to go to the midwives for a tonic even as they began to be involved in western medical care. Mothers would drink the tonic for about six weeks before going to hospital, and then for about six weeks after the baby was born. Maria remembered the women talking about how it helped them to heal faster. In the communities that Hilger studied, some women talked about drinking a tea made of the inner bark of oak, maple or slippery elm, which would be used for ten to fourteen days after a birth.[42]

The extent of post-partum care likely depended on resources and the amount of assistance a woman could enjoy. Some of the literature suggests that women went back to their regular work lives shortly after the birth.[43] Rebecca was told by elder Bella Laliberté, of Flying Dust First Nation, that it was best to stay in the house for the first six weeks and be cared for by family members. Bella said, "Your mother, your grandmother and your aunties are always there to help you so that you can spend time with your baby." Other elders remembered how women in their childhood communities assisted during the post-partum period, especially with heavy work, such as cleaning and laundry. Because Maria's mother was frail and slow to recover from her pregnancies, her grandmother

would stay and manage the household while her dad's two younger sisters looked after the children and cooked the meals.

In some cases, the midwife stayed with the family even after the birth. Marie's mother, who was a midwife, told her it was not possible to "just go and deliver and go home. It wasn't like that," she said. "You have to be there for a week." Olive remembered her grandmother being gone "for a month, maybe more," as did Maria. When the midwife was in closer proximity to the family she would likely stay for less time, but visit frequently. Rose reported that her grandmother would only stay "a day or two to attend to the mother and baby and make sure breastfeeding was on track and Rosella remembered going "back and forth" with her midwife mother during the post-partum period.

Care for newborns included customs that began with the treatment of the placenta and umbilical cord. These practices were considered vital in terms of protecting babies and ensuring long, healthy and productive lives. A placenta was not something to be disposed of or left lying around because it held life force. For example, Rose's grandmother would always put the placenta in a paper bag and burn it, saying this was necessary "because it carries life." A number of the other elders in this study remembered that the placenta was placed in a tree, burned, or buried.[44] June reported that her grandmother would give the placentas to her grandfather, who would sometimes put them in a tree. In her grandmother's practice, placentas were also buried in specific locations to help with the work the child could expect to do in his or her lifetime. Burying the placenta by a tree, for example, might ensure that the individual would be a good wood

cutter; if it was in the grass, this would ensure a gardener; if by water, a lifetime of fishing.

Sometimes the life force carried by the placenta would be called upon for healing purposes. As Marie said, "a placenta is very sacred." She remembered that "if some man or some woman was suffering with a bad leg or ulcers or something that was kept. Mom said they used to put it on a damp cloth and just keep it there. Always keep it damp because if there is a person who's really sick comes by, that's what will heal that person. Then you place that right on the sore."

The umbilical cord was also considered sacred and northern Algonquian peoples have a number of customs related to it. In their work on the Plains and James Bay Cree respectively, Mandelbaum and Flannery both noted that the cord was placed in a small bag decorated with beads.[45] Flannery reported that it was then attached to the moss bag, and that "it was believed that if this was not done, the child would become agitated, looking for its "utisi" (umbilical cord).[46] Mandelbaum recorded that the cord bag was worn around the child's neck, which hung down the child's back. He wrote "it had two compartments; in one the cord was stored, the other was filled with tobacco. An old man or woman might call the child and take a pipeful of tobacco from the bag. Before the old person smoked the pipe, he would offer it to his spirit helpers and ask them to grant good fortune to the child. In this way the parents assured a continual round of supplication for their child."[47] These customs assured a connection between the child and the community and with the elders in particular.

Other customs related to the umbilical cord created a connection between the child and the land. Marie talked about what she had heard from her elders related to the umbilical cord:

> They put [the cord] into a little piece of hide and they tie it with sinew and then they go and approach this tree. They go down to this clear lake – not a place where there are cottages. This person walks around with this in their hand and when this tree speaks to them, "Ahniin," that's where this person stops. [Then] that tree will converse with the person that's got this umbilical cord in their left hand. It's supposed to be a very young girl or an elder that carries this, and the tree tells this person about the life and the journey of the [baby]. In a lot of cases, it's the tree that gives this person an idea of what the Anishinaabe name of that child will be. I have heard that part too. What they do is they dig down quite a bit and if you can find the root, that's where this [cord] goes. You put it under the root and cover it back up. You put some Sema [tobacco] there.

The cord thus allowed for a connection between the lifelong journey of the child, the young and old of the community, and the land.

Although this tradition was not prevalent in the lives of the elders I interviewed, communities were participating in various customs related to the umbilical cord. Rebecca was taught that that the umbilical cord and the placenta would be buried under the roots of a young tree with an offering of tobacco. After the small piece of dried umbilical cord fell off, it was placed into the baby's bundle. Rose reported that the umbilical cord was burned as in the case of the placenta, and June recalled some women would keep the

umbilical cord for awhile and then bury it later. As with the tradition of placing the placenta in a place related to the child's future, June's mother buried her umbilical cord near the house to ensure that she would "be a good woman to look after the house." This is in keeping with Hilger's findings that after the baby was finished with the cord, it was disposed of in a place which related to their future work. Hilger wrote "when a baby boy began to walk, his father took his bag on a hunting trip and dropped it wherever he killed the first animal. That caused the boy to become a good hunter. If it was a bear the father killed, and the bear was in a hole, the cord was thrown into the hole after the bear was out."[48]

Hilger further reported that "a girl's cord was buried under wood chips in order that she might become a diligent wood gatherer."[49] She referred to the work of Frances Densmore, who found that, conversely, among the Anishinaabek she worked with, there was a preference for keeping the umbilical cord and the individual together for life. This was to ensure a lifetime of wisdom of the child, or to prevent the restlessness that might ensue if the individual felt a need to be constantly looking for their cord.[50]

The period immediately following a birth was accompanied by ceremonies and celebrations. Elders in the community had a particularly important role in connecting with the new life right from the beginning. One of their most important responsibilities was in giving a "spirit name" to the baby, for these names were considered both sacred and significant. People in Algonquian communities of the past typically carried a variety of names, including "Indian" or "spirit" names, English or "Christian" names, nicknames, and kinship names/terms. Densmore found six categories of names among the Anishnaabek she worked with: "(1) Dream name given ceremonially by a "namer," (2)

dream name acquired by an individual, (3) "namesake name" given a child by its parents, (4) common name or nickname, (5) name of gens, and (6) euphonious name without any significance."[51]

The first two categories of names involved what have otherwise been referred to as a "spirit" names, or, in more contemporary times, "Indian" names. These names carried a spiritual power that was often transmitted through dreams or visions. The first category of dream name was given shortly after birth, and the second was typically received at puberty or in a vision quest. Densmore noted that one could not transmit the power of a name that was given by another, whereas one could pass on the power of a dream name he or she had acquired on their own. In later life, for example, a person might name others based on the vision and name they had earned in a fast. "Namesake" names were given by parents, sometimes after a person they admired or through a dream, but these names did not carry spiritual power. Nicknames were often humorous and connected to some element of the person's childhood, and "gens" names were sometimes used by chiefs to identify them with their kinship group.[52]

A. Irving Hallowell's explanation of spirit names vs. other names among the Ojibway of Berens River in Manitoba demonstrates how naming a baby was considered vital to ensuring him or her a lifetime of health, wellness, success and longevity:

> In the Aboriginal systems of nomenclature, each child was given a personal name in a Naming Feast held not long after birth. This custom continued long after the system of surnames and Christian names came into vogue. In the native system, a personal name was derived from a dream of the namer – an old man in the "grandfather" category. The namer transferred "blessings" which he or she had received from other

than human persons when they gave a name. Consequently, a personal name had a sacred quality and was seldom used in daily life. In this context, nicknames and kinship terms were sufficient for personal identification.[53]

Hallowell observed that people ensured their safety and well-being by forming relations with "other than human persons," such as animal spirits, and naming was a way to make a connection between the infant and these spiritual beings through the conduit of the namer.

Nēhiyawakak also believed that spirit names carried protective qualities. Writing about late nineteenth and early twentieth century Plains Cree, Amelia Paget observed that "the Indian was never supposed to repeat his or her name."[54] According to Paget, "the mentioning of the name, even most solemnly, was supposed to imply disrespect to the powers of guardianship exercised by the name, as well as being an unpardonable slight to the old Indian who gave it."[55]

Because names were considered to be protective, parents could ask an elder for a second name if their child became ill.[56] Densmore recorded several stories of children who were healed after their parents summoned a namer.[57] This relationship between health and naming was not only experienced at an individual level; it extended to others in the community as well. Danny talked about how the namer also enjoyed the benefits of the health, wellness and power that a name carried. "My grandpa used to call me Neyow, because he gave me my name," he said. "He used to call me "my body." Danny explained that "every name he gave was added to his life. Every child that you give a name to adds to your life; it gives you life. That's why he was over 100 years old! He named a lot of children. "Neyow. My body, come here!" That's what Neyow means."

Naming fostered a connection between elders and infants; those who were closest to the doorways of the spirit world. Within this life, the provision of spirit names by an elder to an infant created bonds along the continuum of life. This can be seen in the work of Mandelbaum, who found that female elders were more often called upon to name girls, and that the namer and infant established a lifelong relationship through this practice: "The two called each other nikweme, and seem to have maintained something of the grandparent-grandchild relationship."[58]

As described in numerous sources on Nēhiyawakak and Anishinaabek peoples, naming typically involved a feast that was attended by family and community.[59] These ceremonies could occur close to the birth, or some time later, and they ranged from casual events to much more formal ceremonies. The oral historian Fine Day explained how this worked among the late 19th century Plains Cree people of his childhood. "When a child is born, the parents prepare food, get some cloth, fill a pipe and call in an old man," he said. "Many people come to watch. Old man takes cloth and smokes and talks to spirit, sings, gives it the name and asks spirit to make the name the guardian of the child. Child is passed around until it reaches the mother, and men and women hold the child as they pass it, expressing a wish for the baby.[60]" Although there are various other versions of the naming ceremonies and feasts in the literature, they commonly celebrate and secure the bond between community members, the spirit world and the child.

Some of the participants in this study spoke of naming ceremonies they witnessed in their communities. "You'd call the old folks and they'd see the baby," June said. "And as soon as they see the baby they'd name it....Whatever they saw." Marie remembered naming ceremonies that were always attended by a number of elders.[61] She noted that

there was always a child from the community who would sit by the doorway where the ceremony was being held. In these ceremonies, the community was witness to the establishment of a spirit helper for the infant. She described it saying "they would pass the baby around and then the baby would tell the elder what their spirit name was. The baby and the elder would speak the same language, which was a language that no one else could understand. And they would speak this language for maybe five, ten seconds. Then they would go back to their regular language, and the baby's name would come from the spirit that accompanied them."

When I first asked Maria about naming ceremonies in her community, she replied that "we didn't have elaborate ceremonies like we do today."[62] In some cases the midwives would name the baby at the birth, or otherwise it was an older person in the family that would name the baby. She talked about one ceremony that she witnessed:

> I can remember one of my aunties had a baby and they came to the house. My grandmother delivered the baby out in the tent. When they brought the baby in, we were all sitting around eating supper and I remember this old uncle was holding the baby because he loved babies. Men usually didn't have anything to do with babies and holding them. But he was holding the baby and he gave the baby a name and then he took some food he was eating and I remember him throwing it into the fire...
>
> You don't think about that stuff at the time, but he must have be offering food to the spirits. And that was a feast because everybody had come to see the baby, although nobody called it a feast.

Maria's story demonstrates how communities carried on their ceremonies in a modified

manner in spite of the oppression of traditional ways.

Communities had other ways of celebrating the birth of a child, mostly through support and acknowledgement from the women of the community. As managers of *madjimadzuin*, midwives had lifelong relationships with the babies they caught, and they had various ways of celebrating and honouring this relationship. Marie remembered that her mother always used to crochet clothing for the babies she delivered. Rose talked about the bond that was created between the midwife and child, as witnessed in the practices of her grandmother, saying "it was always a special day. She never forgot the days when a baby was born. That was his birthday. And they were always celebrated in a small kind of way. Not like they do today, but she'd always make a little hat, or little pants, or a dress for them; it was always home made." Rose remembered that the women in the community were always making care packages to welcome new babies, with diapers, quilts, receiving blankets, vests, t-shirts, diaper covers, sweaters, bonnets, dresses, and boys clothing.

**Caring for Infants and Toddlers**

Once they had been welcomed by their communities, infants settled into a life that was characterized by careful attention to their needs. Jenness observed how committed the Wasauksing Ojibway were to their infants. He wrote that "a child required the tenderest care even before it saw the light of day. Both before and after it was born the mother talked to it, teaching its soul and shadow such information as the habits of the animals it would encounter as it grew up."[63] He commented on how spiritual needs of the infant were tended to, alongside care for their physical being:

> Although a baby might appear to learn nothing for several months, the Parry Islanders thought that its soul and shadow were extremely active, conscious of things that were hidden from adult eyes. Objects that its parents could not see caused it to smile or laugh, brought it to pleasure or pain. Shadows (udjibbom) from the world around, especially shadows of animals, visited it continually; and its own shadow, attached to its body by only slender bonds, wandered far and wide over the earth, gathering experience and knowledge. During this early period of its existence the baby needed special protection lest its soul and shadow should permanently disassociate themselves and its body waste away and die.[64]

Concern over the fragility of new life resulted in many protocols and customs related to protecting the baby.[65] Rebecca learned that quiet time in the newborn stage was important because of the precariousness of new life, and this was the reason for staying close to home with the newborn. "My elder explained that the spirit is pulsing inside the new baby," she said. "In order for the spirit to become secure, a mother needs to stay at home for six weeks, all the while maintaining a sense of peace. Over the six week period, the spirit will eventually quiet and fill the child."

Marie's mother taught her that one should always whisper around babies, because if you spoke to them directly they would speak back. She told a story that mirrors a story that her father (Francis Pegahmagabow) told Diamond Jenness in 1929. In her father's story, a new baby was asked "Where are you from" and answered, "From far away." Marie's father explained to Jenness that "the Great Spirit saw that this baby was born with too much power and he caused it to die." He cautioned, "So you must never ask

questions of a baby." Marie had a similar experience with a baby when she was eleven or twelve. She recounted:

> One time I asked my mother "How come nobody can speak [around a newborn]?" She said, "It's good you asked. There's a ball game on. We'll go down."
> So I forgot all about the question and we went down to the ball game. [ A new mother] was sitting there with her babies. Somebody came along and said, "Oh, let's see her babies." She picked up the baby and was playing with the baby's chin. Then she said, "Where did you come from?" to this baby. And right off the bat the baby said, (oh, he was rolling his eyes), "Waasa" (far away). So my mother nudged me like that. I'm trying to watch the game and I'm watching the babies. I heard him say three or four words.

When they got home, Marie's mother explained that "children are born intelligent and each person that's born brings a gift to the world." She cautioned Marie against speaking loudly or directly to babies in case they would respond.

In terms of the physical care provided for babies, Elsie remembered that there was no scheduling; babies were changed when they needed to be changed, and when they were hungry they were fed. She commented that "the baby was never alone as far as I know." Infants enjoyed a sense of comfort and security through swaddling and/or being in close contact with their mothers. Glecia Bear talked about how the Cree believed this was important by reflecting on the changes she had seen:

> Today... before the child is born, they already look for a separate room, they put a crib in it and also a bottle, all these white-man's things. In the old days the children were swaddled in a moss bag, warmly swaddled up with the moss, but they now wrap

them without anything, and when they bring them home, there they simply dump their baby into that nursery. When the baby cries, they immediately put cow's milk into a bottle and simply give that to the baby, they do not hold the child.... in the old days the baby used to be held while suckling, you kissed it and held it and you unbundled it.[66]

Babies were often put in swings to nap or sleep where they could be near their family members. Maria remembers that the new babies would be "strung up inside of the tent or right outside where the old people would look after them," and Elsie remembered the elders singing lullabies to the children while swinging them.

Up into the middle of the twentieth century, cradleboards (or *tikinaagan* as people commonly refer to them in Anishinaabemowin) were widely used by Algonquian peoples across North America. This allowed mothers to keep in close contact with their babies, and for babies to interact with community members. Frances Densmore offered the following description of the cradleboards used by the Ojibway:

The cradle board, in which a baby spent most of the first year of its life, consisted of a board about 24 inches long with a curved piece of wood at one end to confine the child's feet and a hoop at right angles above the other end. A light rod was fastened loosely to one side of the cradle board and to this were attached the two binding bands, about six inches wide, which were pinned or tied over the child. In the old days the upper end of the board was cut in points and painted red or blue, and the entire structure was held together by thongs. Inside the curved wood at the foot of the cradle board was birch bark of the same shape filled with soft moss. The hoop for the child's head served as a support for a blanket in winter and a thin cloth in summer, thus

protecting the child's head from the weather. On this hoop were hung small articles intended as charms for the child's amusement.[67]

Densmore explained that the mother could carry the cradleboard on her back, with the assistance of a strap that went around her chest and/or forehead. When the mother was not carrying the cradleboard, it could be propped up against a tree so that the child could watch his or her mother and other community members while they worked.

The Anishinaabek of Densmore's study saw cradleboards as a way of developing the child's physical and mental capacities. "It was the desire of the Chippewa that their children should be straight and vigorous, and to that end the mother began a child's training in early infancy," she wrote. "Two means were employed for this training as well as for convenience in taking care of the child. These were (1) the cradleboard and (2) a custom which arose after the Chippewa obtained cotton cloth and which may be designated as "pinning up the baby." With these forms of restraint they alternated periods of freedom when the child was "let out for exercise."[68] Densmore observed that "the cradleboard afforded warmth and protection, and it is said that children cried to be put back in the cradle board after being out of it for a time."[69] The upright position of the cradleboard also facilitated interaction between the baby and his or her community, and the hours they spent observing their families at work were thought to increase their capacity for learning.

Cradleboards were packed with soft moss which served as diapers for the babies. On a trip to Lake Pikangikum in 1932, Hallowell made note of the "highly absorbent and deodorant properties" of sphagnum moss, commenting that it "could be seen drying in the sun in almost every camp."[70] According to the York Factory elders that Flora Beardy

worked with, "If a woman knew she was going to have her baby before the following summer, she would pick the moss during the previous summer and dry it,"[71] and Flannery recorded that James Bay Cree babies spent the first year of their lives in a moss bag.[72]

Although elders in this study did not talk about using cradleboards, moss was commonly used during their childhoods, and infants were swaddled in "moss bags" that were made of fabric and laced up the front to hold the baby snugly. Rebecca talked about how the child learned to self-soothe when snuggled into a moss bag or put onto a cradleboard, explaining:

> They like going into the moss bag. It's training for them to quiet themselves and get ready to sleep. And when they wake up and they let you know, you go to them with a smile and they are eager to come out and to be fed. When you take them out, you massage them, and stretch their limbs, and there is this loving gentle massage, coming out of the moss bag or the cradleboard. The child is absolutely adored and cherished and stimulated when they come out. Then they are changed, and they are fed and bathed and played with. And then when they start getting tired, you put them back in. And so they learn this rhythm of being welcomed into awake, and then quieted and put back in to sleep.

In the past, moss was used as diapers, and a number of the elders had stories about this. Olive remembered about how the moss was cleaned:

> There was a certain moss that the grannies used to go and gather; it's a moss that's very woolly and spongy. It's kind of a pinkish colour, a very healthy moss. The other mosses are kind of chunky and not good. At times you used to see this moss hanging

all over on the branches. They'd pull that and put it all over the branches and they'll leave it there until it was good and dry. That was the old ladies' job. They used to take a canvas or whatever so they could spread it on the ground, take all these down and comb through them. That must've been a days and days work, because they had to stock up for winter. They used to take out all the little twigs and soil.

Madeleine remembered the men in her community hooking up horses to the wagon and driving the women to collect moss for the babies. Although in some communities this was the job of the old ladies, Rosella was required to make moss bags as a teenager for the children that came after her. She remembered that the moss she found was in the muskeg and was very soft and light green, and noted that it was important that she get all the bugs and twigs out so the baby would be comfortable. This would also prevent crying while the family was travelling.

Infant care involved breastfeeding, which was valued not just for the nutrition it provided, but for the bonding it allowed between the mother and infant. In earlier times, children were breastfed at least until two years of age, and in some instances until they were four or five.[73] The elders in this study remembered that breastfeeding was still widely practiced in their childhood communities, but they also talked about conflicting values that had begun to creep in with the mainstream health campaign against breastfeeding. Maria remembered when the health nurse came to her community and told mothers that it was unhealthy to breastfeed: "They were pushing, I think it was Carnation. It was milk with a cow on it." Elders have been known to speak strongly on this subject. "These young women who give birth to a child today," Glecia Bear said, "they could not

claim to be the ones to have the child and to call it their child, the cows have raised the child for them; for the cows have given life to the child which has been born."[74]

Olive remembered some old ladies in her community admonishing the younger generations for moving away from breastfeeding. She relayed that "there used to be this old lady who would say that there's a purpose that a woman was given breasts is to feed the little ones. She and another older lady were coming to the feast and I was standing not too far from there. "Oh," she said to the three little girls, "Look at these three girls," She said, "Look at how much they stare. I won't be a bit surprised if these three were brought up with cow's milk because they're staring exactly like the cows do." In this old lady's thinking, "when we nurse the babies, they're much stronger....But now, when they grow up with animal milk, I don't know if they'll even listen to us." Glecia Bear was of the opinion that discipline problems were the result of parents not bonding with children in the same ways that they had done in the past.[75]

As children moved from infancy to toddler years, there were ceremonies to mark the transition towards one's eventual status as a working community member. Walking, or "walking out," was often celebrated with a ceremony. Regina Flannery documented how "walking out" worked among the James Bay Cree, explaining that Cree communities did not want the baby to go in or out of the tent alone until s/he was able to walk, at which point they would have a feast for the baby.[76] Flannery framed the walking out ceremony as "a symbol of success in the food quest,"[77] for boys were required to walk where they might find game, and girls were to go where there was firewood. This practice symbolized roles they would find themselves in later in life, of procuring and cooking the meat respectively.

Flannery described the ceremony for girls:

> When the first walking-out ceremony was for a little girl, she was equipped with a miniature wooden kettle-hook and axe. She walks towards a pack of firewood in which there was a small amount of meat. Brought this to the oldest woman, who took the pack from her back and the wood was used to cook the meat. The meat was then given to the oldest man who put a bit in the fire with a short informal prayer that the child may have a long life.... then meat from the feast is distributed, the old man eating first and rubbing grease on the child's head."[78]

Although I did not collect any stories about walking out ceremonies in my interviews, many of the elders in this study are involved in walking out ceremonies as they are carried out today. These ceremonies involve gathering family and community members to celebrate the transition into toddler years, typically around the time of the child's first steps. Participants in the ceremony bring gifts and wishes that pertain to the child's future, as he or she "walks out" in that direction. These things are placed into a bundle that they carry as they walk around the circle of friends and family. They are thus literally and figuratively equipped to move into the life stages that follow.

## Conclusion

The beliefs, practices and protocols related to this first life stage demonstrate how northern Algonquian peoples valued the sacredness of life, and how they took great measures to foster and protect it. Perhaps because of the precariousness of new life, the utmost care was taken during this life stage. Pregnancy, infant and toddler care was taken seriously, as is demonstrated by the particularities of the protocols involved. Food and

conduct protocols during pregnancy demanded a discipline from not only the mother but, ideally, other members of the family and community. The care that community members collectively provided during this time was meant to ensure that the newest members learned to trust and depend on the world they had entered.

Ultimately, the health of the baby was connected to the health of the community, and babies also brought communities together through the care that was required and the joy and hope that they represented. Connections between the baby, family, community, the natural world and the spirit world were ensured through practices related to the care of the placenta and umbilical cord, naming ceremonies and walking out ceremonies. These practices of care and ceremony were more than about simply looking after the health of the infant; they were about maintaining life force. This is evident in considering, for example, that elders might extend their lives by naming infants, as these connections allowed for the movement of energy that sustained the life continuum. Women had the most significant roles in terms of maintaining this life force, although all members of the community partook in responsibilities to ensure the well-being of their babies into the future. This "good life" extended into childhood, where different types of responsibilities and preparatory measures were taken, as I will describe in the next chapter.

## Notes

[1] See, for example Robert Alain Brightman, *Grateful Prey: Rock Cree Human-Animal Relationships* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
[2] Diamond Jenness, *Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island: Their Social and Religious Life.* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1935), 90.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] See Michael A. Weiner, *Earth Medicine - Earth Foods; Plant Remedies, Drugs, and Natural Foods of the North American Indians, by Michael A. Weiner* (New York: Macmillan, 1972); and Virgil J. Vogel, *American Indian Medicine, by Virgil J. Vogel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970).
[6] Joseph F. Dion and Hugh Aylmer Dempsey, *My Tribe, the Crees* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1979), p. 6.
[7] M. Inez Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life and its Cultural Background* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951), 2, 10.
[8] Ibid., 4.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 3.
[11] In their book on Métis women in northern Saskatchewan in the late 1970s, Poelzer and Poelzer note the rejection of family planning on religious grounds. Dolores R. Poelzer and Irene A. Poelzer, *In our Own Words: Northern Saskatchewan Métis Women Speak Out* (Saskatoon: Lindenblatt and Hamonic, 1986), 131.
[12] Nathalie J. Kermoal, *Un Passé Métis Au Feminin* (Quebec, Quebec: Les Editions GED, 2006), 106.
[13] Campbell is quoted by Kim Anderson in "Vital Signs: Reading Colonialism in Contemporary Adolescent Family Planning," in *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival*, eds. Kim Anderson and Bonita Lawrence (Toronto: Sumach/Canadian Scholars' Press, 2003).
[14]Kermoal, *Un Passé Métis,* 106.
[15] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 3.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Quote taken from Kim Anderson, "Vital Signs,"181.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 6-9.
[20] Ibid., 6.
[21] It is important to note that pregnancy protocols are still taught among Aboriginal peoples today.
[22] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life*, 6.
[23] Hilger reported that "mothers were encouraged to eat venison, wild rice, lake trout and whitefish." Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life*, 7-8.
[24] Regina Flannery, "Infancy and Childhood Among the Indians of the East Coast of James Bay," *Anthropos* 57 (1962), 482.
[25] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 9; Flannery,"Infancy and Childhood," 476.
[26] See also Flora Beardy's recordings of the stories of Hudson Bay Cree elders, who told her that "a long time ago when the girls were young they were told how to prepare themselves for childbirth. They were always told to stay active." Flora Beardy and Robert Coutts, *Voices from Hudson Bay: Cree Stories from York Factory* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 47.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 6.
[29] Ibid., 8.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Information from personal communication with Anishinaabe Elder Mary Elliot, Sault Ste. Marie, May 2004.
[32] Flannery, "Infancy and Childhood," 476; Kermoal, *Un Passé Métis*, 107; Sarah Preston and Alice Jacob , *Let the Past Go: A Life History* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1986), 35.
[33] Flannery, "Infancy and Childhood," 476.
[34] Flannery, Ibid.; Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 13.

[35] Hilger, Ibid., 13.
[36] Ibid., 12.
[37] Bear, quoted in Freda Ahenakew and H. Christoph Wolfart, eds., *Kohkominawak Otacimowiniwawa: Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in their Own Words* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1992), 73.
[38] Ibid., 75.
[39] Sarah Carter, "First Nations Women of Prairie Canada in the Early Reserve Years, the 1870s to the 1920s: A Preliminary Inquiry," in *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength,* eds. Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996), 63.
[40] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 11, 15.
[41] Hilger, Flannery and Mandelbaum have documented labour practices, focusing in particular on the position of the mother during delivery which often included moving around, kneeling or standing, and using a sapling or rope to brace themselves. See Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 13 – 16; David Goodman Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1979), 241; and Regina Flannery, John S. Long, and Laura L. Peers, *Ellen Smallboy: Glimpses of a Cree Woman's Life* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 31.
[42] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 16.
[43] Freda Ahenakew and H. Christoph Wolfart, eds. *Kohkominawak Otacimowiniwawa = our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in their Own Words* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1992), 75; Regina Flannery, "Infancy and Childhood" *Anthropos* 57 (1962), 477.
[44] Mandelbaum and Flannery reported that the Plains and James Bay Cree respectively wrapped the placenta and placed it in a tree out of harm's way. See Flannery, "Infancy and Childhood," 477; and Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree,* 139.
[45] Flannery, "Infancy and Childhood," 478; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree,* 139.
[46] Flannery, ibid.
[47] Madelbaum, *Plains Cree,* 139.
[48] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 16.
[49] Hilger, ibid., 17.
[50] Densmore studied Anishinaabek communities in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Ontario between 1907 and 1925. See Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Customs* (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1970), 51.
[51] Ibid., 52.
[52] Ibid., 52-53.
[53] A. Irving (Alfred Irving) Hallowell (Jennifer S. H. Brown, ed.) *Ojibwa of Berens River, Manitoba: Ethnography into History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), 12-13.
[54] Amelia M. Paget, *People of the Plains* (Regina: University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Center, 2004), 35.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Densmore, *Chippewa Customs,* 56; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree,* 242.
[57] Densmore, Ibid.
[58] Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree,* 141. See also Preston, who reported "naming the baby places the person giving the name in a god-parent relationship to the child." Sarah Preston and Alice Jacob, *Let the Past Go: A Life History* (Ottawa, Ont.: National Museums of Canada, 1986), 101.
[59] Joseph F. Dion, *My Tribe, the Crees* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1979), 16; Fine Day, *My Cree People: A Tribal Handbook* (Invermere, B.C.: Good Medicine Books, 1973), 14; Hallowell, *Ojibwa of the Berens Rivers,* 12-13, Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree,* 140; Alanson Skinner, *Notes on the Eastern Cree and Northern Saulteaux, by Alanson Skinner* (New York: The Trustees, 1911), 151; Ignatia Broker and Steven Premo, *Night Flying Woman: An Ojibway Narrative* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1983), 14-15.
[60] FineDay, *My Cree People,* 14.
[61] Marie's memories correspond to the documentation of naming feasts by Diamond Jenness, who did field research in her community of Wasauksing shortly before her birth. Marie's father, the celebrated WWI war hero Francis Pegahmagabow was one of Jenness's primary informants.
[62] Maria is referring to the many ceremonies that are practiced today as part of the revival of traditional practices in Algonquian communities.

[63] Jenness, *Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island*, 90. Jenness explained that the Wasauksing Ojibway believed that people have both a soul and a shadow. The soul resided in the heart, and was capable of travelling outside the body but only for short periods of time. It was the seat of intelligence and will. The shadow was located in the brain, and was considered the "eyes of the soul," awakening the soul to "perception and knowledge." Unlike the soul, the shadow could travel widely and often went in front of or behind a person who was travelling. See Jenness, ibid., 18-19.
[64] Ibid., 91.
[65] As I have written elsewhere, "Many Aboriginal cultures teach that infancy is a precarious time, as the spirit can easily slip back into the other world. Some Anishinaabe people advise keeping the baby in the home environment for the first forty days. It is deemed particularly dangerous to take the newborn into environments where she or he might come into contact with negative energy, or where there may be spirits waiting to take the baby back. This is why babies do not attend wakes. Some Aboriginal peoples put holes in a newborn's moccasins as a protective measure. Western Cree say that this gives the baby an excuse not to go if a spirit should come to take them. Some Cree tie a black string around the infant's wrist to ward off malevolent spirits, or set a small stick beside the sleeping infant soothe can defend themselves. The soft spot is also a significant reminder of the baby's borderline status. Algonquian and Haudenosaunee peoples say that this opening on the baby's head represents openness to the spirit world. The baby is still connected to that world until that soft spot closes." See Kim Anderson, "New Life Stirring: Mothering, Transformation and Aboriginal Womanhood," in *"Until our Hearts are on the Ground: Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth,* eds. D. Memee Lavell-Harvard and Jeannette Corbiere Lavell (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2006), 21.
[66] Bear quoted in Ahenekew, *Kohkominawak Otacimowiniwawa,* 223, 225.
[67] Densmore, *Chippewa Customs,* 49.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Hallowell, *Ojibwa of the Berens Rivers,* 9.
[71]Beardy and Coutts, *Voices from Hudson Bay,* 47.
[72] Flannery, "Infancy and Childhood," 478.
[73] Kermoal, *Un Passé Métis,* 109; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree,* 143; Skinner, *Notes on the Eastern Cree,* 151.
[74] Bear quoted in Ahenekew, *Kohkominawak Otacimowiniwawa,* 225.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Flannery, "Infancy and Childhood," 478.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 479.

# CHAPTER IV

# "WALKING OUT" TO PUBERTY

> Every stage of childhood was a celebration because children needed to develop a sense of belonging; that sense that "You are important to the people." [If] a child doesn't have a sense of belonging and responsibility as part of the whole, that's the weakness that will tear up a community. That's the weakness that the child will have in later years, in times of great need or difficulty. In the old days, they might have even had to put their life [on the line] to save another community member.
>
> There was a selfless bravery that children learned in the past. We needed that sense of togetherness and that sense of belonging to live in "the wilderness." Everybody had to work together to survive. [And children needed to learn] that there was order! There were rules and regulations to everything; there were boundaries, and so as children grew they began to learn family law, and community law.
>
> That's the kind of disciplines that I had to learn, belonging to the community.
>
> Mosôm Danny Musqua

Midewiwin teachings refer to the childhood years as "the good life," for in this life stage, one's needs were ideally provided for in a supportive environment. According to Mosôm, it was critical to treat children well so they could learn trust and a enjoy sense

of belonging. As in the first life stage, nurturing was paramount. But in this life stage children also began to learn and practice independence and responsibility. As Mosôm has pointed out, childhood was a time to begin to learn the disciplines of the community in anticipation of becoming a full contributing member. Adolescence was a turning point in which children broke from "the good life" into what Midewiwin teachers refer to as "the fast life," a time of rapid change, introspection, vision, sacrifice and transition.

Childhood and youth thus involved play as well as preparation towards adult responsibilities, with puberty as the pivotal time for determining the quality of the life ahead. This chapter examines the disciplines, work and play of children and the rites of passage associated with puberty. It also explores how principles of independence and interdependence were fostered during this life stage, demonstrating that children were raised as autonomous individuals who were given a lot of freedom while also being expected to maintain responsibilities to family and community. Through this upbringing, the "good life" fostered a sense of duty and commitment in the child, while the "fast life" shifted them into their adult years and responsibilities.

**The 'Good Life:' Nurturing, Discipline, Self-Reliance and Interdependence**

Algonquian childrearing techniques are evident in the observations of early European visitors, who were witness to "the good life" among Indigenous children. They were often perplexed by Indigenous childrearing styles and approaches, typically interpreting the nurturing as indulgence and a lack of discipline. The Jesuits of New France remarked on the "excessive love of their offspring" among the Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples they encountered, and complained that the children enjoyed "the

liberty of wild-assed colts."[1] In the words of historian J.R. Miller, Indigenous childrearing was characterized by an "absence of coercion and routine" which made the Jesuits proposed school regime unpalatable.[2]

Differences between Indigenous childrearing techniques and European approaches were so profound that, two and a half centuries later, Eurowestern observers continued to express both curiosity and judgment on this matter. The reaction of settlers in late nineteenth-century western Canada were documented by Amelia Paget, who wrote that "the love of their children was a particularly pathetic trait in their natures. The youngsters were actually adored, and consequently would impress a stranger as being very badly brought up. They were never corrected for any faults, but, up to a certain age, did as they pleased, when, of their own accord, they seemed to realize the respect due to their parents." [3]

Historian Nathalie Kermoal has noted that nineteenth century observers were critical of what they perceived to be the lax childrearing methods of the Métis. Kermoal quotes the Oblate missionary Alexandre Taché who opined that Métis women sacrificed the overall well-being of their children because of the pleasure they took from them and their apparent fear to correct ("*la crainte de les reprendre*").[4] Kermoal also refers to French historian Marcel Giraud's remarks about the "affection exagérée" that Métis and "Indien" alike demonstrated towards their young.[5] Discipline from a Eurowestern child's point of view resulted in a more sympathetic take in the writing of Egerton Ryerson Young (II). The son of a missionary, Young spent his early years among the Cree and Saulteaux in Manitoba and had a Cree nanny from 1869-1876. In his memoirs Young

reflected on the absence of corporal punishment and coercion, pointing out that his Cree nanny chose, rather, to engage in storytelling as a disciplinary measure.[6]

Responses to distinct childrearing approaches of Indigenous peoples continued into the twentieth century. Early twentieth-century anthropologists such as Mandelbaum and Skinner commented on the liberty and indulgence enjoyed by Cree children.[7] Mandelbaum wrote that Plains Cree children "were never beaten and rarely reprimanded" and Skinner observed that the James Bay Cree "taught by example" and "rarely struck."[8] Yet these ongoing responses to Indigenous childrearing should not be interpreted as a lack of discipline for, as J.R. Miller has pointed out, Eurowestern observers "usually failed to note that, among Indians, discipline was applied to children, although it was administered in ways unfamiliar to the intruders."[9]

Miller has described the most common elements of traditional Indigenous childrearing (education), which include positive role modeling, the use of games, storytelling and rites of passage ceremonies.[10] Children were disciplined by "indirect and non-coercive means,"[11] which Miller linked to widespread Indigenous principles around respecting an individual's autonomy:

> ...among North American indigenous societies in general there was a powerful imperative to avoid imposing one's will on another individual in any but the most extreme situations. This respect for autonomy was extended to young children, permitting them great scope for self expression and preventing the use of direct, coercive techniques of behaviour modification. Hence, the family and community's efforts to educate the young as to acceptable conduct had to be carried out by the use

of sanctions such as embarrassment or ridicule, and the more positive force of story and example.[12]

Part of learning the value of independence and autonomy meant that children were not only disciplined, but had to become self-disciplining. The ability to be self-disciplined was important because it fed into the survival of both individual and community. In her work among the Anishinabek, Frances Densmore learned that children needed to know how to be quiet and still, as circumstances often required a composed demeanor. "The ability of a child to keep still when surprised or frightened," she wrote, "was more important to the Indian than to the white race. For example, the scream of a child might cost the lives of many people if an enemy were approaching the village." [13] Densmore observed that Chippewa women never allowed a baby to cry and that "when the children were old enough to listen attentively it was still desired to keep them quiet in the evening." She described a "game of silence" in which "a prize was given to the child who showed the most self-control."[14]

Minnesota elder Ignatia Broker talked about how discipline started early when her grandmother was a child. In her oral testimony, she noted that being strapped in the cradleboard was the beginning of her grandmother's experience in restraint. "She began to learn this in the customary way," she said. "At certain times when she cried, a brushy stick was scraped across her face and her lips were pinched. These actions would be repeated if the family needed to make a silent journey; then Oona would know she must not cry. It was a matter of survival, especially if there were enemies in the forest."[15]

These examples demonstrate that childrearing was the exercise of what might appear to be contradictory practices of encouraging freedom and autonomy on the one

hand, and instilling unwavering responsibility and discipline on the other. Yet, as psychologist Carol A. Markstrom has pointed out, traditional Indigenous societies were grounded in a co-existence between interdependence and individualism, and this was fostered in children from an early age. Individuals gained status and recognition for their accomplishments, but it was always connected to how well their contributions served the welfare of the group.[16] Markstrom writes of the "profound implications for identity formation" that arise out of this balance between interdependence and individualism, as the child learns his or her own value as well as their place within their community.[17] This corresponds with Mosôm's teaching; that children needed to develop a sense of esteem and belonging which was connected to family and community responsibility.[18] The values that accompanied identity formation were taught throughout childhood and reinforced in a formal way at coming-of age ceremonies.[19]

Although not a universal feeling, many of today's elders spent their early years in an environment of nurturing and what might be called "indulgence."[20] Reflecting generally about the position of children in her community, Madeleine recalled that "no matter how big families were, I always felt that children were very well taken care of and shown a lot of affection." Elsie remarked on how children were always the "centre of the home." She talked about how "everyone looked after [all the children]," noting that whatever their needs were, somebody would take care of them. As prototypical models of "it takes a community to raise a child," there was a sense of collective care and responsibility for children in traditional Aboriginal communities. Rebecca made this point with her memory that children went freely from house to house and were fed no matter whose child they were.

The collective responsibility for children is also evident in examining the relationships between elders and children in the childhood communities of the participants. Madeleine remembered that people did not distinguish whose child it was; "everybody had a kind word. Maybe old people called you by an affectionate name or gave you a [nickname] and that's how they would greet you." Elsie told a story about how she confounded the nuns at boarding school with her fluid and multiple sets of "grandparents":

> When I went away to school I had to enter a convent, and I signed away my life. There were only a few times you could go home: when somebody died in your immediate family, at Christmas (if you could) and in the summer. [When elders died] I would want to go home. [I'd tell them] "My grandfather has passed away." Finally the old nun said, "Elsie, you can only have four grandparents!" But I didn't even know the elders' names. They were just *Nohkom* (grandmother) and *Mosôm (*grandfather), and they [all] called me *Nososim* (grandchild).

All of the old people played a grandparent role to Elsie, and this meant that she was not only the recipient of care, but that she was accountable to them. She talked about having to pay attention to her conduct "as one of them...all over the community." Elsie was also accountable for what happened at school, as the community had raised funds to send her. She laughed as she remembered, "I would be stopped all along the road as I was walking [because] I had to be accountable for my grades and how I was doing."

Sylvia talked about a similar upbringing, stating "What I remember about being young is that I had a lot of grandmothers and grandfathers, and I felt loved and cared for by all of them. I never dawned on me until much later that I could only have two sets of

grandparents." She remembered being both nurtured and "learning about life" from her multiple sets of "grandparents."

While the care of children was a matter for the collective, there were distinct roles in childrearing according to age, gender and position within the family. Men were seldom involved in the primary care of young children because of the nature of their work; up to the age of seven or eight, children typically spent time with grandparents, older siblings and mothers. Mothers and aunts were close to their children, but the requirements of their work also meant that much of the childcare fell to elders and older children. Maria talked about her responsibilities as an older sibling and how this worked in collaboration with her elders:

> We had to drag all of our little brothers and sisters with us wherever we went. You didn't take off and go play by yourself without the kids. You had to take the younger kids along for two reasons. One: they needed a babysitter because your mother was busy. The second reason was because you didn't get into trouble when you had a bunch of little kids toddling [after] you. You couldn't go too far. And then your grannies watched out for you. You were still doing the work, but the old ladies were keeping track of you.

According to Danny, the care that children were provided also taught them how to be members of an interdependent community.

Many of the elders grew up under the eye of their grandparents, particularly in their earlier years. In some cases grandparents were the primary caregivers because of illness in either the parent or child, death of a parent or because parents were away working. Overall, primary care by grandparents was not seen as unusual as it came from a

long tradition among Indigenous peoples. Mandelbaum noticed this in his research, and wrote that children "spent a great deal of time with their grandparents and relatively little with their parents who were preoccupied with adult tasks and cares."[21]

Childcare on the part of grandparents suited the labour requirements of land based societies, but this arrangement was also important because it facilitated traditional education. As the most senior and knowledgeable members of the community, elders were the teachers, and the instruction they offered began with the youngest members of the community. Gertie explained that elders would typically look after children until they were ready to begin more intense training for adult work. "The elders spent more time with the youngest children because they didn't have to be as focused on learning the value of the work," she said. "The fun and the joy of working, the grandparents could take care of that. But when they became young men and young women, the actual value to the family of the work and the effort that was required could be brought home more clearly by the mother and the father and the aunties and the uncles."

Some participants remembered that it was more pleasant to spend time with their elders because they weren't so stressed about getting the work done. The lessened work demands of the elderly meant that they had time to teach. Because Maria's grandmother was still very active as a midwife, Maria remembered that it was her great-grandmother who had the time to answer questions. She recalled that her great grandmother was too old to do the heavy work; "but she could take you out berry picking; show you where the medicines and things were." She noted that her grandmother would help, "but you were the one who did the grunt work. She would [then] sit down and tell me stuff," she said, "so I preferred being with her than with my grandmother, because my grandmother was

too busy. She was helping my mom, she was tanning hides, she was a worker. So we liked being with [great-grandma] because it was always mellow and laid back. If we were lazy and didn't feel like working, well then she would sit and tell us stories!" Grandparents were also the ones who had time to deal with "teachable moments," which came across in Hilary's memories of her grandmother helping her process the racism she experienced as a child.

Reciprocity in relationships was an important principle, and this can been seen in the relationships between grandparents and grandchildren. Youngsters were not simply passive recipients of care and teaching. They were often helpers to their grandparents and were given tasks and responsibilities that facilitated their learning. Gertie remembered that her grandmother would ask her mother to send the children over when she needed help with physical labour. She remarked on her grandmother's skills in making the children feel important and proud, while at the same time motivating them to do the work: "We would stretch the hides for her. At a given point in time, when you are doing hide tanning, you have to stretch that skin. When the hair is all off and all the little fleshy parts are all off and it's nice and clean and it has been doing this soaking business for awhile, then you have the take the water out of the hide and you have to stretch it. Well, there's nothing more perfect than five little kids, all stretching this hide that she was preparing!"

Like Gertie, Maria pointed out that her great-grandmother supervised all manner of chores and tasks, but "most of the time it was us that did the work." Maria also often acted as a "runner" to her grandmother, and she learned a lot from this experience. Likewise, Rose was a helper to her grandmother who worked as a healer. This learning

relationship as well as a more general discussion of the formal, non-formal and informal teaching roles of elders is offered in Chapter VI.

As noted by Gertie earlier, children also had close relationships with aunts and uncles, and these relationships were more significant as they grew older and needed to develop the disciplines required of an adult life. There was a transition of care that happened between seven years old and puberty; what Mosôm calls the "little men and little women" years of moving a child from family circles to community circles. Amelia Paget talked about the "complete alteration" that she witnessed in children moving from the life of "doing as they pleased" into the disciplines that were impressed upon them by people other than their parents. She wrote that "no disrespect for elders was tolerated, and when the children were supposed to have reached years of discretion they were soon made to understand this, not by their parents but by other relatives and friends. Consequently the parents were spared the pain of correcting their children.[22] According to Gertie, aunts and uncles took on a bigger role in caring for older children because they were "a little more energetic in their approach." In her community, disciplining children was a key role for aunts and uncles.

Danny and Maria remembered that there were certain uncles and aunts who took a lead role in instilling discipline and correcting undesired behaviour. Maria talked about the role of "gawas" and "nocawisis": the "little mothers" and "little fathers," stating that "they teach you because your mother and father can't." She remembered one great uncle who played this role:

> [There was a] really old man, my dad's great uncle; we called him "uncle" and he was the one who would get after us. He'd step in if we were being out of line, but he was

> also really kind to us. We were never scared of him, but boy, when he got after us we smartened up. He'd take us aside, he'd tell my brothers, "You don't talk like that to your dad." Or, "Don't have that kind of an attitude." And so he'd preach to us, whereas our grandfathers, our Mosôms never did that.

Maria's story corresponds to Paget's findings a generation earlier, where Cree and Métis children were reprimanded by aunts, uncles and friends when they being disrespectful of their parents.[23]

In Danny's case, it was "Uncle Bill" who was the community judge for the kids. Parents still had a role, but misbehaving children were ultimately referred to others. Danny explained that "if we were behaving badly, my mother would say, "All right. If you are going to behave that way, go and talk to your dad." Then my dad would give us a good lecture. And if we were still misbehaving, he would say "Here." [Motions putting tobacco into the palm of a hand.] "Take a little bit of tobacco. Go and see your Uncle Bill." Danny further explained that Uncle Bill was "much more of a stranger than your mother or father." He would be very nice, and smile a lot, talk a lot, but he had a serious demeanor about him all the time." In presenting tobacco to Uncle Bill, Danny demonstrated that he was willing to learn from his mistake, for one typically presents tobacco to a teacher.

Danny went on to tell a long and engaging story that demonstrated the type of justice that Uncle Bill would administer. In one instance Danny had taken his cousin's bike for a ride after being told to leave it alone. As luck would have it, he got in an accident, damaged the bike and got caught. For this Danny was given tobacco and sent to see Uncle Bill. After trying to minimize what he had done, Uncle Bill replied, "When you

don't ask to take somebody's stuff, you are stealing. There's no such thing as small things. You stole... And once you steal, you steal a little bit more, more, and the next thing you know you want everything for nothing. Just like a small lie to a big lie." The old man then encouraged Danny give up something of equal value. Danny used his nine year-old bargaining skills to try and get away with giving something small, but the old man said, "Your bad decision has brought you to that place of responsibility that you must give up something that carries you around." Through more dialogue Danny was led to the conclusion that the noblest solution was to give his prized horse to his cousin. In the end, Uncle Bill allowed Danny to negotiate this directly with his cousin, who decided to take Danny's dog and new pair of shoes instead.

Upon finishing this story, Danny talked about the disciplines this situation taught in terms of community responsibility, stating "There were community laws, and I had to start behaving like a member of the community." It was Uncle Bill's job to advance Danny's understanding of his responsibilities, including how to handle conflict with other community members.

Traditional disciplinary techniques described by Hilger and Densmore included praise for good behaviour, storytelling, playing on fear and, in some cases, corporal punishment. Both anthropologists pointed out that dialogue was most common. Hilger wrote "every attempt was made to make children mind by speaking to them as occasion arose or by teaching them to do so at times of formal instruction."[24] Densmore's section on the "Government of Children," began with the statement that "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."[25] She added that fear "was often used to induce obedience, but not to an extent which injured the child."[26] Densmore then described how adults would tell stories that might scare children into going to bed on time or staying in the lodge after dark.[27] Fear was generally used to keep children away from situations that were unsafe, and so creatures such as the owl were called upon to deter children from dangerous situations or environments.[28]

Hilger shared some stories of corporal punishment but noted that not all parents approved of whipping children. She quoted an informant as saying "real Indians don't believe in striking children." According to these informants, one could "knock the spirit out of the child."[29] Another one of Hilger's informants reported that her father had chosen to talk to the children every evening rather than using corporal punishment.

Dialogue was paramount and could happen at the individual, family or community level. Densmore was told about a disciplinary technique that involved the whole community during times when the Ojibway would gather in larger camps:

> When everyone had retired and the camp was quiet an old man walked around the camp circle, passing in front of the dark tents. This man was a crier and he made the announcements for the next day, telling whether the people would go hunting or what would be done in the camp. He also gave good advice to the young people who were taught to respect him and obey his words.... He spoke impersonally of the conduct of the young people, describing incidents in such a manner that those concerned in them would know to what he referred. He taught sterling principles of character and gave such advice as he thought was necessary.[30]

The way in which this crier would draw attention to undesirable behaviour corresponds to the use of "shame and ridicule" described by Mandelbaum and Skinner as disciplinary techniques.[31]

Elders in this study remember the use of all of the above-mentioned techniques, though some more than others. Elsie recalled being "lavishly praised" in her childhood, as did Danny and Gertie. A lot of this praise had to do with the quality of their contributions to the work of the family. As seen in the earlier example involving help with tanning hides, Gertie talked about how her grandmother would get the children to help her with various chores. She remarked "for some reason, [helping her] was a big deal to us, because I think what she would make you feel good about being able to do some work."

Some of the participants remembered that there were protocols in their families and communities about how praise was to be used. Maria said that praise was typically done by older sisters or other relatives; praise from a parent was thought to bring bad fortune on a child, perhaps due to an apparent lack of humility. Danny also remembered that praise often came from older siblings and cousins.

A number of the elders talked about the use of corporal punishment in their childhood. Danny's "Uncle Bill" was known as "a switcher," although this reputation was more useful as a threat than as a practice. Danny noted "they never whipped us, but it was [a threat]. He would take out his pocket knife [to carve the switch]. " When asked about corporal punishment, Elsie responded, "[it] was done in my family, but I didn't see it very often. Where I saw corporal punishment was in the school that was run by the

nuns in my community." Elsie also remarked that corporal punishment came into her family in later years when the family and community were beginning to fall apart.

Maria told a story about the time her great-grandmother whipped her with a willow stick.[32] This occurred after Maria had come home feeling wounded from a racist incident at school and had called her father a "good-for-nothing halfbreed." Maria was shocked because her great-grandmother had never hit her before. The beating was accompanied by lots of talk and was never done again. In Rosella's family, corporal punishment was more common. Rosella contextualized this practice by saying, "they called it discipline, but it was abuse. They didn't know the difference. And because alcohol was involved, well, they had no sense of responsibility." Shame, alcohol, and the disintegration of community thus contributed to the use of corporal punishment in cases discussed by elders in this study.

Self-discipline was a highly valued attribute in children. As seen in the earlier reference to the "game of silence,"[33] one way to develop self-discipline was through the practice of becoming a good listener. Danny remembered his grandfather explaining to the Indian Agent that his grandmother held significant responsibilities in terms of teaching the children this skill. His grandfather was emphatic that it was the "old lady" who would teach the children how to be attentive and listen, skills that would be vital as they began hunting. Because Danny was being trained as an oral historian, he received extra tutelage in becoming a good listener. Danny's grandmother was constantly teaching and talking to him as they worked and moved about, and she used land and place as a mnemonic device. Danny remembered being told, "Remember this place! Remember what we were doing here. Look around you. This is where you will find what I'm

showing you; this is what you will remember if you sit here." She wanted him to acquire a system of memory; "a way to remember things by marking places in my mind."

Maria talked about her great-grandmother's lessons in being still and attentive, and about how this was essential to a land-based survival. "[In the spring] we were told to listen to our relatives," she said. "Frogs had been sleeping, and bears [and so on], and they all had dreams and visions and travels to share with us. By listening to animals in the spring or birds coming home, you learned to recognize the different creatures that lived with you." Maria commented that "today when we go outside we just say 'frogs are singing.' But we don't know the forty-some species of frogs that live out there." She added "that was how we learned all of those names, and could distinguish the difference in their voices, or by their songs." She stressed that this was important "because you depended on those creatures for your life."

Self-discipline as well as self-reliance were fostered through practices of non-interference. Rene spoke of the self-reliance he was expected to develop as a child, giving the example that he had to engage in harvesting the food he ate. "They taught it early," he said. "I learned to skin rabbits and go fishing. I learned to cook scone and stuff. You could go hungry without these skills!" Gertie talked about the indirect approach practiced in her upbringing, stating, "I don't recall ever being told to go to bed, or to wake up. Somebody might say very loudly in the kitchen, 'If you stay in that bed much longer, you are going to rot.' But they wouldn't say, 'Wake up now.'

There was a distinction between laissez-faire learning and expectations around family and community responsibility. For example, Gertie had work responsibilities and knew what was expected of her. She commented that "if you are treating and teaching

children as they need to be taught, they will know that they have something to do with the future health of the family." She talked about how they made this distinction as children:

> [As kids] we were under no illusions that if we messed up that deer hide [while helping with tanning] that somebody was going to suffer. We knew that the family would suffer; we knew that the women would suffer, so we did that job right because that's what needed to happen... If you hadn't brought water in for the night, or you hadn't brought wood in and it was your job, you had to do it. No choice, because that affected other people. But if you didn't get your clothes into the wash tub, that was your problem. So that was the difference. If you had something that you were supposed to do that affected the entire family, you did it.

Gertie also talked about how one of her jobs was to set the fish nets. "If we didn't have the fish to either sell, trade or eat, it could get pretty rough," she said.

Gertie's stories demonstrate that work was an important part of childrearing as it taught self-discipline, self-reliance and responsibility to community. Children always had plenty of work to do, and these responsibilities increased with age and ability.[34] As soon as they were able, girls worked alongside their mothers and grandmothers, engaging in domestic, garden and farm work, tanning hides, preparing foods, doing beadwork and sewing, hauling water and wood, berry picking, fishing, trapping and some hunting. These contributions were valuable at the most basic level because of the real contributions they made to family well-being. In particular, mothers with many children needed help with the chores and childcare that would have been unmanageable otherwise.

Rosella spoke about the multiple responsibilities she carried for the upkeep of her family. Her story indicates the kind of independence that was required of her from an

early age. She talked about how she had to collect wood, noting "I would have a dog and a sleigh of my own, and an axe. I'd go way out in the bush. I could go for a mile and I'd chop logs down and I'd fill up my sleigh and I'd come back. But I had to do that because I was the oldest one in the family. The little boys weren't old enough to help me."

Work was graduated according to age so that even the youngest children could make a contribution. Gertie reflected on childhood hunting with her father and uncles, stating "I remember hauling moose out of the bush. It didn't matter how old you were; you could carry something." Maria remembered being involved in food preparation as a youngster, stating, "I started off plucking ducks and skinning rabbits and learning to cut them properly. I picked dandelions and did all that food gathering and learned how to prepare it. At some point people expected me to cook it. You learn that from observation and working with women who are doing it."

Some of the participants talked about how the work could be tedious and exacting at times, but there were as many positive memories. This is likely because the work helped to foster a sense of self-esteem and pride. As noted earlier, children were rewarded and praised for contributing to the well-being of the community and developing skills that would sustain their families in the future. Maria talked about the pride she experienced in being able to "graduate" from one level of contribution to the next when it came to learning how to cook a duck: "I started out by just whining about how I had to pluck the things in the heat like this, sitting under the shady tree and making sure I got all the good feathers into this bag and the bad feathers in that bag and then having to singe them. Then there came a point when it was time for my sister to do it, and I moved up. I would get the ducks after she plucked them." There was a prestige that went along with

this new step. Maria laughed as she commented, "Nobody ever made a big deal when you were sitting back in the bush, plucking."

Work was part of a child's land-based education, and was very different from the formal education system Algonquian children encountered. As stated in the introduction, this thesis is primarily focused on how health and well-being were maintained in northern Algonquian communities and cultures. Because residential school experiences were largely negative (much of which has been documented in other literature),[35] I did not ask the participants about their residential school experiences. Some of the participants, however, volunteered information about the value their families placed on education. Negative feelings about school were thus typically a response to the residential school system and not reflective of resistance to western education on the whole. Many families realized that education was a way to succeed in the world that was coming and they wanted their children to have the opportunities that a good education presented. Olive remembered her father saying that "today everything is changing. You can't afford to be illiterate. It's like being blind." For this reason, Olive's family moved from their original homestead so they could be closer to a day school.

The work ethic that applied to land based education was also applied to formal schooling in many families. Like work, school was valued for the skills it would teach towards survival in the future. Sylvia commented on how her family valued education for the girls. "My dad never talked to me about having a husband and having lots of kids," she said. "It was always, "Get an education, and be something." She pointed out that her grandfather drove her by horse and wagon to the school that was three miles away, a commitment that did not waver during the harsh prairie winter. Rose attended a

school that was nine miles away and was also driven by her grandfather every day. Eventually her grandparents paid (with wood) for her to board at the school. Like many of the elders, however, Rose's schooling was limited. She left in her early teens because her family could not afford the tuition and her wage labour was needed as part of the family income.

Although children worked hard and had many responsibilities, play was an important part of growing up, as it is in any culture. Play often involved copying behaviours and the work of adults. Hilger summarized the play of Chippewa children in noting how "they mimicked their elders in the various occupations of housekeeping, caring for dolls, hunting and fishing and dancing." She pointed out that during her study, "children on several reservations were seen imitating their elders."[36] Densmore wrote about a number of toys, including (real) stuffed animals, clay or bulrush animals, miniature items such as birch utensils for "playing camp," bows and arrows, and an assortment of dolls. These children made jewellery from berries, miniature snowshoes from pine needles, and baskets from plants, and had particular sports and games, such as the "windigo or cannibal game."[37]

Elders in this study did not recollect having toys, but there were some stories of dolls. Maria remembered one time when her mother and aunts got together to make dolls for the girls. She remarked that this could have been an attempt to get the girls more focussed on taking care of children. It wasn't long, however, before they were back to playing outside and climbing trees. Most of the memories of play were not of toys, but of time on the land and with relatives. For example, Gertie's recollection of play involved

going out on the lake with her mom, berry picking excursions, and paddling in the canoe with her sister to visit other relatives their own age.

**Moving into Adolescence: Preparation and Quest**

Basil Johnston's description of "the four hills of life" identifies childhood as a time of preparation and youth as a time of quest. The discipline instilled in children through the ethics of work, self-discipline, self-reliance and community responsibility helped prepare them to effectively contribute to the well-being of family and community as adults. It was about the physical survival of the people. At the same time, children and youth also had to prepare themselves for life's "moral journey."

Both the physical and the moral were tested, strengthened and celebrated through ceremonial practices and passages. The previously described walking out ceremony, a "symbol of success in the food quest,"[38] is an example of how some ceremonies focussed on a child's potential for contributing to physical survival. These ceremonies lauded the accomplishments of an individual based on what she or he would be able to contribute to the collective. For boys, there were celebrations that marked the first hunt or kill. This came out in the interviews with Danny and Rene, who both told stories about how proud they felt upon being recognized by their male relatives for killing a moose and catching a fish respectively. In both cases, this passage was spontaneous or, as Rene pointed out, brought on with the assistance of mother earth.

The stories that Danny and Rene told about their entry into the world of 'provider' demonstrate that health, well-being and survival was recognized as a matter of the collective through ceremony, and this could be formal or informal. Rene explained how

this occurred for him. "There was a whole bunch of uncles standing by the shoreline, fishing for whitefish," he said. "I saw the tail end of a northern pike and I reached in and grabbed it - tossed it right out of the water. And they all said, 'Eehhh!!! Ki sa kin a.' It means 'You wrestled with him and you beat him and you are a man!' Even that recognition made me feel tall just walking away." According to Rene, it was "the uncle's job" to recognize and celebrate his accomplishment, "but you need a community to do that; not just one or two," he said. "You need a bunch. Maybe ten, ten of them standing there." Collectively, Rene's uncles helped him to feel proud of his changing status in the community. He noted that these feelings of self-confidence, self-esteem and responsibility were further enhanced at a later point when his uncles invited him to go hunting.

Danny talked about how he was awarded a more powerful rifle for his first large animal kill. This happened spontaneously while he was working as a cook on a hunting trip with a number of old men. While they were out, Danny shot his first moose and prepared it for the men to eat upon their return. In acknowledgement one of the old men took Danny's (22) rifle and gave him his own new (30/30) rifle, stating "now you are a man. You fed us today. You graduated to this rifle. I'll take this 22 and I'll retire. Now you take over." Danny reflected on what this meant, remarking "It gave me a purpose, you see. As much as I hated to kill animals, I had to [hunt large game] now, to feed the family and to feed the community. That was it. That was the end of my youth. I had entered the world of the adult. Now I was accepted as an equal to the men."

Other ceremonies used physical challenges as a way of advancing an individual's spiritual path. Fasting was the most common practice in this regard. For land-based

cultures, fasting was important because of the tenuous nature of survival and the necessity of establishing good relationships with animals and the food they provided. As an intense physical and spiritual exercise, fasting cultivated spiritual help towards food security while at the same time training the young to withstand periods of hunger.

Religious scholar and historian Christopher Vecsey has noted that fasting in the past "dramatized the Ojibwa dread of starvation and defined the state of hunger as one deserving of pity."[39] This pity then brought about the assistance of the "manitos," (spirits) who could accompany an individual for a lifetime. Drawing on sources from the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Vecsey pointed out that Ojibway puberty fasts were significant because they helped youth develop his or her identity. Prepubescent children lived with a "borrowed" identity, grounded in the spiritual power they received from the person who named them. Puberty was a time for the child/youth to connect to their own source of power, and this was achieved through fasting.[40]

Although fasting among youth - and especially the "vision quest" for pubescent boys - is most commonly known, it is important to note that Anishinaabek children of both sexes as young as four or five also fasted up until the early twentieth century. In fact, the Chippewa in Hilger's study stressed that it was critical for children to fast *before* puberty, while still "pure" and innocent.[41] She learned that boys and girls fasted between one and ten days, depending on their age and their capacity for endurance.[42]

Although there is ample information on childhood fasts,[43] puberty fasts and ceremonies are even better documented in a number of sources. This may be because many of these customs continue to be practiced and/or are undergoing a revival among Indigenous peoples today.[44] Stories of early to mid-twentieth-century Algonquian

puberty customs show that they were both commonplace and similar across North America at one time. Carol A. Markstrom's monograph, *Empowerment of North American Indian Girls: Ritual Expressions at Puberty* provides the most recent and comprehensive and comparative look at historical puberty ceremonies in the United States and Canada, while also documenting contemporary expressions of these practices. Markstrom did most of her field work with the Apache but she also examined contemporary Navajo, Lakota and Ojibway coming-of-age customs.[45] The work of Hilger, Densmore, Jenness, Landes and Mandelbaum also offer substantial information on historical Algonquian puberty ceremonies, from which I have drawn a composite description.[46] All of these sources explore the customs for pubescent boys and girls, which were distinct. My focus is on what occurred among girls.

Cree and Ojibway girls coming-of-age ceremonies took place at the onset of menstruation, at which time girls were expected to seclude themselves from their families and communities. The pubescent girl would typically spend four to ten days alone in a lodge specifically constructed for this purpose. This structure was set up for her in the woods or some distance away from the house, although by the early twentieth century some families were isolating girls in makeshift sections of the main lodging. Hilger reported that the Chippewa called this time *makwa* or *makwawe*: "turning into a bear," or "the bear lives alone all winter."[47]

It was particularly important to avoid contact with boys and men at this time, as the power that a girl carried during her first menstruation disrupted male energy and was considered strong enough to kill. A pubescent girls' touch could also wither a plant, kill

fish in a lake she entered, kill a tree or turn soup to water.[48] Jenness wrote about how a woman's power was heightened at the time of puberty:

> The Parry Islanders believed that every woman was possessed of a mysterious power that was dangerous to men. This power was latent in them at all times, so that during the hunting season men kept aloof as far as possible lest it should neutralize their hunting medicines and rob them of success in the chase. It was strongest during labour, when any man who inhaled the expectant mother's breath (except the most powerful medicine man) lost all his hunting power; and it was perhaps no less strong at the first blossoming into womanhood. Every month the moon renewed this power, just as it renewed the medicine power of the *wabeno*, *djiskiu*, and *kusabindugeyu*;[49] for it was grandmother moon, by day the oldest and by night the fairest of all women, who brought the first Indian maid to maturity...[50]

Because of this power, a girl on her first menstruation was not to touch, look at, or cross the path of any male. Landes reported that only women past menopause and girls who were also menstruating were allowed to visit.[51]

A girl's power also warranted taking precautions about touching herself. Girls were given a scratching stick and were forbidden to touch their own hair, which would be tied back or covered. In some cases, girls' faces were covered with charcoal, which served the purpose of letting others know she was in seclusion while protecting anyone she might gaze upon. Although it was not a full fast, food was limited and was served by mothers and grandmothers in special serving dishes, which the girl might use during their menstrual periods henceforth. Girls were forbidden to eat food that was coming into season, because of the belief that they could offset the harvest. As one of Hilger's

informants explained, "If they had given me fish, all the tribe would have had bad luck fishing."[52]

Puberty was considered an optimal time for learning, spiritual enlightenment and commitment. Because of this powerful and liminal state, it was extremely important how a girl conducted herself during this time: her behaviour during seclusion would determine how she would live her life. Girls were to focus on industry, self-reliance, self-restraint and connection to spirit. Hard work was exemplified by spending their days in seclusion doing sewing and handiwork, preparing hides and chopping wood. Elder women would assist by coming in to talk to girls about the adult responsibilities that lay ahead, instruct them in their work and/or give them information about sexuality, courting and marriage. In some cases, girls would seek and/or receive a vision. Such girls were granted power to heal, act as medicine people or become other types of leaders. Jenness wrote about girls who had visions that promised them a future as great warriors, stating, "The forefathers of the Parry Islanders followed such women leaders with alacrity, believing that they enjoyed a twofold power, the mysterious power inherent in all women and the special supernatural powers they derived from their visions."[53]

When the seclusion period was over, the girl was celebrated with a feast attended by family and community members. Densmore and Landes wrote that girls were then required to observe certain practices for the following year, such as abstaining from berries and seasonal produce.[54] Densmore documented a Midewiwin ceremony in which girls had to show their restraint by refusing to consume berries.[55] She also noted that at each harvest in the following year a girl needed to be introduced to the seasonal food by having it served by someone else or by mixing it with charcoal.[56] Hilger reported that

"during the entire year following first menses, [the pubescent girl] was not to touch babies, or clothes of her father, or brothers, or of any man, for it would cripple them."[57] One of Markstrom's contemporary informants explained to her that "these sacrifices were meaningful because they represented those things that would be important to her for the remainder of her life."[58]

Carol Markstrom has identified some key beliefs about pubescent Indigenous girls that are valuable in understanding "North American Indian" coming-of-age customs. (See Table 1). She points out that puberty ceremonies for girls were not simply about acknowledging fertility and reproductive capacity. Rather, they were grounded in Indigenous understandings of menstruation as "an extension of the same power responsible for all creation and annual rejuvenation of the Earth."[59] A girl's first menstruation was considered particularly powerful in this regard. It is critical that proper protocols were followed, for as Markstrom writes, "the impacts are not restricted to one component of life, (i.e. spiritual or religious) but are pervasive within the person and actually extend to the community and, in some cases, the entire Earth."[60] The continuance of the people, and life itself, thus hinged on how this elemental power was respected and managed.

Markstrom denoted a link among the Apache, Navajo and Lakota between the pubescent girl and archetypal female characters from their respective creation stories.[61] This link enabled some girls to channel the power of archetypal/original females for the good of their communities: girls in seclusion could be asked to offer favours, blessings and healing ceremonies to other community members.[62] Although the contemporary Ojibway Markstrom consulted did not indicate such a close link between archetypal

female characters and pubescent girls, Markstrom cited a nineteenth-century reference about a girl who was told to engage in her vision quest "for the good of all mankind," and who was equated to the character of "Everlasting Woman."[63]

Table 1: Beliefs About Pubescent Girls Held by North American Indians (Carol A. Markstrom)

| |
|---|
| 1. Menstruation and menstrual fluids are powerful in general, and the first menstrual cycles are particularly powerful. |
| 2. Feminine representations in cosmological constructions, including origin stories, are instructive to the pubescent girl, as well as to women. |
| 3. The special quality of menarche is a necessary (but not sufficient) event for connection of the initiate to the spiritual realm (rituals complete this process). |
| 4. The proper performance of rituals ensures the initiate's successful transition into adulthood and influences her life course. |
| 5. The initiate's performance of tests of endurance will subsequently affect her life course. |
| 6. The malleable state of the initiate at puberty necessitates her subjugation to the instruction and influence of adults, particularly an adult female mentor. |
| 7. Due to her empowered state, the initiate's behaviour at puberty will have an impact on her future; hence, taboos and behavioural restrictions must be followed. |
| 8. Due to her empowered state, the initiate can influence the welfare of others. |
| 9. The coming-of-age event is not only a transition from childhood to adulthood but also a transition into the world of the spiritual. |

Source: Markstrom, Carol A., *Empowerment of North American Indian Girls: Ritual Expressions at Puberty*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008, p. 72.

The participants in this study had varying experiences of puberty and coming-of-age ceremonies. For some women, the onset of menstruation was not acknowledged or celebrated in any way, nor did they receive any information about it. Some were simply told "now you can have kids," but were unsure about how the process worked. Others had mothers and grandmothers who explained the changes to them. When Rose was nine, for example, her grandmother talked to her about menstruation, "explaining everything."

Rose was lucky to receive this information, as residential schooling, pressure from the church and the repression of traditional practices had made it difficult to talk about

sexuality or to acknowledge the transition to womanhood by this time.[64] There were, however, a few participants in this study who underwent fasts or seclusions similar to the ceremonies described in the literature. These ceremonies were not as rigorous as they had been in previous generations, and by mid-century, families who maintained these practices often did so in secrecy.[65] The continuation of these ceremonies demonstrates the value that some families placed on marking this life transition, in spite of pressures to abandon their practices.

June's rite of passage involved being sequestered in a dark room in her house for ten days at puberty. Fasting was not part of her seclusion, as she was allowed to eat many of her favourite foods: rabbit, partridge, rice, jam and scones. Yet sacrifice was expected of June during the year that followed. She explained, "I couldn't go near babies, I couldn't pick berries, haul water, get wood. I couldn't touch trees. If I were to touch a tree they would hurry up and do something with it. I don't know what they did, my grandfather wouldn't tell me." She noted that pubescent girls could also kill a drum by touching it, remarking "That's how powerful a girl is." At the end of her puberty year, June was given a cedar bath and she moved fully into the women's circle.

Marie was also put her into a ten-day seclusion when she reached puberty. She spent the time cordoned off in a separate part of the house behind a curtain. Her seclusion included some fasting; as she explained "[It was] just a little cubby hole place and all I lived on was a little piece of scone and about a half a glass of water in the morning and at night." She exclaimed, "Oh I used to really sip that... But I survived!" Marie also recalled that it was dark and that she was instructed not to touch her teeth, eyes, ears or hair. While she was there, she did sewing and darning with the assistance of older women

who came to teach her: "They would show you and then they'd leave. And when they came back the next day you had to keep showing what you did. If you didn't do it right, they had another one there ready for you." Marie's behaviour during the fast corresponds to the findings in the literature; the activities she engaged in were linked to ensuring she would be a good worker in the future. She talked about the knowledge she acquired from elders during this time by saying that it was an important "because it was our survival. They taught me how to crochet and how to knit," she said. "And then they talked to me about cooking; wild geese, deer, beaver, whatever."

Unfortunately, Marie's seclusion was cut short when her older brother arrived to visit on her ninth day. Having been told that she had been absent from school due to illness, he insisted on seeing her. When Marie's mother finally conceded and let him visit, he immediately gave her a hug. This broke the protocol about contact with men and consequently broke her fast. Marie lamented that she did not finish her seclusion, as she had just begun to dream and have visions of ancestral visitors. The secrecy of her seclusion and the fact that her mother felt she could not share it is a vivid demonstration of the stress that families were under to curtail these customs.

Like Marie, Rebecca learned self-discipline in her coming-of-age ceremony, along with the value of hard work. She also learned about the sacred nature of her new identity. She recalled how her first cycle came about. "I was playing at the edge of the lake when suddenly I felt water flowing through my body," she said. "It scared me, so I ran in to tell my mother. She stopped what she was doing and told me that soon I would become a woman." Rebecca's cycle began the following day. She remarked, "I wish that

I had my mother with me today, I would like to ask how she knew that my moon-time was about to begin."

During this first cycle, Rebecca's mother taught her how to cleanse herself. Rebecca recalled that her mother taught her to bathe in a special way; to take her time and wash with care when she was in her cycle. "She told me to move softly and think about the work that my body was doing cleaning itself through the cycle of the Moon," Rebecca said. "Today, I realize that the rhythmic movements she taught me followed my body's lymphatic system and cleared the female hormones out of my body."

This teaching was followed by a seclusion which involved staying in the house for a month. During this time Rebecca's mother instilled in her the disciplines of work as well as the disciplines of caring for the power she had acquired. As Rebecca recalled, "during that time she gave me new responsibilities. I had to get up at 4:30, to make the coffee and start getting things ready in the kitchen. After the men were gone for the day I washed the floors, did laundry and cleaned. At the end of the day I used to have to scrub and restock the grub boxes. Sometimes the men would come in late and I would be standing on a box at the sink doing dishes after dark." Rebecca pointed out that her seclusion involved her mother teaching "devotion to task: to take pride in my work; to always do my best with the everyday tasks of washing floors, doing laundry and preparing meals." She talked about the support she also received from her father during this time, recalling "one night my father came into the kitchen and saw me standing at the sink, silently crying with exhaustion. Without saying a word, he picked up a tea towel and began drying dishes. We worked together until the job was done."

From this coming-of-age experience, Rebecca learned that "to be a good worker was a way of life." Yet Rebecca also learned that she had to manage the power that she had been given. She reflected that "during the month that my mother kept me in the house the task of learning about being a woman absorbed me completely. She taught me the things I could and could not do when I had my menstrual cycle. I was not allowed to cut up meat or pick berries and I could not pick or make medicine. I also learned that if Grandmother Moon comes when a woman is about to prepare feast food, she must humble herself and ask another woman to do it for her."

Some of the other elders told of ceremonies that were greater variations of what appeared in the literature; perhaps because they had been modified to suit the times and the family circumstances. Gertie engaged in a ceremony of transition and sacrifice that involved both childhood and puberty fasting. At the age of seven, she was sent by her grandmother to pick berries, and was instructed not to eat any. This was new for Gertie, who had been allowed to eat as many as she wanted previously. This practice went on for five years, and each time Gertie brought in the berries, her grandmother would make jam. This jam would be put away until winter and then given away."Making sure that I could see," Gertie recalled, "she would pick up those berries in the jar, hand them to somebody and say, 'My granddaughter picked these berries in the summer and I want you to have them.'"[66] After the five year period, Gertie's grandmother opened a jar of berries and told her that she could eat some before she giving the rest away. Gertie remarked that "what I learned was that I didn't have to have everything that I saw." She added "It wasn't a fast [as we know about them now], but I fasted over those berries for a long time. I think she just figured out it took a lot longer for somebody to learn self-discipline in those days

than it [had in her generation]."

In some instances, families tried to harness the transformative power of puberty and the power of the pubescent girl for healing purposes. In his ethnography of the Parry Island Ojibway, Jenness wrote that a pubescent girl's power could be used to heal. He gave the example of a man who suffered from a spine ailment that "rendered him helpless" until he was brought to a pubescent girl's seclusion hut and treated by her. In this case, the girl walked slowly up and down the man's spine and, by transferring her power "enabled him to rise to his feet with all the vigour of a young man."[67]

Marie told a story in which she was witness to a healing provided by her sister, about twenty years after Jenness had been in their community:

> They brought this man from Deep River and put him in a little shed [outside our house]. I remember they brought my sister out. They had her fasting upstairs. [It was] the last day and they took her in that little shed. Of course, I had to see what was going on.
>
> His legs were bad. This was a returned soldier from Second World War. I guess he got a spinal injury somewhere and his legs just went. And you know what? They pulled up his pants (like that) and she bit him. They told her to bite him hard. She said, "It's so hot my teeth are going to fall out."
>
> I could see him because I was peeking in the door there. She bit him all the way up and all the way back down. After that they get her to go like that, [makes a pulling motion]-- like pulling something out of him.

Marie finished her story by saying that the healing worked "because he walked after that."

In her study of coming-of-age ceremonies across North America, Markstrom emphasized that communities benefitted as much as the individual from these customs.[68] Although the ceremonies of elders in this study were not as public as in previous generations, it is nonetheless evident that other community members were involved and benefitted from them. Both Rene and Danny talked about what they learned as boys upon witnessing their sisters and cousins go through puberty ceremonies. Danny remembered seclusions and ceremonies in which the grandmothers would gather to teach the girls, using pipes, rocks and drums.[69] He recalled one instance in which he was told to leave the house and go with his grandfather to a tent because one of his sisters had come into her time. This story demonstrates how men supported coming-of-age ceremonies for girls. "While the ceremony was going on inside," Danny stated, "my grandfather lit the pipe outside. He smudged his pipe and then went and smudged the house all around, so no spirits could disturb this girl in her moment of purity." As boys and men, they had a role in ensuring the success of this passage. Danny remembered that during this time "we sat outside, and we smoked."

Rene talked about how he became aware of the girls' change in status when they came out of seclusion. "When grandmother took my cousins away, they called it kitchi kwe we," he explained. "We wouldn't see them for awhile, and would wonder where they went. Kitchi kwe we: they were having their first moon. After she came home, she's kitchi kwe – she's a woman now." "Kitche," meaning "great" and "kwe," meaning "woman" delineated a new role for Rene's cousins, and changed his relationship to

them.[70] He talked about how this grounded his identity as "Anishinaabe," the term used to signify the Ojibway but which translates to "from whence lowered the male of the species."[71] Reflecting on the humility he carried with respect to mother earth and to older women in particular, Rene mused that "I often think of what Anishinaabe means. Anish – to lower the man. These names lower us… it implies women were always here. And us guys, we need to have that balance!" For this reason, when Rene's cousins returned as "kitche kwe" it implied a new respect and role for him as a boy in relation to them as "great women."

As Rene's story indicates, girls' puberty ceremonies were significant in terms of teaching boys about the respect that was due to the women in their communities. Rene lamented the loss of these customs, which in his community occurred when they moved from their traditional homeland onto a reserve. He remarked on the loss of respect for women which happened as a result: "You talk about two worlds. When you are on the rez (reserve) now, that thing is not taught. There is no more kitchi kwe we. And I think that's why they get beat up sometimes. There's violence all over the place."[72]

The new status that girls gained after going through their puberty ceremonies traditionally meant that they were welcomed into the women's circle, and with this came new responsibilities. Marie shared her mother's memory of how this rapid change took place in her life experience, stating "my mother said that you are a mature person when you come out of that; you don't even think like a little girl anymore." She recalled that when she was taken out of her ceremony the first thing she did was go home and cook a meal, demonstrating a level of expertise that she didn't even know she had. Just as boys were initiated into the role of provider, girls were expected to take on work

responsibilities related to sustaining their communities. These new responsibilities will be discussed at length in the next section.

**Conclusion**

The stories told by the participants correspond to teachings about this life stage, as children were nurtured and taught the disciplines that they would need to be functional members of their communities. This was a time of preparation, in which all members of the community had a hand in ensuring that their upcoming members learned what they needed to know. Community health and well-being was dependent on this education. Marking the end of childhood, puberty was a time of rapid transition between preparation for, and then entering into the world of adult responsibilities. The puberty ceremonies that the participants described clearly show a shift in expectations, not only in terms of the work that was expected, but in learning how to make sacrifices. This is presumably what Gertie's grandmother was trying to teach her by requiring her to abstain from berries while offering them to others in the community. Ethics of hard work, sharing, and sacrifice were thus built into childrearing practices and the ceremonies that marked the transition to adult life.

There is not as much information here that demonstrates the spiritual path described in some of the teachings, although the fostering of moral development is certainly evident in the participants' stories of disciplinary practices. The quest for vision described by Johnson is more often described with relation to boys fasting, however, there are descriptions in the literature that this was also a desired intent of girls' fasting.[73] Marie's experience in her puberty fast certainly indicates that she was heading in that

direction, as she talked about how she was beginning to dream and have visits from ancestral spirits before her fast was interrupted. Perhaps because of the limited nature of ceremony during this period, the personal nature of the knowledge, or the secrecy involved, it is difficult here to demonstrate how principles of individual identity and or spiritual connections worked in the lives of these participants or others in their communities. Minnesota Anishinaabe Elder Ignatia Broker wrote that it was the custom of the people; "to learn which girls would be Dreamers or Medicine people."[74] An exploration of how the quest for individual identity and spirit connection is something that is worthy of further consideration; and particularly how the process worked for girls and women.

This chapter demonstrates that, up until puberty, gendered identities were not as clearly marked. Rebecca commented, for example, that she was able to be a tomboy until she went into puberty. After puberty, young men and women went separate ways in order to engage in the work that was assigned to them. The women's world that girls entered is the subject of the next chapter.

## Notes

[1] J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 46, 55.
[2] Ibid., 38.
[3] Amelia M. Paget, *People of the Plains* (Regina: University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Center, 2004), 39.
[4] Nathalie J. Kermoal, *Un Passé Métis Au Feminin* (Quebec: Les Éditions GED, 2006), 110.
[5] Ibid., 112.
[6] See Jennifer S.H. Brown, "A Cree Nurse in a Cradle of Methodism: Little Mary and the Egerton R. Young Family at Norway House and Berens River," in *First Days, Fighting Days: Women in Manitoba History*, ed. Mary Kinnear (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1987).
[7] David Goodman Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1979), 144; Alanson Skinner, *Notes on the Eastern Cree and Northern Saulteaux, by Alanson Skinner* (New York: The Trustees, 1911), 151.
[8] Mandelbaum, ibid., 144, Skinner, ibid., 151.
[9] Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision.* 56.
[10] Ibid., 17.
[11] Ibid., 18.
[12] Ibid., 19.
[13] Frances Densmore, *Study of some Michigan Indians* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1949), 59.
[14] Ibid, 51, 59.
[15] Ignatia Broker and Steven Premo, *Night Flying Woman: An Ojibway Narrative* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1983), 16.
[16] Carol A. Markstrom, *Empowerment of North American Indian Girls: Ritual Expressions at Puberty* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 56-60.
[17] Ibid., 59.
[18] See earlier quote that begins this section.
[19] Markstrom, *Empowerment of North American Indian Girls.*
[20] The current generation of elders were largely residential schooled, and many have expressed the contrast between what they experienced in their home communities and what they encountered when they were sent to school. The elders I interviewed did not talk about residential school experiences, as we chose to focus on childhood experiences in the community prior to entering and/or during time away from the schools. This meant that we spent more time discussing the positive experiences of their childhood as well as traditional parenting and childrearing techniques.
[21] David Goodman Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1979), 144.
[22] Paget, *People of the Plains,* 39.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 58.
[25] Densmore, *Chippewa Customs,* p. 58.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 58-59.
[28] See also Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 58.
[29] Ibid., 59.
[30] Densmore, *Chippewa Customs,* p. 60.
[31] Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree,* 144; Skinner, *Notes on the Eastern Cree,* 151.
[32] This story is also documented in Campbell's *Halfbreed.* See Maria Campbell, *Halfbreed* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1973), 51.
[33] See page 93 of this chapter, and footnote #14.

[34] Glecia Bear's stories speak to the qualities that were nurtured through work. The story of how she took care of her sister when they got lost overnight at ages eleven and eight is a remarkable tale of self-reliance as well as community engagement and responsibility for children. See Glecia Bear, "Lost and Found," in *Kohkominawak Otacimowiniwawa: Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in their Own Words,* eds. Freda Ahenakew and H. Christoph Wolfart (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1992). At eleven, Bear was given the responsibility for a cow at calving time, and at thirteen she was hauling fish to town and helping her dad on the lake. She stated that as young girls "We used to do everything. We used to mud the house and the horse barn; we cut wood in the bush and dragged the firewood home." Bear in Ahenakew, ibid., 209.
[35] There is an abundance of literature about residential schooling. To find bibliographies and publications about the impact of residential schools visit the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, www.ahf.ca.
[36] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 110.
[37] Densmore, *Chippewa Customs,* 64-72.
[38] As described by Flannery and noted in Chapter III, page 83 (footnote #77).
[39] Christopher T. Vecsey, *Traditional Ojibwa Religion and its Historical Changes* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1983), 135.
[40] Ibid., 121-122.
[41] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 43.
[42] Ibid., 39.
[43] See Maude Kegg and John D. Nichols, *Portage Lake: Memories of an Ojibwe Childhood* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1991), 23-25; Ignatia Broker and Steven Premo, *Night Flying Woman: An Ojibway Narrative* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1983), 51.; Jenness, *Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island,* 48-51; Ruth Landes, *The Ojibwa Woman* (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 3, 44.
[44] See, for example, Kim Anderson, "Honouring the Blood of the People: Berry Fasting in the 21st Century," in *Expressions in Canadian Native Studies,* eds. Rob Innes, Ron Laliberte, Priscilla Setee & James Waldram (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan Extension Press, 2000).
[45] Carol A. Markstrom, *Empowerment of North American Indian Girls.*
[46] Hilger,*Chippewa Child Life,* 49-55; Densmore, *Chippewa Customs,* 70-72; Jenness, *Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island,* 96-98; Landes, *The Ojibwa Woman,* 5-10.
[47] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 50.
[48] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 52; Jenness, *Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island,* 97.
[49] Jenness is referring to medicine men: the "healer and charm-maker," "conjuror," and "seer" respectively. See Jenness, *Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island,* 60.
[50] Ibid., 96.
[51] Landes, *The Ojibwa Woman,* 5.
[52] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 51.
[53] Jenness, *Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island,* 97.
[54] Densmore, *Chippewa Customs,* 70; Landes, *The Ojibwa Woman,* 6.
[55] Densmore, *Chippewa Customs,* 71.
[56] Ibid., 53.
[57] Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 52.
[58] Markstrom, *Empowerment,* 334.
[59] Ibid., 73.
[60] Ibid., 10.
[61] Ibid., 101.
[62] Ibid., 81.
[63] Ibid., 333, 338.
[64] See Barbara Helen Hill, *Shaking the Rattle: Healing the Trauma of Colonization* (Penticton, BC: Theytus Books, 1995), 100; and Kim Anderson, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (Sumach/Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000), 91-94.
[65] See Kim Anderson "Honouring the Blood of the People."
[66] Some of these quotes are taken from a previous article on berry fasting, featuring Gertie. See Kim Anderson, "Honouring the Blood."
[67] Jenness, *Ojibwa Indians of Parrry Island,* 97.
[68] Markstrom, *Empowerment,* 1.

[69] Mosom provides further accounts of witnessing girls' puberty ceremonies in Diane Knight, ed., *The Seven Fires: Teachings of the Bear Clan as Told by Dr. Danny Musqua* (Muskoday First Nation, SK: Many Worlds Publishing, 2001) 70-73.

[70] One of Hilger's informants also referred to the term kitche kwe, reporting that when she first menstruated, she was told that she was "old enough": "You are now a "big woman" (kitchekwe, meaning both big woman and first menstruation)." See Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life,* 54.

[71] See Edward Benton Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (St. Paul, MN: Red School House, 1988), 3

[72] Carol Markstrom refers to Duran, Duran and Braveheart's contention that the loss of cultural linkages that were strengthened through coming of age ceremonies is a contributing factor in the high level of problematic behaviours in contemporary North American Indian adolescents. See Markstrom, *Empowerment*, 10, 30; and Bonnie Duran, Eduardo Duran, and Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart, "Native Americans and the Trauma of History," in *Studying Native America*, ed. Russell Thornton (Madison: Univerisity of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 60-76. Markstrom also emphasized the importance of men's involvement in girls' puberty ceremonies. She documented the revival of supporting roles among the Ojibway men and boys in the contemporary Northwestern Ontario community that she consulted. In this community men and boys carry responsibilities during the year that follows the seclusion. This includes "providing transportation and attending to any of her needs that might arise." Markstrom notes that the "acquisition of respect for and honour of women was a major goal of learning for boys during this year's time." She was told by her informants that "the ceremony was also meaningful for men because it gave them purpose and understanding of their place in the social order of their culture." See Markstrom, ibid., 334-335.

[73] See Jenness, *Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island,* Broker, Night Flying Woman, and Kegg, *Portage Lake,*

[74] Ignatia Broker and Steven Premo, *Night Flying Woman: An Ojibway Narrative* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1983), p. 51.

# CHAPTER V

# PUBERTY TO GRANDMOTHER YEARS

> In the adult world you did community work; you worked with the leaders of that community, you worked along with the elders to prepare for winter life, for winter food, clothing, wood and stuff like that. You went to all the meetings, you associated with all the leaders and you participated. You were sworn as a member of your dodem and your community. Now you carried the responsibility for the continuation of the collective as a living, viable community. You had to make sure that you did your fair share to keep the community healthy and well.
>
> Mosôm Danny Musqua

The material in this chapter covers a broad span of years, as it has been organized around general responsibilities of women in their childbearing years. Mosôm teaches that adulthood was a time to carry responsibilities for providing for family and community, and in Midewiwin teachings this time is referred to as the "planning and planting life." The span of years in this chapter thus represents the change in status which occurred after puberty and which carried into elder years. During this phase of life young and middle-aged women had responsibilities to ensure sustenance for the community and care for the young and old. These responsibilities would have evolved as they went through their adult years, as women took on increasing authority with age, but the stories here demonstrate generally what girls encountered when they entered the "women's circle."

With comparison to the other life stages, it is important to note that these years

were much more defined by gender. As Gertie observed, puberty was the beginning of a more distinct separation between male and female; a time when "girls began to spend more time with the older women of their family, and the young men would go off with their fathers, uncles and grandfathers." The divided nature of land-based work leant itself to these distinctions, as men were typically involved in hunting large game while women harvested smaller animals and plant foods and managed family and community affairs. Women also held physical and spiritual responsibilities for maintaining the life force of the community through their ability to give birth. All of this "women's work" determined the life course as it was lived during these middle years, and defined the types of authorities that women held. Because of the distinctly gendered nature of this life stage, I will begin the chapter with some more theoretical teachings about what the "women's circle" entailed.

**Entering the Women's Circle**

Elders will often say that in the past, men had the responsibility to protect and provide for their communities, and women held responsibilities to create and nurture. While it is certain that men engaged in hunting outside of the community while women raised children and managed their home territories, it is important to avoid interpreting these teachings from a western patriarchal framework. In searching for an English word to describe the way in which women and men operated in distinct worlds, Mosôm landed upon the term "jurisdiction." This word is defined as "the power or right to exercise authority" as well as "the limits or territory within which authority may be exercised."[1]

Women had authorities, territories and even ways of speaking the language that

were respected by men, and vice versa, although it is also noteworthy that there was flexibility when it came to work that needed to be done and who was available to do it. According to historian Sarah Carter, the gendered division of First Nations people on the prairies in the early reserve years "was not always sharply marked and could break down in the face of expediency and individual preference."[1] Women had to know how to take care of everything in terms of survival, for as Rose pointed out, men were often out of the community, hunting, trapping or otherwise working, and it was "the fortitude of a Métis woman" to take care of everything in their absence. Overall, however, men and women's "jurisdictions" worked together as part of a system aimed at ensuring balance and community well-being.

Drawing on her teachings from the Anishinaabe Elder Peter O'Chiese, Maria Campbell has explained this system by using concentric circles, in which men occupied an outer circle and women occupied an inner circle, followed by elders and children.[2] Men protected these inner circles and provided for them by bringing in resources. It was the women's job to manage and care for these resources in a way that would ensure community well-being. Women also looked after social relations within the family and community.

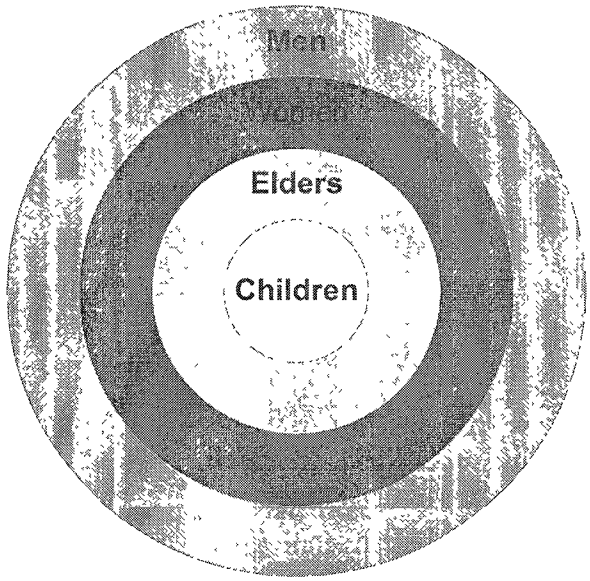


**Figure 1: Social Organization of "Traditional" Communities**

Although responsibilities and duties were not fixed and were often overlapping, these concentric circles are helpful towards conceptualizing the territories occupied by men and women.[3]

Traditional teachings about the tipi are also helpful towards gaining an understanding of the spiritual and practical grounding for Algonquian women's jurisdiction of the inner circle. Cree Elder Mary Lee teaches that "women were named after that fire in the centre of the tipi, which brought that warmth and comfort."[4] She explains how this understanding is built into the Cree language, stating " 'Woman' in our language is iskwew...We were named after that fire, iskwuptew, and that is very powerful, because it honours the sacredness of that fire." The teachings provided by Lee capture how the tipi was equated with the way women traditionally held the home territory:

> In our language, for old woman, we say, Notegweu. Years ago we used the term Notaygeu, meaning when an old lady covers herself with a shawl. A tipi cover is like that old woman with a shawl. As it comes around the tipi, it embraces all those

> teachings, the values of community that the women hold. No matter how many children and great grandchildren come into that circle of hers, she always still has room. And if you put it up right, the poles never show on the bottom, and that tipi stands with dignity, just as, years ago, women always covered their legs with the skirt, which also represents the sacred circle of life. When you put the flaps up, it teaches you how we embrace life itself. It's like a woman standing there with her arms out, saying "Thank you" to everything.

Lee concludes these teachings by saying "That is what the tipi is - it is the spirit and body of woman, because she represents the foundation of family and community. It is through her that we learn the values that bring balance into our lives."[5] Tipis and other types of lodging were thus both the metaphoric and literal terrain of women in the past, as it was the woman who owned the tipi and did the ceremonial work involved in putting it up.[6]

In our discussions on this subject, Mosôm made a distinction between western patriarchal notions of "a woman's place in the home" and the jurisdictions and authorities of womanhood in an historical Algonquian context. He remarked that the jurisdiction and authorities of women were much greater than they are today. "It became westernized," he said. "We began to think about only just the house, and around the yard. And on the reserve, that's the way it became. We moved out of our tipis and wigwams to log buildings. The log building is a permanent structure. You didn't tear it down and move it around, where you leave it from one season to go to the next." Mosôm noted that women had a greater organizational role in migratory community life, stating, "in that world, you had places to go each season. And that required a lot of discipline and order to move from one place to the next."

Mosôm 's comment draws attention to the fact that "a woman's place" was not confined to the walls of a single household; rather, it involved maintaining order in the community. He gave the example of a time when his people used to meet in large gatherings in the fall and spring. These camps were organized according to clan, and it was the clan mothers who had what Mosôm called the "public function" of organizing the spaces community members would occupy according to their particular responsibilities. He noted that "it was the women who set up these things. Today there is no community planning; we don't know how to plan. Such a lot is missing. The old people would say 'We've lost our hearts: our women!'" To this, Mosôm added that "this damn Indian Act and the control they put upon us, they destroyed our women's place among us."

Families were still moving seasonally during the period covered by this study, but they did not have the freedom of mobility they had known in the past. Patriarchy and violence had also moved into these circles and spaces, and so "the woman's place" had become more restricted, as Mosôm pointed out. Nonetheless, gendered territories and jurisdictions were still operating with the vestiges of tradition and to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the family and community.

Maria talked about how space was organized according to gender and age in her home community, where men, women and elders literally occupied different spaces around the home. She remembered how this worked in the summers in particular, when there was more use of outdoor space and larger gatherings of visitors. Elders would visit in a tent away from the house, while women would be near the kitchen. Children would move back and forth between the women and elders, with the youngest typically staying

close to the elders. Maria pointed out that men never came around the house. They spent time in her father's space, a log cabin that was off a trail in the bush. She explained "there were a couple of bunks and a stove and that's where my dad kept a lot of his traps and all of his hunting gear. And when the men came to visit him, that's usually where they hung out." Community space consisted of an arbour where everyone would meet to enjoy meals and socialize. When it came time to retire, the men would stay in her father's house while the women and children would stay in the house or in a tent. As Maria remembered, "those rules were really strict. We never went in that shack of my dad's. That was a men's house. And the men never came into the house for meal time if it was summer. If they were around the house, they were on the side where the arbour was."

As I will discuss in the next chapter, some of this spatial organization had to do with protecting women and children from abuse, as in the case of segregated sleeping arrangements during larger gatherings. But even when they were in smaller extended family groups, women and men held different spaces. These environments were respected to the extent that it was considered inappropriate to go into another group's territory because it could interfere with the authorities and powers within.

Some participants talked about how women did not go into men's particular spaces because it would mean a "tangling" of powers.[7] A woman's power, particularly during menstruation was considered so strong that it could interfere with men's work. Women in the childbearing life stage therefore did not go around the hunting and trapping equipment that was housed in the "men's houses" away from the main lodging. Rebecca remembered that "when Grandmother Moon came to me for the first time, my mother taught me many things. I was no longer allowed to touch a man's gun or knife,

and it was at that time my father gave me my first woman's knife. Although I could clean fish when Grandmother Moon was with me, I was not allowed to cut up meat or pick berries and medicine. I was never to cross between a man and the fire, and I was also not allowed to step over the top of a man's feet or a man who was lying on the floor." Young women thus learned to respect the tools men that used to sustain their families; they learned not to tangle with that power. It is important to note that once women were beyond their lifegiving years there was more freedom of mobility. Maria pointed out, for example, that her grandmother was able to come and go into her dad's house if necessary. Gender segregation was thus most pronounced for women during the years between puberty and menopause.

This principle of respecting gendered jurisdictions was significant because it underpinned notions of balance and well-being in the community. Mosôm drew attention to this by telling a story about how his grandfather tried to explain jurisdictional issues to their Indian Agent during the 1940s. In Mosôm's story, the Agent was told not to go to a certain part of the reserve because it was occupied by a bear. When the Agent showed no regard for this advice, the old man admonished him with the following:

> [Don't go there!] That bear's just waking up and she's hungry. She could kill you. And why shouldn't she kill you? That bear's been there for ten, fifteen years. Its mother was there before it. Before I arrived, the bears were there. I let them be and they let me be. I know where they go. It knows there is a boundary there, and there's an authority that I can't go overtake. I will not step into that authority....Just like over there, you see my wife sitting over there? She's talking to her daughters and some boys. I don't go there. I won't step into that authority base. That's her power. The

power to teach the laws of this family. Those laws keep this family held together, and this woman learned them from her mother and my mother. And I'm not going to interfere with that, that same way as I'm not going to interfere with that bear over here.

With his handling of this incident, Mosôm's grandfather tried to impress on him (and the Indian Agent) that balance and well-being are contingent on respecting boundaries.[8] The following sections in this chapter detail some of the women's world by looking at how they managed the work and social responsibilities that fell within their boundaries.

**Managing Resources: The Work of Women**

In her reflections on the teachings she received at puberty, Rebecca summarized one of the core values of Indigenous womanhood: "to be a good worker was a way of life." As previous chapters have demonstrated, hard work was a highly valued attribute, and much of girlhood was spent in preparation for adult work responsibilities. This Aboriginal work ethic is manifest in the comments of the early twentieth century Cree leader Fine Day, who remarked that a "good woman was never idle," and pointed out that "in the old days the young fellows went after the good worker, not the good looker."[9] Oral histories of mid-twentieth century Cree women in Saskatchewan collected by Freda Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart also indicate that a high value was placed on "personal competence, self-reliance and hard work."[10]

It is not surprising that Fine Day would have looked for a good worker in a partner, because a woman's abilities in food procurement, security, preparation and preservation were critical to the well-being of her family. Laura Peers has argued that

historians and ethnographers have emphasized large game hunting within Aboriginal cultures at the expense of ignoring women's contributions to community survival.[11] Referring to pre-reserve Saulteaux societies, she writes "we are now realizing that the Saulteaux had a much broader, more flexible subsistence base better able to cope with ecological fluctuations, and the role of women in providing food and in making decisions about subsistence and group movements was far greater than previously thought. In fact, what might be called "alternate" or "women's" foods were, for much of the year, the constant in the Saulteaux diet: large game was added to this base when it was available. These "women's" foods included vegetable foods, maple sugar, small game, and, to a certain extent, fish."[12]

Peers noted that literature has moved on from research concerned with "Man the Hunter,"[13] but it remains important to point out the extent to which Aboriginal women contributed to the food supply by hunting, trapping and fishing. Many of the participants in this study talked about how their grandmothers taught them these skills through their own practices, and although this was commonplace, women's abilities in these areas continually surprised newcomers. Rose remembered how her fishing skills impressed the English owner of a fishing camp where she worked when she was fifteen. When he asked her one afternoon if she knew how to use a gun, she replied "I'm not scared to grab the gun and shoot a deer or something. The only thing I haven't shot is a bear." Rose proved this to be true by shooting an elk and serving it for supper later that season.

Although men typically did the large game hunting, some of the women in this study came from families and communities in which men were scarce or only in the community sporadically. In these environments, women did most of the hunting, trapping

and fishing that fed their families. Elsie's mother shared a trap line with another woman, and when they were out working on it the children would be cared for by "an aunt or two that stayed behind." Rosella also grew up in a family of women who supported their children with trapping and fishing, and who worked their own trap lines. In her family, the practice of self-sustaining women began with her grandmother who was "kicked out of the reserve" and subsequently raised her children by herself. Rosella said, "she used to have a dog team to go from Molenosa to Montreal Lake to get groceries for her and others. She hauled wood, she built her own houses, everything." Rosella's mother also raised her children without much assistance from their fathers. Rosella quipped, "my mom was independent; she didn't really need them anyway!" She then qualified this statement by adding "but there was always somebody who made sure that we had moose meat. Everybody shared; nobody ran out – but that's gone now."

Danny talked about how women contributed to community survival through the planning and management of food. He asserted that women were particularly responsible for "time and its relation to the ecology of the earth and its seasons." As he noted, "they had a system and a calendar because it was necessary; they had to learn the different growth factors and maturation of plant life around them in order to harvest." He explained that grandmothers in his community had the role to harvest and share the first meats of the spring (young muskrats and beavers) and that it was their job to teach the younger generations about the upcoming seasons in the spirit of preparation and food security:

> In the springtime they would sit down and tell you, "Well, this is where we will pick the Saskatoon berries. The strawberries are going to come to full term at this time. On

> the eighth moon, we'll get the fish spawning."... And before the leaves came out, there was a walkabout on the land, and teaching about all the different trees and what they produced. [The old ladies] would say, "This is the next moon." They would walk you around and show you what a Seneca Root looks like and when it is just coming out of the ground. "[This plant is ready] at the end of this moon," -- that is what they would tell you. And then when September arrived, [they would say] "Now we have got to start preparing for our move to the winter grounds."

Danny noted that older women concerned themselves with food security by ensuring that some moose were hunted during the month of July so pemmican could be prepared for the winter. It was also their job to ensure that there was enough dry food to go around. "They would make the distribution of the foods in September," he said, "when that fall moon started to come out. They would level out all their dry goods, and make sure that everybody in the community had enough pemmican."

On the whole, women were responsible for food distribution. Rebecca noted that "women knew when meat was needed in the community. The men would go out hunting and women, who were responsible for distribution, made certain that everyone had meat." Danny also talked about how men would bring the food into the women for distribution. Resources belonged to the family and community, and it was up to the women to make sure that these resources were distributed equitably and according to need. According to Danny, men listened to the women, who voiced the needs of the family.

A number of participants talked about the women's role in food preservation. Women worked with berries which were used for pemmican and also dried into cakes. This food lasted well into winter, and could be stored for long periods of time. (Maria

recalled finding some edible chokecherry cakes in the cellar of her grandmother's house long after she had passed away). Women were also in charge of drying meat and fish, which in communities like Rosella's was the only means of preserving food. In other communities, such as Madeleine's, women dried food but also engaged in canning to prepare for the winter. This was done as a collective activity, and in great quantities. As Madeleine said, "the women canned everything feasible: vegetables, fish, and even meat. They made pickles; one time my mother said she put up 500 jars!"

Like Madeleine, Maria had memories of the volume of food that needed to be prepared for the winter. This was typically the work of her mother and other women in the community who worked assembly-line style to get it done, although she noted that "after my mother died, it was nothing for my dad and I to can 400 quarts of meat, vegetables, and berries for the winter," (an example of how gendered work responsibilities were flexible when necessary). Madeleine summarized the women's work in food preservation stating, "The women worked extremely hard to make sure there was food. In the winter there were rabbits and deer to be had, but to have a balanced diet the women went out and made sure that all of these other things were preserved."

Olive talked about how resourceful women had to be with food, remarking that "my mother could make a meal out of nothing." She pointed out that her mother could cook equally well whether they were at home or travelling, and fondly remembered her mother making bannock and meat on a stick over an open fire. Likewise, Rose remarked on the ability of her mother to make tortière while they were travelling. Other participants reminisced about the special occasion foods that their mothers would make. For Maria, it was blueberry cake on the odd Sunday when blueberries were in season, and Christmas

foods such as "boulettes," tortière and mincemeat. She described how the women worked collectively to make these holiday foods:

> They would start cooking in early November. They'd make the poucin – the Christmas pudding. They would all come together to start getting ready for Christmas baking too, because they didn't have much money. So one family would be responsible for buying all the raisins. [Others would be responsible for something else]. And then you would bring it all together because [in our community we were an extended family] and we would have Christmas together, so the women would do all that kind of baking together.

Clothing was another key component of women's work. A few participants talked about how important it was to make families feel and look good, particularly in light of the racism Aboriginal people were experiencing from the outside world. This was evident in Madeleine's comment that "women made sure that men looked and smelled good when going to town. They dressed [them] nicely and to make sure that they felt every bit as good as the [white people], who rarely saw Indians and vice versa." Maria also pointed out that, after her mother's death, her grandmother saw to it that her dad didn't go anywhere "looking raggy."

Because of scarce resources, clothing was limited. As Maria pointed out, "I didn't know anybody who owned lots of clothes. My mom had the dress she wore on Sunday and then she had two other skirts and two blouses, and I think she had more than most people." She added, "I had one good dress that I wore to church on Sunday or any special day. That one dress was made in the fall and it had to last until spring. The hem was big

enough that it could be let down and then used the following year, or [mom] would buy some flour sack material and sew it on to make it longer."

Madeleine also talked about the thriftiness of the time, recalling that "women sewed clothes with whatever they had and a lot of time fabrics got recycled. If someone had a big coat, then maybe two jackets were made out of it." Madeleine remembered her mother showing her the Sears catalogue and asking "Which style do you want?" Her mother would then make the dress by looking at the catalogue. Rose's grandmother also made dresses without patterns; as Rose pointed out, "if she loved a dress, when it wore out, she put it down on the cloth and cut one more of it."

Much of the clothing was hand sewn, particularly among the older women. Hilary noted that, in the case of her grandmother "even her undergarments" were done by hand, and that some of the work, such as pleated blouses was very fine: "She could put little pleats, from her collarbone all the way straight down the front of her dress, to the waist." The only apparel that Hilary's grandmother bought were the rubbers that went over her moccasins in winter or inclement weather. A number of participants remembered the excitement when sewing machines came into their families.

Although there was always mending and repair work to be done, work around clothing tended to be seasonal. Women worked on sewing during winter evenings when there was less gardening and outdoor work. Summers were dedicated to tanning hides which would then be turned into clothing and moccasins over the fall and winter. In many communities and especially with the older people, moccasins were the only footwear. Women also used the hides to make jackets, and muskrat, rabbit and beaver pelts were used to make leggings, stockings and blankets. Winter nights were also occupied by

sewing handicrafts, which women could sell or trade at the store for sugar or other special things.

Women's work also included participation in the cash economy. As noted previously, some women ran their own traplines and sustained their families that way. Others worked for wage labour. This was more common for unmarried girls, as in the case of Rose and Rosella. Rose started working as a chamber maid in a hotel in Prince Albert when she was fifteen and from there she went north where she worked in a fishing camp for two years. Rosella also moved away from her family at the age of fifteen, and worked as a clerk in a store. A few of the other participants talked about the wage labour that their mothers did. Olive, for example, noted that her mother had worked as a domestic for the local doctor.

In summary, one of the strongest themes that came out of the interviews regarding this life stage was the rigour of the work involved. This was coupled with a strong emphasis on the aforementioned "Aboriginal work ethic." As Gertie pointed out, "I don't remember my mother ever being without a job or without work to do. I don't ever remember her saying, 'Oh you guys make me work so hard.' It's just what she did." What Gertie learned from the women in her family was "If you wanted to have something for your family, then you did the work you had to do. It was never 'Oh, somebody else will come and give that to me,' or 'My husband is going to give that to me." Rosella commented on the work ethic as well, stating "Most of the girls I grew up with were hard workers like me. They had to work hard; we had no choice – we had to survive."

Work, however, also involved cooperative and social activity; it was a way of

building and maintaining community. This element of women's work will be covered in the next section.

**Keepers of Relationships: Collectivism and Kinship**

Land based communities were by necessity interdependent, for it was a matter of survival that people worked well together. Relationship building was thus vital to the well-being of the collective, and as the keepers of relationships, women held important roles. Maria reflected on this, saying "When people say it was the women who held culture together -- its not "culture" they held together; it was kinship. They looked after the big, extended family and made sure that nobody fell by the wayside. Culture comes from all of those things – from the way that people live together, the way that people treat each other, the way they interact with one another. That's kinship. In Cree [this concept is captured within] mino pimatisiwin. Living a good life."

A strong foundation for the collective came from the relationships women built among themselves, and a lot of this relationship building happened while they were working. Where they could, women worked collectively. There were more opportunities for this in summer, as Maria remembered. "All summer long the women would do their work together," she said. They would dry their meat, do pickling, canning; all those kinds of things. Everything was done outside. All the jars were there and they were divided up equally among the family, depending on how many kids they had." Maria shared other memories of how the women and children used to do their laundry together, which she described in detail:

> Everybody at home always washed clothes on Mondays and mother would be waiting for the [other women] with all of our laundry and our tubs. She had a huge cast iron

pot that she boiled water in, and homemade lye soap and all of the things like scrub boards that we would need for washing.

As kids, we would wake up so excited Monday morning. We'd get all loaded up in the wagon, and about eight or ten wagons of us would go to this big pit about a half a mile up the road from our house. (It had eroded and was full of clean water).The women would make several fires around the edge of the pit, putting these cast iron pots onto them where there were tripods. They would then sit around and visit while the water was heating up. The kids would strip down to underclothes and swim, and we'd be in the water all day long. As the girls got older, we had to take part in the washing of the clothes. The boys had other work, like setting snares, or catching food to eat. My mom and the women would cook our lunch out there, usually something warmed up from Sunday supper. They would bring mending out, and in between all of this, while they were waiting for their one batch of clothes to dry, they would sit and do their mending.

Maria remarked on the community building benefits of this practice, saying, "It was such an amazing experience for all of the kids; a way for all of us to play together with all our cousins, just to know each other." She also called attention to the camaraderie and exchange among the women, stating, "They laughed and talked and helped each other. If you had just had a baby, you couldn't do all that heavy work, the scrubbing of stuff. So you would come out there with all your laundry, but you might be in charge of cooking while the women did your laundry for you."

Rose talked about how women in her community gathered to work in quilting bees or to make hats, mitts and scarves for children in need. These women also worked together to make kits for new babies in the community, and cooking bees were popular, especially for special occasions like Christmas. This collective work of women offered cherished opportunities for visiting. As Maria noted, "women used to sit down together and sew blankets. There was a lot of laughter and sharing of personal and intimate things that would go on." She pointed out that there were "healing" benefits that came from women gathering on a regular basis to share their work and their lives.

The value of visiting was also raised by Rebecca. Growing up without radio or TV, visiting was an integral part of the social fabric of northern communities. As she said, "growing up in a small community where children were welcomed into every home, we learned how to relate to one another. When invited to visit 'for tea,' if we made a mistake, adults gently corrected our behaviour." In Maria's community there was radio, but women would still gather together to listen to shows like "Ma Perkins" while they did their mending and visited.

Collective work was a way of making the labour of women more fun. Maria told a story about finding archival correspondence in which a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in Saskatchewan complained that road allowance people were "always having picnics." The message that the Métis were lazy angered Maria because, as she said, "nobody worked harder than we did." Upon reflection, Maria realized that the MLA misinterpreted what they were doing because they were always laughing and joking while they worked. "So if anybody were driving by, they would just think you were a bunch of lazy people, sitting around telling stories all day," she said. "[And] if they drove by [on

laundry day] and saw us all laughing and talking and the kids splashing around in the water, the women lolling around on the beach, they [would have] thought this was a big picnic." In Maria's community, the social and healing benefits of laundry day were lost once the gas washing machines came in, as the women no longer had that weekly "ritual" of community building.

Berry picking was an ongoing form of work that offered social interaction. Marie talked about the fun they would have on berry picking excursions, remembering that they would load up in a boat and travel across the lake for a day trip. She remembered that someone might shoot a duck or catch a fish for a shared meal. Berry picking was typically done by women and children, although men would sometimes go along to protect them from bears. Rebecca remembered her father sitting in the shade with his rifle, while the women and children picked nearby. Danny told a humorous story about one man that was usually sent along, but was demoted from the job because all he was doing was pacing around the edge of the women's patch, telling boastful stories and flirting.

A number of elders spoke fondly of the longer berry picking excursions they would make with their families. Olive remarked, "it was such a happy time. We used the team and wagon. Our wagon used to be full: we had our tent, and we were well equipped." In Maria's family, these excursions occupied most of their summer. "When school was out in June, usually we were on the road," she said. "We'd load up all the wagons and off we'd go, pick berries and pick roots and travel all summer long. We replaced the buffalo hunt with doing all this other work because that's how we supplemented our income, by picking berries and seneca root and selling it."

Socializing for women wasn't always about work, however; it also included playing games. Women had traditionally had their own games, including the women's "testicle game," in which they used sticks to throw "a double ball made of two bags of deerskin stuffed with buffalo hair and connected by a strip of hide."[14] There were no memories of traditional women's games among the participants in this study, but some remembered "hand games" that the elders used to play with bones, sitting in long rows across from one another. Marie had memories of elders playing games using bones and sticks, and Olive talked about a game they used to play with the rabbit's head. She explained, "we used to fight for the head after everything was eaten and there was just the bone left. You'd say: 'Rabbit, who's the ugliest in the family?' And you twisted it around and wherever the nose pointed, that was the ugliest person!"

Gambling was popular, and had historical traditions among women. Fine Day talked about the gambling that used to go on in the late nineteenth century when there was a big camp, stating "Cree women bet their dishes against the dried meat of the Soto women." By mid-century, gambling had been banned by the church, but community members found ways to do it anyway. Hilary shared a story about being a young child and sneaking off with her grannie to meet others in the woods so they could gamble all night. This story shows community cohesion as well as resistance to the oppressive conditions Aboriginal people were living with at the time. She explained:

> They always had a secret little meeting place in the bush where they would get together... [Grannie] would wait until it was the dead of night. She would have our blankets that we would be sleeping in, and her gambling stuff and a little bit of food. She was tiny, but she would carry that on her back.

We had to be totally quiet because the priest had spies in the community. And so you had to make like you were just going to visit somebody. I was instructed never to talk. No matter who it was, I wasn't to talk to them -- just act shy. I remember sometimes being tired and starting to cry: "Nohkom I'm tired, I don't want to walk any further." So on top of all the stuff she was carrying, she'd throw me up there and carry me.

Pretty soon, there would be young men who came to meet us. One young man would carry me and the other young man would carry her blankets the rest of the way to the gambling site.

[When we got there] she would put out her blankets around where they were sitting and I would curl around her legs and sleep. I'd wake up once in awhile and hear the gambling by bitch lamp,[15] or whatever. There would be laughing and talking and carrying on... I remember looking forward to the morning time, because there would be kids to play with.

Maria remembered her mother and aunts playing poker for their beadwork or embroidery. She talked about how these goods would circulate around the community, stating that "it was kind of a joke. My one auntie would have everything tonight, and tomorrow night somebody else would have it. Whatever my mother lost, she would usually get it all back by spring." Listening to this story, Hilary commented "I think that's where my Nohkom got a lot of her fabric."

Maria made a distinction about the type of gambling that was done in her childhood and what she sees now. In her estimation, gambling was historically used as a way to bring people together, and to distribute and redistribute goods. She remarked that "in those days you didn't starve to death because you were gambling. You didn't leave your kids. It's not the same [now] – the wahkotowin (kinship/relationship building) is gone from gambling, where it used to be part of it." Hilary and Maria reflected on how gambling had also once been a sacred activity among plains people, and they pondered whether or not it had become one of the safer "ceremonies" that people could practice in their time. As Maria pointed out, "even though it was against the law with the church, you wouldn't get punished the same way if you were caught gambling as you would if you were caught in ceremony."

When asked about other forms of recreation, the Nēhiyawak and Michif in Saskatchewan in particular talked about dances. Dances were held at peoples' houses, with different families taking turns to host them. Olive, Maria and Rose talked about a tradition whereby a nickel was planted in a cake, and whoever got the nickel would hold the next dance. Sylvia also had many memories of dances because her father was a fiddle player. She recalled that "during Christmas we would have a dance every night. My aunts and uncles would just push the furniture back. My dad would play at different houses, and [everyone] would take their kids with them."

Dances were more prominent in the winter when men were home from trapping, and they tended to go on all night. As Maria explained, "from New Year's all the way up until Lent people would visit and party and dance. It was just non-stop. And then lent would come and the Catholics would sacrifice. Nobody would have parties any more

[after that]." Rosella remembered that dances used to take place in the fish plant in her community, and she talked about the dances she attended on the reserve as well. "When I was a kid we used to be hauled to Montreal Lake to watch the square dances," she said. "They never had any alcohol there, all they did was dance! So we grew up learning how to dance all these square dances, jigs and everything." This activity was intergenerational; as Olive pointed out, "when there was a wedding, we went with our parents. It was healthy. It was fun."

**Sexuality, Courting and Marriage**

When girls passed through puberty and entered the women's circle, they also entered into new experiences involving sexuality, courting and marriage. For some, relationships with men and boys changed immediately. Rebecca pointed out that she had been a tomboy prior to puberty, but that afterwards her mother had kept her closer to the house. She noted that girls were chaperoned more closely as soon as they went through puberty. In general, the participants' stories demonstrated that the 'traditional' notions of their preceding generations related to sexuality, courtship and marriage were still being applied, although girls were sometimes resistant to them in their efforts to be 'modern' or more in line with mainstream society.

As described in the previous section, dances were a big part of social life, and they were one way for young women to enter into the world of sexuality, courting and marriage. As a teenager, Rose attended dances with friends. This was a freedom she enjoyed, although she remembered her grandmother waiting up for her and lecturing about the risks of unplanned pregnancy. Other participants came from families where

courting was more strictly regulated.[16] For example, traditional chaperones were still in place in Maria's childhood community. She told a story about going to her first dance, which was held in a neighbouring town. Maria wanted to be like the white girls but her family held to their strict ideals. She explained:

> When I went to my first dance I had this old lady that came with me... And she wasn't a pretty old lady! But my dad insisted and she loved me dearly. She was always making a big deal over me. So I just loved her when I was a kid -- until I had to take her to my first dance! By that time I was looking through a different lens...
>
> When dad told me I had to take her, it was the first time that I really looked at her. I thought, *I can't take her!* I mean, I was starting to get into Elvis Presley and all that stuff -- To be dragging this old Indian lady around, with her long skirt and her rubbers and moccasins and her funny little beret...and she had a great big hook nose! [laughter]. She was just as homely as a mud fence, but dad said, "Well if you want to go dancing you can't go without her."
>
> So I went, thinking, *Well, she'll sit in the corner someplace and I'll just pretend I don't know who she is.* Most of the other kids were white. They were going to think "Who does she belong to?" Nobody else had a chaperone.
>
> If I went outside, she went outside. I then realized that it was her job was to follow me around; she was a traditional chaperone. And if somebody said, "Oh, is that ever a pretty dress," she was just so happy for me. She'd make all these little noises on the

side. It was awful!... She walked behind me, and watched to make sure that I didn't go out with anybody, and that I didn't do anything I wasn't supposed to do.

Some of the other participants also talked about how they were carefully watched as girls. As June put it, "you couldn't get pregnant because you couldn't get out anyway."[17]

In general, girls were taught to be modest about their bodies. Sylvia remembered being taught by one of the grandmothers in her community "never to wear shorts in front of our brothers." The main lesson Sylvia received from this grandmother was "to respect our bodies." Danny reflected on the modesty of the time and told a story about how he had asked his grandfather why women wore long skirts. His grandfather referred him to their creation story, in which "the male within God" decided to manifest himself in the physical as mother earth. Mother earth was named for her beauty, he said, and this beauty is equated with women's bodies. It was a modest and reserved beauty that was reflected in the care women took in how they presented themselves publicly.

Modesty in dress and behaviour may have come from traditional teachings, but it was also likely the result of a different set of teachings which came from residential schools. Participants in this study were the offspring of previous generations who were indoctrinated with sexual repression from the churches in charge of their schooling.[18] Maria talked about her mother, who was raised in a convent and was "prudish," in contrast with her grandmother, who was not residential schooled and was "anything but" a prude. The intergenerational effects of residential schooling likely stand behind the fact that only a few of the elders in this study received sex education.

Where information about sex was passed on, it was typically the job of the "aunties" or "other mothers." Maria remembered that "if I wanted to know about boys or

stuff like that, I went to my aunties. And sometimes they wouldn't tell me, but they would be talking among themselves and they wouldn't chase me away." Rebecca shared that her mother never talked to her "about creation," but, rather, arranged a friend to do it:

> When I was 10, while going to school in town, a friend of my mother's came to where I was boarding and invited me for tea. Secretly, I thought that my mother must have told her I had [started] my Moon time, because that would be the only reason that a woman would invite me for tea.
>
> My mother's friend kept me in her house all day. I had tea, but she also taught me everything I would ever need to know about creation...She talked about how my body would develop and the feelings a girl has when she first likes a boy. When instructing me in the choice of a good man, she said, "If you want to choose a good man, have him take you home for dinner. Watch how he treats his mother, because that's how he'll treat you."

Rebecca remembered how thorough her mother's friend was in giving her teachings about creation:

> I listened to my mother's friend all day. She would talk, stop for awhile, and then start again. When she spoke about being a wife, a mother and a grandmother, I learned the passages in a woman's life, as well as the natural order in caring for self, family and community. The woman instructed me in caring for and honouring my female being, while at the same time, she spoke at length about the ways that women are respectful of the men in our families. Many years after my mother's friend gifted

me with teachings on how my body would embrace womanhood, her words came alive when I went into labour and delivered a child, and later still, when Grandmother Moon was waning in my life.

Rebecca noted that it was not until she became a mother herself, that she realized the wisdom of having an "auntie" provide the very detailed and specific information about creation that would have caused discomfort for her own mother. This practice was also in keeping with traditional ways in which the training of older children was undertaken by aunts and uncles.

Elders in this study typically entered marriage in their late teens. Rosella explained that in her community you knew you were old enough to get married when you had all the skills to work and thrive in a traditional lifestyle. She pointed out that "hard workers" were still valued as marriage partners, noting that women in her community attracted men from around the region for this reason.

Looking for a good worker in a partner is one example of how, at mid-century, marriage still manifested some of the old ways. Marriage had also traditionally included arranged, common-law and polygamous alliances, and it had not been long since these traditions were fully active. Arranged marriages had been very common in the parent and grandparent generations of the participants, and were to some extent still going on at mid-century. Maria talked about how many of her aunts and foremothers had been in arranged marriages. Her grannies had also picked someone for her when Maria was young, but this did not come to pass as the community was no longer cohesive when she came of age. In Danny's childhood during the 1940s, arranged marriages were still happening, and Rosella and Madeleine mentioned that some of their siblings were also involved in

arranged marriages around that time. There is evidence in the literature that some communities carried on with the tradition of arranged marriages into the 1950s[19] and Elsie remembered them into the 1960s. Some sources indicate that fathers were in charge of arranging marriages for their daughters,[20] while other sources indicate that this practice fell within the jurisdiction of older women.[21] In Rosella's case, it was her aunt and uncle that did the matchmaking. Chapter VI will include some examples of how older women still held some of these responsibilities.

Oral history from Nēhiyawak women indicates that arranged marriages were not always welcome among the young women who were beholden to them,[22]but in some cases, the girls were able to resist and exert agency in how they partnered.[23] Literature also suggests that some couples in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries eloped and were accepted back into their communities without question.[24] In most cases, however, marriage was an arrangement that facilitated survival of the family and well-being of the community, not romantic love. Maria talked about her aunts' experiences, in which arranged marriages were a necessity because there were so few marriageable partners. It was the old ladies' job to match people and ensure there was no mixing of families. Maria was also told that marriage was often a question of economics; a way of ensuring there was a balance of workers in each family unit to ensure sustenance.

Some of the participants in this study married out of economic necessity, while others demonstrated agency in the choices they made. Rose talked about the way she had managed her husband's attention. Her husband had expressed an interest in her when she was fifteen, but she chose to make him wait, moving north to work in a fish camp instead. She eventually married him three years later. Other participants spoke about how there

were a number of common-law arrangements in their communities. As mentioned earlier, Rosella and Elsie both came from families in which the men were not consistently present, and Maria remembered an aunt who had never married either, although she had men who came and went.

Even though some of the old ways regarding marriage were still operational, by mid-century communities had already experienced a couple of generations of pressure to engage in Christian ideals of what constituted a "proper marriage." This involved "extolling the virtues of a life-long commitment, of a stable home for the children, and of a formal act accompanied by high ritual."[25] Polygamy had particularly come under fire.[26] Values and attitudes towards polygamy did not change overnight, nor did the practices. Writing in 1933, Regina Flannery observed that "young women don't think much of it [but] the older ones even today agree that it was a good thing and did not consider it to have been in any sense degrading."[27] For some, polygamy had been a way of "reducing the household work"[28] of women, who often came into polygamous marriages with their sisters.[29] Maria remembered polygamous families in her community, and the wives were typically sisters, but there were no other stories of polygamy in this study.

Divorce and separation were also caught up in a mix of traditional and Eurowestern ways, values and attitudes during this time. Mandelbaum wrote in the 1930s that "if a couple proved to be incompatible, either the man or the woman returned to the tipi of his or her parents. The one who remained cared for the children and kept the household effects. After a time, both were free to marry again."[30] Danny asserted that traditionally "when a divorce took place, the man left the tipi. And the grandmother would come and check to see if he cleared more than that." This had to do with Saulteaux men typically

coming to live within the woman's family,[31] which meant that any property was left with the woman's family. Danny asserted that the grandmother would give departing husbands the following lecture:

> You don't own anything [here]. You take your moccasins, your bow and your hatchet. The tipi was given to you by your grandmother. The blankets were given to you by your cousin over here, and the rugs were given by this family here. The poles were cut by this uncle over here. The community put this up. But, you've still got to bring meat and you've still got to bring food to this family, until your partner finds another partner.

Danny chuckled and said, "It was said sometimes the men who got divorced would try to find a partner for their wives to take responsibility because they had to continue to feed that family!"

The economies of many twentieth century unions did not permit as much freedom for divorce or separation. When Maria asked her aunts about their options for divorce, they told her that it wouldn't have been possible, "because there was nowhere to go." In these cases, women needed to stay with their husbands because their families of origin did not have the capacity to support them. Maria noted that her one aunt who had never been married would turn her boyfriends out if they became abusive. Some participants gave examples of separations in their families: for example, Sylvia recalled that her grandfather's wife left him and his children when they were very young.

With settler ways, marriage became more of a union between a man and a woman, but traditionally it had been more of a community investment. Danny talked about how the community was still involved in his early years, saying "when you got married, the

whole community got into the preparation of the marriage. Some of the men got together and built you a house, and then they would give you a team of horses. They gave you an axe, saw and a rifle, and all the blankets you required to be married." The community provided support in material ways, but family and community also had a significant role in helping the young people with their new social and work responsibilities. Jennifer Blythe and Peggy McGuire have written about how "marriage and sustenance were community responsibilities because they were vital to the long-term survival of the whole group" among the Moose Cree.[32] They further note that "people expected that a newly married couple would take a few years to work out relations of independence, and community members were available to mediate when problems arose."[33]

With marriage, young women were brought into a circle where they were mentored by older women. Marriage was therefore as much about strengthening female bonds of kinship and family as it was about a union between a man and a woman.[34] Both matrilocal and patrilocal arrangements have been recorded about the Nēhiyawak, Anishinaabek and Michif.[35] In arrangements where the man moved in with his wife's kin, it was expected that as a new husband he would hunt and provide for her whole family.[36] Girls who moved in with their husband's families were taken in and taught by the older women among his kin. The most thorough example of this can be found in the story of Emma Minde, in which she talks about how she moved into her husband's family as a young woman and was taken under the wing of her mother-in-law and husband's aunt. Editor H.C. Wolfart states in the introduction to her story that "the teaching role of the mother-in-law covers the entire range of human life," and that from the day of her

marriage onward, "the mother-in-law may well be the most important person in a young woman's life."[37]

Maria recalled how her own mother was required to fall within the "jurisdiction" of her paternal grandmother's authority. As stated earlier, her mother had been raised in a convent, so the move to her father's community required some adjustment. Maria remarked that "it was kind of hard for my mom when she first came, because she was moving into a different system. My grandmother was very much the boss. My great-grandmother was the ultimate boss, but she was pretty gentle. So my granny was the boss, in everybody's house, in everybody's life, and my mother had to follow that way." In some instances, this situation could have been experienced as oppressive for the younger women, who, like younger wives in polygamous marriages, might find themselves under the authority of the older women who subjected them to a heavy workload. In Rebecca's case, this custom involved being taught and taken into a welcoming circle of women's kinship when she married and moved to her Cree husband's community in the early 1970s.

Rebecca's experiences demonstrate that, although experiences of sexuality, courting and marriage were in a period of transition at mid-century, many of the old ways still held. In the 'traditional' societies of the early twentieth century, marriage had been about establishing strong ties of kinship that would strengthen the community and ensure health, well-being and community survival. Although this system was starting to break down under pressures to assume the patriarchal, single family units of mainstream society, northern Algonquian communities hung on to some of the extended family culture that marriages had supported in the past.

## Conclusion

In the opening epigraph Mosôm asserted that the adult years were about carrying "the responsibility for the continuation of the collective as a living, viable community." It is perhaps not surprising, then, that so much of what the participants shared in relation to these years was about the work that women did for the good of the collective. Women managed material resources and worked as 'keepers of relationships' to ensure family and community well-being.

The training they had received as children in terms of the 'Aboriginal work ethic' was now fully applied, and the commitment to family and community that had been fostered in them underpinned their ability to meet the responsibilities of these adult years. In many ways, these middle years were a time of sacrifice, or, as Gertie once said to me "parenting is the longest fast you will ever do!" Puberty rites had introduced them into this circle, where they would stay until it was time to ease into new responsibilities as older women. The lives, authorities and responsibilities of older women are the subject of the next chapter.

## Notes

[1] Taken from Merriam-Webster on-line. (www.merriam-webster.com)
[2] I have written more extensively about these teachings in Kim Anderson and Jessica Ball, "Foundations: First Nations and Métis Families," in *Visions of the Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issues, 3rd Edition,* ed. David Long and Olive Patricia Dickason (Toronto: Oxford University Press, in press). See also Kim Anderson, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (Toronto: Sumach/ Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000), 158-164.
[3] Responsibilities that were particular to elderly women will be discussed in the next chapter.
[4] Taken from Lee, "Cree Teachings," www.fourdirectionsteachings.com
[5] Ibid.
[6] Mosôm learned from his elders that "her tipi, and the contents of it belonged to her." This tradition is also evident in reading the words of Fine Day, who noted that in the late 1800s it was typically old women who would make the tipis. He stated, "the woman puts up the tipi and owns it." See Fine Day, *My Cree People: A Tribal Handbook* (Invermere, BC: Good Medicine Books, 1973). Amelia Paget also remarked on the women's relationship with the tipi, writing, "If the buffalo hunt was successful, women would make new tepees or wigwams – many workers would offer their help in sewing it up. Then they would have a feast upon completion, and all the women of the band were bidden to this ceremony, no men ever attended."[6] Amelia Paget, *People of the Plains*, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004). Elder Mary Lee continues to teach the ceremonies that are part of women's responsibilities for putting up a tipi, as this is the work that holds the community together. Lee, "Cree Teachings,"ibid.
[7] Writing about the Lakota, Raymond DeMallie writes "according to Deloria, the menstrual blood gave a kind of temporary power to a woman, a wakan quality. This was not thought of as polluting but rather as at odds with the wakan power of men; a woman's menstrual power clashed with a medicine man's power. The clash was characterized by the work ohakay, 'to cause to be blocked or tangled.' Hence women were to be secluded from men during their menstrual periods." Raymond J. DeMallie, "Male and Female in Traditional Lakota Culture." In *The Hidden Half:Studies of Plains Indian Women,* eds. Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine (Washington: University Press of America, 1983), 257.
[8] This lesson was all the more important for the Indian Agent, an active participant in the colonial system that was violating the boundaries of Aboriginal people on almost every level: territorial, spiritual, sexual and so on.
[9] Fine Day, *My Cree People*, p. 13.
[10] Freda Ahenakew and H. Christoph Wolfart, eds.*Kohkominawak Otacimowiniwawa: Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in their Own Words* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1992), 26.
[11] Laura Peers, "Subsistence, Secondary Literature, and Gender Bias: The Saulteaux," in *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength,* eds. Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996), 39-50.
[12] Ibid., 45.
[13] Ibid., 46.
[14] David Goodman Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1979), 134-5; Fine Day, *My Cree People*, 39. Joseph Dion also makes note of women having their own games in Joseph F. Dion, *My Tribe the Crees* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1979), 12.
[15] A makeshift lamp made out of old rags braided together, soaked in grease and put in a can.
[16] Strict supervision around courting, including the use of chaperones is described in a number of sources, including Alice Ahenakew, Freda Ahenakew, and H. Christoph Wolfart, *Âh-Âyîtaw Isi ê-kî-Kiskêyihtahkik Maskihkiy: They Knew both Sides of Medicine: Cree Tales of Curing and Cursing* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), 45; Fine Day, *My Cree People*, 7; Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 147 and Nathalie Kermoal, *Un Passé Métis au Feminin* (Quebec: Editions GED, 2007), 120.
[17] This corresponds to a comment made by Cree oral historian Glecia Bear: "In those days the old people used to guard the girls so closely you never went anywhere." See Bear in Freda Ahenakew and H. Christoph Wolfart, eds., *Kohkominawak Otacimowiniwawa: Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in their Own Words* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1992), 215.
[18] See Kim Anderson, *A Recognition of Being*, 91-94.
[19] James Bay Cree oral historian Alice Jacob tells of getting married in an arranged marriage in 1948 and

James Bay Cree author Jane Willis writes about how her family tried to arrange for her to marry in 1958. See Sarah and Alice Jacob Preston, *Let the Past Go: A Life History* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1986), 49 and Jane Willis, *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood* (Toronto: New Press, 1973), 182.

[20] Fine Day, *My Cree People*, 7; Madelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 146; Ahenakew and Wolfart, *Kohkominawak Otacimowiniwawa*, 211; Emma Minde, Freda Ahenakew, and H. Christoph Wolfart, *Kwayask ê-kî-pê-Kiskinowâpahtihicik: Their Example showed Me the Way: A Cree Woman's Life Shaped by Two Cultures* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1997), xxvii. Scholars have cautioned against reading these types of arrangements from the lens applied to them by the earliest European observers; a lens that has turned into the myth that Aboriginal men "sold" their daughters into marriage. This misperception has been addressed by Dion, *My Tribe,* 17 and Rebecca Kugel and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, eds, *Native Women's History in Eastern North America before 1900: A Guide to Research and Writing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), xxix. Katherine Weist has written, "Europeans thought that men bought their wives because they witnessed the giving of horses... In reality, they were only witnessing one facet of a set of exchanges." See Katherine M. Weist, "Beasts of Burden and Menial Slaves: Nineteenth Century Observations of Northern Plains Indian Women," in *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*, eds. Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine (Washington: University Press of America, 1983), 44.

[21] Laura L. Peers, *Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780 to 1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 57; Preston and Jacob, *Let the Past Go*, 94.

[22] Bear in Ahenakew and Wolfart, *Kohkominawak Otacimowiniwawa,* 213; Minde, *Kwayask ê-kî-pê-Kiskinowâpahtihicik,* xxxii.

[23] Bear, ibid.; Alice Ahenakew, Freda Ahenakew, and H. Christop Wolfart, *Âh-Âyîtaw Isi ê-kî-Kiskêyihtahkik Maskihkiy*, 49; Willis, *Geniesh* (Toronto: New Press, 1973), 3; Dion, *My Tribe,*16-17; Preston and Jacob, *Let the Past Go*, 127.

[24] Fine Day, *My Cree People,* 8; Mabdelbaum, *Plains Cree,* 148.

[25] Minde, *Kwayask ê-kî-pê-Kiskinowâpahtihicik*, xxxi., 13, 57..

[26] See Sarah Carter, *The Importance of being Monogamous : Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008); Sarah Carter, "Creating "Semi-Widow" and "Supernumary Wives": Prohibiting Polygamy in Prairie Canada's Aboriginal Communities to 1900," in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal & Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past,* eds. Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2005), 131-159.

[27] Regina Flannery, "The Position of Women Among the Eastern Cree," *Primitive Man* 8 (1935): 84.

[28] Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree,* 148.

[29] Fine Day, *My Cree People*, 8-10; Paget, *People of the Plains*, 40, Peers, *Ojibwe of Western Canada*, 83; Alanson Skinner, *Notes on the Eastern Cree and Northern Saulteaux, by Alanson Skinner* (New York: The Trustees, 1911), 57.

[30] Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 150.

[31] Writing about the Ojibway of western Canada, Laura Peers has stated "It was the Ojibway custom that after marriage the groom lived with his wife's family for at least a year, hunting and trapping for his in-laws." Peers, *Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 35.

[32] Jennifer Blythe and Peggy Martin McGuire, "The Changing Employment of Cree Women in Moosonee and Moose Factory," in *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom and Strength,* eds. Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996), 147.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Rebecca Kugel and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, eds.*Native Women's History in Eastern North America before 1900: A Guide to Research and Writing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), xxx.

[35] Fine Day, *My Cree People,* 8; Peers, *Ojibwa of Western Canada,* 35; Minde, *Kwayask ê-kî-pê-Kiskinowâpahtihicik*, xiii; Skinner, *Notes on the Eastern Cree*, 151; Flannery, "The Position of Women," 81. Diane Payment has documented a strong female kinship tie among the Métis families that resettled at Batoche in the late 19th century. See Diane Payment, ""La vie en rose"? Metis Women at Batoche, 1870 to 1920," in *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom and Strength,* eds. Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996), 23.

[36] Peers, *Ojibwa of Western Canada,* 35; Fine Day, *My Cree People*, 8.

[37] Minde, *Kwayask ê-kî-pê-Kiskinowâpahtihicik*, xi.

# CHAPTER VI

# ELDER YEARS

> There is a status that comes with old age among First Nations people. In old age, one is considered to have acquired wisdom by virtue of living a long life...Old age is a very productive stage of life. Old people have much to contribute in that they are the teachers of history, traditions, language and philosophy. They are also keepers of the law, nurturers, advisors and leaders in ceremonial practices.[1]
>
> Mosôm Danny Musqua

It would be difficult to overstate the role of elders in Indigenous societies, as once people had reached this "fourth hill" they were revered, respected and treated with deference. This was something that was earned by living a good life and having honoured all of the responsibilities associated with earlier stages. In the introductory chapter, I quoted Basil Johnson who noted that "by living through all stages and living out visions, men and women know something of human nature and living and life."[2] Presumably, those who did not live a good life did not achieve the same level of authority as those who did, but all elders were rewarded some level of respect by virtue of their age. This chapter focuses on how elders in the childhood lives of the historian participants manifested responsibilities for leadership, teaching, and making connections with the spirit world, as prescribed in the life stage teachings.

I will begin with a section related to the physical aspects of aging. These first stories demonstrate that in spite of diminishing physical ability, women remained

industrious until the end of their lives. Looking at the memories of elders provided by the participants, it is clear that old age was eminently "a very productive stage of life."

With a focus on roles and responsibilities, I have divided the subsequent sections according to five areas: leadership and governance; teaching; managing the health of the community; and doorkeeping to the spirit world. Collectively, the roles and responsibilities discussed in these categories demonstrate the powerful position that elderly women held in Algonquian societies. The stories in this chapter give meaning to Mosôm's words that "no nation existed without the fortitude of our grandmothers."[3]

Before analysing the material provided by the oral histories it is worthwhile to further define the three stages of elder years referenced in Chapter I. This material, along with background teachings on the roles of elderly women in Algonquian societies, provide context for the stories that follow.

**General Roles and Responsibilities for Elder Years**

Mosôm's life stage teachings distinguish between community elders, ceremonial elders and earth elders. In his experience, "you entered the old people's club when you had a grandchild." He outlined the preliminary responsibilities by saying "when you became a grandparent you would start participating with the old people's council. You sat there as a member. You didn't speak very much, because you didn't know very much. But you listened to the teachings of the old people; how to become an elder, what your responsibility was. You were the keeper of traditions, you were the keeper of your disciplines, you were the keeper of the laws. And you would have to minister the appropriate use of those laws. So you had to know how to do things."

This description frames the community elder role as a beginning for some of the more senior roles elders would adopt in later years. But Mosôm went on to say that "the community elder is also typically a chief or a councillor. The head man or chi-ogima. And the same thing with women, the woman chief. They were there for as long as required." Community elders thus served the community in a leadership capacity, as they increasingly took on responsibilities to do with governance.

The next level in elder years was the ceremonial elder. This person carried spiritual responsibilities, such as conducting opening prayers and pipe ceremonies and overseeing council dances in Saulteaux society. Mosôm talked about how these elders would be the ones doing naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies and funerals. Generally speaking it was the responsibility of these elders to look after the health and well-being of the community, which they did through spiritual practice and engagement. Mosôm said that a ceremonial elder was responsible for "the circles of healing, the circles of peace, and human justice, when things go wrong." It is the job of the ceremonial elder, he said, "to bring about closure to different things, to mourning, to breakdown in the community."

Mosôm described earth elders as those who were seventy-five or eighty years old, "the last twenty-five years of life!" This age span and the responsibilities associated with it speak to the lack of such a thing as "retirement" for elders in the world of Mosôm's childhood. Earth elders in this environment were those who were too infirm to travel, and so it was the learner's responsibility to go to them. Mosôm stated that they represented "the last phase of the teachings, the philosophy, the in-depth learners of the purest functions of our responsibilities to the Creator."

Mosôm's teachings about the three phases of elder years correspond to roles outlined in the Midewiwin and Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy models presented in Chapter I. The AHWS model makes a distinction between "grandparents" and "elders," with corresponding responsibilities for "life teacher" and "spirit teacher." Mature adults and elders are distinguished in Midewiwin teachings by responsibilities of the "doing life" and "elder life" respectively. "Younger" elders may have therefore been more engaged in work related to the life and management of the community, while senior elders provided reflection and teaching on this life, as well as connection to the worlds beyond. The progression from one phase to the next likely had to do with a diminishing physical capacity, which was enhanced by a movement to the philosophical and spiritual.

These phases of elderhood applied to both men and women, but the responsibilities of elderly women in particular corresponded to a movement away from the primary function of sustaining communities through childbearing and physical work, and into new authorities and a newfound sense of power. Menopause marked a transition between the kind of authority a woman held as a mother (or woman in childbearing years), and the authority of a 'grandmother." To date, I have not found any stories of ceremonies to mark this transition either in the literature or in the oral history, although June lamented that her grandmother died without passing on such teachings. It is possible that today's generation of elders were too young to be included in knowledge sharing and ceremonies about menopause that were happening in the first half of the twentieth century; or, as I pointed out in the methodology section, that there is a time and place for stories to make themselves known, and this is not the venue for them.[4]

Reflecting on the dearth of traditional stories about menopause, Rebecca noted

that menopause was likely a much more personal transition, especially when compared to ceremonies that accompanied puberty. "When I asked my mother about the symptoms that might accompany menopause, she said that if women have difficulties when Grandmother Moon is waning, to simply continue to work hard and not complain," she said. In recent years, other participants who consulted elders about their own menopause were told to go with the physical upheavals, to avoid hormone therapies, and to take the time to know their bodies. Listening to Elder Edna Manitowabi at a Trent University Elders Conference, Rebecca learned that menopause is a time when everything becomes magnified. As she remembered, "Edna told us that menopausal women go through a time of feeling all the things they have not had time to fully experience when they were leading the busy lives of their childbearing years. She said that in her journey to wisdom, a woman must allow herself to acknowledge these feelings."

What is certain is that post menopausal women in the past had the ability to move into certain jurisdictions that had previously been reserved for men. This applied to everything from the everyday to the ceremonial. In the previous chapter, I pointed out that Maria's grandmother had access to the 'men's house' where her dad kept his traps and hunting supplies, whereas the younger women did not. Elderly women were also able to move back and forth in the spiritual arena. As Maria explained, "once you had reached menopause you were considered both genders; you were both a man and a woman. You could use a man's pipe; you could sit down inside of a circle. Nobody said anything. You could move back and forth between."

The power of women in their grandmother years was not, however, simply about being able to move into men's jurisdictions. Writing about her time spent among the

Cree and Saulteaux of the late nineteenth century, the Scots-Métis author Amelia Paget described how the old ladies used to work as fire keepers. Paget's description provides a good starting point for exploring the greater purpose of "old ladies" in Algonquian societies. She wrote that "as the Indians had such difficulty in starting a fire, to the older and more responsible women would be entrusted the task of keeping it alight. And when moving from one place to another these old women would carry a lighted torch of wood, always watching to see that the spark did not die out."[5]

Paget's explanation – that old ladies were given the job of torchbearers because they were trustworthy – is likely not the only explanation as to why they held this responsibility. On a deeper level, it could have been in recognition of the key role they played in keeping their communities alive. Writing about the Cree during the same period as Paget, Joe Dion described how the old ladies sustained the communities in Big Bear's camp following the 1885 resistance. He explained that the elderly women were "an example of industry and thrift" that could always be counted on, noting "everything that the elderly ladies gathered and stored away during the summer months was for the enjoyment and benefit of others."[6] Dion extolled their strength and virtue of the old ladies and credited them for getting their communities through the dismal winter of 1885-86.[7]

The descriptions provided by Paget and Dion demonstrate that it was the spirit of the old ladies that kept their communities alive in the past. This greater purpose as "firekeeper" was an extension of their position as women/fire at the centre of family and community, as described in Chapter V. A closer look at the similarities for words that describe fire and women in Algonquian languages indicates that women acted as intermediary for spirit connection, a power that grew stronger with age. As noted in

Chapter V, the word for woman in Cree, *iskwew*, is derived from the word for fire, *iskwuptew* (using the spelling from Lee's text). Winona Wheeler notes how fire in this sense is a metaphor for life." She writes that "the taxonomical genealogy of iskwew goes back to the sacred stories of the first woman which explains that women's bodies are links between the spirit and human worlds through which life emerges. The image iskwew elicits is that of a brightly burning fire that nourishes and protects life on its journey to earth."[8]

Mosôm has explained that "the word "fire" in Saulteaux is defined as "woman's heart." "They say that the love of a woman is so great, so powerful that it caused creation to take place," he writes. "Fire is a revered and respected life giver of everything in the universe." [9] Mosôm stresses that "the foundation of our people is the heart of a woman. When they are strong, we are strong...The day we begin to recognize this is the day we will become great again."[10]

As the senior lifegivers of their societies, it was the "old ladies" who carried the fires of their nations, and this chapter demonstrates how they held responsibilities for overseeing the health, well-being and longevity of their communities; responsibilities that included being "doorkeepers to the spirit world."

**Beginning with the Physical: Ageing**

One of the first impressions in reviewing stories of elderly Algonquian women's lives at mid century is how active they were. Gertie shared her lasting impression of her grandmother, stating that "even from her wheelchair she would go out on the lake every summer to pick berries. She wasn't stuck in the house. She was out and about, she made sure of that. She had to use crutches or canes, but she got out there." Gertie

added that "she was never somebody that I would look at and say, "Oh poor grandma." It was more like, "Keep up with the old lady!" [laughs] "Keep up with her because she is on the move!"

Reflecting on the hard work she observed among elders in her youth, Rebecca pointed out that as long as elders had the energy, they continued to contribute in many ways. Elders of all physical abilities were actively engaged with the community. Rebecca remarked that "I was taught that as elders grow old and their physical body slows, they move into a new place of quiet where their wisdom becomes even greater." Their purpose and value were recognized until the end.

The vitality of many of the old ladies in the participants' childhood communities is evident in that they often lived in their own homes, at least until their very final years. This manner of living demonstrates the balance between principles of autonomy, self-determination and non-interference on the one hand, and practices of reciprocity and collectivism on the other. Old ladies were able to live active lives and exercise independence because of the complementary roles of others in the community. Danny described how this worked in his youth:

I was given the job to look after the old people. I was raised up by old people; I knew what their needs were, so they gave me that position. Get water for them, make sure they had enough wood to last them a month, make sure their porches were good. I had to fix all their shacks. I patched up all the walls and the holes and did mud plastering for the winter so the shacks would not be cold. I was also a good bird hunter, so I would go hunting ducks, and give them to these old people all over. That was my job, to feed them, and to cut their wood. And my brother who was raised up by my father

and my mother was a pretty good hunter. So he looked after the moose, the deer, and stuff like that for these old people, like widows. That was his job, along with other people. And of course, my sisters were making stockings out of muskrat hide, so the elders always wore moccasins and muskrat socks to keep their feet warm.

Where possible, old ladies carried on with the "women's work" that sustained their households and communities. Hilary remembered her grandmother hauling water from a lake at the bottom of a hill up to the top where she lived. Other participants remembered that elderly women were constantly on the move: chopping wood, cleaning and tanning hides, or weeding their gardens. They shared memories of their grannies picking berries and setting snares for small animals that could contribute to the family food supplies or their personal economies. Maria reflected on the harvesting activities of her grandmother:

My grandmother did small trapping and hunting and my brother and I would go with her. We would set snares for partridge and rabbits, and we'd have fresh rabbit every day. She would also set snares for weasels and all kinds of small fur bearing animals that she would sell at the store. There was never any big fur around; we didn't have beaver and things like that. She would mostly get weasels and rabbit skins which she would tan for our use or else she would sell them. Weasels (or ermine skin) used to sell for really good money when I was a kid. She would get maybe five or six of them a day, and she would hang them in a big round circle. Towards spring they were just packed, there were all these little skins hanging that she had trapped. All of that little trapping was extra money for women. They were able to buy their beads and their embroidery threads and things like that.

The self-sufficient Aboriginal work ethic described in previous chapters evidently carried on into the senior years. Rose recalled her grandmother's attitude in this regard by remarking that she was very independent. "She was not one to tell a person, 'You can't do this, you can't do that. If you can't do it, well try again,'" Rose said. "Grandma would say, "I'm crippled, and I can do things that you can't do." (Because she would saw cord wood and pile it on!)"

Women who were not as physically active still contributed to the work of the family through supervising the labour of younger women and children. For example, Maria explained that "when we went to do the laundry, my great-grandmother would sit and sew under a tree. The old ladies never did any of that heavy work," she said. "If we were smoking meat or drying meat or drying berries or preparing medicines they would be there. But they'd only supervise everybody and make sure we did it right. One of the grandmas was in charge of it, and it was the job of all of us little girls to keep the fires going. So they stayed there to make sure we did our work properly. And all of the drying of the meat and everything was right close to where the old ladies had their arbour or their tent."

Grandmothers who were frail still took on work, finding tasks that were less physically demanding. Many participants recalled that their grandmothers were constantly engaged in sewing and craftwork. Some of the grandmothers made baskets which they could sell. As noted earlier, Olive remembered that it was the old ladies' job to comb out the moss that was harvested for diapers, stating "That must have been days and days of work, because they had to stock up for winter."

There will be further discussion of other work roles in the following sections, but for now it is important to note that elders were still valued and honoured for contributing to the material needs of the community. As Maria pointed out, "Nobody was to take anything for nothing, so that's why they did things. As pitiful as it seems, my great-granny was still sewing for the family. It made her feel useful. And she was contributing. So whatever she was getting from the family, she was giving back."

**Leadership and Governance**

If one were to judge by the currently male-dominated arenas of Métis and First Nations' politics, it might be easy to assume that governance was typically "men's business" in Algonquian communities of the past. The history shared by participants about their grandmothers' authorities demonstrates that this was not necessarily the case. Men may have had specific roles that were more visible in terms of politics and governance, but this does not negate the vital role that women -- and particularly older women – held in leading and managing their communities.

Reflecting on changes in his childhood community, Rene made a distinction between the type of governance that was happening when they lived in their traditional homeland, and that which ensued after they were moved onto a reserve in the early 1960s. In his homeland community, Rene explained, it was the old ladies who governed. He knew this because they held certain names or titles which informed the community of each woman's purpose. As a child, Rene was not allowed to use these names; he addressed all the old ladies as Nokomis (dear "little," or special grandmother). But he knew their names, and respected the roles and responsibilities that they represented. Rene's biological grandmother, for example, was Kitchi gawik, which he translated as

"standing up woman." Rene recalled "I can see this person standing against the winds of change. Standing firm, you know. No matter what happened, with all the things that were coming against us; the encroachment." This grandmother had responsibilities in terms of protecting the community with her acts of resistance.

Kitchi gawik had a sister named O bo ma, who held a complementary role. Rene stated that her job was "to arouse, to stir," and added, "shit disturber, come to think of it! That kind of a woman! She was small, but did those things. She was O bo ma. And when she came to visit, that's who she was." Rene also spoke of other ladies such as De chi ka wik: "You look up, and there's a level place. She makes that. Just levels high places, I guess." Like grasses that become too tall, it was De chi ka wik's job to stomp them down; to level the field.

Rene reflected on the authority of these old ladies in his homeland community, saying that "you get all these grannies with big names like this. And that's how we saw these people. That's how I think our grannies governed our community; because of their names...What a government!"

Rene attributed the loss of this governing council of grannies to the beginning of social dysfunction in the community. He explained that "the grandmothers were dying in the late '50s and early '60s. And then my uncles started to move to the rez, and started with the dependency. We were gradually moved off the homeland into this reserve, where my uncles saw their mothers die, and I saw my granny die. And they started drinking and all of a sudden my aunts started getting drunk. Everything seemed to explode around me." Rene remembered feeling *that's not how I was raised*! He talked about the shock of witnessing the changes, saying "disrespect set in. I used to go home and see cousins

having babies. Whose father is that? All kinds of fathers. And now I had nieces and nephews who had different fathers."

This breakdown created a shame which Rene carried well into his adult years, and a big part of his confusion resulted from witnessing the shattering of gender roles in his community. He explained that his understanding of himself as an Anishinaabe, an Ojibway man, was compromised when women lost their respect and authority.

Male-dominated politics in First Nations communities are largely the result of the Indian Act, which replaced the diverse traditional systems of governance with chiefs and councils, who, until 1951, were exclusively male.[11] Communities that fell outside of the Indian Act were more apt to have continuity with older systems where women held power. Such was the case with Rene's community, and also with many Métis communities. In these instances, governance was rooted in the family, where grandmothers often held sway.

As the road allowance community where Maria grew up was comprised of a cluster of extended families, governance was managed through family networks. Maria's great-grandmother was the head of her family, and her father was "the spokesperson for the head of the family." She explained how this system worked, stating "my great-grandmother was the one with all the power. Partly, I guess, because she didn't have an axe to grind. Her total and only concern was that everything would be okay with the family. I would think that's why somebody her age would have that kind of power." Maria stressed that "nobody argued with her. She would tell my dad what she thought and he would listen."

At the broader level, Maria's great-grandmother was the head of all the extended families of her offspring and this gave her tremendous influence over the community. Maria noted that "if they were going to do something they made sure it was okay with her first. The people that lived in that community knew that the Campbells wouldn't do anything without that old lady."

Maria talked about how issues would always be discussed among the immediate family first. Family discussions afforded women and children the opportunity to have direct input and participation in decision-making. As the family spokesperson, Maria's father would then take the decision of the family to a community meeting, where he would meet with spokesmen for other families. That these men were beholden to the decisions that had been discussed at the family level was shown in many instances by the old ladies' attendance. Grandmothers would rarely speak at these meetings, unless they felt that the issues were not being addressed in an adequate fashion.

As a child, Maria used to tag along with her grandmothers, and she remembers a few instances in which her great-grandmother took a public stand:

> One time was at a trapper's convention. They were talking about trapping blocks, which, in those days were hereditary. It was at a time when the changeover was starting to happen, and government was reassigning blocks to people. Everybody was talking and talking, but they weren't really clear about what they were saying.
>
> She listened and listened, and then she got up and really got after the government people that were there. She was really angry, because the trapping block of my dad's had been in our family for who knows how long. It was my grandfather's trapping

block and it had been his grandfather's. They were switching everything around and she was really angry about that. And I think it was because the men weren't articulating whatever it was that she felt they should be saying.

Maria remembered how impressed she was, "because even the government people shut up and never said a word. They listened to her."

In another instance, Maria remembered her great-grandmother addressing the men in her extended family about an alleged pedophile. This person lived in another community, and was planning to come and work with some of the men in Maria's family. Maria's uncles were told they could work with this man if they chose, but that they were to keep him away from their home community.

Some issues were in the domain of women's decision-making, and at other times there were issues that arose out of discussions among women. American historian Rebecca Kugel has studied how women engaged in politics among the late nineteenth-century Ojibway in Minnesota. She writes "the daily environment of a work group provided an obvious forum for political debate, and indeed, in the work group setting, Ojibwe women discussed issues and formulated their opinions."[12] This was also true of the women in Maria's family, as they would discuss issues while doing collective work such as laundry. It was during these times that an issue such as domestic abuse might come up, and if the women felt the issue needed to be addressed beyond their circle it would be taken by Maria's great-grandmother to the men.

Maria remembered an instance which demonstrates how decisions within the women's jurisdiction were managed, and how they held authority in the community overall. This example comes from a time when her community was being pressured to

move from the road allowance to a Métis settlement that the federal government had established. "The government told my dad and the men that they should go and look at this community," she said, "because that's where they were going to try and move us. They only meant for the men to go, but my mother and a couple of other women were picked by the rest of the women to go. Those that stayed behind looked after the kids."

Maria explained that while the men investigated the region's potential for hunting and procuring resources, it was the women's job to investigate the water supply, the possibility of setting up a home and opportunities for the children. As it turned out, water was problematic: "I remember my mom telling my aunties that there were no wells. That people were getting water out of the lake and boiling it." The bottom line, however, were the social relations. "They had moved Métis families from the south and the north and all over and just dumped them there in one community," Maria said. "Our family and the people where I come from always lived in family groups. And so, coming into this place where all of these desperately poor people had been just dropped off, there were tensions. My mother saw that you could not have policed anything like that, because the grandmothers couldn't go and interfere in other people's business."

Maria's mother and the other delegates perceived a lack of discipline within the community. They were concerned about the fighting that was happening because of the compromised position of the relocated families and the breakdown of traditional family governance systems. In particular, it was the loss of the grandmothers' ability to manage social relations. In the end, the women decided that they would resist the government directive to move. Maria noted that "when they came back and they had a meeting the women said, 'No, we're not moving there. We're not taking our kids there.' " So we

didn't move. And government was really mad because men wouldn't go. They didn't understand why, because it looked great for the guys. But it didn't look good for the women and their kids, and the men saw that."

What is evident in many of these stories is that there was often a "head woman," in extended families, and this woman was typically an "old lady" who wielded great authority in terms of community governance. Gertie talked about the significance of "Gii maa kwe" (or ogi maa kwe) in Anishinaabe clan governance systems, stating that each clan would have had their head man and head woman. Whereas clans were no longer functioning in such a structured way in her childhood community, there was still a gii maa kwe that emerged as the head of extended families.

Although they did not call her that, it appears that gii maa kwe was the role that was played by Maria's Cree/Métis great-grandmother. In Gertie's case, it was her paternal grandmother. "Gii maa kwe was the head woman," Gertie explained. "She had earned that from the people who were around her. There wasn't a ceremony or anything like that. But here was an acknowledgement that this person had responsibility. She provided that centre on which to focus. If she wanted to see something done, then that's what would happen. She wasn't bossy, but she took it on herself to do certain things. And so Gii maa kwe defined her role as the unifier of the family."

In a kin based society, holding the role as the unifier of the family was significant in terms of governance and maintaining community well-being. Gertie talked about how each time a Gii maa kwe passed away, an unsettling period would follow until a new head woman emerged. Maria also spoke about what happens to a family in the absence of a head woman, saying that it could represent "the death of a nation. You see that over and

over again," she said; "where there's no matriarch, where there's nobody that's the boss. If that's not there, that's where you see a broken family and all kind of ugly things can happen."

Rene provided some examples of how his grandmother was clearly the boss of his extended family. He shared the following story:

> My granny would say, "Okay, I'm going to pick blueberries today," and my uncle would say "Mother, we planned on going next week."
>
> "I'm going right now." She just takes the tin down, starts packing and away we went. We paddled along the lakes and rivers to this beautiful lake. And we'd sit down to camp and the next morning I would hear this small little *putt putt putt* – a three horsepower. That's my uncle! [laughter]
>
> Eventually everyone is camped on this island, picking blueberries. She just said, "I'm going now." It was that kind of authority, and it worked. Other grannies would also come: "I'm going to go where she is. Pick blueberries too."

Danny commented on the authority of his grandmother in managing the daily activities of their extended family. "It wasn't my grandfather who always talked," he said. "It was my grandmother. She was the one that said, 'You sit here. You go do this. Today, you are going to see this one.'" Danny maintains that "In her house, she ruled. In her yard, she ruled."

Old ladies also held responsibilities as the ultimate guardians of kinship. As discussed in Chapter V, grandmothers were often responsible for arranging marriages, a

practice that was still going on in some of the participants' communities in the late 1940s. Although they had lost their authority in terms of arranging marriages in many communities, old ladies still held responsibilities for knowing who was related to whom so as to prevent marriages between relatives. Rose remembered her grandmother's careful attention to the boys she was going to dances with as a teenager. Her grandmother would ask "Do you know who your relatives are?" Danny was taught by his grandmother that, as a bear clan member, he needed to know every bear clan member in the territory.

The responsibility for knowing one's relatives was not only limited to knowing those who were alive. This came out in a story that Maria told about the old ladies' role during their annual community graveyard cleaning:

> We'd go out to all of the graves, and the old people -- two or three old ladies would be standing at a grave. They would talk to all the little kids there, saying "This was your great auntie." "She was so and so's sister." They would tell us some stories about her, and then we would go to the next grave. And you would find out, "This was the one that gave us a really bad time; he was a really cranky old man! -- and he haunted some people after. That's what happens when you are not kind to people." There would just be all of this stuff, they would be cleaning and making little last minute things on the graves, but you would get all of this history of who were those people in the graveyard, so that you always felt a connection to them.

Old ladies thus ensured that the family members were grounded in their connections to kin, including ancestral kin.

As the heads of their families, grandmothers also administered justice and maintained harmony in the community. Danny talked about how elders of both genders

managed disputes in his community, but it was "old Kohkom Flora" who would be called upon when tensions would arise over people borrowing possessions that they did not return. Social justice and harmony were also managed through equitable distribution of food. Danny remembered how the old ladies were in charge of distributing meat at community feasts, stating "when the food was given out, there were procedures. The women would be the ones who would point out who was in need: "This one over here. And that one doesn't have very much food at home." So all the leftovers in the pots, you would take it and give it to her so she could eat for the next few days."

Many of the participants talked about the safety they felt with their grandmothers. In their capacity as overseers, the old ladies were instilled with responsibilities to watch out for children's safety in particular. For those communities struggling with alcohol, social breakdown and sexual abuse, grandmothers could provide some protection and solace. Hilary talked about how her grandmother enhanced her feeling of safety, and about how she had heard of this from other women as well:

> I don't know where all it stems from, but grandmothers were always the protectors of children. They were the ones that maintained boundaries between parents and their children, or between the relatives.

> One time I heard an elderly lady say, "Our Kohkom didn't sleep with us for nothing. There was danger afoot in our house. And when my Kohkom was there, no one came into our bedroom or our bed, to bother us."

As discussed in Chapter V, space was organized according to gender and age in Maria's childhood community, and this enhanced the safety of children. Maria talked

about the spatial organization as a prevention measure against abuse. "They were very strict when I was a kid about men and children" she said. "It would have been hard for somebody to molest or bother children as long as these things were observed." With respect to the role of the old ladies in ensuring children's safety, Maria pointed out that her grandmother's bed was always the closest to the door, whereas the children slept furthest from the door. This ensured that grandma knew who was coming and going. Maria noted that elderly people are often light sleepers, and so it was fitting that her great-grandmother was posted in a place where she would have easily woken if someone were to go past her in the night.

The role that grandmothers held as protectors against abuse was also manifest within their role as storytellers. Family and community laws were embedded within the stories by grandmothers who were also keepers of these laws. One of the stories that Maria remembered involved taboos against incest. Every winter her great-grandmother would tell the story about the time when Wisakecak[13] seduced his own daughter. In this story, Wisakecak is portrayed as lazy, greedy and immoral. He gets around the incest taboo by pretending to die and then disguising himself as a handsome young man who comes to the village to court his daughter. He is eventually found out and dealt the punishment suitable to someone who had broken the incest taboo.

Maria talked about the importance of the old ladies in her family telling this story on a regular basis, as it reminded everyone about the law against incest and its consequences:

> The old ladies used to tell those stories. They would be telling the kids the stories, but everybody was sitting around because you are all in the same room. My dad would be

working at snowshoes with my uncles too, if they were there. They were hearing it over and over; by repetition, it was really engrained in everybody's head. It reminded us that those things were wrong. And everybody was getting different things from different places. Like the story tells you what a mother is supposed to do if this happens. She didn't do anything when she suspected him for the first time. She could have prevented it. So the story tells you all of this, and when you hear it over and over again you start to think about it.

Maria pointed out that these stories were also intended for outsiders and visitors to establish ground rules: "If you were a strange man coming to visit for the first time, the message was 'Watch it young man. This old lady has been around the block and knows what the laws are.' "

As discussed in the methodology chapter, traditional stories are known for having layers of understanding which are intended for different audiences, and stories also have layers of meaning that unfold over time. Maria talked about how the incest taboo story has continued to teach her throughout her life, and has provided lessons about her about her own role as a grandmother:

That story taught me how grandmothers are supposed to behave. It taught me that my job is to protect, to make sure that [abuse] doesn't happen to my grandchildren. It's also my responsibility to make sure that my family hears those stories, so that they learn that incest is a taboo and that it's not acceptable behaviour. It teaches the laws about what we are supposed to do [in the case of incest] -- and it was really an extreme law.

So all of this works into you as a person getting older. As a kid you are learning something. You know something else when you are a mother; that it is your job to protect -- but as an old woman your obligation is to teach others to do the same. All of the obligations and protocols were tied in to the story.

Grandmothers, then, held responsibilities not only to protect, but to guide others with respect to their own responsibilities. Their role as teachers was significant, as will be explored in the next section.

**Teaching**

Elders are well known for their role as teachers in Indigenous societies. Cree elders from Hudson Bay have talked about how these responsibilities were enacted in their communities, stating "a long time ago the youngsters gathered around an elder, like we sit around the TV today. The elder would relate stories about survival. That's how the children learned. Listening to elders. If there was one old man who knew how to play the fiddle, he was the teacher and this was passed on from generation to generation." As these historians point out, "the elders were the teachers in everything. [14]

Participants in this study had many memories about how the elders in their communities fulfilled this role. Although there is typically more information about how elders worked with children, it is important to remember that community members of all ages looked to elders as their teachers. The previous section demonstrated how elderly women were sought out for their wisdom and advice in matters related to governance. Maria noted that it wasn't only her father and other members of her family who looked to her great-grandmother for advice. She remembered that her great-grandmother "would sit

and tell stories" to other adult members of the community who came to her seeking counsel on a number of issues.

Marie remembered that elders in her community held public forums. As a child she attended community feasts where elders would stand up and speak formally to the community after they had finished eating. She pointed out that the elders also took turns providing these lectures. These experiences correspond to Danny's stories of how elders took on a teaching role at feasts. He remembered that "you would have all your traditional teachings that went along with the feasts. The feasts were like classes; the more you participated in them, the more you learned. After a good scoff of soup and bannock the old people got up each in turn and told something about how they parented, how they looked after their children, how they became good grandparents."

The majority of stories about the teaching role of elders were, however, about how elders worked with children. This is likely due to the fact that children were often cared for by their elders. As Mandelbaum noted in his research with the early twentieth-century Cree, children spent substantial time with their grandparents."[15]

As teachers of the youngest children, elders were engaged in preparing them to be healthy, contributing members of their societies, and they did this through formal, non-formal and informal education.[16] It is important to make these distinctions because we know too little about the formal structures of education that existed in Aboriginal communities. But if formal education occurs in institutional or structured environments, or "when a teacher has the authority to determine that people designated as requiring knowledge effectively learn a curriculum taken from a pre-established body of

knowledge,"[17] this is precisely what was taking place in Danny's childhood community. He described classes that the elders held on a regular basis:

> It was the elders who were the teachers. When the mothers and fathers would go gathering and hunting, and working during the day, it was the old men and women, the kohkoms past 50s and 60s and 70s; those were the ones that were holding classes, just like everybody else. We expected that. I remember my brothers and sisters, even the ones who were going to school would come during the summer months. It was at least at the beginning of every moon. It was set -- there were time factors! When the moon was ready, that was the day that teachings came in. There was order in the things they did. At the beginning of the moon, we'd know that we had to go sit with kokum and Mosôm.

The structure of these sessions was related to the rhythms of the moon, when elders determined that the children were more open to learning. Of course, there were also protocols and schedules related to storytelling, with winter as the most prolific time for sharing.

Individuals also had specific learning courses within the formal and structured learning systems. The authority to designate and then train these individuals rested with the elders. Traditional healers provide a good example of roles the necessitated structured learning experiences. For healers, there were specific protocols and learning outcomes that were undertaken at an early age.[18] Participants in this study spoke more about the training they had received to take on future roles as historians and traditional knowledge keepers. As noted in Chapter IV, Danny's grandmother taught him to use a system of

mnemonic devices that would enable him to fulfill the role he carries today as an Elder and oral historian.

Maria spoke of a knowledge transfer system referred to in Nēhiyawewin as notokwe opihikeet, (old-lady raised). This likely grew in response to well-founded fears around the fractured knowledge systems that resulted from losing children to residential schools. Maria explained that there were certain children who were required to spend more time with their elders so that traditional knowledge would not be lost. According to Maria, notokwe opihikeet "ensures that if children are snatched away, then someone in the family will know the language and will have some, if not all of the information." Maria noted that "old-lady raised" children were often the eldest in the family, but they may have also been younger members who were identified with specific gifts or learning needs. In Danny's case, early childhood illness meant that his parents were not able to care for him, and so he spent much of his childhood and youth in the presence of 'old ladies.'

Non-formal education included every day learning that was not as institutionalized. Some children apprenticed with their grandmothers for roles they were to take on later in life. As will be discussed later in the section on health care, Rose worked with her grandmother from a very young age, providing assistance in her work as a community doctor. This work provided experiential training that her grandmother would have parceled out according to Rose's readiness to learn.

In addition to specialized learning, there would have been general things that all children needed to learn, and much of this was managed by their grandmothers. In Danny's story about his grandfather's lecture to the Indian Agent (Chapter V), he made

the point that his grandmother had jurisdiction over family law. Danny remembered his grandfather telling the agent that the children were well behaved, obedient and good at listening. His grandfather credited his grandmother for this, stating "she's the one that teaches them the fine art of listening, hearing, communicating – all those powers of understanding that I need when I'm out there hunting. I need them to believe that what I'm telling them is right. She does all that for me. She gets those kids ready for me, to take them out into the hunting fields."

In this story, it is apparent that the grandmother had the job of teaching children to be respectful, but also to have the skills that would be necessary to live in a hunting culture. Maria spoke of a specific practice that related to both teaching respect and ensuring survival as hunting peoples. Notokwe maciwin, "old lady hunting" was a term to describe the hunting lessons that young children would receive from their grandmothers. As early as three or four, children would begin to set snares and hunt for small animals under the guidance of their grandmothers. The principle behind this was that the senior lifegivers (grandmothers) should be the first to teach about taking life. This ensured respectful hunting practices and adherence to protocols that both men and women would need to follow later in life. In general, it was the old ladies' job to teach about pimatisiwin, life, and it was critical that they began with the very young children.

Much of the learning about pimatisiwin, of course, took place through informal learning, as children had plenty of opportunities to tag along with their grandmothers. Informally, grandparents had time to explain things to children and engage in storytelling because they were not labouring at the pace of young and middle-aged adults in the community. Maria attributed much of what she has learned to time spent among the

elders in saying "I think I was influenced by those old ladies because I was the one who looked after them. I would make their tea, haul their wood, look after their fire... They would be doing their work, bet it sewing, beading, grinding medicine or playing handgames, and it was my job to be there for them."

Many elders were still actively engaged in all types of work, however, as will be discussed in the next section. That children were consistently present and witness to this work is further evidence of the formal, informal and non-formal education that the elders were providing.

**Managing the Health of the Community**

In general, health care was women's business among the early to mid- twentieth century Nēhiyawak, Michif and Anishinaabek. Swampy Cree storyteller Louis Bird has asserted that "the women were the medicine people – the nurses and doctors in the family – because they had all the knowledge about the herbs and plants to cure almost any disease."[19] As Madeleine has pointed out, "there were no public health nurses when I was growing up, so if we came down with colds or the flu, my mother was our nurse -- 24/7 if need be."

As mothers, women had to have a certain amount of skills and knowledge to look after their families. But when they became grandmothers, women were able to build on skills and experiences and devote more time to their roles as health care managers and practitioners. Whereas mothers looked after the health of the family, it was grandmothers who looked after the health of the community.

In her book on Métis women in the nineteenth century, Nathalie Kermoal took note of the special roles and status that elder women had as the midwives, doctors and

pharmacists of their communities. She wrote "Elles étaient sages femmes et medicins sans diplômes, pharmaciennes et herboristes sans échoppes. Elles allaient de maison en maison, de village en village, pour partager leur savoir et soigner les patients avec des plantes salvatrices soigneureusement récoltée dans les bois. "[20]

Kermoal's depiction of the old women going from "house to house, village to village" mirrors a story provided by Danny, who shared that the old ladies used to make "rounds," especially with the onset of winter. Moving "from tipi to tipi, from place to place," Danny noted that "it was these grandmothers who went around with their bags of medicine on their snowshoes." He also talked about how the grandmothers even had "hospitals": "a big tipi where these kohkoms would work." Danny added that they called these women "grandmothers," not nurses. "There were specialists," he recalled, "who dealt with different illnesses, age groups, and parts of the body."

Many of the participants remember the general doctoring that their grandmothers did for their home communities as well as for non-Native people in the area. Rosella's grandmother worked in Molenosa but also travelled back and forth to Montreal Lake to doctor people. There was a western doctor in Duck Lake where Rose grew up, but it was often her grandmother who was called upon to treat both Native and non-Native people. As a young girl Rose used to assist her grandmother in doctoring, and she recalled a few incidents of going to treat accident-related injuries. One of the stories involved a young Belgian man who had been burned in a fire at the mill. Rose remembered going with her grandmother and being instructed how to get the shirt off him, which had melted on during the accident. For this call, Rose's grandmother received two bags of flour and some oatmeal from the Belgian man's wife. Rose explained that her grandmother was

usually paid in a system of exchange where she would "get a piece of meat or something, or sometimes eggs or chickens, stuff like that." This was also in accordance with the protocol and tradition of being a healer, particularly when working with traditional healing remedies. Rose explained that "you never sold your herbal medicine. People had to give you something in return. They can't just take it like that, but it could be a shirt, it could be a skirt -- whatever you had."

Some of the participants remembered talk of their grandmothers dealing with "bad medicine." Rosella explained how her grandmother was involved: "It's like Indian witchcraft. Somebody sends bad medicine to you and this person gets sick and something happens to them. She would come along and she would heal them." Rosella never witnessed her grandmother doctoring for bad medicine, nor did Rose, but both had heard that their grandmothers were doing this kind of work. Rose mentioned that her grandmother was very secretive about it.

Olive had vivid memories of her grandmother warning her about plants that were used for bad medicine and she shared the following story:

> One time we were going to help Grandma pick these tiny yellow leaves and then she stopped. There were two of us following her; me and my cousin. And she said, "Wait. I want to tell you something. Take a good look at this."
>
> It had a very lovely rich purple in the centre. But there were sharp thorns there, even at the bottom of that flower. "I want you to look at this." She said. "Look at the thorns. If you were to ever step on this, you'd be hurt. Those thorns are so sharp they

would hurt you." Grandma said "with this medicine, always, always walk around it. Never have anything to do with it.

When Olive responded that she thought the flowers looked nice, her grandmother told her "that flower looks nice, but it's for bad purposes. It's as bad as the thorns are sharp."

This story about the medicines highlights a great strength that elderly women had in terms of managing community wellness: their work as herbalists. Old ladies were particularly known for the relationships they were able to forge with plants and plant medicines. This came through in a story that Sylvia told about how they perceived elderly women when they were children. "I remember as a kid we would play old ladies with all these medicines," she said. "We'd pack up all of this stuff and we'd put it beside our beds. Then we would pretend we were real old ladies, and we would wear these long skirts. Because that's how we related to our grannies." Sylvia remembered the grandmothers would wrap medicine in cloth pouches, and keep them under or behind their beds.

The image of old ladies with medicines packed under their beds is a familiar one to many of the participants. Rebecca had similar memories of her husband's grandmother, recalling "when Grandma invited me into her bedroom, I knew that she wanted to give me something special. She kept new tea towels, jars of berries and medicines under her bed." Rebecca also remembered that "Grandma hung her medicines outside in the shed. She and I would go out in season to pick medicines. Upon arriving back home, she would instruct me how to clean, dry and store them until needed."

Elderly women worked with many different kinds of medicines. At the most fundamental level, women were keepers of plant food as medicine, and so it was often the

old ladies that were in charge of the gardens. Maria talked about the old ladies' authority to decide when the family gardens would be planted in the springtime:

> My grannies were the ones that got the gardens started. My dad and uncles would get the horses and the ploughs ready in the spring and they would cultivate everybody's garden, but it was my granny who did the planting with the older women. And she never planted the garden until the thunder came and shook the land, and then the rain came. She said those two have to have a meeting first, and then she'd plant her garden. She also planted her stuff in hills because she said that plants were relatives and you had to think about how plants were related.

Maria noted the significance of her grandmother's lead, explaining that "if the thunder didn't come until June, we didn't do anything until then.

The connection between older women and their gardens was impressed upon Marie during her puberty fast as one of the teachings she received was "when you get older you make gardens so your grandchildren can come and help you." Another thing Marie learned was that, "while the grandchildren are helping you, you teach them. You talk to them and never waste time." Gardening, then, and work with plant medicines was part of what Mosôm would call the women's jurisdiction. As noted in the teachings around "old-lady hunting," it was also the old ladies' job to connect children with this world.

Many of the elders had memories of going out with their grandmothers to pick plant medicines. As demonstrated by the story told by Olive about the "bad medicine" plants, grandmothers had a responsibility to instill protocols related to the medicines. Rose talked about the care she learned from her grandmother:

We would go on a medicine trip, they called it. She'd say, "Okay, you have to pick this." She had a little pointed stick and she would point at the thing. I had to dig away from the bottom. She said, "If you break the root it won't work as strong. Shake it, don't pull on it!" And then we would put it in the little cotton. You couldn't put it in a plastic bag or a paper bag. She always had a little cotton rag and she would tear it into squares. "And don't take the flower off" she would tell me. "Leave it there." It would dry in there and then she would know what kind of medicine it was.

Rose also learned that "you always had to pick the medicines when it was a full moon because the strength is stronger."

Elderly women instilled a sense of respect and reverence for the medicines in children by being clear about the behavior that was expected of them on excursions. Hilary related how she was a talkative child, but had to curb her chatter when on medicine picking trips with her grandmother. Her grandmother would tell her: "Now is the time to keep still; you have to be quiet now." As Hilary remembered, "I would hear her singing. She was probably chanting as she was picking things."

Danny had a similar memory from when he was a pre-school child:

I remember one time I was eating a sucker because grandma was trying to keep me quiet. I was sitting there in the shade and she was looking at this plant. She cleared the grass and she was putting some tobacco down and praying. And I was with my BB Bat, making all kinds of slurping sounds! [laughter]. All of a sudden she says, "Baby! I'm trying to pray. I'm trying to talk to the spirit of this plant. I need to get some thoughts!" So that was it! I took my blanket and moved it. "Don't move too far away; there might be porcupines," she said.

Danny's grandmother and elderly aunts instructed him that "when you are working on these things they have got to be done right. You have got to be sure that you pray properly." He remembered his grandmothers telling him that "you have got to be able to take some of this medicine and put it aside, along with your tobacco. Maybe just sprinkle some seeds and pass it on." As Danny explained, "you didn't just pick them; you had to spread the life of that plant around."

Knowledge sharing also happened between the grandmothers about their plant medicines. In Maria's community the old people would get together "in the spring and the fall to grind medicines and sing the songs that were part of this work." Danny remembered seeing two or three grandmothers working on the open prairie, teaching and conferring with each other. He explained how different grandmothers had specific jurisdictions over territories, plants, and even colours of plants. In spite of the fact that grandmothers might only work with certain plants, they were able to do a substantial amount of work. "Some of these grandmothers would take no more than seven plants," Danny said. "They would mix them in every batch and form for every particular ailment they had – for earaches, nose, sicknesses around the eyes, skin sicknesses... all the parasitic things." Danny asserted that "there were specialists that we have today: an eye doctor, ear and nose doctor, heart specialist – well they had those kinds of things! They had jurisdictions and practices of certain specialized medicines, those old women."

Grandmothers were respectful of each other's jurisdictions while also generous with knowledge sharing amongst each other. The old ladies would exchange knowledge through dialogue, prayer and the exchange of gifts. Danny explained that although they knew their particular medicines well and were able to use them for a variety of purposes,

they also found it useful to borrow from one another. He remembered that they would say things like, "You have to ask Kohkom Flora for this. I know what it is, but I haven't received her permission to use this yet. But in place of it, I use this one over here. It does pretty much the same thing, but hers is more potent." The gathering and exchange between grandmothers was part of the research that they needed to do to build their skills, as Danny pointed out: "You are talking about investigative research? Well that's what these old women did. They did that. They were researching; they were studying the medical properties of these plants, and sharing how that works."

Because of all this work, elderly women were able to offer a variety of remedies. The elders referred to medicines for pinkeye, scurvy, rheumatism and the digestive system, pain analgesics, mosquito repellent, medicines for reproductive systems, and tonics for general cleansings. Danny spoke of all this medicine-making as a sacred responsibility of women, which was tied into their relationship with the land. This view is grounded in the creation story as he learned it, where it was the female who gave life to everything, and is the great mother. In this worldview as expressed by Danny, "women came with all of the knowledge of everything on the earth. *Everything*. She knew all of the plants, all of the medicines, all of the animals... because she was the mother! She was born with all that knowledge." The connection between women and "mother earth", according to Danny, is the reason that "we learned that discipline of checking the animals, checking the things around us, from the wisdom of the grandmothers. Because they were the ones who studied the plants; they were the ones who studied the earth."

Danny talked about the women's power in the community also being linked to their role in planning according to the seasons. He stated that younger people "learned

about herbology, which is associated with time factors." Old ladies had to know which plants were ready to pick and when, as many plants had different uses according to their seasonal lifespan. "These are the things that the women had to learn because they had to have these medicines available" Danny said. "Their responsibility was humungous because they kept the community healthy. They had the responsibility to keep those children alive."

The old ladies' responsibility for the greater health and well-being of the community is evident in a story that Maria told. She remembered being taken as a child to pick medicine in a very special place. This lake was called Nōtokēw Sākahikan, "Old Lady Lake." It stands out in her memory because the children were taught to be quiet and reverent when visiting. Even though there was a beautiful beach, they were not allowed to swim. In speaking to her father many years later, Maria realized that the reason they called it Nōtokēw Sākahikan was because it was a place where the old ladies would pick medicines, and in particular, medicines that they would use in their work with birth and death. Midwives harvested their medicines from this lake, as did those who needed medicines which could "absorb the smell of death." Thinking back, Maria realized that "that whole area had to do with women's medicines. There must have been a lot of women's medicine there." The old lady lake was therefore where the old ladies connected and worked with the land to support them in what was *their* special medicine: being doorkeepers to the spirit world. This special role is the subject of the final section of this chapter.

**Doorkeepers to the Spirit World**

> Men were not part of birth and death – they didn't stay for that. It was the women who took care of the birthing. It was an old lady that brings you in, and an old lady that takes you out. And according to them, on the other [spirit] side, it's an old lady that [welcomes] you; there is a midwife/grandmother on that side [to bring you back to the spirit world].
>
> Maria Campbell

Elderly women held a role which I am calling "doorkeepers to the spirit world" because they assisted people with the transitions between life and death. In Maria's experience, grandmother/midwives caught new life coming into this world, and grandmothers also saw you off when you departed. Maria also learned that "there is always a grandmother on the other side." A "grandmother" was always present on the spirit side of the threshold, either to send you into the world through birth, or receive you when you returned to the spirit world. This section describes some of the doorkeeping roles that the participants witnessed.

As practices of midwifery have already been discussed in Chapter III, this section will briefly examine how and why it was that grandmothers held these roles. First, elderly women were seen to have the wisdom and authority to safeguard life and death. As senior lifegivers, grandmothers were given the responsibility to teach about pimatisiwin – life, and they were the keepers and teachers of the relationships that we form on this journey. With this understanding, one can see why they were deemed the most suitable people in the communities to catch new life as it came in.

There were also many practical reasons which led them to this role. Grandmothers had more freedom of mobility and time to devote themselves to the work of midwifery than did mothers. As described in Chapter III, when the delivery was a distance from where the midwife lived it was often necessary for them to them to move in with the expectant mother. By moving in with families or being in close proximity, grandmothers were able to help with pre-natal and post-natal care, along with attending to infants. Grandmothers were also well suited to catch babies because of the experience they had garnered with age. They were also able to use different levels of experience and energy according to the needs of the birth. For example, Maria's great-grandmother would be called in to assist if there was a problematic birth, as she was too elderly to do all of the long hours that were required in regular midwifery.

Even when old ladies were not the midwives for a birth, their presence was deemed important to the labour. Maria witnessed this in her youth. "I used to see all the old ladies go rushing to the house where a baby was being born," she said. "You know... they weren't there necessarily to help the midwife. But with their experience, all of them being there, it was like, somehow they were holding the energy and helping; just by their telling funny stories and whatever, they were keeping the energy or life force in that place in a good way."

Maria told a story that she had heard from a Nēhiyaw woman in northern Saskatchewan, which further demonstrates how the presence of older women at a birth was valued:

> This woman said all the old ladies came when she was having her baby. She said they built a fire outside and made a big pot of duck soup, and they laughed and told stories

all night and all the next day. And the harder she screamed, the harder they laughed and the more ducks they ate. She was telling me, she just felt like wringing their necks. But what it did was, by them laughing so loud and everything else, she didn't have time to think that much about her pain because she couldn't believe they were doing this to her. And she said it wasn't until she was an old lady that she realized how much they had helped her by doing that; by letting her know that life goes on. It was important for her to know that she wasn't going to die.

Maria reflected that this was part of a "ceremony of birthing" that was aimed at helping women feel good about the birth, particularly in the Christian environment at the time, where, as Maria remembered, "everything having to do with birthing was associated with evil and death and bad and considered 'unclean.'" She noted that the presence of the old ladies might have helped to communicate to the mother that she was doing something remarkable and full of life.

The presence of older women also had an important function when it came to death. As with the midwives who would move in when there was a new life coming, grandmothers or elderly aunts would also come to live with families who were coping with imminent death. They administered to the dying through palliative care, but they were also there to look after the living. Maria described the role they played in calming families in crisis over death. "If somebody was dying, then one of them would come and they would stay with you, to take care of the dying person but also to take care of the family," she said. "They would cook things, special things." Maria remembered her auntie being in the kitchen, "and cooking that food that would calm you down." She

noted, "she made amazing soup. It wasn't anything that anybody ever talked about, but when you saw her doing that, you knew that everything was okay."

Maria related this to her story about the old ladies who waited outside during a birth. "It was the same thing when somebody was dying," she said. "The old ladies would come in and they would laugh and tell stories. They would tell jokes with the person that was dying, you know, so they could laugh and feel good."

Elderly women often operated as the funeral directors for their communities, doing everything from preparing the body, to instructing the men in building a casket and digging a gravesite, to planning and overseeing the funeral. Medicines used around death were, as Maria described earlier, "old lady" medicines. With no embalming and the corpse typically lying in wake for four days, the old-lady medicines were necessary for keeping the body and casket fresh. Maria talked about the how her grandmother managed the funerals in her youth:

> My grandma was the one who looked after death for community members. My dad and my uncles would make the caskets for our community and the communities close by. I think the reason for that is probably that my dad and my uncles were my grandmother's helpers. That's why so many people came to them, because they came to my grandmother, and my grandmother would delegate work out to her sons.
>
> After grandma cleaned and dressed the body, my dad and uncles would bring the casket in and they would put the body in there. But before they put it in, my mom and my aunties would come over. We would put black cloth over top of this board, because the coffin was made from board. Then they would lay a blanket inside it, and

trim it sometimes with ribbon around the edges to make the casket look nice. My aunties would make flowers out of crepe paper and then my dad would come in and they would lift the body inside of that thing. My grandmother would fix it all up. So she was kind of like the undertaker.

A number of the participants remembered helping their grandmothers when they were little girls in these duties. Rosella said it was the midwives who often did this work. She remembered helping her mother wash a body. "I never thought nothing of it," she said. Rose also helped her grandmother a number of times, and was able to describe her experiences in detail, as follows:

They would come and ask for her. So she would go down there, and she had to measure the body, then the men would go and get the lumber to make the casket. She covered the lumber with black cloth and with white inside, and a straw pillow.

She'd wash the body first, and then she would let it sit and dry off. And then they were stiff, eh? So she would lift the body, and I would put the pants on, fully dressed, like a person was going out someplace. And she would say, "Depêche toi. Prends pas toute la journée," she'd tell me. So I had to hurry up. Because they get stiff, eh?

Like Rosella, Rose didn't think anything of working with the corpse, as this was part of the work she did as a little girl helper to her grandmother. But she shared a funny story about how others were not as accustomed:

One day, one of my aunts was with us. She was helping Grandma. You know, right after death, the air goes out from the body? And when Grandma moved her, she laid her on the slab there, and she was turning her over to wash her back. And it was just

like air came out. My aunt fainted right there! [laughs] She thought she was coming back to life! [laughter].

She grabbed her head and she was crying, "Elmire, she's come back!" (That's what my grandmother's name was, Elmire).

And Grandma said, "No, no, no. That's just the air coming out of her," Grandma put her hands right here, [on the pulse]. She says, "No, no, she's dead. Look: put your hand here," (because her hand was cold and everything). And she says [motioning to the young Rose]: "She does that all the time, she always helps me. She touches a dead body and it doesn't bother her."

It was Rose's grandmother's job, in the absence of the local doctor, to ensure that the person was dead. As Rose said, "they had to do it because there was nobody else around here."

Rose talked about wakes that would go on for three days after the death, and pointed out that her grandmother had a lead role. "Some would come to sit with the body during the day, some would come during the evening, and some would come during the night," she said. "They would take turns. That way there was always someone with the body. It was never left alone. But most of the time, it was grandma that stayed there, to see that everything was done right." Rose went on to say that "they don't do like they used to; where they would reminisce of the person's life. They would laugh too." At the wakes Rose witnessed, "when it was a man, there were more men. And when it was a woman, there were more women."

Women were in charge of the food at wakes and funerals, which was plentiful, and Marie even had memories of women cooking and sending food up to the site where the men were burying the corpse. In addition to overseeing the cooking, elderly women managed wakes and funerals through the rhythm that keening provided. Maria described all of these old-lady roles at the wake:

> There were the old ladies that looked after getting the body ready; getting it all dressed and packing it with medicine, and making sure the casket looked nice. The others would supervise the cooking, and making it into a celebration.
>
> There were customs that they would bring in that were very old. They would make us cry, for example. The old ladies would come in and they would just wail – do this keening that would make everybody cry. And then, when you finished crying, they would bring out tea, and sit around laughing and telling stories in little groups. Singing songs, or whatever. And then it would be time to do the whole thing all over again. You would do that four times during the night for the whole time of the wake.

Maria said that her grandmothers and aunties also relayed the protocols of what to do after the death. "We were told that when the person was buried then we had to turn around," she said. "We turned around clockwise and we would walk out of that graveyard and never look back; we weren't supposed to say that person's name again. We put them out of our mind for a whole year. Because they needed to make their journey, and it was not up to you to make that journey harder for them. And if you cried or talked about them, then you were keeping them there."

Maria added that her great aunt "was very strict about that; there was no kindness in her voice when she was telling you "this is what you have to do: don't be sitting around crying because you're just doing it for yourself."" At the end of this first year, there would be a feast for the person, at which point it would be acceptable to talk about the person once again. And again, it was the old ladies who governed these processes.

Birth and death were thus the purview of old ladies, as they were able to make the connections between life in this domain and spirit life. As Maria said, "It was an old lady that brings you in, and an old lady that takes you out."

**Conclusion**

Elderly women held the fires of their nations in a number of ways. They were often the heads of their families, or the gii maa kwe that looked out for the safety and well-being of the community and held everyone together. As storytellers, they acted as keepers of the laws, as demonstrated in the example that Maria provided about the laws around incest. As midwives, doctors and herbalists they held responsibilities for the health of the collective. As teachers, they ensured that everyone learned their own responsibilities and was able to live up to them. As keepers of relationships and doorkeepers to the spirit world, they ensured that "all our relations" (human, spirit, and those with the natural world) were intact.

Authorities increased with age, but leadership was also earned through action. This leadership was recognized by the community; as Gertie said, "there wasn't a ceremony or anything like that. But there was an acknowledgement that [gii maa kwe] had responsibility." With age and experience, women also graduated through different stages of elderhood. Although the participants did not speak directly to the community,

ceremonial and earth-elder distinctions provided by Mosôm, some of these distinctions can be seen in the different roles of elders that were described in the stories. Younger elders took more active roles in the physical and community work of midwifery, for example, while older, great-grandmothers were visited for counsel and called upon for leadership. The clearest example of this distinction come out of Maria's stories, in which we can see the "doing" work of her grandmothers, and the ultimate authority of her great-grandmother, who was the final decision-maker.

The elder years were a powerful time of life, in which women were able to move in all circles of the community. The work that old ladies did with plants also points to the strength of their connection with the earth at this stage, and their work as "doorkeepers to the spirit world" is an acknowledgement of their highly evolved spiritual connection. This was no time for retirement, for as Mosôm said, "old age was a very productive stage of life."[21] As in Amelia Paget's observation, the old women carried the torch, "always watching to see that the spark did not die out."[22]

## Notes

[1] Quote taken from Diane Knight, ed. *The Seven Fires: Teachings of the Bear Clan as Told by Dr. Danny Musqua* (Prince Albert, SK: New World Press, 2000), 82-83.
[2] Basil Johnson, *Ojibway Heritage* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 112.
[3] See Chapter I.
[4] Charlotte Loppie has written a doctoral dissertation about contemporary Mi'kmaw women and menopause, but there is little else out there on Aboriginal women and menopause. See Charlotte Loppie, *Grandmother's Voices: Mik'maq Women and Menopause.* Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dalhousie University (2004).
[5] Amelia M. Paget, *People of the Plains* (Regina: University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Center, 2004), 33.
[6] Joseph F. Dion. *My Tribe the Crees.* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1979), 115 – 116.
[7] Ibid., 116
[8] Stevenson (Wheeler) *Decolonizing Tribal Histories:* Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley (2000), 16.
[9] Knight, *The Seven Fires* (Prince Albert, SK: New World Press, 2000), 16, back cover.
[10] Ibid.
[11] For discussion and analysis on how the Indian Act has interfered with First Nations women's involvement in governance see, *First Nations Women, Governance and the Indian Act: A Collection of Policy Research Reports.* (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 2001).
[12] Rebecca Kugel, "Leadership within the Women's Community: Susie Bonga Wright of the Leech Lake Ojibwe," in *Native Women's History in Eastern North America Before 1900: A Guide to Research and Writing, e*ds. Rebecca Kugel and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 171.
[13] Wisakecak is a Trickster figure in Cree Culture, and there are countless stories about him that are both entertaining and educational. As Omushkego Cree Elder Louis Bird says, "This guy plays many parts, fills in the answer where there is no explanation. In a way he plays a part that makes us laugh, and the mystery then can be just sort of eased away from your mind." See Louis Bird and Susan Elaine Grey, *The Spirit Lives in the Mind: Omushkego Stories, Lives and Dreams* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 175.
[14] Flora Beardy and Robert Coutts, *Voices from Hudson Bay: Cree Stories from York Factory* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 90.
[15] David Goodman Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1979), 144.
[16] David Livingstone defines these types of learning as follows: "When a teacher has the authority to determine that people designated as requiring knowledge effectively learn a curriculum taken from a pre-established body of knowledge, the form of learning is **formal education**, whether in the form of age-graded and bureaucratic modern school systems or elders initiating youths into traditional bodies of knowledge. When learners opt to acquire further knowledge or skill by studying voluntarily with a teacher who assists their self-determined interests by using an organized curriculum, as is the case in many adult education courses and workshops, the form of learning is **non-formal education** or **further education.** When teachers or mentors take responsibility for instructing others without sustained reference to an intentionally-organized body of knowledge in more incidental and spontaneous learning situations, such as guiding them in acquiring job skills or in community development activities, the form of learning is **informal education** or **informal training**." See D.W. Livingstone, "Adults Informal Learning: Definitions, Findings, Gaps and Future Research. SSHRC Research Network, New Appproaches to Lifelong Learning Papers (Toronto: Centre for the Study of Education and Work, OISE/University of Toronto, 2001), 2.
[17] Ibid.

[18] For example, Dene healer Be'sha Blondin talks about her training that began at age five in Kim Anderson, "Notokwe Ophihikeet - 'Old-Lady Raised': Aboriginal Women's Reflections on Ethics and Methodologies in Health," *Canadian Woman Studies/ les cahiers de la femme* 26, 3/4 (2008): 6-12.
[19] Bird and Gray, *Spirit Lives in the Mind*, 182.
[20] An English translation for this would be: "They were midwives and doctors without diplomas, pharmacists and herbalists without shops. They went from house to house, village to village, to share their knowledge and care for patients with the healing plants they had carefully harvested from the woods." Nathalie Kermoal, *Un Passé Métis au Féminin,* (Québec: Les Éditions GID, 2006), 144.
[21] See epigraph of this chapter.
[22] Paget, *People of the Plains*, 33.

# CHAPTER VII

# CONCLUSION: BUNDLING THE LAYERS

This thesis has satisfied my research interests, purpose and intent in a number of ways. On the most basic level I learned something about "how it was" during the childhood years of our current generation of elders. With reference to the objectives I quoted from Steven Mintz in Chapter I, the literature and oral history that I drew upon provides valuable information on how northern Algonquian peoples understood life stages, and how life stage experiences and rituals changed from early to mid-twentieth century generations. With this information, I have been able to explore how Anishinaabek life stage theories were manifest in 'traditional' or land-based communities of the past. I had a particular interest in how life stage related roles, responsibilities and practices might have contributed to the health of northern Métis, Cree and Ojibway women and girls, and how gendered and age-related responsibilities contributed to the overall health and well-being of the collective. I looked at these implications through each of the life stage chapters, and will summarize how they worked across the generations in this concluding section.

One of the unanticipated outcomes of my research was that it allowed me to explore and apply Indigenous oral history methodology, and to think about how to situate myself in Indigenous historiography. I learned that one of the main purposes of 'doing' Indigenous history is to delineate the worldview of the people involved. This type of work can also validate and support a sense of identity and belonging, objectives which I had coming out of previous work I had done in "reconstructing Native womanhood." The

methodology I chose was thus congruent with my original intent of contributing towards decolonization through my dissertation research. In doing this kind of research, I am a participant in a greater movement towards rebuilding shattered identities and communities out of the strengths of past.

Like a good Indigenous story, there are a number of different layers of meaning happening in this thesis. There are some layers which I have chosen not to write about here, and others that may reveal themselves to me or to readers over time. In conclusion, I will address the layers that the dissertation makes immediately available: "how it was" for northern Algonquian girls and women at mid century; how Anishinaabek life stage theories apply to these experiences; how life stages roles and responsibilities contributed to health and well-being; and how the project fits within Indigenous historiography.

**"How it Was"**

Although I have raised theoretical questions about the potential for 'truth' when working with Indigenous oral history, the material in this dissertation can still be useful for those with an interest in conventional history. With this audience in mind, I have tried to be as specific as possible about dates and the chronology of change among Cree, Métis and Ojibway peoples from early to mid-twentieth century. Some of the secondary source information dates from the nineteenth century pre-reserve era, and this allows for a consideration of how customs changed over the course of three or four generations. As my sample size of oral historians was relatively small, there is no way of claiming whether the experiences we documented were typical of northern Algonquian communities at the time. Customs and practices can also vary from family to family and

from community to community, and the participants I interviewed covered a wide geographic area. The oral histories nonetheless offer some idea about "how it was" for women and girls among the Anishinaabek, Michif and Nēhiyawak at mid century, and I found many similarities between the stories themselves as well as with the material in the literature.

With respect to pregnancy, infancy and toddler years, we can see how some practices and ceremonies were more resilient than others, at least in the families and communities of the participants I interviewed. The size of the participants' families (see appendix) demonstrates that family planning was not practiced as it might have been in preceding generations, but there were some "old ladies" who hung onto family planning knowledge and made it available. When it came to pregnancy, the only ceremonies the elders could remember were relegated to the category of "long ago," but food and behavioral prescriptions were still being practiced into and beyond the period discussed here. Up until the mid 1950s, pregnancy, birth and post partum care were managed almost exclusively by midwives, some of whom offered extensive attention in the pre-natal and post partum periods. Once the baby was born, special care was taken around the umbilical cord and placenta; customs which were widespread and longstanding in northern Algonquian communities. It was "traditionally" considered vital to maintain a good connection with the spirit world through naming and other protective practices. Although the naming practices shared by the participants were not as elaborate as those described in the literature, naming ceremonies were still being practiced at mid century. In terms of ceremonies for toddlers, participants didn't share any stories about "walking out," other than to talk about how these ceremonies are being practiced today.

The section on childhood and youth shows a consistency in parenting styles from the earliest European observations into the twentieth century. These parenting styles were based on a belief that the autonomy of the individual needed to be respected. Children were thus taught to be self-reliant while learning a sense of responsibility to the community; co-existing principles of independence and interdependence were the foundation for childrearing. Everyone in the community had a responsibility for childcare, with younger children being cared for by elders, older children and mothers, and older children being taught by aunts and uncles. There was reciprocity in this caregiving arrangement, in which children were expected to help their caregivers, and particularly the elders. Children were also expected to learn the disciplines and work skills that they would need in adult years. This is perhaps not unlike how farm children were raised at the time, although the means of instilling this discipline would have been distinct. As European observers had noted over the centuries, non-coercive and indirect techniques were the hallmark of Indigenous childrearing. Mosôm also pointed out that it was considered vital to treat children well, as the nurturing they received fostered the sense of trust and loyalty that would instill discipline and assist with community survival.

The "good life" of childhood ended with puberty. This brought about rapid change in the status of the individual, who was now expected to fully contribute to the adult work of the community. A number of the participants talked about their change in status at this time, commenting on how they immediately moved into the "women's circle." Whereas not all of the participants did a puberty fast/seclusion, it is evident that many families still valued the ceremonies that marked the transition to adult years and responsibilities. Some created their own types of ceremonies to mark this passage, as the

puberty seclusions of previous generations were not possible. The level of secrecy with which many families conducted puberty rites at mid century demonstrates the pressures they were under to abandon them.

What stands out in the stories about young and middle-aged women is how hard they had to work to ensure the survival of their families and communities. This was part of living a land based lifestyle, but women's work would also have been compounded and complicated by poverty and discrimination. This meant that women had to be extra resourceful in managing the material necessities of their communities, such as food and clothing. The value placed on their home-centered work meant that women had their own circles or "jurisdictions" from which they were in charge of not only the material resources, but also the social relations of the community. As "keepers of relationships," they formed strong bonds among themselves and were responsible for teaching the family laws to the youngsters. As they grew older, women would have been able to influence kinship by keeping track of family relations and arranging marriages. There is evidence that arranged, common-law and polygamous marriages were still happening in some communities at mid century, but sexuality, courting and marriage practices were in a period of transition and assimilation due to the pressures to conform to western Christian standards.

The elderly women that stand out in the participants' memories offer evidence that women had power and authorities that were at odds with western patriarchal family structures. There were a number of elderly women in the participants' stories who were leaders in their extended families; the gii maa kwe (head woman) was the final decision maker in many cases. Because so much of the community business was grounded in

extended family units, these old ladies often held a significant role in terms of governance. Traditional forms of governance that involved women were thus ongoing in spite of the fact that at mid century, First Nations communities were several generations into an Indian Act system which prohibited women from voting or even speaking at a public meeting. Old ladies were also valued for how they looked after the communities through their attention to kinship, and by managing the health, well-being, and spirit connections of community members. As with the younger women, the old ladies in the participants' stories worked hard to ensure the survival of the community, contributing to the very end.

## Layering Life Stage Theory with Experience

I have long harboured an interest in how life stage theories of the Anishinaabek play out in the lives of women, and particularly those who lived in land-based communities of the past. The stories offered by the participants have allowed me to make some of those connections, and to continue to wonder about others.

In the "physical" journey through the "four hills of life," as described by Johnson, young life was supposed to be both cherished and protected. This came through in the participants' stories about the kind of protocols and precautions that were undertaken with pregnant women and infants. When children began to climb the "second hill," the nurturing continued, but there were increasing demands that children acquire the disciplines of adult life, which they learned through work and a spirit of self-reliance. In Johnson's "four hills" theory, this was a stage of "preparation," which culminated at puberty and the vision quest. Stories from the elders in this study demonstrate that

children were "prepared" through nurturing, relationship building, and the expectations that were placed upon them to fulfill age appropriate duties and responsibilities. As adults climbing the "third hill," women were said to be charged with caregiving and providing for their families and communities. This came through in accounts about the tremendous amount of work that the elders' witnessed among their mothers, aunts and grandmothers. Finally, the teaching and leadership roles described in teachings about the "fourth hill" were evident in the participants' stories about the authorities they witnessed among their grandmothers. The three phases of elderhood described by Mosôm were not as clear, but some distinctions could be made between the roles of grandmothers and great-grandmothers in some of the participants' families.

The "moral journey" that Johnson refers to, involving preparation, quest, vision and fulfillment of vision was not as clear in the stories shared by the participants. Within the first two stages, there was some evidence of attention to this spiritual trajectory, as naming ceremonies and protocols around the placenta, umbilical cord and infant care were about connecting infants and children to spirit helpers to ensure their health and longevity. The disciplines that were expected of children could also be seen as part of the "preparation" that the moral journey required. These disciplines would have certainly helped children to endure the sacrifice and perseverance that would have been required of them during the quest/ fast undertaken at puberty. Although some of the participants did a puberty seclusion/fast, it wasn't clear whether they received moral guidance and/or spiritual direction that was particular to their purpose in life. Likewise, it is not possible to know whether and/or how the women and elders in the participants' stories fulfilled their personal visions, although there are some glimpses of this in some stories. It is

possible, for example, that the grannies who governed Rene's community according to their names were working with visions they had acquired, but there is not enough information about their lifelong spiritual trajectory to say this for certain.

As the moral journey was often a very personal one, it is not surprising that there is little opportunity to track this path as it occurred for individuals. Some of the general material, however, can be linked to Mosôm's teaching about life being a journey in which one's spirit strives to learn about the physical world. As noted in the introduction, Mosôm teaches that the spirit is more conscious in the earliest stages of life and we spend our lifetimes in pursuit of reawakening the spirit as we journey "home." Within the stories we find an acknowledgement that infants and elders were closest to the spirit world; there was an understanding that they stood at the doorways that represented entering and then leaving this world. Rebecca shared that infants were thought to have the spirit pulsing inside them, and Marie was taught to take care in how one talked around babies because of the risk that the infant might pass back into the spirit world. In Marie's community, it was also understood that elders and infants could communicate with one another, presumably because they shared an affinity with the "other side." This may be one of the reasons that elders and infants spent so much time together, as in the Maria's memories of infants swinging in hammocks above the elders' as they sat visiting in tents during the summer. Elders were also charged with naming infants, which not only renewed connection with spirit, but also affirmed the life force represented by new life meeting with the old. The affinity that elders had with the spirit world also meant that they were charged with catching those coming in, and with releasing those who were returning. This came out very clearly in stories about the duties of midwives and older women in general.

Overall, the material I collected for this thesis satisfied at least some of my interest in how life stage theories of the Anishinaabek could be applied to life experience in land based communities. The elders' stories also allowed me to think through further questions around how "life lived like a theory" exemplified and fostered individual and community health and well-being.

## Life Lived Like a Theory: Applications for Health and Well-Being

In Chapter I, I introduced the Anishinaabek notion that health and well-being are dependent on how well we fulfil life stage responsibilities. I referred to Odawa Elder Liza Mosher's contention that one can get stuck at any part of this life journey, and that each stage must be successfully completed to advance to the next. I also drew attention to Mosôm's teachings, that ceremonies both facilitate the journey and honour the milestones that are achieved. Individual identity was thus fostered through understanding and experiencing life stage roles and responsibilities, for they defined an individual's purpose and position within their world.

According to the World Health Organization, "health" is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."[1] We can see how this state of being was fostered in the individual through the life stage teachings and experiences described in this dissertation. Physical health was ideally attended to through care and nurturing, particularly of the young and old, and mentally, there was a respect for the autonomy of the individual as he or she made their way through the learning process of life. It is the social as well as the spiritual components of health, however, that stand out in the work that is presented here, as they

demonstrate some of the more distinct notions of health and well-being among northern Algonquian peoples. The concept of mino pimatisiwin (simplistically translated as "living a good life") came through in the stories, demonstrating the social and spiritual influences in how health was cultivated and maintained. At one point, for example, Maria commented that "culture" comes from "the way that people live together, the way that people treat each other, the way they interact with one another." Maria then added, "that's kinship; in Cree [this concept is captured within] mino pimatisiwin. Living a good life." Health and well-being were contingent on how well one managed relations; all of one's relations, including those with the human community, the land and the spirit world. Life stage teachings, roles and responsibilities were set up to facilitate all of these types of relationships.

I have always been most interested in how relationships are fostered within the human community, and this was the focus I took here. Looking at these types of relationships, Chapter III demonstrated Mosôm's teaching that belonging was actively fostered from the earliest stages of life. In Chapter IV, some of the elders told stories that are fitting with the old adage that "it takes a community to raise a child." Sylvia, Elsie and Madeleine noted that they had many "grandparents" in the community, and this created a sense of security and belonging for them. Family and community members used kinship names to address and refer to one another, and this consistently reinforced the relationships, roles and responsibilities they carried towards each other. Youngsters learned that they could count on being the recipients of care, but that they also had a responsibility to contribute to the care of others. This manifestation of reciprocity is evident when one considers how children were expected to assist their elders.

Responsibility was an important part of engendering a sense of purpose, and the milestones of the young in particular were honoured and recognized. Danny and Rene's stories about their first kill/catch show how children learned that their contributions to community survival were valued. Girls who underwent traditional puberty ceremonies learned the strength of their power, and how it could influence community well-being.

Individual and community health and well-being were thus connected: the health of the individual was understood to be the health of the collective and vice versa. This notion stretched forward and backward in time, for disruptions to the chain of ancestors and the life yet to come could affect community members of the present. Within the human domain, the way in which community members connected across the generations was critical to the health and well-being of the present and future community. Relationships between elders and children were considered critical in terms of maintaining life force and survival of the people. This was beautifully demonstrated in Mandelbaum's description of elders taking and smoking tobacco out of the pouch in which the child also stored his or her umbilical cord. Elders and children thus worked closely to maintain the circular connection between spirit, new life, and a life fulfilled, and adults in their middle years took care of the old and the young so they could do this work. In the end, everyone had a job to do, and the balance of responsibilities that took place between these stages upheld the order and life force of the people.

The balance of this system was represented in the diagram offered by Maria, in which she used concentric circles to show the interconnected roles and responsibilities of men, women, elders and children. Life stage roles thus not only defined individual identities, but also citizenship – in the sense of "the quality of an individual's response to

membership in a community."[2] As Gertie has told me in previous research, "who you are" among her people has always been tied into questions of "what is it that you have to do," and "what is it that you are capable of doing?"[3]

I have not spent much time defining men's responsibilities here, other than to mention the work that men did in terms of bringing resources into the community and offering protection. My focus was on the lives of girls, women and "old ladies" in an effort to draw attention to how we can engage in what Neal McLeod has called "the visionary process of imagining another state of affairs."[4] In a world in which Aboriginal women suffer oppression because of their gender as well as their Indigeneity, my hope is that this information can help us to "conceive of a different way that people might live together."[5] Like Mosôm, I believe that our healing as peoples will be greatly advanced by considering the way in which Indigenous societies formerly honoured balance and respect between genders.

I begin the thesis looking for glimpses of the fortitude, "counter-imperial positions" and egalitarian roles of our grandmothers and ancestors. My research indicated that gender was not a significant factor in terms of identity or experience in the earliest years. Gender separation began as children started to take on the work tasks of adult life, and the separation became much more pronounced after puberty. As adults, men and women had distinct responsibilities, authorities, and even spaces that they occupied, but it is important to note here that one was not considered more important than the other. Everyone had work to do, and all work was valid in terms of keeping the community alive. Women were respected for the ways in which they managed material and human resources, and given authority accordingly. Women of childbearing age were also

considered to have a power so strong that they needed to stay away from the tools of men's labour, lest they "tangle" with the powers that men held.

As women aged, they were given a new kind of respect that allowed them to move in and out of male and female jurisdictions, and they were recognized for their leadership. Stories about the grandmothers' leadership positions demonstrate some of the counter imperial authorities I had been looking for. I believe we have much to gain from holding on to the image of Maria's great-grandmother standing up and having the final word at a meeting in which the government was trying to re-organize trap lines. Rene's grannie Kitchi gawik standing against the winds of change can help us with a decolonizing vision; or the exercise of imagining "another state of affairs." The very notion of elderly women having such decision making authority is counter-imperial, and it is remarkable to consider that this was going on into the middle of the twentieth century. If we call upon these stories, they can help us to rebuild healthy communities. To participate in this process is to be part of Indigenous historiography.

## Decolonization and Launching My Way in to Indigenous Historiography

This thesis explored Métis, Ojibway and Cree women's life stage experiences during the early and mid-twentieth century; a period that was, in many ways, traumatic for Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The participants in this dissertation could have told stories about the disruption, poverty, racism and abuse that they endured in their early years. Our work, however, fell within Indigenous oral history traditions of delineating a worldview that can help us with current realities. We live with the legacy of our colonial history today, and many of our families and communities continue to be in a state of

crisis. In spite of all this we have avenues of hope and vision; avenues which are cultured and advanced through the oral histories of our elders. In seeking out and listening to these stories, we engage in an act of decolonization and Indigenous historiography; a way of imagining a bètter state of affairs, and one which belongs to us because it comes from our peoples and our past.

Within the stories the historian participants told, we can tease out components of the "social and moral code" that sustained northern Algonquian communities in the past. Many of these things will be familiar to community members today as they are the foundation of Indigenous cultures; things like non-coercive childrearing practices, for example, are still operational to some degree in our communities. Sadly, many strengths of "traditional" society exist only as platitudes that we hear but do not always see in practice. "Children are the heart of the community;" "women are the backbone of our society"; "respect your elders" and other expressions must find their way back into our daily lives in a much more comprehensive way. Such practice will also be an act of decolonization and healing.

I have always intended that this thesis might serve as a useful tool for decolonization, and, as such, find a valuable place within Indigenous historiography. I have already done some analysis on how this dissertation fits within Indigenous oral history methodologies in Chapter II, noting that I set out with purpose to "dig up the medicines" that might contribute to our healing. Each person or community may find medicines here that suit the needs they are addressing, be it parenting, working with elders, working on gender relations, etc. I have also taken the story medicines and worked them through Anishinaabek life stages teachings, weaving "the old man," Mosôm,

throughout the chapters to provide a theoretical base for the layers of story. This act will hopefully provide a useful example of how "life lived like a theory" can be applied in our lives today. My hope is that as I launch this dissertation into Indian country and the world beyond, it will work like an arrow, piercing the injustices of our past and slicing open more avenues for change.

## Notes

[1] Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948. In a recent UN report, Myra Cunningham notes that "WHO has begun to debate this definition and to consider the possibility of
incorporating a cultural aspect into its concept of health." Cunningham also provides an international Indigenous definition of health as follows: For indigenous peoples, health is equivalent to the "harmonious coexistence of
human beings with nature, with themselves, and with others, aimed at integral well-being, in spiritual, individual, and social wholeness and tranquility." See Myra Cunningham, "Chapter V: Health" in United Nations, *State of the World Indigenous Peoples,* (New York, United Nations, 2009), p. 156.

[2] Merriam Webster on line.

[3] Gertie Beaucage, quoted in Kim Anderson, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood.* (Toronto: Sumach/Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000), p. 229.

[4] Neal McLeod. *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Modern Times.* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2007), p. 98.

[5] McLeod, Ibid.

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-- "Notokwe Ophihikeet - 'Old-Lady Raised': Aboriginal Women's Reflections on Ethics and Methodologies in Health," *Canadian Woman Studies/ les cahiers de la femme* 26 (3/4) (2008): 6-12.

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# APPENDIX I

# PARTICIPANT/ COMMUNITY PROFILES

This section offers some basic information about the historian participants' communities of origin. As noted in Chapter II, there has always been diversity between (and within) Nēhiyawak, Michif and Anishinaabek cọmmunities, but I have grouped these individuals together because of their linguistic and cultural roots and their land-based lifestyles.
All of the historian participants grew up in communities that sustained themselves through hunting, trapping, fishing, gathering plant foods and medicines and in many cases managing gardens and/or small farms. Algonquian communities in the middle of the twentieth century were also typically engaged in the cash economy through casual and seasonal work which, depending on their location, included trapping, commercial fishing, logging, working as guides, or working as farm hands. Participation in the cash economy was often thwarted though restrictive policies around trade or those that made it illegal for Aboriginal peoples to hunt in their own traditional territories. Many had to resort to "poaching" even to feed their own families.

In general, twentieth-century Algonquian people lived in log or lumber houses that they built themselves until the late 1950s and 1960s when those on reserve began to see the introduction of "that pre fabricated cardboard housing" (as described by Gertie). Water was hauled from nearby sources as running water didn't come to most communities until the 1970s. (It is perhaps notable that, according to the Assembly of First Nations, one in thirty First Nations homes still do not having running water). Most families were still seasonally mobile to some extent, living in tents for their summer excursions and in some cases, in tents out on the trap-line during winter.

Christianity was well entrenched in all of the participants' communities by mid-century, but there were also still plenty of "traditional" spiritual practices going on in one form or another. It was hard for participants to assess the level of traditional spiritual practices, as much of this was done in secrecy. Most of the communities had one or several churches or missions, which in some cases caused fractures in the community because of conflicting denominations. Western health care was scarce, and usually involved having to travel to the closest town. As noted in Chapter VI and VII, women, and older women in particular, were largely responsible for the day to day health care in the communities. Schooling involved a mixture of day schooling and residential schooling for First Nations and Métis alike.

First Nations communities were officially governed by chief and council following the enactment of the Indian Act in 1876. As a representative of the crown, the Indian Agent held tremendous authority over all matters within his jurisdiction, including chief and council. Métis communities were not subject to this particular authority, but were nonetheless subject to colonial authority through game wardens, local politicians, the RCMP and other policing mechanisms.

Some of the historian participants came from communities where there was little to no interaction with whites, other than with the governing and policing authorities who were in their communities. In other cases, there was interaction for business purposes only. The language in many of these communities was either exclusively Cree or Ojibway, although some grew up with a mixture of Cree, Ojibway and/or Chippewyan along with French, English and Michif.

## Individual and Community Profiles

**Marie Anderson** (Ojibway, b. circa 1940) grew up on Wasauksing First Nation, an island in Georgian Bay adjacent to Parry Sound, Ontario. Marie is the daughter of the acclaimed World War I hero, Francis Pegahmagabow, who was a community leader and the primary informant for the ethnographer Diamond Jenness.

**Gertie Beaucage** (Ojibway, b. 1954) is from Nipissing First Nation, located on the north shore of Lake Nipissing between Sturgeon Falls and North Bay, Ontario. This reserve consists of several small villages, and was part of the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850. In Gertie's childhood, the men in her community worked as wage labourers in farming or fishing, in lumber camps or as hunting and fishing guides. Gertie's mother also worked seasonally at the tourist resort located on reserve, and her father was one of the few who still worked a trap line on the reserve. Schooling for children at Nipissing was a mixture of day and residential schooling, and Gertie and her four siblings were bussed into North Bay where they attended a Catholic day school. Gertie's family was a mixture of Catholics and "traditional" people who resisted the ways of the church.

**Maria Campbell** (Cree/Métis, b. 1940) grew up in a Road Allowance community near Prince Albert National Park. Her community and others in the region consisted of families who had moved there following the 1885 (Riel) resistance. After thwarted efforts to homestead in the area, many of these families ended up living on the "road allowance;" crown land on either side of the roads. Maria's people lived in this territory in extended family groups that subsisted on hunting and trapping.

**Rosella Carney** (Cree/Métis, b. 1943) is from Molanosa, a small community that gets its name from its proximity to Montreal Lake (First Nation) in Northern Saskatchewan. Rosella's family were among others who had left the reserve at Montreal Lake to form the small settlement where they were able to trap, fish, and work in logging. In Rosella's family, it was her grandmother who came to Molenosa after having been "kicked off the reserve" for partnering with an outsider. As the community was small, there was very little in terms of infrastructure. Rosella remembers her grandmother travelling by dog team or canoe to get supplies at Montreal Lake, 30 km away. There were no churches, but there was a Mennonite mission where some children were schooled. Others were schooled in a one room school, housed in a donated building in the community.

**Madeleine Dion Stout** (Cree, b. 1946) is from Kehewin Cree Nation, located 240 kilometres east of Edmonton, Alberta. In Madeleine's childhood, families were self-sufficient and there was very little interaction with neighbouring communities, other than the occasional trip to sell cream or where the need arose for western medical care. The language spoken in the community was exclusively Cree. Men from the community had some interaction with farmers, for whom they worked stooking hay or picking rocks. Families subsisted otherwise on what they acquired hunting, fishing and berry picking. Madeleine's family also had a limited amount of cattle, pigs and chickens, and they lived off the produce of their large garden. Madeleine attended day school until the age of seven, and was then sent to residential school. Madeleine is the niece of Joseph Dion, whose book *My Tribe the Crees* has been quoted in this thesis.

**Rose Fleury** (Métis, b. 1926) is from the town of Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, where she still resides. In the 1930s of Rose's childhood, Duck Lake was a thriving centre, where French, English, Scottish and Doukabour immigrants had arrived by train in previous decades. The town also included Métis and First Nations inhabitants, and was situated close to two reserves (Beardy's & Okemasis and One Arrow). It was, therefore, a multi-lingual, multi-cultural centre where people came to go to church (Anglican, Catholic, Baptist), to shop, do banking and other business. The town had a mill and a slaughterhouse to serve the area's farms and ranches. Rose described her family as "hunters more than anything else," although they also worked as labourers on farms where, in addition to earning wages, they were also "paid" with produce and permission to hunt on the farmer's land. Most families had a small number of farm animals and grew large gardens. During the school year, Rose boarded at the local convent and was schooled there, as her family lived slightly out of town.

**Hilary Harper** (Cree/Métis, b. 1952) shared stories that come from time spent with her "little kokum," Celine Morrisette Wright from Moosomin Reserve just outside of Cochin, Saskatchewan. Hilary was primarily raised in Lloydminster, Saskatchewan, but spent a lot of time at Moosomin where her maternal grandparents and great grandparents lived. Hilary's family had been displaced from a disbanded reserve just outside of Duck Lake, Saskatchewan.

**June King** (Ojibway, b. 1945) is a pseudonym for an elder from an Ojibway community in north central Ontario.

**Rebecca Martell** (Métis, b. 1950) spent her childhood in Northern Saskatchewan, where the economy was based in mining trapping, hunting and fishing. Rebecca's family lived on their own and "in the bush" in the summer, where they resided in a log house or in tents, depending on the activity. During the winter, Rebecca's family would move into town, where Rebecca attended a day school. The languages spoken in the community of Rebecca's youth were English, Cree and Dënesųłiné (Chipewyan).

**Rene Meshake** (Ojibway, b. 1948) spent his first ten years in his grandmother's traditional territory of Pagwashing, in Northwestern Ontario about 80 kilometres north of the town of Geraldton. This community was built along the CNR railway tracks and was "off reserve," although many members were registered with either Long Lake #58 First Nation or Aroland First Nation. In the 1960s, this community was moved onto the aforementioned reserves, a point of rupture which Rene describes as the beginning of the end of their "traditional" ways. In addition to occupations of hunting and fishing, men in Rene's childhood community worked on the railway, built highways or worked as forest firefighters. Rene's grandmother engaged in fishing, trapping and hunting, sold blueberries and traded with people passing through on the train.

**Olive Morrisette** (Cree/Métis, b. 1930) is a pseudonym for an elder from a Road Allowance community in northwestern Saskatchewan.

**Danny Musqua** (Saulteaux, b. 1937) is a member of the Keesekoose First Nation, a reserve formed after the signing of Treaty 4 (1874), and located in southeastern Saskatchewan near the Manitoba border. Danny's family were farmers and hunters. As he was a sickly child, Danny was

raised by his grandparents, who instilled in him a lot of the traditional knowledge that he shares today.

**Elsie Sanderson** (Cree/Métis, b. 1943) is from Cumberland House, a Métis settlement on Pine Island in northeastern Saskatchewan and close The Pas, Manitoba. Because of it's location on the Saskatchewan River Delta, the community has a long history as a stopping point on the fur trade route, and a longer history as a meeting place. In Elsie's childhood, the community still emptied out in the fall time and moved out to trap lines where they would remain for the winter. When asked how many families would live on the trap line together, Elsie replied "it's hard for me to say because to me we were all one family." Families lived and worked together in tents within their traditional extended family territories. Furs were sold collectively to a broker who came to the camps, and members would come in periodically for supplies at the Hudson's Bay Store. During the summer, community members worked in the local commercial fishing industry. In Elsie's youth, the elders spoke Michif, but this has generally eroded and Cree remains the only Indigenous language in the community.

**Sylvia Wuttunee** (Cree, b. 1945) is a member of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation, a community that was established following the signing of Treaty 6 in 1876. The Red Pheasant people settled on their reserve in the rolling hills approximately 33 kilometres south of North Battleford in 1878 with a recorded population of 416 members. When Sylvia was a child there were about 500 people living on reserve in small "villages" or family communities. Sylvia's mother is Métis and came to Red Pheasant from the Eagle Hill district in the Battlefords to enter into an arranged marriage to Sylvia's father. Sylvia's maternal grandparents wanted this marriage so their

daughter could get treaty status, telling her "your children and grandchildren will always have a land base if you marry a treaty Indian -- not like the Métis who have no land to call home and have to live on road allowances." Sylvia's parents raised her as a Christian, and were both strict and loving in her youth. Their family lived off subsistence farming along with the wage labour of her father, who drove a truck for the grocery store.