

**THE TEACHINGS OF THE BEAR CLAN:  
AS TOLD BY SAULTEAUX ELDER DANNY MUSQUA**

**A Thesis**

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**by**

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## **Abstract**

The Sauteaux Nation is comprised of 7 major clans the larger of which is the Bear Clan. This thesis examines the holistic philosophy of the Sauteaux world view and the oral teachings of the Bear Clan. The teachings, which emphasize the nature of healing and personal growth, were related by Elder Danny Musqua to myself from within the context of traditional Bear Clan ceremonies and practices. This thesis documents my journey to understand these teachings and in the process to arrive at a deeper understanding of self. This is done within the context of Bear Clan culture and within the context of my relationship with Elder Danny Musqua. This thesis relates my struggle to make meaning of these teachings on a personal level and how these teachings have affected my life.

Narrative Inquiry is the methodology employed in this study. Through a reliance on narrative as the research methodology, the oral tradition of the Bear Clan and its traditional methods of knowledge transmission are honoured. The methodology utilized in this study is relatively unstructured in that no formal questioning process is utilized. Instead, it relies upon the relationship between the Elder/teacher and the son/learner in which to transmit knowledge. This process stresses the relationship between Danny and myself and emphasizes trust and respect as important elements of learning. In this relationship,

knowledge was transmitted through participation in the sweatlodge, the learning lodge and through conversations with Danny. This approach to research respected the implicit nature of the oral tradition and allowed for me to make meaning of Danny's teachings in their original context and interpret them at a level appropriate for my own personal development.

This thesis struggles to define traditional healing and the role that the healer, the one oppressed by illness and the spiritual realm play in the healing process. This thesis may prove valuable in educating and informing those who do not have an understanding of concepts of First Nations' healing. It may also serve as an invitation to all people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to expand their notions of healing or to search out a similar path in life.

## **Acknowledgment**

Whenever you attempt to complete a journey of this sort, it is not accomplished on one's own. I have many people to thank and without whose support this thesis would not have been completed. First I would like to thank my noose, Elder Danny Musqua for his teachings, his patience, his understanding and the love that he has shown me. I would also like to thank all of the members of the Bear Clan, particularly Chester, Jane, Chris, Fran, and Laura. I would also like to thank the members of my committee, Mark, Verna, Howard, and George as well as my SUNTEP family of Bente, Donna, Elaine, Kathy, Lon, Lorraine, Murdine and Sandy. In addition, I have appreciated the support from my friends and family with special thanks to Rick, Stan, Trish, Curtis, John and Doreen. I am thankful for the influence my late brother Phil has had upon my life and for the teachings and love of my mother and father, Lee and Peter Relland. Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to thank my wife Jackie for her encouragement and support these last seventeen years. I humbly recognize the important role that all of these people have played in my growing into the person that I am today and words can not begin to express my gratitude.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to Elder Danny Musqua, my wife Jackie, my mother and in memory of my father and my brother Phil.

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## Chapter I: Defining the Path

### Introduction

Western theories of healing have failed to significantly contribute to the mental health of Aboriginal people. This ineffectiveness is rooted in the failure of Western thought to acknowledge the importance of environmental factors such as systemic oppression stemming from racism (Ryan, 1976). It also fails to recognize the importance of cultural uniqueness, and the role of spirituality in healing (Katz, 1994). Instead, mental and physical illness is viewed as possessing standardized characteristics which permit for uniform types of treatment. Western medicine tends to view illness as a result of a causal relationship between the physical environment and the human body whose metabolism is affected in an adverse way. In contrast, Aboriginal healing is less restrictive and confined in nature and recognizes the importance of the environment upon the human journey as well as the pivotal role played by the spiritual dimension. Because of its inclusive nature, Aboriginal thought has the potential to contribute to the healing of all people, not just First Nations' people, because it acknowledges the relationship between the individual and the environment and the importance of this relationship to the healing process (Sioui, 1992).

## **The Legacy of Colonization**

Colonization has had a profound effect upon Aboriginal people. These effects typically include the oppression of their language, cultural identity and world view. This oppression, which is a direct result of systemic racism and the colonization process, inevitably detrimentally effects many aspects of human development such as how individuals within a specific community view themselves in relationship to others, especially if those individuals occupy a place of socio-economic privilege. Ironically, what begins as a problem originating with the larger society, becomes internalized when the individual is diagnosed by the Western system as the identified patient. This mis-diagnosis is a result of the systemic design of Western medicine. Because of its design, it cannot admit to problems in the larger socio economic and political context and instead reduces the problem to the individual (Memmi, 1965; Ryan, 1976). The resultant erosion of culture, and the accompanying pressures placed upon colonized peoples to assimilate, and accept the world view of the colonizer, has a profoundly destructive effect upon the self-concept, self-esteem and self-worth of members of the colonized society. It becomes difficult to maintain a positive attitude about self when one's language, knowledge systems and traditional means of spiritual expression are constantly being devalued and subjugated. These developmental problems manifest themselves in a number of societal and community problems such as suicide, alcohol abuse and other self-destructive behaviour. These problems have been compounded by Western psychology's

inability to effectively foster spiritual and emotional healing among Aboriginal people. This failure in providing effective healing for the Aboriginal population may in part be due to the close relationship between the loss of traditional cultural values and practices and the feeling of cultural isolation and alienation experienced by Aboriginal people. Therefore, in order to remedy this alienation, and restore individual and community pride and identity, it may be necessary for Indigenous people to return to their cultural roots and traditional practices (Couture, 1985; Memmi, 1965; Phillipson, 1992).

## **World View and the Interpretation of Reality**

### **1. Dominant Western Conceptions of Reality**

How we make meaning of existence and how we interpret physical reality is subjective and culturally bound (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978). Individual cultures interpret reality from their own unique perspective or world view. The Western world view, which dominates our understanding of reality in North America, has its roots in the Newtonian thought of the seventeenth century (Peat, 1994; Whitehead, 1925/1967). This world view holds that reality can be reduced to objects as existing in isolation from one another. Not only are objects isolated from each other but they are broken down into their simplest parts. Reductionism is a tendency in Western science to explain reality in terms of the simplest elements supposedly at the base of all physical objects (Whitehead, 1925/1967,p.58). In Western psychology, for example, this reductionist view

manifests itself in the view that illnesses are internal to the individual or identified "patient". Little if any consideration is given to other factors, such as systemic societal problems associated with the environment, that may have significant bearing on the problem. This is due to the tendency of the Western world to reduce existence to fit neatly within their own "Western" reductionist models which do not adequately account for the individual uniqueness or the complexities of influences which impact upon the human condition. The connectedness of one's mental, physical, and spiritual well-being is rarely taken into consideration by Western psychologists (Caplan, 1995; Szasz, 1961).

## **2. Traditional Aboriginal Conceptions of Reality**

In contrast to the Western world view, Aboriginal philosophy focuses on the connectedness of all things in the universe. In this view things are not separated one from another but are organically related in an all encompassing unity. There are, in fact, some universally held ideas among Aboriginal peoples. The idea of 'connectedness of all things' is one of the key concepts shared by nearly all Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal societies throughout the world tend to see their connection with the earth, their mother. They also tend to recognize a spiritual bond between the earth, themselves and the cosmos. However, while there are a number of philosophical similarities in world view, each Nation has its own unique way of expressing these universal ideas (Cajete, 1994). Moreover, the connectedness of all things is extended by Aboriginal peoples to include the

connection of the physical and spiritual realms of experience. The individual is not viewed as an entity isolated from the physical or spiritual environment. Rather, the individual exists in concert with both of these realms. In the Aboriginal world view life exists, and is integral to, a mental/ physical/ spiritual reality. The individual cannot be understood outside of the context of this all-inclusive reality (Cajete, 1994; Neihardt, 1934; Sioui, 1992). In keeping with this 'holistic' interpretation of reality, illness is defined as a disharmony or imbalance between the individual and mental/ physical/ spiritual reality. Healing, in this sense, is the return of the individual to a state of physical and spiritual harmony or balance.

### **Informing the Process of Healing: An Aboriginal Perspective**

In the Western world view, mental health is viewed as a disorder whose origins, physical and mental, are internal to the 'patient' and may be biochemical or physiological in nature. Since, inherited genetic predisposition or poor lifestyle choices are the primary reasons for the existence of illness, Western medicine need look no farther than factors internal to the patient to uncover the underlying cause of illness. This view on illness allows for the maintenance of the status quo and does not encourage an examination of the impact of systemic structural oppression on illness. This view of mental health tends to be reductionist in approach because its focus is limited and fails to consider external environmental factors or allow for internal individual variance. This approach is

in striking contrast to Aboriginal perceptions of healing as passed on through the centuries by the Elders and the teachings of the oral tradition (Caplan, 1995; Ryan, 1976; Szasz, 1961). The words, stories and counsel of Aboriginal Elders holds centuries of knowledge that their people have gathered and passed on through a rich oral tradition. The Elder's oral teachings have been refined over the millennium to accurately reflect the traditional Aboriginal culture of their individual nations. When examined closely, the Elder's teachings articulate a comprehensive, organic, spiritually based philosophy that serves to identify the cultural uniqueness of the world view of Aboriginal people. Therefore, if positive human growth and development is to be fostered, the uniqueness of the Aboriginal world view, as described through the oral tradition, must be preserved and promoted within the context of contemporary society (Katz, 1994; Katz & St.Denis, 1991; Sioui, 1992; Wall, 1996).

Historically, the oral tradition of the Elders encourages a philosophy of spiritual connectedness with the cosmos that, when utilized in life, helps define and determine Indigenous reality (Cajete, 1994; Highwater, 1981; LameDeer, 1972; Neihardt, 1932; Sioui, 1992). In the holistic Aboriginal world view, the relationship between humanity, the natural world, and the spiritual world are viewed in an integrated manner. In fact, in this view these three realms are inseparable because humankind is defined as spiritual beings who come from the earth and will eventually return their physical bodies to the earth before returning to the realm of the spirits (Musqua, 1996). This is articulated very

clearly by Lame Deer when he relates how the holistic world view is embodied in the symbol of the circle:

The Indian's symbol is the circle, the hoop. Nature wants things to be round. The bodies of human beings and animals have no corners. With us the circle stands for the togetherness of people and friends and people united in peace while the pipe passes from hand to hand. The camp in which every tipi had its place was also a ring. The tipi was a ring in which people sat in a circle and all the families in the village were in turn circles within a larger circle, part of the larger hoop which was the seven campfires of the Sioux representing one nation. The nation was only a part of the universe, in the sun, which is round, or the stars, which are round. The moon, the horizon, the rainbow - circles within circles, with no beginning and no end (Lame Deer, 1971,p.100).

The circle, according to Lame Deer, is not only a beautiful and fitting symbol but also a reality which enables Native people to give expression to the harmony of life and nature. This harmony is timeless because the spirit force is boundless and infinite and possesses the ability, over time, to take on different forms and enter a variety of different realms. In addition, because all things in creation arise from a common source, they are connected and contain a spiritual component which permeates and links the physical and spiritual realms. Lame Deer describes this circular relationship "as timeless, flowing; it is new life emerging from death - life winning out over death" (Lame Deer, 1971,p.100). Lame Deer came to understand physical experience as inextricably linked with the spiritual and that the two realities are perpetually involved in a birth, death, rebirth process, understanding recognized through the teachings of Elders and the oral tradition. This belief recognizes the journey of the spirit as infinite. It

also teaches that the spirit's path is cyclical in that it is formulated and reformulated in a variety of different realms and realities, one of which is the physical world. Therefore, even though the physical body dies, thereby exposing the spirit to death and the lessons that death can teach the spirit, the spirit undergoes a metamorphosis and rejuvenates itself in another journey completing the cyclic nature of life and death. For example, at conception the spirit is linked to the physical realm. This bond is maintained until death, at which time the spirit is freed from the physical realm before continuing on its journey either back to the Great Spirit or to another realm (Musqua, 1997). This example was given to me through the teachings of Elder Danny Musqua. It helps to lay the philosophical and the spiritual foundation on which many First Nations' interpretations of healing are based.

Notions of spirituality are central to the philosophies of First Nations' people. It is important to remember that regardless of the similarities between Nations, each Aboriginal group is the keeper of its own distinct knowledge and relates to the spiritual realm in its own culturally specific manner. Yet in relation to healing, Aboriginal nations throughout the world adhere to a number of shared beliefs. For example, humans are viewed as spiritual beings, and as such, they are all reflections of the creator, perfect in spirit (Katz, 1994; Musqua, 1997; Neihardt, 1932). The emphasis on the spiritual does not imply a remote connection by a dynamic, interactive one that allows for a direct communication with the spiritual realm. This is achieved through dreams and visions during



which time humankind possesses the ability to travel in spirit to far away destinations or to communicate with other spirits (Cajete, 1994; Wall, 1996). It is commonly believed that physical reality is an illusion and that the spiritual is the only true reality. Among Aboriginal peoples' it is this commonly held principle that guides traditional healing practices. Individuals who fail to understand this principle leave themselves open to physical, mental or spiritual harm. They may be described as having wandered from the path, or lost their way, because they no longer possess an understanding of spiritual things and have cut themselves off from the creator (Katz, 1994; Wall, 1996). As a result of losing one's connection with spiritual reality, an individual may become dominated by physical reality and susceptible to the human frailties such as greed, fear and hatred. Succumbing to any of these temptations can cause an individual's life to become unbalanced or uncentered and provide an opportunity for the "shadow", or the influences of the physical, to control the individual (Wall, 1994,p.264). Put another way, "only the spirit is real. The physical is the shadow. The shadow is a reflection of the soul or spirit. Your experiences are only echoes of where the physical has been or is going." (p.264) Since Aboriginal people traditionally view the spiritual as the one true reality, life is believed to be a spiritual journey that is guided by the Great Spirit. For this reason Aboriginal people tend not to believe in coincidence, but rather feel that people follow their own paths, make their own choices in life, and that these choices are part of a greater plan (Musqua, 1996).

It is such commonly held beliefs that shape most Aboriginal views of healing, and therefore, their ceremonial practices and the roles of their healers.

### **The Role of First Nations' Elders/Healers**

Because the various First Nations share a common holistic spirit-centered philosophy of healing, it is not surprising that they also share similar cultural and ceremonial expressions of healing practices. This is demonstrated by the role of the Elder/Healer in First Nations' society. In the Aboriginal world the role of the Elder/Healer is that of advisor, healer and teacher. The Elders commonly undertake this role in the community because they know their relationship to the spirit world, are in touch with their inner spirit, and are also more sensitive to the spirits of those around them. (Katz, 1994; St.Denis & Katz, 1992) Elders have the ability to see the Creator in all of creation and to call forth these spirits so as to become active in the healing process. Because they are highly developed spiritually, Elders and healers have the power of second sight or the ability to communicate with the spiritual realm through dreams and visions. Not only do Elders see the creator in plants, animals and in all things, but as spiritual guides and teachers they are required to understand the oneness of the universe and their own relationship and dependence with the physical and spiritual world. (Katz, 1994; Wall, 1996)

One such respected First Nations' Elder and healer is Danny Musqua from the Keeseekoose Saulteaux First Nation in Saskatchewan. The basis of

this thesis is my immersion in the oral teachings of Elder Danny Musqua. Like other First Nations' Elders who practice their traditional ceremonies, Danny possesses the wealth of knowledge contained within the oral tradition. While the healing philosophy shares many commonalities with other Aboriginal Nations, Danny's teachings also possess characteristics that are unique to the Sauteaux Nation. Like other Aboriginal healing philosophies, Sauteaux healing is holistic in that it focuses on the individual in context with his or her environment in the fullest sense. Danny stresses the importance of the spiritual reality and the importance of understanding the spiritual realm and the limitations of the physical world in relationship to human development and healing.

### **The Purpose of the Thesis**

Life is an unpredictable journey. It is a road that we all must travel but of which we can foresee very little. This thesis is my attempt to explain and interpret the meaning of the life journey according to my interpretation of traditional Sauteaux society of the Bear Clan according to the teachings of Elder Danny Musqua. In keeping with the holistic view of traditional Aboriginal philosophy, and the belief that no one individual can exist in isolation, this thesis will focus on a number of interwoven journeys. Directly or indirectly, this thesis is about the journey of the "old ones", their teachings, and the rich legacy that they have left us in the form of a life philosophy rich in ceremony and meaning. It is also about Elder Danny Musqua's journey as it is about my own journey and our

journey together. It is a story, a metaphor, that tells of my attempts to make meaning of the concept of healing as described in the teachings of the Bear clan as told to me by Danny. It is about my struggle to understand, internalize and communicate these teachings in a contemporary context and in the process arrive at a better understanding of self. Arriving at a better understanding of myself and my limitations and weaknesses, I will be able to use this knowledge to grow in a positive manner and develop a clearer understanding of my place in the universe as well as to make meaning of what life events, such as my brother's accidental death, mean in the larger sense. It is my hope that this thesis will afford all of those that read it a better understanding of the Saulteaux world view and its beliefs on healing. It is also hoped that this thesis will serve as an invitation to Aboriginal people to explore the topic of healing from their own Aboriginal perspective. The teachings of the Bear Clan will be transmitted from Danny to myself through the traditional teaching practices of ceremony and through the traditional relationship of Elder to learner or father to son. These teachings will focus on the teachings of physical, emotional and spiritual rebirth and healing as passed down and related in the oral tradition. The thesis will discuss the teachings of the Bear Clan that are central to a philosophy which emphasizes wholeness and healing. It will examine these teachings, stories and prophecy, and relate how I have come to understand their significance and their application in contemporary Aboriginal society.

I will attempt to explain these teachings as I have come to understand them through my relationship with Danny Musqua. It is through our relationship that I have had the opportunity to learn within the context of Bear Clan society. It is through participation in the sweatlodge, the learning lodge and other traditional ceremonies that this knowledge has been conveyed to me. With Danny's permission, I have also tape-recorded him on a number of occasions so that there would be a partial written record of his teaching and that his voice, in his own words, would appear in the text of this thesis.

Unfortunately, while I have learned from Danny in a culturally appropriate manner, my ability to correctly perceive and interpret his teachings are limited by the fact that I am unable to speak the Saulteaux language and my thinking has been strongly influenced by the world of Western academia. Yet, I take solace in Danny's teaching that no two journeys are alike and that each journey is important and meaningful. The meaning to which I ultimately arrive, regardless of the fact that I can not speak Saulteaux, is significant to my personal journey and helpful in defining how I make meaning of my own experiences and how it facilitates my own personal growth. Another limitation to my interpretation of Danny's teachings is that like all people, I am in the process of becoming, of learning who I am, and understanding my purpose and place in the universe. Because I am in the process of becoming, I can only understand Danny's teachings at the level to which I have evolved in my thinking at this point in my life. Therefore, truth is not a fixed point but rather may change over time

depending on where one is in his or her life. This approach, which emphasizes personal freedom of interpretation, is in keeping with the teachings of the Elders and Aboriginal philosophy in general. This freedom is due to the fact that knowledge is transmitted through story and the oral tradition. This narrative form of knowledge transmission can be interpreted on a number of literal and symbolic levels. It relies on the metaphor to unfold progressively deeper levels of meaning which are interpreted and comprehended differently by different people, dependent upon their capacity for insight and understanding (Urion, 1991). This thesis will also attempt to use narrative as a reflective vehicle utilized to explore our own inner space rather than as an analytical tool used by the Western world to analyze outer space (Ermine, 1995).

This study provides an opportunity for me as an Aboriginal person to take responsibility for articulating traditional knowledge within the arena of Western academia. It allows for the active participation of an Aboriginal Elder in defining and interpreting the teachings of the oral tradition. The study provides an opportunity for cross-cultural research to be conducted in a sensitive and respectful manner in which the knowledge of the culture under study is valued and thought to possess merit in its own right. Through the course of this study I will attempt to discuss the teachings of Danny Musqua through story and metaphor. This is important because, to date, little information is available concerning either the Saulteaux world view or the oral tradition of the Bear Clan. People who wish to understand the Bear Clan teachings on healing may find the

story outlined in this thesis helpful in achieving a deeper understanding of Saulteaux philosophy through a research methodology whose origins lie within the Saulteaux world view and which honours the Saulteaux culture.

## **The Learning Path**

### **1. Western Research Methodologies and the Inequity of Power**

As it currently stands, many Aboriginal people are researching traditional First Nations' knowledge, but these studies can be more adequately described as Aboriginal academics conducting research rather than Aboriginal research. Western academic research has tended to undervalue the importance of culture to epistemology. This oversight on the part of Western theory detracts from research findings (Bishop, 1996).

Aboriginal academics (Bishop, 1996; St.Denis, 1992) argue that a large inequity in power exists in Western research practices. This is particularly true when research focuses on women's issues or on minorities. For this reason it is important that an Aboriginal specific research model be developed when conducting research with the Native community (Bishop, 1996; St.Denis, 1992). By utilizing a cross-cultural approach to research, developed within the context of the culture of the research participants, Aboriginal people can be freed from the marginalization and oppression that inevitably occurs when a research model foreign to the culture of study is imposed (St.Denis, 1992). Bishop (1996) states that traditional academic research epistemologies have developed their own

methodological approaches for inquiry, evaluation and assessment. He states, however, that these approaches stem from cultural preferences and practices which originate in the Western world view which is clearly outside the life experience and cultural center of Aboriginal people. For example, he states that the Western academic world's, "preoccupation with neutrality, objectivity and distance by educational researchers has emphasized these concepts as criteria for authority, representation and accountability" (p.15). This methodology effectively belittles and invalidates First Nations' knowledge. In the world of Western academia it is the researcher who exercises power and control over the research. By bringing preconceived ideas to the study the researcher inevitably biases his approach to the research subject, and by committing himself or herself to a 'grand theory' he or she will be biased and may be obliged to interpret their findings in a manner that supports the theory. This can lead to the researcher interpreting the results of the study in accordance with the theoretical framework that was initially imposed. Bishop (1996) suggests that the imposition of an 'outside' theory is inappropriate when conducting research into the Aboriginal community. Aboriginal academics state that the theory utilized by the researcher, and the life experiences of the research participants, must merge together and be grounded within the culture of the research participants in a manner that validates interpersonal communication, the relationships between people and the importance of human exchange (Bishop 1996; St.Denis, 1992). In this definition, research is viewed as a process which encourages mutual



learning and a sharing of knowledge. Since knowledge is shared and is linked to relationship and the articulation of what is known, the use of story and the narrative method is appropriate in Aboriginal research because it allows participants to make their own interpretations of meaning (St.Denis, 1992).

## **2. Researching First Nations' Knowledge**

By conducting research from an Aboriginal framework, and the intimate nature of this type of method, the researcher is challenged to develop a competence in the culture that he is studying. The onus is on the researcher to develop an understanding of the culture by participation in it. This is what St.Denis (1992) has referred to as "Community Based Participatory Research" (p. 60). Through this model, the researcher assumes culturally appropriate manners within the context of the culture under study. This not only facilitates a clearer understanding for the researcher, but it provides for a more moral model of research. To achieve this end, the researcher must develop a research theory which evolves out of, revolves around, and connects with the cultural experience of those in the culture they are studying (Bishop, 1996; St.Denis, 1992).

Bishop (1996) states that to develop a truly Aboriginal theoretical framework we need "to acknowledge our participatory connectedness with the other research participants and promote a means of knowing in a way that denies distance and separation and promotes commitment and engagement" (p. 23). This approach is in direct opposition to traditional research practices which

state that, in order to maintain objectivity, the researcher must not come into too close of contact with the research participant. Personal involvement is viewed as a dangerous bias and many types of positivistic research have developed measures intended to minimize or eliminate this loss of objectivity (Bishop, 1996; Fetterman, 1989; St.Denis, 1992). According to cross-cultural researchers, this approach is incorrect. In a cross-cultural setting, researchers should strive towards the development of a 'participatory consciousness'. This means becoming involved in a "somatic, non-verbal quality of attention that necessitates letting go the focus of self" (Bishop, 1996, p.27). This implies that the researcher must be prepared to relinquish his position of power and take on an equal and reciprocal relationship with the research participants (Bishop, 1996; St.Denis, 1992). Implementing an Aboriginal research model, according to these authors, means recognizing an equality in power dynamics between researcher and participant. It also means that participants are not thought of as simply 'informants' but as full partners in the knowledge creation process. These partners are respected as individuals who possess meaningful experiences, concerns and questions. In keeping with the Aboriginal world view, the researcher and the research participant do not work in isolation but are interconnected. Through narrative the researcher and the research participant are jointly responsible for articulating a new story or shared experience or truth (Bishop, 1996; St.Denis, 1992). In this manner, our story is a reflection of our journey which, according to Danny (1996), is an expression of the truest form of

knowledge because it originates from lived experience. Therefore, story or narrative, which is based upon lived experience, is not only a legitimate form of knowledge, but one which can facilitate complex forms of knowledge. Story can be used as a metaphorical tool which is used to transmit knowledge and whose meaning can be interpreted by the reader on a number of literal and symbolic levels of various complexity. Honouring story and the innate knowledge that it contains allows for numerous interpretations of lived experience. These interpretations, unlike their qualitative counterpart, allow for the incorporation of the human element and provide an opportunity for the individual's understanding to be filtered through their own personal lenses as they have been defined by their life experiences.

To address the disparity in power between researcher and research participant, Bishop (1996) recommends implementing an Aboriginal research agenda. Bishop calls this agenda the Kaupapa Maori. In this study, I will refer to this process as the Anishanabe agenda of research. The Anishanabe agenda must challenge the traditional position of researcher as the one in control of the research. It holds that the researcher will abdicate his position as expert with power and decision making authority for a role of learner and co-creator of knowledge. This allows the research to become a personal process, where the knower is attached to the known, and where research participants are encouraged to enter into a reflective, dialectic process in which they develop their own understandings, interpretations and practical applications of the

knowledge (Bishop, 1996; St.Denis, 1992). This form of research revolves around and views lived experience as a legitimate form of knowledge. Because this process validates lived experience, the researcher is no longer operating in a methodological manner but is somatically involved in a process that is simultaneously physical, ethical, moral and spiritual in nature. This process is advantageous to the research process because it is respectful of the participating culture (Bishop, 1996).

Because the Aboriginal world view and the Western academic world view are so divergent in nature, it is difficult to accurately transform the knowledge of the Aboriginal world into a written form which reflects its original cultural context, but can also be understood from the Western perspective. Not only is there a great danger of distorting the original spirit or intent of the knowledge, but it is also difficult to transform this knowledge in a manner which is respectful of the culture from which it originates. Because the Narrative Inquiry method recognizes story as a legitimate form of knowledge, it is an empowering vehicle for enabling people outside of the dominant Western culture to develop their own voice, or in the case of this thesis, it allows me to relate my interpretation of Danny's teachings and their impact upon my life. The importance of the narrative approach is that story can be used as a method for marginalized peoples to relate their knowledge on their own terms and from a theoretical framework which has its origins from within their own cultural perspective (Bishop, 1996). Narrative Inquiry recognizes the legitimacy of the spoken word,

or in the case of Aboriginal pedagogy, views the teachings of the oral tradition as representations of truth and allows for an equitable sharing of power between the researcher and the research participant. This manner of conducting research from the university within Aboriginal communities reflects a new way of being in the world.

If a theoretical framework is to be utilized, it is essential that such a framework has its origins from within the culture that is being studied (Bishop, 1996). The use of story or narrative in this thesis will stress the 'connectedness' and 'relationships' between the participant (Elder Danny Musqua) and the researcher (myself) as well as honours the relationship between the 'knower' and the 'known' or, in the society of the Bear Clan, the 'Elder/teacher' and the 'son/learner'. In traditional Bear Clan society, an Elder assumes the role of teacher and takes on the responsibility of passing on the knowledge to those who come after. It is the obligation of the knower to share his or her gift with those who are on the path. It is the learner's responsibility to be respectful of his teacher and to be humble and honour their Elders. It is also the learners' responsibility to reflect upon what they are being taught and to develop alternative pathways of learning through the use of various ceremonies and prayer. This is the relationship through which knowledge has been transmitted within traditional Bear Clan society. Therefore, story and the narrative approach, that focuses on knowledge transmission within the context of my relationship with Danny, will enable me to develop a clearer understanding of the Bear Clan's

knowledge, as well as foster my ability to articulate this knowledge in a manner which minimizes the amount of misrepresentation and distortion.

I realize the irony of using a Narrative research model, which has its origins in Western academia, as a vehicle to explain and understand traditional Saulteaux knowledge. This is particularly ironic because many Aboriginal academics are critical of its appropriateness for reasons such as problems in language translation and moving from an oral to a written tradition. Hopefully, in the not too distant future, Aboriginal people will develop a research model that specifically addresses these issues so that traditional First Nations' knowledge can be properly honoured and respected. Until this is successfully accomplished, I agree that the use of the Narrative Inquiry model is a compromise but its use is more consistent with First Nations' philosophy, and the oral tradition in which it is rooted, than the use of surveys and statistical analysis because it honours relationship, story and lived experience and the inclusion of the spiritual aspect of existence. For these reasons, and for the time being, the Narrative Inquiry model allows for knowledge to be gained from within the context of the culture and its traditional ceremonies of the sweat lodge and the learning lodge.

## **The Method of Knowledge Transmission According to the Sauteaux/Bear Clan Agenda**

### **i) Making an Offering**

In keeping with traditional Sauteaux protocol, the gift of tobacco, cloth or a personal offering of some form will be given to initiate the learning process and to serve as a sacrifice for the knowledge that I will gain from Danny's teachings.

### **ii) Coming to Know Through Direct Experience**

- a) The Importance of Direct Experience:** Danny teaches that to really understand something you have to have directly experienced it for yourself. Without direct experience, knowledge remains an abstraction with which one may be familiar but lacks first hand knowledge. This is why to gain a meaningful understanding of the teachings of the Bear Clan one must participate in traditional ceremonies like fasts, sweats and learning lodges.
- b) The Importance of Relationship:** Within the context of the Bear Clan, knowledge is not a sterile entity that is objectively dissected and transmitted in a rigidly structured system. Instead, it is a subjective process which emphasizes the importance of a trusting relationship and the value of the oral tradition. Knowing develops out of understanding one's relationship and connection with others and his/her interpretation of their world. In the tradition of the

Anishanabe, the primary vehicle for knowledge transmission stems from the relationship of Elder/teacher with the son/learner. From within the context of this relationship the learner experiences the Elder's modelling humility, respect, self-sacrifice and through observing their bearing and demeanour. Once this relationship based upon trust and mutual respect has been established, the learner can learn simply by listening to the stories and teachings of the Elder.

**iii) Process of Meaning Making:**

Unlike many methodologies within the Western research model, Narrative Inquiry accepts that a culture's stories convey knowledge and have the potential to expand our understanding of ourselves, others, and our relationship to one another. The research method utilized in this study is based upon the relationship of Elder/learner or father/son, as defined by the culture of the Bear Clan. This method of knowledge transmission stresses relationship as an important element of the learning process.

- a) Questioning Strategy:** Within the context of my relationship with Danny, the narrative will begin to take on a life of its own without the imposition of a rigid external structure or questioning strategy. In keeping with the Anishanabe agenda it is the research



participant who determines the direction of the study. Therefore, while I will have a number of questions that I hope to have answered, the form and manner of the knowledge disclosed will be determined by Danny in a manner which Stake (1995) calls progressive focusing. Because knowledge transmission will occur informally between Danny and myself through the use of dialogue, questioning and inquiry will be conducted in a flexible, relatively unstructured manner. This unstructured dialogue, or interview, will utilize two types of questioning, open questions and probing questions. Initially, I will utilize "Grand Tour" questions which are broad-based open-ended questions which allow the researcher to elicit a survey of a cultural scene (Spradley, 1972). These open-ended questions are used to allow the Elder to choose the knowledge and the level of the knowledge that will be shared. Grand Tour questions will eventually be followed up with more focused questions, or probing questions, which will allow Danny to elaborate on specific topic areas (Spradley, 1972; Fetterman, 1989).

- b) Emphasis on Dialogue:** A large portion of my making personal meaning of Danny's teachings revolves around our informal conversations and discussions as we journey together. Primarily the knowledge that Danny bestows upon me will be transmitted

through story, conversation, and participation in traditional ceremonies such as the sweat lodge and learning lodge. Danny and I will discuss, through the dialogic processes inherent in the culture of the Bear Clan, the true nature of healing as defined within the context of Saulteaux culture. Through these discussions, which occurred over the last seven years around the sweat lodge, the learning lodge, the kitchen table, or at feasts, I have had the opportunity to learn from Danny in the traditional role of father and son. During this process Danny assumed the role of learned teacher while I attempted to humbly assume the role of learner. However, in order to create a permanent written record of some of Danny's teachings, I have requested and received, Danny's permission to audio tape an interview. The audio tapes will be transcribed verbatim. After the transcription is completed, I will review the transcripts to ensure their accuracy. I will make minor grammatical corrections, being intent not to alter meaning. Once the transcription has been completed and verified, Danny will be given a copy to review and confirm for accuracy.

- c) **Reflection:** Reflection and soul searching is an important element of understanding knowledge. Whenever possible, we must not only live the experience in order to grasp its meaning, we must also reflect upon ourselves in an attempt to come to a deeper

understanding of self. It is the responsibility of the learner to reflect on what he or she has seen, heard or felt and attempt to understand its meaning and impact in relation to self and past experiences.

- d) **Seeking Clarification:** Focusing questions or closed questions may be emphasised during this stage of my continuing dialogue with Danny. In this ongoing dialogue Danny may be asked to clarify my understanding of self by interpreting my dreams, or I may ask him questions intended to clarify my interpretation of his teachings or my own experiences. These clarifying questions will assist me in ensuring I am not distorting the intent of Danny's wisdom as I struggle to make meaning of the experiences of the Bear Clan. Because it is experiential and personal in nature, it is important to remember that a time line can not be imposed upon this process of knowledge acquisition. It is also important to remember that, while the learner is responsible for his learning to a certain degree, it is the Elder that controls the process. For example, while questions may be asked on the part of the learner, there is no guarantee that they will be answered. Questions may be left unanswered for a number of reasons. For example, the Elder may decline to answer a question because they feel that the question requires more soul searching on the part of the learner. It

is important to remember that in the Anishanabe world the acquisition of knowledge comes at a cost to the learner. It is also important to acknowledge the existence of different levels of knowledge and to understand that the learner will be unable to comprehend the deeper levels of knowledge until their time has arrived. Because they understand the nature of knowledge, Elders tend to only impart answers for which the learner has the capacity to understand and for which they are properly prepared to incorporate into their lives.

### **Methodological Summary**

Because traditional Aboriginal philosophy approaches life experience in a holistic manner, it recognizes the importance and equality of the relationships among body, mind and spirit. Also, since personal experience is a valuable form of knowledge and, according to Danny, lived experience is the purest form of knowledge (Behar, 1996; Musqua, 1997), it is essential that this thesis allow for reflections, impressions and observations of a personal nature. This thesis, like life experience itself, will emphasize the importance and interconnectedness of these processes. It will contain a number of voices and will discuss a number of journeys. It will serve as a reflection of the journey of the Grandfathers, the journey of Danny Musqua, my personal journey, and our collective journeys. This interrelatedness is reflected in the fact that Danny has adopted me as his

son in the Saulteaux way. Because of our relationship, and in keeping with the Saulteaux tradition, I will reserve the right to refer to Danny as either Danny or 'noose'. I use the term noose, which means 'father' in the Saulteaux language, out of respect and gratitude for the guidance and openness that Danny has shown to me, and for reinforcing my belief that life is a journey best not travelled alone.

This holistic approach to life is based upon sound philosophical principles. However, they are not readily accepted by a Western world view which is reductionist in nature (Cajete, 1994; Whitehead, 1953). Newtonianism, for example, explains everything through simple causal relationships where matter is viewed in a decontextualized, reductionist manner as inert (Ermine, 1995; Whitehead, 1925/1967; Woodhouse, 1996). Viewing objects in isolation ignores the connection of the mental, physical, and spiritual worlds. Moreover, it fragments this relationship by imposing an unnatural separation between the body and the mind (Flynn, 1995; Whitehead, 1953).

As a result of these fundamental philosophical differences, the dominant Western world view does not adequately take into account Aboriginal world views and their importance to the Aboriginal community. In the context of colonization, this lack of understanding led to the oppression of Indigenous people and to the imposition of the Western world view with little or no regard for Indigenous thought, as embodied in the oral tradition. Through the power of the vision, which is insight given by the Grandfathers and usually attained through

prayer, meditation and fasting, Aboriginal Elders were forewarned of the hardship that colonization would hold for Indigenous peoples (Neihardt, 1934; Wall, 1995). Through visions they were made aware of how colonization would undermine Indigenous culture and cause generations of hardship for Indigenous peoples. But the Elders' vision also held that this hardship would be followed by a period of tremendous cultural rebirth (Neihardt, 1934).

### **Definition of Terms**

In this study a number of terms are of significance. As a result the following definitions are outlined for the purpose of clarity.

1. **Aboriginal person**: An Aboriginal person is any individual with Native American Indian lineage and/or any individual who was raised within the cultural milieu of Aboriginal society and whose identity stems from this upbringing.
2. **Saulteaux Nation**: The Saulteaux Nation includes those individuals from Keeskoose First Nations whose origins have evolved from marriages between the Ojibwa and Cree people, but who have since developed their own distinct cultural identity as Saulteaux.
3. **Anishanabe**: This is the Saulteaux word for human being. Saulteaux philosophy states it is the ultimate goal of all people to become a good human being. Because we are spiritual beings

living a physical journey, we must attempt to understand the limitations of the physical world and develop our spiritual dimension. Anishanabe are rewarded by an inner peace and raised consciousness which are reflected in their actions. With this understanding, physical death marks the successful completion of an Anishanabe's journey through the physical realm.

4. **First Nations**: First Nations are those groups of Aboriginal people who are recognized by the Federal government under treaty and/or who are recognized as possessing traditional territorial rights. While this term was coined by Aboriginal people as a preferential term of identification, its definition is in large part defined and dictated by the Federal government. This is due to the fact that government determines who can "legally" or "legitimately" be considered a member of this group. For example, while Metis, or mixed blood people are recognized within the Canadian Constitution as an Aboriginal people, a debate currently exists as to whether the Metis can also be termed First Nations people. For the purpose of this study, First Nations will refer to all Aboriginal people including the Metis.
5. **World View**: World view refers to the manner in which an identified group of people view the world and approach life in general. World

view comprises such elements as philosophy of life, culture, attitudes, values and spiritual beliefs.

6. **Reductionism**: Reductionism is a tendency that runs through much of Western thought to explain reality in terms of its simplest parts. Hence, seventeenth century science explained the entire universe in terms of "hard massy atoms" and the mechanical laws that govern them. In doing so, it focused on certain variables (force, mass, acceleration) and ignored their relationship to human experience. Western psychology, mimicking the same method, attempts to explain different aspects of the human condition, such as cognitive development, moral development, and psychosexual development by isolating a few key variables ignoring their relationship to one another, excluding concrete experience from the equation, and suggesting that behaviour is all there is to being human. This leads to distortions or misinterpretations of both reality and human experience. An example of this would be radical behaviourism which was developed by B.F. Skinner. In his theory Skinner suggests that cognition and experience are not significant because they cannot be measured and that an individual's behaviour can be determined by manipulating the environment and using effective rewards and punishments.



7. **Holistic**: The holistic approach emphasizes the indivisibility of human existence. It refers to an implied harmony, unity, inter-relatedness, and indivisibility between the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual components of human existence. Holism attempts to understand the reality of human existence by viewing an organism in its entirety and by interpreting all relevant factors as related to one another rather than in isolation.
8. **Spiritual**: The spiritual can be understood as a feeling of communion, connectedness, oneness and belonging with the cosmos. It denotes a belief in a force or energy within the universe which is not bound by the limitations of physical reality.
9. **Cyclical**: A way of understanding the sustainability of the life force which permeates the universe is through its cycles. In the Aboriginal world view, this life force manifests itself through an individual's spirit, which is believed to be eternal and which cannot be extinguished even by the death of the physical. Instead, this life force is formulated and reformulated over time, and is able to re-configure itself in a number of different realms, one of which is the physical. The cyclical nature of life is prevalent in traditional Aboriginal beliefs, which state that we originate from the Great Spirit and will eventually return to the Great Spirit. An example of the cyclical nature of experience is that we are born of the earth

and will one day return to the earth. Cyclical thinking can also be adapted to concepts such as time. Unlike the Western world, which is organized around incremental time, the traditional Aboriginal view of time is cyclical in nature, and time is viewed as a process which continually replays itself in the phases of the moon, the season of the earth and the stages of the birth, life, death and rebirth process.

10. **Connectedness**: Connectedness refers to the belief that all things are part of one organic unity, and therefore, interdependent and inter-related. In relation to human experience, connectedness refers to the belief that, as spiritual beings in physical form, we are indivisibly tied to all other matter of the physical world, the cosmos, and the spiritual realm.
11. **Physical**: The physical refers to one of the many realms of existence. Specifically, it refers to the elements of fire, water, earth and air from which all physical life originates. The physical realm is experienced by spiritual beings when they commune with any of the four elements.
12. **Noose**: Noose is a Saulteaux term which refers to a spiritual father or mentor. The noose is a teacher who acts as a counsel and guides individuals on their spiritual journey.

13. **Wholeness**: This term refers to an individual's ability to achieve internal integrity between the physical, mental and spiritual realms. Wholeness is attained by balancing the spiritual, physical and emotional components of human existence.
14. **Healing**: Healing is a process by which an individual's physical, emotional or spiritual health improves and the individual's quality of life and ability to function is enhanced. This process is culturally specific. Western medicine tends to focus primarily on physical healing which relies on medication, surgery, or the Western counselling model that differentiates the 'therapist' from the 'client' or the 'healer' from the 'afflicted'. In contrast, traditional Aboriginal healing utilizes herbology and traditional ceremonies to promote spiritual, mental, physical and emotional healing. Aboriginal healing, while holistic in nature, emphasizes the spiritual component and the belief that the spirit has the power to heal the body. Aboriginal healing stresses the equality between the healer and the 'relation' who has sought guidance and aid on a deeply personal level.

## Chapter II: The Journey

### The Man From The East

Once there was a man from the East whose life had truly been blessed. He was respected by those in his community as a success. All of his neighbours envied the man's good fortune, the fact that he possessed large tracts of land, had a beautiful wife, loving children, a home that was unrivalled for its comfort. The man from the East took great pride in the admiration of his countrymen. So as not to disappoint the expectations, he became well-read, and as his library grew, all those around were impressed with his extensive knowledge. They came to think that if the man from the East did not know the answers to a question then there was no answer. Those around him dared not speak folly for his curiosity was legendary and he possessed a rapier wit and the ability to disarm those who were foolish enough to speak before they thought. He had a reputation for questioning everything and everyone. This personality trait he dismissed with a chuckle stating, "I guess I just have a curious mind." In befitting a man of his stature, the man from the East made it his practice to surround himself with beautiful objects with which to fill his home.

Although by all measures, the man from the East was a success, he remained discontented. He described himself as a restless spirit, and no matter how hard he tried, he could not shake the gnawing feeling that something

intrinsic was missing in his life. He found this an unsettling feeling. Then one day, when he had been at the local bazaar, he overheard two villagers describing a mystical village across the great river. He listened for a moment as they told of the wealth and beauty that existed in this strange land. Indeed, it was a great and wonderful mystery. The annoyance of the man from the East grew, until he chided the villagers and admonished them for repeating such childish rumours. After the villagers had grown quiet and dispersed with an appropriate measure of humility, the man from the East whispered, "Fools!" under his breath.

The weeks passed uneventfully and the man's discontentment and uneasiness grew. He kept thinking about the villagers and their story of untold wealth beyond the great river. He thought, "Is it possible? What lays beyond the great river?" He recalled legends of the mystic village he had heard of as a youth. There had even been claims of seeing people gathered on the far side of the great river. However, since he had never seen it with his own eyes, he had always doubted their existence. He remembered how, as a boy, he had journeyed to the great river, but he had not had the courage to cross to the deep and mysterious forests on the distant banks. He recalled the cautions of the old people who warned about the great river's swift current and dangerous undertow. Still, he thought how marvellous it would be if he crossed the great river and returned with treasure's that he could display in his home for his neighbours to marvel at and admire. The man from the East thought that, if he could successfully complete such a journey, he could possess something that no one

else would ever have. This would indeed be a unique treasure, he thought to himself. At that moment, he decided that early the next morning he would start out for the great river in search of the mystic village.

Early the next morning as the man from the East passed through the village carrying his knapsack, the villagers waved and smiled at him and queried him as to where he was going. With a broad smile of reciprocation he said, "I'm going to cross the great river in search of treasure." Since no one had ever been known to cross the great river, the villagers grew excited and whispers of anticipation encircled the man from the East, and as the mob grew, each new villager in turn asked in confirmation if it was indeed true that he was going to cross the great river in search of treasure. With each asking, the man's smile broadened as he firmly, and matter of factly, stated that it was indeed true and that he thought the entire trip would take little more than a day. His manner was casual as if he was discussing something as common place as a stroll through the village. As the man from the East left the village, the crowd began to thin and by the time the village was two miles over his shoulder, all of his hangers-on had ceased their pursuit.

The man from the East walked bristly over the road leading from the village. The road felt firm and familiar under his feet. He listened as the sounds of gold coins jingled quietly from within their hiding place. He had already decided that, if necessary, he would use the gold that he had brought to barter

for treasure. But this would be only as a last resort. His intention, if at all possible, was simply to take the object of his desire.

He walked on for many hours, and as he drew nearer to the great river, the road narrowed and the path become overgrown. Footing became more precarious and the man from the East had to ease his pace as he was forced to concentrate on feeling his way over the tangled grasses that had encroached upon the path. Finally, by mid afternoon the smell of water filtered to his nostrils, and as he turned his ear in the direction of the fragrance he could hear the whirling, swishing, swirling sound of the great river. As he drew nearer to its banks and caught his first glimpse of the water, apprehension welled up in his stomach. He had not remembered how wide the river had been or how swift-flowing the current. Surveying the distant shore did little to ease his nervousness as the forest looked wild, forbidding and untamed. Mustering his courage the man began working his way upstream. He walked for an hour before he came upon a bow in the river where a large stock of driftwood had gathered. Upon discovering the driftwood, the man from the East retrieved a generous length of rope from his knapsack and began lashing them together into a makeshift raft. When he had secured the final knot, he studied the sun's descent in the sky and gauged that he had at least three hours of sunlight before darkness enveloped the land. Before he could change his mind, and retreat to safety, the man from the East launched his vessel into the heart of the great river and began poling vigorously for the distant bank.

The crossing was a blur to the man. All he recalled of traversing the river was the surging of the current, almost having the pole wrenched from his hands three times, nearly capsizing, and being at the mercy of the current for what seemed an eternity when the depth of the river made poling impossible. However, as he pulled the raft upon the bank, moored it securely, and hid from view under a collection of branches, the man from the East marvelled at his ingenuity and at how he was able to champion such a mighty opponent.

As the man's eyes scanned the forest he couldn't help but notice its immensity. The trees, which had appeared large from the opposite shore, were enormous, imposing figures that cast a gloved shadow. They were thick with undergrowth and they rustled with the sounds of life, as birds and small animals milled about in its shrouded reaches. The man from the East looked without success for a trail to break the wall of forest. The sun was growing low in the Western sky before the man discovered a partially overgrown path leading to the water's edge. He worked his way up the path cautiously so as not to draw attention to himself in this strange world. Finally the path connected with another, and then another, until he found himself at a fork in the road. Having come from the East he had three choices open to him. He decided to turn right in the northern direction, which meant he would be travelling in a direction parallel to the great river and nearer to his own land.

The man from the East had not been walking on the path too long when he heard the sound of voices approaching. As the voices drew near, he scurried



into the shadows hidden from view and waited. Minutes later four men strode past his hiding place. He noted that they were large men with eloquent features and broad foreheads. Their gait was marked by long strides and they appeared cheery as they laughed heartily amongst themselves. While he could not understand their language, he surmised that they spent the day foraging and were presently returning to their village. The man from the East smiled as he considered his good fortune. Now, all that was required was to follow at a safe distance and the men would lead him to their village where he would wait, observe, and when the time was right, take his opportunity.

From his hiding place on the fringe of the clearing, the man could see all the happenings of the village. The people's homes appeared to be rustically, yet intricately, constructed. They were arranged in a circular fashion, and while some of the buildings had distinguishing characteristics, they tended to be uniform in design. Although it was now growing dark, the man from the East noticed a small plantation in the centre of the compound. Due to its immense size, the man surmised that it must have belonged to the lord of the manor. Next he noticed a great hall-like structure in the heart of the community. He gazed intently at the great hall, studying it closely before he concluded that if there is treasure to be found, it would be hidden in such a place. Immediately he struck his plan. Under the cover of night he would make his way to the great hall and carry off the prize.

After darkness engulfed the forest and the embers from the fires had grown cold, the man from the East worked his way stealthily towards the great hall. To his delight he found the village asleep and his path unobstructed. Once inside, he stood motionlessly beside the entrance way waiting for his eyes to adjust to the darkness. The only illumination was provided by the moonlight which was streaming in through the two entrances at either end of the structure. His sight slowly returned until he was able to make out the vague forms contained within the hall. Feeling with his hands along the outer wall the man from the East began his search. He judged several articles as unworthy of his attention before he discovered it. The material was exceedingly soft to the touch and gave off a distinctly earthy fragrance. In the darkness he determined the cloth to be some sort of large tapestry whose weave felt fine and even to his probing fingers. Withdrawing to the half-filtered moonlight of the entrance way, he could vaguely discern ornate patterns, figures, and designs standing out from the dark background. Without hesitation the man from the East decided that this was an object worthy of his attention, and before making his retreat, hurriedly rolled the tapestry into a ball and stuffed it into his knapsack.

Once he reached the edge of the village, his retreat from the mystical land became one of blind fury. While the moon shone brightly, casting good light, it also cast an ominous glow upon this strange land. It made the man from the East's heart pound and his hands tremble. He fell many times on his flight back to the great river. At times he scrambled on all fours, feeling his way with his

hands for the firmness of the path. The sounds of the night chased him through the woods and to the banks of the great river to which he returned scratched and bruised but with his treasure in tow. Upon reaching the shore, he began heading south and within an hour he had located the raft where he had moored it earlier that day. While he realized that crossing the river by moonlight was foolhardy, he quickly released the raft and pressed onward, deciding that to take such a chance was preferable to risking detection or to spending the remainder of the night in the contorted shadows of the looming forest.

Upon reaching the homeward shore the man from the East cast his vessel adrift and collapsed in a heap upon the shore. He did not know how long he slept, he only knew that it was still dark when he awoke and that he had seen into the face of death, and lived. Gathering his remaining strength the man started in the direction of home, his heart weary, his pace slow, his feet heavy upon the path.

It was mid-morning when the man from the East emerged through the door of his house and placed his knapsack upon the table in the dining hall. His adventure so wearied him that he barely took note of his treasure as he pulled it from the knapsack and spread it upon the table. Glancing at it through heavy lids, the man smiled weakly before turning slowly on his heels and climbed the stairs to his awaiting bed. In his weariness the man did not notice the explosion of colour that had unfurled before him. He did not see the craftsmanship in the weave, or the hours of toil required to produce such a thing of beauty. He did

not notice the pageant that was unravelling in the story before him. He did not see the spirits as they spoke to the stars, the hunter communing with the night fire, the spirits of the earth speaking with the guardians of the animals in an attempt to coax them into sacrificing one of their own in tomorrow's hunt. He did not notice how the scene played itself out from a central axis so that it took on a symmetrical shape which allowed it to re-play itself infinitely. His only thought was how the villagers would marvel at it and wish they could possess such a rare curiosity.

When the man awoke the following morning, he quickly dressed and returned to the dining room to appraise his treasure. During the night he had dreamt of how beautiful his treasure would look hanging upon his wall and how all the villages would marvel upon its uniqueness in slack-jawed envy. As he surveyed the scene portrayed on the cloth, his first thought was how differently it appeared in the light of day. After studying it for a moment, he rubbed the cloth between his thumb and forefinger gauging its thickness and commenting to himself on its softness. He sniffed the cloth as he recalled the earthen fragrance of the night before. Then his attention turned to the weave of the tapestry. Never had he seen such craftsmanship. The weave was near perfection, tightly woven, multi-coloured and intricate. He noted the fringe bordering the tapestry and upon close examination he could see where the artisan had carefully braided the cord at the outside boarder to prevent it from unravelling.

Never in his life had he seen such marvellous work, even from the finest weavers in the village. So impressed was he, in fact, that he untied one of the knots and began to pull gently on the woolen fabric. He thought to himself that, if he could discover the method by which they wove such treasures, there would be no end to his wealth. As he began to pull on the cord, it yielded evenly without resistance. Attempting to decipher the nature of the weave, the man's eyes stared unblinking at the cord as it slowly unravelled. Slowly, strand after strand, row after row, colour after colour, the man from the East unknotted and unravelled the weave until only four separate piles of coloured cord lay at his feet. Not being able to discern how the tapestry was woven, or even determine if its method differed from local practices, the man remarked, "Perhaps, it isn't in the weave at all that makes it superior. Perhaps, it is the material." With this the man examined each pile of cord in turn, alternately sniffing, touching, and weighing it out in his hands. Again, the results were inconclusive and the man was at a loss to explain its beauty. At this point he thought momentarily of putting the tapestry back together but quickly realized that he could not remember how, or where, to begin. He even thought about returning to the mystic village to retrieve another such treasure, but after considering the risks he thought that it was probably an unwise decision to tempt fate twice in one lifetime. His face was tight with concentration as he began to role each pile of coloured cord into a ball. He thought that perhaps some good may yet come from his endeavour in that his wife may be able to put the material to use in her

own handiwork. When the task was completed, he stowed the balls of yarn in a trunk before turning to leave. By this time, the man from the East's mood had brightened considerably and he could be heard confidently announcing, "I think I prefer our method of weaving anyway.... Yes, it definitely has more character."

That evening in the mystical village, when all the villagers had gathered in the great hall to celebrate a successful hunt and divide the bounty to all, a number of villagers overheard one of the Elders comment that she had somehow misplaced her shawl.

## **Two Worlds Collide**

Whenever two fundamentally different worlds collide, there is the potential for misinterpretation and misunderstanding of how each defines, legitimizes and transmits knowledge. Because the Aboriginal world emphasizes the use of metaphor through story and the oral tradition, I thought it appropriate to begin my own story in metaphor. Traditionally, Aboriginal Elders use story and metaphor as an effective teaching tool. The meanings and lessons are quite often implicit and the listener is left to his own devices to come to an understanding of the lessons. The Elders' teachings are contextual in nature and they mean more than they say. In fact, as active learners we can learn nearly as much from their implied or unspoken words as we can from their spoken words. Because most Elders' stories can be interpreted on a number of levels, from the literal to the symbolic, what the listener extracts from each story is dependent on where they

are in their life and upon what they are prepared to absorb. In this manner, a story or a teaching may be told to a group of people with each person taking a different meaning from the Elders' teaching. In addition, over the years, as an Elder repeats a story the listener may derive different meanings from the story or come to understand its teachings on a deeper level than was previously possible. This does not mean that initial interpretations were incorrect. Rather, it implies that the stories and teachings possess implicit meanings which can be peeled back like the layers of an onion to reveal deeper metaphorical meanings.

Elders, in order not to impose their wills upon their listeners or confront them with concepts and meanings that they are not yet prepared to understand, relate their stories in a manner which leaves the responsibility for interpretation in the hands of the listener. It is the listener's responsibility to derive at meaning, to define truth and to develop the story's practical application in their own life journey. In this manner, the story is open to interpretation. This is quite different from the approach of Western academia where the meaning is spelled out to the learner in an explicit manner and where there is usually little doubt as to what meanings are to be imparted to the audience. In their attempt to discover truth through logical demonstration and free of its context, Western academia can quite often misinterpret other cultures and unfamiliar events.

In keeping with the implicit nature of the Elders' teachings, I will not interpret the various meanings or metaphors that exist in the story, "The Man From the East", except to say that it possesses many meanings and can be

interpreted in a number of ways on either a literal or symbolic and metaphoric level. While I will refrain from promoting a single interpretation of the story, the story does relate somewhat to my own experience in that my journey into the world of the Anishanabe bears some similarities to the journey of the man from the East into the mythical kingdom. Like the man from the East, my interpretations, and the manner in which I internalize Danny Musqua's teachings and stories, is coloured by the filters through which I view the world. For example, while I am a Metis person, of French, Cree and Saulteaux descent, I do not speak Saulteaux nor was I raised on a reservation. These factors influence how I perceive the world and how I make meaning out of my experiences. Therefore, like the man from the East I may unwittingly misinterpret Danny's intended meaning. Yet, because the Elder's teachings are implicit in nature they require interpretation and contextualization on the part of the learner. For this reason, my story will focus on how I make meaning of Danny's teachings and how they have profoundly influenced my life and my search for truth. I will also attempt to honour the Saulteaux tradition of using story to convey my meaning in an implicit manner and, unlike the man from the East, I will attempt not to unravel the tapestry which binds the beauty and depth of Saulteaux philosophy.



## **The Journey of the Teacher**

It was eleven thirty p.m. on May 21, 1997 when the jangle of the telephone awoke me from a deep slumber. Sensing the call would be for me, I bolted for the phone so that it would not awaken the other people in the house where I was boarding. I had been expecting Elder Danny Musqua to arrive some time that night because I had arranged for him to speak to my class the following morning. On the other end of the line, his voice was its usual animated self as we exchanged hearty greetings before I gave him directions to the hotel where I had arranged for him to spend the night. Danny explained that he had just arrived from Keesakoose, which is his home reserve located near Kamsack, Saskatchewan, some two hundred miles to the south east. After hanging up, I quickly dressed and hustled myself down to the hotel where we had agreed to meet. I had only been waiting a few minutes when I recognized Danny's daughter's car coming down the street. In the years I have known Danny, he has owned several cars, but he inevitably gave them all away. As a result of Danny's generosity I came to understand that for Danny material possessions are of little importance and that he is intimately familiar with the concept of giving whether it be of his possessions, his knowledge or himself.

The street lights illuminated his short stocky frame as he unfolded himself from the confines of the car's interior. Danny's eyes sparkled mischievously and a wide elfin grin spread wide across a pleasant round dark brown face that was accentuated by a broad nose and wide-set eyes. In contrast, Danny does not

conform to the stereotypical image some people have of Native Elders with their hair in long braids and their body adorned in traditional garb. Danny's deceptively youthful face and black hair, which is only beginning to grey, seems to defy his sixty years upon this earth. Instead of wearing his hair in the traditional braids, Danny has thick short-cropped black hair pulled forward in Caesarian fashion to partly obscure his face. His clothing is non-portentous as he wore black slip-on loafers, blue polyester slacks and a golf shirt left open at the collar. Because Danny defies the Native Elder stereotype, on a number of occasions I have heard people who are meeting Danny for the first time remark that his appearance does not fit with their preconceived image. As we approach one another Danny offers a warm, firm, meaty handshake before enveloping me in a fatherly embrace. Moments later we found ourselves in his hotel room where the conversation flowed freely and the evening's lesson began to unfold magically. Danny's being became relaxed as his large frame settled into the arms of the hotel room chair. His hands joined by interlocking fingers rested upon his ample stomach which betrayed his zest for life and love of food. The evening's discussion covered topics as diverse as the nature of knowledge, the relationship between the world of academia and need for cultural identity and the future direction of Native education. As Danny relaxed from his long journey, he grew more animated and his growing passion and vitality was reflected in his voice and bearing. Many times have I sat with him in this manner and marvelled at his gift of expression and the eloquence of his words. We talked, or rather

Danny talked, while I listened intently, until well after two in the morning during which time I was mesmerised by the quickness of the man's mind and the depth and breadth of his thinking. I thought of how honoured I was to be seated in his company and how privileged I was to be exposed to his teachings. Finally, fatigue gripped us. We also both realized that Danny needed his rest if he was to be in good form to speak to over thirty students in less than seven hours. After we had exchanged good nights, I returned to the house where I was boarding while teaching in Prince Albert.

Each time I taught this particular class I had invited Danny to speak about his Saulteaux teachings on human growth and development. While each time the talk was similar, I was amazed with the eloquence of his message. The words flowed from him like a river flowing over a flat plain. Danny weaved a rich tapestry with his words that transported those present to a deeper understanding of the world and themselves. Whenever Danny speaks of spiritual things, it is as if his words are not his own but gather strength from a higher level of consciousness outside of himself. He outlines the teachings of his ancestors with great familiarity and care. The beauty and intricacies of his teaching unfolded like a rare flower before the students' eyes. Like a magician casting a spell he holds the students' attention as if they were in a trance. I realized that when Danny speaks, he speaks not only for himself but for all the ancestors who have gone before him. His voice is a reflection of their's, and his teachings are the teachings of a millennium. Therefore, in order to understand the man you

must understand his history and the history of his people. On one fall day in 1997 I was fortunate to capture Danny's story in his own words. As we sat outside the sweat lodge watching the fire dance before us, I sat mesmerised as Danny's story unfolded.

### **The Path of The People**

*What the old people tell us is that we came from two different areas. One group which is my grandfather's father's people came from western and central Ontario, International Falls, Manitoulin area, Thunder Bay area and beyond even further into the St. Lawrence. Those people arrived over here some six hundred years and beyond.... That was the first migration that the old people recall with any certainty in their stories. Later, there was another group of people that came in larger numbers. As the migration continued some came because of fear, and then with the arrival of the Europeans, they came noticing the changes in their health, sicknesses, new kinds of sicknesses that accompanied the arrival of the Europeans. So, because they couldn't understand how to deal with these sicknesses, they moved and they just simply ran from these sicknesses, according to these old people. This was the only way that they could deal with what they didn't understand. They just moved. That is what the old people say....*

*The other area that the old people tell us that we came from was the Southern Detroit area, Wisconsin and Michigan. Another group came from*

*there. So I was talking about the second major migration. It came after the conflict between the French and the English. That conflict caused a continuous migration to come up these rivers.... Another great migration, especially among the Southern tribes, was in 1812 when the conflict took place between Canada and the United States. Many of the tribes that fought on the American side came to the West. My grandfather's grandmother's people came from there. Our genealogy, for our people, follows through our mothers to our grandmothers. We don't really follow our genealogy through our fathers like the European Society. For us its more important to find out the genealogy of your family through our mothers....*

### ***We Come From the Padiwami***

*We come from the Padiwami but Naconini is what we are termed by the Crees and this is what we call ourselves, Naconiniwak. So that is what we call ourselves. We don't really call ourselves Saupteaux. That is a name that was given to us by the French.... The name comes from the French word Saultaire. So we are Ojibwa in a sense in terms of where we came from historically, but we changed when we came to these prairies. We began to associate through our marriages with the Crees. In some places we are called the Oji-Cree but we just call ourselves Saupteaux. We intermarried with the Crees for five hundred years, maybe more.... So being a brother tribe we allied with them and we protected one another.... So the Naconiniwak is what we want to be known as.*

*That is what we want to be called. That is what we are. We are an offspring of both the Cree and the Eastern Indians that came from Ontario, Wisconsin, Michigan and that area. The old people tell us that we are a distinct tribe to ourselves. We want to be a distinct tribe. There is only eight thousand of us. Some of the old people are worried that we are going to be swallowed up by the Cree or swallowed up by the Ojibwa. We want to be who we are and who we believe we are, a child of both, and to say that we are one or the other would be to profess our destruction.... We have a mixture of both the Cree and the Ojibwa ceremonies different from both the Ojibwa and the Cree. They are similar but different.... We call ourselves the Anishanabe. We are just human beings. We are made of the earth and spirit. Anthropologists and sociologists have just recently captured what they call the Algonquin Nation which they say is comprised of something like 50 tribes. We as a people call ourselves the Anishanabe.... The clans are part of the Anishanabe people. We set ourselves into clans under symbols of animal deities....*

### ***The Clans of the Anishanabe***

*Basically, there were seven major clans. It was divided into seven to reflect our spiritual teachings. All of our teachings and all of our disciplines and our virtues and our living principles of life, the skills that we get out of life, come from the teaching of seven, the seven disciplines, seven virtues, seven grandfathers, seven stages of life and seven levels of life. We decided that*

seven was a very important number so we use that process of seven in developing a government based upon the seven clans. We used it to more or less organize and keep order and keep the people strong and healthy. Each clan was also a government process.... The Bear Clan is basically warriors, the army, the policing societies and they were the most numerous because everybody was an honorary member because of the purposes of army. It was the military and the policing society so everybody at one time would be a part of it. But the Bear Clan is also a specific clan in itself. Those specifically from the Bear Clans are usually the ones that are the generals, who are organizers and leaders of the army, as well as the teachers.... The Wolf and Bear Clans they were the army....

The Bear clan was supposed to maintain all of the stories of all the clans. We were supposed to keep the stories of all the clans intact. So there, in that sense, I would say that we are a failure because I certainly don't know enough about those clans to tell you what they are, and yet we are supposed to know....

### ***The Voice of My Grandfather***

I was just a little boy when I had most of my education from my grandfather, but I was one of those who was fortunate enough to be around those old people, but he was not the only one. It would be unfair to say that he was my only teacher. I spent most of my time with him because he took care of me. He took care of us. I spent more time with him because I was a sickly little

*child and maybe I was his special little one. Every grandparent tends to claim one little one for himself. In that sense he more or less took me in because I was there and I was sickly.... The old men were also there and they would speak and tell stories. All of them would tell their stories to the children that were there. It was very important that they tell their stories to the children because children have the capacity to remember things much better than adults will. They can attain information much more effectively than older people. Children really have fertile minds. A child's mind is like a garden and the grandfathers would call us their 'gitigon', their 'garden', meaning that they would seed all of their information, their teachings, in the child's mind and it would grow. The children were called gitigone which meant the garden where they saved their knowledge. This was the term they would use, the old people. What is really important in my life is to live a fruitful life.*

*I was raised up in a very large family and most of my life was based upon survival and upon sharing things with one another. Mom and dad only had enough food to give us. Dad was a very good hunter and a very good provider so that was what was wonderful about my life with my family and my brothers and sisters. The time that I spent with my brothers and sisters was always wonderful. I grew up as a sick child. I was sickly. I had epilepsy. I had TB by the time I was four or four and a half years old. When I was five or six years old, I got healed. My grandparents kept me at home and looked after me. I had consumption which was a sickness that I had contracted from my deceased*



brother-in-law when I used his cup. We were deep in the forest and my father was working in a mill. He was cutting logs and hauling logs from the bush to the mill which most of the guys on the reserve would do in those days. And this is where I contacted my sickness. My grandparents came and got me from there. I used to spend a lot of time back and forth between my parent's home and my grandparent's home. Most of the time I was with my grandmother because I would get sick, epileptic, and grandmother had the time. So I was always being borrowed from one place to the other. Grandfather would come and put up a big fuss when he didn't have me so they would let me come home with him. He would turn into a big angry bear if he didn't have his baby around. That's the way I am too when I don't have my grandchildren around, especially a couple of the ones that are very close to me like my baby daughter whom I call Cynthia. She is the youngest and the little boys are very close to me and I'm trying to raise them up. I can only allow them to be out of my sight for four or five days and then I go into a quandary and then I start huffing and puffing. I guess that's how my grandfather would have been too and I can see a very close resemblance between the way he would have spoken and the way I speak now about these kind of things. I spent a great deal of time with old people all my life because they were the first people I met and the first people with whom I had a relationship. I was always around. So I learnt a lot by just being there when they were telling their stories and I also learned how to appreciate life as thoroughly as I could because of my being sick all of the time. I know about

*being sick. I know about being alone. I know about being hurt, physically. There is one thing I can tell you and that is I know what being physically sick is all about. Pain is no big stranger to me. I know about physical pain. Sickness does that, especially epilepsy and seizures. You're so helpless. It is something that I don't wish upon anybody. And having also suffered from TB, consumption, I knew pain and hurt. You know, sometimes all you could do was to hope them away and think them away. We didn't have pills or medicine for epilepsy or even any medication for tuberculosis. So my whole feeling and attitude had a lot to do with how well I would recover.*

### **God is in All Things**

*I guess, how well I recovered was based upon my feelings and my faith in God, my belief that God would always be there and God is always there. My grandfather taught me that God is in all things. God is everywhere. God is merciful, omnipotent. God knows and has a plan for everything. Every person who has been born has been given a road and a purpose on this earth, even if it's a very wicked thing that he comes to live for. Even if his body wins over his spirit, even in that journey he is of help to other people by his misery. By his treachery other people learn how to understand what treachery is. He can serve as an example of these kind of people and so we can say don't be like that, and a lot of times treachery is a result of our own failure to know what goodness is. When we stray away from goodness, we have the companion of evil with us.*

*Evil is always there. You can't be the companion of both. You can only be the companion of one. That's what the old people tell us. So I learnt that and I learnt to become a very fun-loving, happy child. I had to be because I didn't have very much with which to live. My whole happiness was dependent upon being around my grandfather, my grandmother, my father, my mother, my uncles, my aunts. I spent a lot of time finding things humorous. I tried to find laughter in everything I did. Maybe that's why I survived. I always found humour in everything. I like humour. I like hearing a good story. I like hearing a good joke. I think life is far too serious a lot of times. Life is a very serious thing. It's a very serious occupation and you can end up being overly involved in the seriousness of it. You have to balance seriousness and being foolish enough to laugh at yourself and to laugh at your own failures. If you do that you will learn to be much more aware of the things that you do right and wrong. So that's what I was taught and that's how I grew up. I grew up around the sweat lodge. I grew up around the stories of the old people. I grew up in a place locked from the outside world on the reservation. We were locked from the outside world and we could only surmise and suppose what took place on the other side of the fences in the settlers' communities. We were fortunate to be living next to a couple of old Ukrainian farmers who were very friendly to my father and his brother, uncle Bill. So our relationship with these old people was very good because they were very good neighbours.*

*I grew up learning to live as freely and happily as I could. I loved to go walking in nature with my grandfather. I loved walking out with my father and my uncles when they went out hunting. I was never much of a hunter myself but I loved hunting small game and eating wild food. I still do. I was not excited about killing anything, but yet I had to. I've killed my fair share of wild animals, but I've never really found it good to kill anything. Everything is so beautiful when it's alive. It, like everything else, has the right to live and a place where it must be and, if animals are here to sustain humanity, we must use them only when we need to use them. That is why I despise the whole idea of hunting for sport. I think it's a bloody waste of good animal life. I think you should only hunt when you need to. I think it is a shame what they have done to our people, keeping us away from hunting and doing the things that we were born naturally to do, to live on the land, to be of the land.*

### ***We Change With the Tides of Time***

*These things I am very sorrowful for, but life goes on. We change with the tides of time. Like everything else we have to change with the things that come into our world. To have to change those things that are necessary to help us survive in the world. The world is changing. Even as we sit here the world is changing right now. Nature is changing. So everything has to adapt to fit into what nature is changing into. It is the natural instinct of man to fit into the natural world, but lately he has not done that. Instead, man has changed things in*

*nature. The old people told us that we would have problems because of that. So I spent a lot of time in my life learning. I love to learn. I learnt to read early in life. I know I will never be alone if I have a library. If I had a thousand books I would probably stay in one place and read all the time. That's just the way I am. But one thing I know is that books are fallible. What we write today may be all wrong tomorrow. I learnt that man's knowledge is fallible. Man's knowledge is not exact. We use time to tell us how exact we are and some of the things we talk about today are totally wrong tomorrow. It could be all wrong, but that is man. We are limited beings who are taught by our successes and failures, probably more from our failures than successes. Our failures bring us to success. I was looking at a documentary on aeronautics and all the people that died, the pilots and good men, so we could break the sound barrier, but when we did we understood the beginnings of the first stage of entry into space and beyond the powers of the gravitational forces of this world. So we learn through our mistakes, and we have to learn this way because we are fallible beings. I learnt that early in life. I learnt that as a child. I learnt that from the old people and I never stopped to remind myself that I am a fallible being. Through their advise I have learned how to respect death. I'm not afraid of it. It is non-sensical for anybody to fear death because we are all going to die. The thing you have to do is prepare yourself as best you can. You know that at the point of death when death comes your going to suffer and you're going to have to die*

*and it's as simple as that. It's much more important that you use your suffering as a tool of understanding the inevitable. That's what I learnt early in life.*

### ***My Mother Taught Me to Respect Jesus***

*I grew up in school always wondering why people sent their children there because we were so lonely and so far removed from the things that we loved. We were so far away from the people who loved us, the people that mattered to us. I could never really understand the purpose of people wanting you to understand God in a situation that was wrong and with people that didn't have the right to be there teaching you the things that they were teaching you because they weren't your parents. It was the result of their missionary zeal. It was their attempt to try to help us understand Jesus as they thought we should. I understand now that this was their missionary vocation to do this but I don't really rightly believe that what they were teaching was true because, in the way they were teaching us, they were totally contradicting themselves in what they were saying and what they were doing, especially in comparison to what Jesus was saying and doing. Jesus was a wonderful loving human being and I learnt that from my mother. My mother taught me about Jesus early in life. My mother taught me about Christianity. Her type of Christianity I'll never forget and I will always embrace and love her teachings as I love all the things she taught me. I will always respect the great love she had for her faith. She never even really preached to me. She was an example of those teachings and from her I learnt*

*to watch if people did the things they said. And so I try to live that way and I try to teach my children by the things that I do because my father and grandfather before me taught me that way. They taught by doing things for me and by living the things they were saying. It is so important to me. So there is little or any effect upon me by people who do a lot of saying and do very little doing.*

### ***God is the Essence of all Life***

*We have to remember that God is the essence of all life. I have to totally rely on God's message in my life every day. The message of God in my life everyday is all around me right here. I learnt that as a child as I walked into the forest and heard the birds singing, or I see a rabbit in the grass, or the beauty of a coyote sunning across an open plain, or the beauty of exuberant lively fox. It is all so beautiful. There are teachings in all of these things and I know that God is magnificent and that he is great when I see all of these beautiful creatures. Creatures that are totally reliant upon God. They don't question him. They don't put food away or sow anything. I learnt that even before I read the good book. I learnt that from the teachings of the old people. These creatures are totally at the love and mercy of God and, if you can live like them, you will truly begin to understand who God is and what God wants of you. So I try to live that way and when I didn't live that way I fell on the wayside of misery, shame and pain. It caused a lot of misery and pain to be invoked upon me by people I did not understand, and I really can't do anything about that because it was another*

*necessary experience in my life. I didn't like what took place, but I was never raised up to hate anybody. I was raised up to love and I was surrounded by love and mercy and understanding. So I cannot hate these people who hurt me, or who hurt my character. I cannot hate the religious people who did the things that they did to me because of their good intentions. I can't really hate these people because they had good intentions, but they just did it in the wrong way. I forgive them because that is the only way to become free. If you let hate and anger stay within you, it will eat you up and it will eventually consume you. If it consumes you, you will die of it. You will kill yourself, or be killed, or you will go out there and kill someone because you can't let the teacher of death be part of you. So that's the way I've lived all of my life.*

*I've lived everyday always conscious of the Creator's mercy that surrounds me. And every day I pray. I can't remember a day that I didn't pray. I pray every day. I pray sometimes because I have nothing else to do and if I have nothing else to do I should pray. That's important because then I am doing something good. Even if I'm not good at least I'm doing something good, I'm praying. I think we are good when we try. I don't think anybody could really say he is good until he tries, and you can't try it, you've just got to do it. So I've always done the things that I believe that I should do and being true to those things that you believe in is the most that you can do in life because we are limited beings. We are confined by all of these limits around us. We are bounded by failure every day because we are limited beings. I understand my*



*failure. My failures are much better reminders for me to do better next time. We live to do better next time. From one hurdle to the next. From one step to the next. A human being walks up the mountain one step at a time. And that is what my grandfather, and my father, and my grandfather's father said: Use all of your faculties to understand this world and to live the best you can. That is what you are here for, to fulfill your journey, to fulfill that which is given to you. He doesn't put it right there for you in an open book. You have to find it somewhere inside yourself. It's in your mind. It's in your spirit. It's right back in there somewhere. You'll find it as you do it, and as you do it, it becomes much more clearer what your destiny is. If this is my destiny then I am doing what the Creator wants me to do. Here we are sitting in this beautiful place. That's why He wants me to be here. He wants me to be happy to come here and to speak with you. And I am happy and I have fulfilled my destiny and his purpose in my life. And that is how I have lived most of my life as a young person on the reservation, loving and hating it because we were so limited in what we could do. The government controlled everything we did and we were treated more like children. There was paternalism then. Paternalism, for what I don't know. I think sometimes paternalism was more geared to protect everybody else around us, against us, rather than us against them because we were poor and I think we still are because of the way the reservation system is set up. The Indian agents were the predators then and our leaders today that have been taught by the department of Indian affairs, are our predators now. They are doing the same*

*things that Indian affairs did to us. That's what the old people tell us. They say that we will go from one state to the next, but we will not be vanquished by these things and by what these people do to us. The Creator has a purpose for our people. Our purpose is to teach people how to live in this world. The purpose of the First Nations' people, the purpose of the Anishanabe is to teach people how to live in this world, to live in the beauty of this world. We are a people. We are earth people. We are a people of the earth and, if anybody wants to understand the beauty of this earth, they can come and sit with me. That's what Mushum would say. Come and sit with me and love the pristine beauty of life thereon. That is what it means to be an Anishanabe.*

### ***Catholicism and the Residential School Experience***

*I went to residential school for ten years. I enjoyed it and I disliked it, but it was a necessary part of my journey. It was not all bad. There were many good things such as I can read and write. There were some good priests and there were some good nuns. They weren't all bad. Like everything else the bad ones made all the good ones look bad and the bad ones made it worse for all the good ones. Some of them should have never been priests. Like everyone else some of them should have been married. Why they did these things we will never know. I don't know. When I think about it in my mind, it is something I don't understand. So I continue to live by those teachings because I've learned even in that place. I learnt from some of the good priests. Just like I learnt from my grandfather, I learnt from some good priests and some good nuns. I've learnt*

*some good things and there were some good people. There is nothing wrong with religion my grandfather said. If it is meant for you then you should follow it and live it well. That is all you can do and if it's not for you then it's not for you. But me, I have lived both as an Anishanabe and as a Christian. I'm a Catholic. I don't necessarily believe all of things that I was told in Catholicism because I am an avid reader and I've learnt how to find out some things about the good book myself which don't necessarily fit with the things I was told. But I don't go around saying those things are all wrong. I keep it to myself. I don't go around saying you shouldn't believe in this thing, you shouldn't believe in that thing, this is what it says in this scripture, this is what it says in that scripture. I don't do that because I have this feeling that we don't understand what it is anyway. The old people tell us that the good book say itself that you can't understand the word of God. As a Christian, I would say that we can't understand the good book. He tells us right there. God tells us through his holy people that we couldn't understand his words and he said I will send you holy men and prophets to tell you what this means. Nobody can tell me that you can spend four years, seven years or even fifteen years in some monastery or some bible school somewhere and all of the sudden you can become an expert on the word of God. I think many times those people come to realize that after fifteen years of study they know as little as they did when they started about the word of God. That's because the word of God has to be lived before it can be understood. You can't talk about the word of God until you've lived it. If there is one thing*

*that I've learned from my grandfather and the old people is, do as little talking as you can, but do as much as you can. Then, once you've done it, you can talk about it because the only real truthful thing in this earth is what you've experienced. So you should talk about your experience and you should relate your experience. That is total honesty because you're relating to something you did and not to something that someone told you to do, that someone told you to talk about or that you read about in some book. That's what the old people tell us. So I live by the things that I have learned by observing what the old people do and other people do.*

*My mother was an avid church goer and I went to church. I still go to church. There is nothing wrong with my going to church. I loved it because my mother impressed it upon me. The grandfathers taught me to be a good human being. They gave me all of the Christian teachings and all of the teachings in the Anishanabe way. Both are geared towards helping one become a good person.*

### ***The Purpose of the Way***

*To be disciplined, to be understanding, to be loving, to be good at what it is you are to do. Anything that you are going to do you ought to be good at. So they gave you the tools, they gave you the teachings, they gave you the disciplines to do that, and they said if you want to be a good man come and fast and sweat, and fast and meditate and pray with me. You'll be a good man. If you want to be a good priest come and sweat and fast and pray with me and*

*you'll be a good priest. You won't come to these lodges and lose your priesthood. You'll come out of here a better priest. You'll have everything you have. If you want to be a good Catholic then practice it well. If you're not sure of yourself then go and fast cause we've got to fast. That's all we do. We fast to know who we are. We have the tools. The tools are there. The sweat lodge is only a tool. It's a prayer tool. It is very much like when you go to the church and you use the rosary or a holy picture of the holy book. The bible is a tool. That's all it is. They made no religions of it. It's not a religion. It's all discipline. It's all systems of self-learning and self-analysis and self-development - human development. That is what the old people said that these teachings were all about. The day that they begin to make a religion of it, that will be the day that you've lost the meaning of it all. It's only here to help you learn who you are and to help you make a better road for yourself in whatever you're doing. I say to these people, ok you want to be a better Pentecostal, come and sweat with me. It will make you a much better Pentecostal. This won't take anything away from you. It will only strengthen you and make you much more fervent in what you are doing. We never talk about religion. We never talk about faith in so far as my faith as opposed to your faith. We talk about our journey. We talk about our healing. We talk about the things we do and that's what the old people did when they talked about themselves. They didn't talk about that guy. As soon as you start talking about that guy, hey, hey, that's gossip. We don't need that. We need human growth here. We need the things that you can see and things that*

*you can touch to help me understand what that young person over there is feeling. There are no "musts" here. The only must is that you must worship God. God is the only one that is due worship. Nothing else. Everything else is a tool. Everything else is a means of learning. That's all it is. Only God is due worship. And we talk about the spirits and the angelic beings. Well, it tells you in the good book that they are at work in the universe and the old people believed the same thing, but they are not due worship because they too are created beings. Only God is due worship, but we can ask these angelic beings to pray with us. We can ask for them to sit down, and we can ask them to help me and pray for me. You are much closer to God my brother so help me. We can ask them for help. We can ask them to ask God to bless us. They are like a good court worker who can go and speak to the judge for me. That's the way these spirits are. You can speak and pray to them, but you cannot worship them like an infallible or an eternal God. That's what the old people say. That's what I think.*

*I have no difficulty being Anishanabe. I have no difficulty because all I've ever learnt is to be a good human being, a good Anishanabe. And if I'm a good Anishanabe I can be a good Catholic. I'm not necessarily sure that if I'm a good Catholic I can be a good Anishanabe because I am bounded by all of their doctrines and dogmas and their whole idea of congregating and having numbers, and a bigger population, or throng, or big organization. Everythings been organized for us so we don't organize it. The world is too perfect to be*

organized. The only real organizer and master that I really want is God in my life. That's the most. That is what the old people tell us. He is the most. He is all. He is everything. That's how I've been taught so that is how I live. I've lived all over this land. I went to the north into the Yukon. I've worked in many Indian organizations. I've raised up ten children. I'm a recovered alcoholic. I'm also a recovered parent because I was an alcoholic, I neglected my parental obligation to my family for ten years in my hard drinking times. If it wasn't for my wonderful wife, I guess my poor little children would have been lost. Today I try to retribute myself by trying to do good things with them. Sometimes people say I am spoiling them. Well, I was spoiled when I was a child. I was spoiled good with a lot of love. I don't mind spoiling anybody with love because if there is anything is going to carry you, the loving and understanding that you get from your mother and father is going to carry you. If you're going to spoil someone, spoil them with a lot of love. Constructive love. So when I give I give my children twenty bucks or five cents I tell them why I'm giving it to them. Because you're a good boy or because I want you to go and do this for yourself. I don't want you to go and waste it. I worked darn hard for my money. That's what my Mushum said, "I worked hard to get this thing. I worked all over the bush so I don't want you to waste it. I went over there and I got cold and I chopped trees down to give you this nickel." That's what my dad used to say. So don't waste it. "If you want to waste something, go and get your own nickel and work and waste that, but don't waste mine because I'm giving it to you out of the goodness of my heart and

*because it comes from the goodness of my heart, I don't want you to waste it.”*  
*That's how Mushum would say it so that's how I treat my kids today.*

*I try. A lot of times we fail but I fail too. That's because we are human. We are limited beings. We succeed in spite of our failures. That's what it means to be a human being. We're not perfect. In life we are gradually elevating ourselves to that state of perfection that is going to come when we die. When we die, a door opens. Death opens a door. We have to elevate ourselves for that. The key in the end is always what you give on this earth. Old Grandfather death will come and say it is time to go home. Yet we are always trying to make deals with him. People are lucky that know they are going to die. That's what grandfather used to say. They that don't know they are going to die we should feel sorry for them. But he who knows he is going to die is blessed with time because he knows his time has come. We only have so much time to live. So he has all of that time and he is blessed, he who knows that he is going to die, while others still aren't aware of anything about the end. That's what my old people tell us. I am sixty years old now so I'm happy. If I live another ten more years I'll be even doubly happy. I'm happy with every day I live. You have to be happy with every day you've got. That's the most you've got, twenty-four hours of beauty. Who is so blessed to live in such a place. In this world there are people starving, children dying, people who don't even have a morsel of food, people that are afraid to poke their head out because somebody is going to shoot them. We probably live in the most beautiful country in the world. The*



*most beautiful land in the world is right here. You're blessed! I'm blessed!*

*Thank God for letting us be a part of this beautiful place. Thank God for your bringing me here because I'm truly happy, truly at my very best. This to me is where I'm really at my happiest time. This is how I was raised up as a child. I have done my best with the children that I have. If they failed then I have done something wrong. It is not their fault. It is not their fault if they failed for I have overlooked something and I'll have to deal with it if it ever comes. But I know what it is.*

### ***Your Work Is Your Dignity***

*Well, like I say I wasn't a brat. For two years I went to Saint Joe's College then I went home and I farmed. I farmed for thirty years. Dragging and scratching with old broken-down equipment but always making enough to eat and feed my kids. I tell my kids that if there is one thing that I can tell you that is absolutely important it's that you earn your bread. You earn your keep. There is no dignity in someone putting a loaf of bread on your table and giving it to you. If there is something that I would tell you, is that I have always earned my bread. Even when I went out to the bush to bring an animal down, and it was cold and miserable out there, I brought it down and put that meat on the table. That's dignity. I never want anybody to take that away from me. I never want anybody*

*to take my dignity away from me. Right now that's one of the most important things that we can teach a child. Your land is your dignity! Your work is your dignity! Dignity is when you can buy that food, when you can work for it, and put the clothing on your back. I'm totally unhappy and grieved by what the government is doing to my people. Even my own children. This welfare! Taking away all of our hunting rights. Taking away all the things that we used to live by honourably and feel dignified. If there is anything that this government is going to lose for, it will be that. This hidden genocide that they are practising. In the world of nations they are great, but by golly God is going to judge them hard for what they are doing to us. He is going to judge the churches hard. Our people say why are the churches in trouble. Because God judged them hard, they are being punished for what they have done to us. The next guy that is going to be punished is Mr. Government himself. The Canadian government is going suffer hard by God's judgement for what they are doing to the First Nations' people in this land. Putting them on welfare and keeping them there. Keeping them from the competitive world and not giving them the skills, and all of a sudden there are huge numbers of them and they realize, "Oh we got to make them pay taxes because they are getting everything for nothing." It's there own dang fault. They've done that for almost one hundred years. They've fed those guys and locked them inside the reservations without skills, and they took away all of their bread wampums and their bread storages. They took away the lands over there, the hunting lands and the trapping lands. That's where they were good. They*

*should have left them there. They would have saved millions of dollars if they would have let the people stay in their trap lines, let them keep on hunting in the forest and feeding themselves. Now they're saying, "Oh they're costing us money." But it's their own fault. I say this to a lot of people but they just laugh. Still I say that Canada is under judgement. God says that I don't just judge individuals but I judge countries too. I judge Nations and Canada will be judged. They are already having their problems with the French wanting to separate. Well I say, "Ok. We want to use the beauty of what God gave you. God gave you this land to look after. He didn't want you to come and destroy people because of the land and because they gave you the land. They have to maintain their nationalities on those reservations, that's what the old people say." There's no reason why those reserves can't help us keep our national identity, our language and those things that God made us to be as a Nation. That's why they gave up the land so they could maintain their national identity.*

### ***A Time To Stand Up***

*But anyway that's the things that my grandfather, and my father especially, taught me. They said that there will come a time when we'll have the means to stand up and tell the world about our plight. There will be a time when we have enough educated people like yourself and other Indian and Metis people that are just as educated as everybody else now. There will be a time when the government will respond. There will be a time when this will happen*

*because our numbers are getting stronger. We're not getting weak. We are going to unite. We are going to unite as a people. We are going to unite, not just the tribes, but the Metis people are going to unite with us and we will come under one roof. The government is going to throw us in one big pot. They are going to succeed at doing that but it will be politically volatile. It will be volatile because the government won't accept what it has created. All of a sudden there will be people in government offices and our politicians will be sitting there on their doorstep and we'll be sitting beside them. They will create that. Pretty soon our people will start organizing and saying, "Ok you guys, all of you phone these houses on Riverbend or up in Riverside over there or over there in Confederation." We will band together to put one guy in city office. It's coming. I'm not talking like that. It is the young people that are talking like that. They're saying, wait, we want one candidate from all of the reserves. Where all of the reserves will come under one or two constituencies. We want people in office. That's coming. The people are starting to talk. It's not me. It's our young educated people that are learning this, and when they get into those places the government will have to listen. The government will succeed in uniting us, but it will not be to their liking. That's what the old people said. Isn't life that way? We have to do things we never like, but sometimes those things that we don't like are sometimes the best things for us. It will be the same for any nation. It is the same for the nation as it is for the individual. Nations are compelled by the things that we have to do in order to hold the common dignity of people and their*

*need to be who they are. Who they are is important. Who they are as a people, and who they are as individuals. Hey!*

## **Joining the Circle**

Who we are as human beings is greatly determined by the total sum of our experiences, positive and negative. The oppression that is heaped upon our spirit by the harsh realities of the physical world and our attempts to overcome this oppression play a large role in the life journey. These experiences temper how we view ourselves in relation to others, how we develop emotionally, how we express our spirituality, and to a large degree, how we view ourselves and define our own identity. I was not raised with an awareness of traditional Aboriginal thought. On the contrary, I was raised in a family that was devoutly Catholic. As the son of a French father and a French/Metis mother, I considered myself both French and Metis although in my youth I was unable to articulate the significance of either. As I grew older, I came to understand the importance of my heritage in defining who I am. In part, this was due to the words of Louis Riel who stated that we should not be preoccupied as to the percentages of our Indian or European lineages; instead he stated that we should focus on recognizing and honouring both. Therefore, while by blood I am mostly of French lineage, I would be remiss if I denied my Aboriginal ancestry. It is something to take pride in and which I have the right and obligation to explore.

When I was twenty-nine years old, I lost a brother in a car accident. He was thirty-one years old at the time and the nearest brother in age to myself. I found that coming to terms with his sudden and unexpected death was extremely difficult. After his death, I discovered that although he had been ordained a Catholic priest only two years earlier, his life had meaning and he had touched many people. His life, the purpose that it possessed and the void that his death created in my life, initiated my own personal journey of self-discovery, and it was through this journey that I began to explore traditional Aboriginal forms of spiritual expression. At first my attempts to explore my Aboriginal heritage were tentative. I recall feeling like an interloper in a foreign land. However, the words of the Elders gave me comfort and helped me to understand that nothing happens by coincidence and that there is always a greater purpose to all things. I began attending sweat lodges and found them to inspire an unquenchable desire to return. This thirst for knowledge was both comforting and addictive in a manner that is not easily verbalized. During this early period of exploration, I remember the words of Elder Bill Ermine who told me, “when we pray in the sweat lodge we don’t pray just for ourselves. We pray for the next seven generations.” I recall finding this thought both profound and comforting. I found it profound because it stressed the connectedness of existence over time, and comforting because if the old ones prayed for the next seven generations then they were, in fact, praying for me. This thought made me feel that I belonged and that I was not an interloper but a member of a circle that has

existed for millennia. I gathered strength and a sense of belonging from these words as well as confirmation that it was the Creator's intent for me to explore the Aboriginal way of knowing as a part of my own journey.

This sense of belonging and of purposeful direction was reinforced by the manner in which I met Elder Danny Musqua. It was in the fall of 1991, and I was working in a teacher training program in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Although I was aware of Danny's reputation as a respected Sauteaux Elder, I had not had the pleasure of being introduced to him. By "coincidence" when we met there was an immediate bond between us. For my part, I sensed a magnetic warmth, sincerity and compassion exuding from Danny's being and I sensed that he felt comfortable in my presence. This bond grew into a recognition that our meeting was part of a larger plan. About a week after we first met, I was invited to participate in a sweat lodge that Danny would be holding at Muskoday Reserve just south of Prince Albert. At the time I had only attended a handful of sweats, so in order not to act inappropriate, I simply mimicked the actions of others in the hope that I would not do anything inappropriately. Just when we were preparing to enter the lodge, Danny stopped at the lodge door, turned around, began beating on his small hand drum and raised his voice skyward. I did not recognize the song that sprang from his lips but I gathered in front of him like the others to listen. He sang for a few minutes, his plaintive voice gathering strength as the song repeated itself. Suddenly, the song broke off in mid-stream as Danny's upturned eyes flashed in recognition and he uttered a sentence in

Saulteaux. He repeated the phrase in his language before he turned his glance upon me, repeating the phrase in English for my benefit and stated, "that is your name". While I felt honored by Danny to be given a name, as I look back on it a lot of the meaning was lost to me because at the time I did not understand the significance of the events that had transpired.

It was at this point in my journey that Danny adopted me as his son. In the Saulteaux tradition an Elder can adopt four sons and two helpers. To my surprise, I became Danny's fifth son and doorman to his lodge. The suddenness of how this all transpired amazed and momentarily overwhelmed me, and it wasn't until later that I learned that Danny had been foretold of my arrival in a dream, and therefore, my arrival was expected. I later learned that this foresight is not uncommon among Aboriginal Elders. In fact, I grew to understand, what Danny had known all along, that our meeting was not a random, chance encounter as I had initially thought, but rather a purposeful opportunity to journey with one another in a meaningful way. Indeed, the opportunity to journey with Danny has had a profoundly positive effect upon my life and I have been blessed with the opportunity to hear his teachings and learn the traditional ways of his ancestors.

I am thankful to Danny for sharing his teachings with me and with the opportunity to share his teaching with whomever reads these pages. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you how, over the years, Danny's traditional Saulteaux teachings have influenced how I interpret the world, and how they



have helped me attain a deeper level of understanding regarding the nature of the spirit, the purpose of existence, the interconnectedness of existence, the nature of evil, the limitations of the physical and the nature of healing. While my primary interest is on the underlying philosophical and ceremonial practices of traditional Saulteaux healing, I have come to understand that the Aboriginal world view defies division, and that true understanding of Aboriginal healing can only be achieved by developing a comprehensive understanding of the spiritual centre.

In the following text I will attempt to describe the teachings of Elder Danny Musqua as I have come to understand them and incorporate their meaning into my own thinking. I will also discuss how Danny's teaching are supported by the growing body of literature focusing on the traditional teachings of other First Nations' Elders. I also realize that my own understanding of the philosophy of the Bear Clan is limited and, in attempting to interpret Danny's teaching as I have come to understand them, I will make mistakes. For this reason, I would like to apologize to Danny for any errors or misrepresentations I might make. I would also like to apologize to the Aboriginal community if my words and thoughts are offensive in any manner. I wish you to know that this writing comes from the heart and is only my attempt at trying to understand and make meaning of life.

## **The Journey of Spirit**

Danny, in his gentle way, helped me to understand that, according to traditional teachings of the Bear Clan and Saulteaux philosophy, we are spiritual beings living a physical journey. This is a central theme in Danny's teachings. Danny talks about the nature of the spirit and how, because it is part of the Great Mystery, it is perfect, timeless and knows no limitations. Danny helped me to reaffirm my belief that our individual spirits are infinite in that they have existed since the beginning of time and possess all of the knowledge of the universe and that the spirit existed long before it was joined to our physical body and it will continue to exist long after the physical body returns to Mother Earth. Therefore, the physical realm is only one of a number of realms which the spirit experiences over time. In the physical realm the spirit, as a boundless all-knowing being, is subjugated and bound to the physical world at conception. The task of the spirit in the physical realm is to come to understand the concept of limitations. It must learn, much like Christ did, to understand and overcome physical suffering, oppression, lust, greed, envy, hunger, and the unavoidable deterioration and death of the physical body. The physical world poses many hardships and is fleeting in nature. These factors are unique to the physical world and are intended to help the spirit to understand limitation before it makes its way back to the Creator. By this definition, the life journey is an ongoing struggle to understand physical limitation and achieve balance and control over the physical.

Ironically, many traditional beliefs such as the nature of the spirit appear paradoxical. For example, the spirit is believed to be perfect and all knowing, yet, it must experience limitation and work towards understanding and overcoming the limitations of the physical world. According to Danny Musqua, this paradox can be explained by the nature of the spirit. Because the spirit knows no limitation, knows no weakness, and is unable to comprehend evil, it reacts strongly to being bound to the physical. At conception, as a result of the trauma the spirit undergoes when it joins with the physical, it “goes to sleep” or enters a dormant state. Life then becomes a journey where the individual must revitalize, reconnect or “awaken” the spirit and the knowledge it possesses. In achieving this, the individual is able to reconnect to the spiritual realm in a meaningful way and is able to understand and overcome the limitations and hardships unique to the physical.

However, just as the spirit can be awoken through prayer, meditation, fasting, and a variety of purification rituals, it can also become more inaccessible by abuse and neglect. The spirit has a natural aversion to evil. Therefore, if the spirit is oppressed by abuse, neglect or exposed to evil with great regularity, in order to protect itself, it shuts down and builds a metaphorical shell around itself. This act, while protecting the spirit from further assault and injury, also makes it more difficult for the individual to get in touch with their spiritual centre and the inherent power and knowledge that it possesses. As a result the individual operates more on an instinctual and cognitive level, and is devoid of the spiritual

dimension which typically functions as an anchor for moral judgement and conscience. When the spirit is oppressed and the person is operating on a cognitive and instinctual level, it is possible for an individual's thoughts and actions to be destructive and hurtful. This oppression of spirit causes the individual to feel disconnected from their community, their environment and the cosmos. This disassociation means that the individual views others as mere objects to which he is not connected. Because others are viewed as objects, it is easy to yield to hedonistic, instinctual and rationalized cognitive desires. This is the nature and origin of evil in our society. In such extreme situations, where the spirit has been traumatized by severe neglect and abuse, the awakening of the spirit, or healing, is still possible although the process is difficult and complex.

### **Healing and the Nature of Illness**

According to Elder Danny Musqua, illness is allowed to enter the body when the individual is not living in balance. Living in balance means that the individual lives a balanced life where their mental, emotional and spiritual needs are being fulfilled and they are taking the time to nurture their own development and are open to and receiving the nurturing of other individuals and their environment. When the person lives in balance, they are living in spiritual, emotional and physical harmony which means that all aspects of an individual's existence are functioning in an integrated manner. This integration would be

reflected in their lives through a raised level of consciousness and self-esteem. Balanced individuals would understand their place within, and relationship to, their Creator and the natural world, and their relationships with others would be marked by the ability to give as well as receive kindness, love and support.

While maintaining balance is an ideal for all Anishanabe, it is a difficult goal to achieve and maintain in a physical world which is dominated by a world view which encourages the disassociation with, and the domination of, the natural world. Ironically, this view overemphasises the importance of acquiring the material benefits that spring from the natural world. As a result of the negative external forces exerted upon the spirit, it is constantly challenged to renew itself. If the assault of the physical world is overwhelming and the individual is drawn away from his/her spiritual centre, especially for a prolonged period of time, the body, mind or spirit can become susceptible to illness and disease. Illness and disease can manifest itself in physical, emotional or spiritual form. Therefore, many physical or mental health problems, especially in young people, can be a sign of an oppressed spirit or of an imbalance in the life of the individual.

Just as disease can be allowed to enter the body when the spirit is oppressed, so too can an invigorated spirit promote good health and healing. The spirit has the capacity to heal the physical body and to correct physical and emotional imbalances. Because traditional Saulteaux philosophy emphasizes the importance of the spirit in healing, it is not surprising to discover that

Saulteaux healing focuses on freeing the spirit from oppression so that it in turn can focus its energy in healing the body and mind. While illness springs from an imbalance within the person that causes the spirit to be oppressed, conversely, once balance is restored the spirit possesses the ability to heal all illness. While this may sound like an easy process it is in fact very difficult. For a variety of reasons we may resist healing. We may fear the life changes that could accompany healing, or the effects healing may have upon our relationships with others. Perhaps we have become so accustomed to our sickness that it has become a part of our identity and of who we believe ourselves to be. In this instance, destroying the illness can be equivalent to destroying a part of ourselves. As members of a society in which punishment and reward are common practices, we sometimes feel a need, or compulsion, to punish ourselves. As a result we sometimes cling to illness as a means of punishing ourselves for what we perceive to be our sins. For whatever reason, if an individual identifies with the illness, and/or hesitates to relinquish his or her hold upon the sickness, healing cannot occur because the individual has not allowed themselves to become involved in the healing process. For healing to occur, the person who seeks healing must have faith that it will occur and must become actively involved in the healing process by willingly relinquishing the sickness from the body, the mind and the spirit. Because the person seeking healing must participate willingly in the process, healing cannot be imposed or forced. For this reason, people will only heal when the time is right for them to do so. In

this manner, healing is a process that occurs in its own time and does not respond to force or coercion.

## **The Gift**

Danny talks about how all people possess gifts. Some people may have the ability of visioning, or seeing into the future, while others may possess the ability to heal or interpret dreams. A person's gift may be to be a good storyteller, to possess the ability to make people laugh, to be a good negotiator, a good provider, to be a leader, or to make people feel at ease in their presence. One gift is not considered better than another. They are simply different and all gifts are of equal importance. Gifts are unique to the individual and can be used in two ways. First, the gifts that a person possesses can be used for the betterment of the community and to serve the community. For example, when someone is struggling with illness, either physical, emotional or spiritual they may seek out one of the healers from the community. It is the responsibility of the healer to allow themselves to be used as an instrument of healing through which the spirit world can operate. It is the role of the healer to provide emotional and spiritual support, just as it is the role of the hunter in traditional Aboriginal society to share his good fortune with less fortunate members of the community. Gifts also serve a second important function in traditional Saulteaux society. Gifts are given to all people by the Creator. The

challenge for the individual is to use their gift to come to a deeper understanding of self and his/her relationship and connectedness with the cosmos.

Interestingly enough, not all gifts need to be positive attributes. Weaknesses can also be considered gifts in that they can initiate tremendous growth within the individual and it is through our weaknesses as much as our strengths that we discover who we are, our limitations, and our place in the universe. These “gifts of weakness” can prove to be our greatest test in life. When I asked Danny Musqua to explain why this was so, he said that, “the greatest tests come from inside the circle.” I took this to mean that, in order for us to truly understand ourselves, and our thoughts and actions, we must come face to face with our own weakness and vulnerability. Only then can true understanding occur. This concept can apply to other aspects of our life other than with self. For example, for a life event to have a significant impact on us it must be from “inside the circle”. The focus of the gift must have significance in our life. An illness or an ongoing struggle with a partner, sibling, parent or child would be defined as originating from “inside the circle” and may pose both an obstacle to overcome as well as an opportunity for growth. Even these difficult events may be defined as gifts because they provide an opportunity to better understand ourselves and allow us to explore the virtues of patience, self-discipline, respect, humility and tolerance. These gifts can also serve to teach us the limitations of the physical world and, providing that we are able to



understand the significance of these gifts, they can enhance our development as we strive to keep on the spiritual path.

### **Understanding Truth**

Many times when I have sat with Danny listening to his stories and teachings, I found myself agreeing with what he was saying. Yet, while I had not previously heard the words that he spoke, it was as if I had heard the words before, and instinctively knew them to be true. When I asked Danny to explain this feeling of familiarity he said that truth is inextricably linked to the nature of the spirit. The teachings focus on the perfection and infinite knowledge of the spirit. They stress that the spirit has existed since the beginning of creation, and since it is part of the force of creation, it contains all of the knowledge contained within creation. In short, while the knowledge contained within the spirit is not always readily accessible to the individual, the spirit is all-knowing. Because it is all-knowing, when the spirit is in the presence of truth it recognizes truth. This is why the Elders say that it is important to follow your heart, for when you are following your heart you are following a deeper truth and relying on the spirit's ability to recognize the true path in life. In this way the "spirit" or "heart" acts as a mediator between the intellect and the emotions. However, unlike the intellect and the emotions, the source of spiritual knowledge is divine in origin. Spiritual knowledge, according to Saulteaux tradition and belief, is unlike Western scientific knowledge, which is reductionistic and limited by the boundaries of the

rational mind and logical intellect. This type of knowledge is one-dimensional and is based upon physical "truths". True knowledge is spiritual in origin and is tempered with wisdom which means that it can be applied to life experience and linked to the human condition. True knowledge promotes harmony between the spiritual and physical reality and is more holistic in nature in that it connects spiritual, mental, emotional and physical elements with one another.

The challenge to the individual is to learn how to gain access to the knowledge of the spirit. This can be achieved through reconnecting and nurturing the spiritual connection and by "viewing oneself as an interconnected force" within the universe and "a universal stream of consciousness that pervades all things." The Elders say that we are of the earth and that we will return to the earth. They say that the earth is our mother and that as spiritual being we are connected to all things in the universe and through this invisible tapestry we have purpose on this earth and we have a responsibility to all other living things because whatever we do to our world we do unto ourselves. Once we realize this interconnectedness with the universe, we are able to find our place and nurture our spirits. This is a central element in discovering what it means to be an Anishanabe.

### **The Concept of Freedom**

To understand the underlying philosophy of Saulteaux Healing, one must first understand the concept of freedom. Danny describes freedom as a sacred

concept that is central to Saulteaux culture. Freedom is linked to the belief that the spirit is living the physical journey in order to learn about the limitations of the physical. Therefore, the physical journey is but one level of existence which the spirit must experience as it journeys back to the creator.

It is believed that all experiences, joyful or sorrowful, serve a purpose and contain lessons from which one can learn and develop their spirit. All experiences have the potential to instruct the spirit and guide it towards fulfilling its destiny. However, there appears to be a relationship between destiny and freedom. In fulfilling one's destiny a person must make choices in life. Good choices will bring the person closer to the Creator while poor choices will serve to further isolate the individual from the spiritual realm. This freedom to choose also explains the nature and existence of evil in the physical world. Danny acknowledges the existence of such evil, but states that it is a result of the choices we make in life and not an entity independent of human thought and action. This is why the Bear Clan does not spend a great deal of time focusing on the darker side of human nature. Discussing the darker side is what gives it power. In this way, evil is a man-made phenomenon. Even the trickster, or tester, is not innately evil. Rather, it is the role of the trickster to test our resolve and our level of faith and commitment. It is through our successes and our failures, as much as anything else, that we learn about self, our limitations, and

the limitations imposed upon the spirit by the physical world. In this way the "test" in itself is not a bad thing for it can actually provide opportunities to learn more about self. For example, if we lack resolve and therefore give in to physical temptation, we may make choices that are motivated by greed, avarice or lust and which hurt others. It is understood that for true learning to take place, all individuals must experience the pain, loneliness and suffering that is an integral part of the human condition and occasionally a direct result of the autonomous choices we make in life. The Elders state that because the Creator gave human beings the right to make their own choices in life, mankind does not have the power to interfere in this process. This is the philosophy upon which the concept of non-interference is based. It is accepted that an individual has a "gift" and a "destiny" and as such it is the responsibility of the individual to find the appropriate path in life to grow towards his gift, and therefore, closer to the Creator. If our help is solicited, we may help the individual towards his gift, by lending support or providing guidance, but at no time is it acceptable to interfere with another's journey or attempt to control or force them to act in accordance with our will. This would be a violation of the law of freedom and disrespectful of the individuals' autonomy.

The sanctity of freedom means that all people are viewed to be on a path in life which is of their own choosing and which they themselves define. The life journey is viewed as an experience that is different and unique for each individual and in which all individuals must come to their own understandings of

meaning and define their own path by the choices they make in their life. Collectively, we are merely fellow travellers bound to one another through a spiritual connection in the world of the unseen. Through the spiritual connection between all entities and beings, we can influence one another on such a deep level that it is beyond the capacity of cognitive understanding. It is through this connectedness of the spirit that we are able to show respect for one another in a profoundly meaningful way, while at the same time allowing each other the freedom to explore our destiny without coercion or intimidation. Ironically, life is a journey where we strive to achieve perfection. However, our striving for perfection is an impossibility because we cannot hope to fully overcome physical limitation. Although perfection is an impossibility, in life the Creator presents us with opportunities to achieve perfection momentarily. If we choose to be altruistic and help our fellow man, we can, for that moment in time, achieve a state of grace or perfection. Unfortunately, this state of perfection is impossible to maintain because the limitations of the physical cannot be overcome indefinitely. However, for an Anishanabe the reward is in the moment that perfection is achieved.

### **The Importance of Sacrifice**

Personal sacrifice is an important part of acquiring knowledge, and knowledge plays a vital role in maintaining balance, promoting healing and keeping the individual on the path or road back to the creator. True knowledge

is spiritual knowledge. It enables the Anishanabe to better understand themselves, the spiritual world, and the relationship between the two. Spiritual knowledge enables the person to build a closer relationship with the spiritual realm.

Because all learning is considered a gift from the Creator, and is intended to guide us in our journey, it requires sacrifice on the part of the one receiving the knowledge. Sometimes knowledge is conveyed via conduits such as Elders, parents or teachers. Sometime it is learnt directly through observation of the natural world or through the interactions and experiences of others. Regardless of how knowledge is acquired, it is the obligation of the learner to acknowledge the gift through personal sacrifice. These sacrifices may take the form of offerings, such as tobacco, sweet grass, blankets, or material offerings, or it may take the form of a more personal form of sacrifice such as committing oneself to completing a three-day fast or participating in a Sundance. While all knowledge is recognized to originate with the Creator, as physical beings living in a physical universe, it is appropriate that offerings are made toward the conveyers of knowledge such as Elders and teachers. Both the type of offering and the amount are determined by the person receiving the knowledge because only they are in a position to assess the impact of the knowledge upon their existence.

Knowledge transmission, like many other aspects of traditional Aboriginal philosophy is cyclical in nature. Knowledge is recognized as belonging to no one

person, and therefore, it is intended to be shared for the benefit of all. This does not mean that truth is easily defined in black and white terms or that the knowledge we acquire through the course of our life should be imposed upon others. Rather, it implies a sharing of knowledge which emphasizes respect for the teacher and the learner. It is a reciprocal relationship. As a learner we make offerings, either personal or material, for the knowledge we acquire in life. Once the knowledge has been earned it is our responsibility to communicate it to others who will in turn reflect upon, evaluate and appraise the knowledge in an attempt to determine its relevance in their own journey. Thus, the cycle is completed with the learner becoming the teacher and the offering given out to later be returned.

### **The Concept of Time**

Patience has never been one of my virtues. All of my life I have lived by the Western concept of incremental time which focuses on the dissection of time into seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years, decades, and so forth. It is my experience that the Western world has a preoccupation with incremental time and the concept of "punctuality". Unfortunately, I have been strongly effected by the concept of incremental time and the desire for punctuality. In retrospect, I view this as one of my greatest vices and I have come to realize that learning patience will be one of the tasks of my journey.

Danny helped me to realize that time is not linear and quantifiable but is like a river that flows with purpose in a cyclical fashion. This is demonstrated with the repetitions of the natural cycle of life from birth to death and rebirth or in the natural progression of the seasons from spring, summer, fall, winter, and again to spring. Some cycles of time are short like the passage of a day, while some are much longer in duration like the approaching ice age. However, both serve as examples of, what I would call, natural time which is not linear or incremental but rather cyclical because it is governed by the natural world.

Incremental time and natural time both focus on the physical universe. This is strikingly different from spiritual time. Danny talks about spiritual time and how spiritual time, not physical time, is important to the healing process. Spiritual time knows no bounds and cannot be contained within the confines of traditional Western conceptions of incremental time. For example, in traditional Aboriginal philosophy there is little or no distinction between past, present and future. Due to this lack of separation, individuals may be given glimpses of truth and of future events through visions and dreams, but there is no set time for when these events will occur. The vision may come to pass in a week, a year or in fifty years depending on when all the conditions are right. This is also the case with the acquisition of knowledge or with healing. Although an individual may have been foretold of the gifts of knowledge or healing that they are to receive, the meaningful acquisition of either will only occur at the appropriate time when the individual is destined to learn from the opportunity or is properly



prepared to receive the healing. Because healing is bound by spiritual time and not physical incremental time, it can occur spontaneously or over an extended period of time. At times, one healing ceremony will constitute healing while on other occasions ongoing healings may be required to maintain balance and harmony within the individual, thereby giving them the strength to keep the illness at bay. Danny is a good example of the latter case.

Several years ago, Danny was diagnosed with cancer. Instead of opting for surgery and Western medical intervention, he began receiving treatment from traditional Aboriginal healers. As a result of the healing he has received, Danny's cancer has gone into remission. By strengthening his spirit through repeated healings, he is able to keep the disease at bay and stop it from spreading to other parts of his body. Through repeated healings, Danny is able to extend his physical journey and come to a deeper understanding of the limitations of the physical and his relationship to the spiritual realm. Healing is quite often not dramatic and instead is a process which takes time. Danny once told me that the Creator prefers to work in a subtle manner and if we know what to look for, he reveals himself to us everyday. Danny says that this subtle approach of the Creator has a much greater long-lasting impact than if he were to only periodically reveal himself in a flash of light. This he attributes to human nature and our natural tendency to doubt our own perceptions unless they are constantly reaffirmed. In relation to healing, this would mean that instantaneous healing would not be as beneficial, or possess as lasting an impact, as healing

that is characterized as an ongoing process which emphasizes building a spiritual relationship with the Creator and a deeper understanding of all things spiritual. Since the emphasis is on healing as a process, it reflects the view of a journey, or coming to know, which is consistent with Danny's belief that life itself is a journey of understanding where we are to learn the lessons of physical limitation and overcome these limitations as we journey back to the Creator.

### **Healing as Process**

To understand Danny's teachings on traditional healing, one must first understand his teachings on the nature of healing itself and how this concept is affected and defined by, as well as intertwined with the concepts of time, freedom, respect, sacrifice, gifts and the nature of the spiritual realm. Danny's teachings of the Bear Clan outline a world view that defies reduction. And any discussion that attempts to oversimplify the interconnectedness of the teachings would serve only to distort and oversimplify a well-rounded and comprehensive philosophy of healing. I confess that Danny's philosophy and teachings may also be distorted or oversimplified in my own attempt to understand and explain their significance upon my own journey, but as a child upon the path I beg for his patience and guidance as I attempt to put into words my own understanding of the teachings of the Bear Clan, and how they have influenced my life and my perceptions. For example, through Danny's teachings I have come to understand that there are two realities operating in the universe, the realm of the

seen or physical, and the realm of the unseen or spiritual. It is the unseen or spiritual realm that is at the core of Aboriginal conceptions of healing. It is believed that illness emanates from a neglected or oppressed spirit and that true healing is evoked from fortifying or nurturing one's own spirit. The spiritual realm is not viewed as an abstract entity that is disconnected from human experience but rather as a living reality from which individuals can draw strength, support, knowledge and guidance.

Physical, emotional, mental and spiritual healing is the dominion of the spiritual realm and as such human beings have a limited capacity to understand the complexities and underlying purposes involved. Quite often when we are in the midst of healing we do not even understand that healing is occurring. Because the power and healing capacities of the spiritual realm are infinite, healing has no bounds or limitations. For example, at times healing can be transformational in nature and dramatic change can occur almost instantaneously with the immediate alleviation of all symptoms. While transformational healing can occur, it is the exception rather than the rule and healing should be viewed more as a life-long process or journey. It is a journey governed by spiritual time, not physical time, so it may occur swiftly or over the course of one's lifetime. It is a process unique to each individual and is governed by the autonomous choices one makes in life. It is a journey in which the individual's spirit must be awakened and nurtured and where the individual must earn and make sacrifices for the knowledge that accompanies and

influences a spiritual awakening. At times healing may be a painful journey marked by many peaks and valleys. It is also a journey marked by respect for the individual's right to choose a personal path in life in an attempt to grow to understand self and its relationship with the spiritual realm. This increased knowledge and awareness of self, and our relationship to the spiritual realm, is achieved in part from understanding one's own 'gifts', which may take the form of strengths or weaknesses. These gifts are an important vehicle in coming to understand self, one's own limitations, our purpose and path in the life journey. As human beings we are all in the state of 'becoming' or evolving into the Anishanabe we are destined to become. During the course of this evolutionary process, we are required to make choices in life. It is these choices that will, either bring us closer to our gift or purpose and in the process closer to discovering our true nature as spiritual beings, or lead us away from our gift and towards a sense of despair and loss of direction and purpose.

As I reflect upon my own life, I see how some decisions drew me closer to my gift while others pushed me in the opposite direction. The understanding of each gift brings a clarity of mind and an enhanced knowledge of self and others. Many of these gifts take the form of life experiences. The gifts, or life experiences, that have had the most profound impact upon who I am as a human being were also the most painful to endure. The death of my brother Phil in the spring of 1991 and of my father in November, 1996 played a pivotal role in my development as a human being and upon how I perceive the world. My

brother's death in 1991 caused me to face my own mortality and to question the meaning of existence. It initiated a journey of understanding or an odyssey whose goal was to discover spiritual truth. This journey caused me to look for answers outside myself for explanations as to the nature of the universe and the purpose of the physical realm. At this point in my life I happened to meet Danny, and was exposed to the teachings of the Bear Clan. I began to attend sweat lodges and participate in traditional ceremonies. Eventually, I became comfortable in developing and expressing the spiritual dimension of my life through either the sweat lodge or my Catholic faith. I felt that I had regained my grasp upon life, what was important and what made life meaningful.

When my father died five and a half years later, my life was again sent into disarray, but this time I was sent on a journey of discovery of a different variety. Like my brother's death, the death of my father prompted me to seek explanations and sent me looking for answers. Unlike the outward journey for answers that was prompted by my brother's death, my father's death initiated an inward journey in which I was forced to look at myself, and come to terms with my own limitations and weaknesses. I had to come to understand who I was today, how I became the person I am at this point in my journey, and how in order for me to become a whole person, I would have to address and rectify some of my own limitations and weaknesses. At the time of the deaths of my father and my brother, I did not view these events as gifts. I could only feel the pain. Yet, as I now reflect back upon both events in my life I can see that both

were indeed gifts because they caused me to grow immeasurably as a human being. This growth and increased self awareness caused me to understand myself better and, through better understanding self, I gained an increased capacity for understanding and empathizing with others. Both experiences influenced how I viewed reality, what I viewed as important in life, how I made meaning from existence, as well as how I developed myself spiritually and how I related to my fellow man and came to understand my place in the cosmos.

Ironically, the first journey was an external journey that attempted to make meaning of life, while the second journey was an internal journey that attempted to understand and come to terms with self. Of the two journeys, the second was much more difficult in that it focused on the limitations of the self from which there is no escape. At this point in my life I am still in the process of becoming, but I feel that I have begun the healing process and am coming to know myself on a much deeper level. As a result, I am beginning to understand my limitations, or my weaknesses, as well as my place and purpose in the world. I have come to realize that death is a good teacher. It serves as a time for reflection through which one may discover how they are connected to their fellow human beings in a profound manner. Unfortunately, like many things in life, we are quite often unable to understand the significance of this connection until it has been severed. Although the deaths of my brother and father were painful to endure, they increased my awareness of the world and of myself, and had a long-term positive impact upon my life. In this manner, these life events could

be described as gifts in that they helped me to attain knowledge regarding self and the nature of the spirit. In briefly outlining my own healing journey it is important to remember that no two journeys are alike and that all people respond differently to the world around them. We must remember that we are all on the path and that, while the journey may at times be arduous and painful, we do not journey alone through life because we are all connected to one another through the spirit.

### **The Role of Traditional Ceremonies in Healing**

It is the spiritual connection between people and the Creator that makes healing possible and serves as the catalyst for healing. While spirituality and the connection to the Creator serve as the spark to ignite the fire of healing, it is the traditional ceremonies like the sweat lodge that are the tool through which the process is initiated and sustained. Danny talks about how the traditional ceremonial practices of the Bear Clan attempt to foster healing and restore balance by strengthening this spiritual connection through the disciplines of prayer, meditation and fasting. Traditional ceremonies such as the sweat lodge and the learning lodge are intended to purify the physical body and cleanse and invigorate the spirit. These ceremonies are communal processes which stress the equality of all those present as well as recognizing the spiritual interconnectedness that transcends racial and religious lines. Danny states that these ceremonies have been given to all Anishanabe as a way of growing closer

to the Creator and, while the creator has blessed all people with different gifts, he does not differentiate between human beings. Paradoxically, the Creator provides us with the guidance and the resources to develop a closer relationship with him through the ceremonies, while at the same time respecting our freedom by giving all individuals the autonomy to make their own choices and follow a life path of their own design. Because the world of the unseen guides us in our life journey in a subtle and mysterious manner, it is believed that all those who attend a ceremony are "meant" to be there. It is the design of the Creator. For this reason no one is turned away and it is believed that they have been sent for a reason. Perhaps they must learn something for their own journey or they are there as part of their own healing. Perhaps they are there to lend support to one of the other participants who is experiencing difficulty in their life. Regardless of the reason, it is believed that those who arrive for a ceremony, either intentionally or coincidentally, were sent by the Creator and their presence is welcomed accordingly. This spiritual focus which emphasizes building a stronger relationship with the Creator, in a guided yet autonomous manner, is central to the teachings of the Bear Clan. For this reason, Danny states that the philosophy of the Bear Clan is a manner of living which he calls the 'way' or a way to God. He states that it is not a religion but rather a way of understanding the spiritual world and developing a deeper relationship with the Creator.

Someone once said that trying to explain Aboriginal culture is like trying to describe what a strawberry tastes like. Effectively describing something in this



manner is an impossible task, for one can only learn such things through lived experience and, regardless of how good the description, understanding comes from tasting or experiencing life for oneself. Such is the case with understanding Aboriginal culture and the nature of the ceremonies whose beauty and impact can never be replicated by mere words, no matter how eloquent. For this reason, I can only paint shadows for the reader with my words in the hope that you will accept this as an opportunity for reflection and an invitation to seek out and develop your own forms of spiritual expression. My own lack of experience limits what I can speak about through personal experience. For example, as a member of the Bear Clan, I have participated in fasts, learning lodges, sweat lodges and healing ceremonies, but I have not been to a sundance or a shaking tent ceremony. For this reason, although I have been told about them, have read about them and understand that they play an important role in healing, I do not feel that I can speak about them justly because they are outside the realm of my knowledge. For this reason, I will only discuss the healing ceremonies of the Bear Clan as I have come to understand them through Danny's teachings and my own personal experience.

The sweat lodge, learning lodge and healing ceremonies are all instruments of healing. They strengthen the connection between the spiritual realm, which is the source of healing, and the physical realm, which is the cause of illness. The ceremonies allow for the power of the spiritual world to be mediated through physical reality by restoring balance and harmony. Such is the

case with the sweat lodge where, through the power of prayer, the Grandfathers, or spirits, are evoked to provide healing and guidance to the individuals present as well as the community at large. There are a variety of different types of sweat lodges such as the prayer lodge, the healing lodge, the men's lodge and the family lodge. Regardless of the type of lodge, each provides an opportunity for prayer and the rejuvenation of the spirit. For those attending the sweat lodge the experience is healing in a number of ways. For example, through prayer the individual's ability for spiritual expression and forming of a closer relationship with the Creator and the spiritual realm is developed. The burden upon the spirit is also lightened during the course of the sweat. This is due to the spiritual and physical nature of the sweat lodge. Metaphorically, according to the Elders, the sweat lodge is the womb of mother earth and the lodge's physical darkness and warmth replicates our own experiences within our mother's womb. As such it provides a safe, secure environment where people can express their pain and sorrow without fear of reprisals or the risk of their trust being violated. For many people this alone is healing and an important part of the healing process. Besides providing the opportunity to express their pain, the sweat is a sacred place where the Grandfathers are present and often choose to carry our burden for us until we are strong enough to deal with it ourselves. According to this belief, the forces of the world of the unseen are tangible and have the capacity to impact upon and influence the physical world through direct involvement.

Finally, the sweat lodge promotes healing through nurturing a sense of connectedness with the spiritual realm, the physical realm and our fellow human beings. This sense of connectedness with the earth is established through the humble manner of the ceremony which utilizes the four elements of earth, fire, air and water. We also develop our connection with the Grandfathers and with each other through a sharing of ourselves and communing with one another in an honest and sincere manner. All of these factors together enable us to feel that we are supported and are not travelling through life alone. By allowing us to strengthen our connection with the spiritual world, by providing us an opportunity to share our burden and pain with others, by permitting the Grandfathers to assist us in carrying our burden, and by helping us to understand our place and connectedness to all things, the sweat lodge serves as a powerful source of healing within the traditional ceremonial practices of the Bear Clan.

The learning lodge is another ceremony that plays an important role in healing. The learning lodge usually lasts for three or four days during which the participants deprive themselves of food and water. A great deal of time is spent in prayer and reflection. The members of the circle endure the test together and understand the experience as an opportunity to come to a better understanding of self and grow closer to their Creator and to better understand the nature of their gift and their purpose in life. The purpose of fasting is to develop our spiritual dimension. Danny says that by depriving our body of food and water during a fast our physical body weakens and begins to die. With the onset of

dehydration our muscles begin to ache as our body begins to actually consume itself for survival. Through the act of fasting we are subjugating our physical body to our will, and through the imposition of this will we are able to weaken our physical body and, in turn, weaken the bonds and constraints that the physical universe places upon our spirit. As our physical body weakens and the bonds to the physical world loosen, the spirit grows in strength and we become more in tune with the spiritual world and better able to understand and commune with the spiritual realm. It is through subjecting ourselves to this process that we come to a deeper understanding of self, our strengths and our weaknesses, of our role in the cosmos and of our connection to all things. It is a manner of feeding the spirit which also reveals our frailty and vulnerability of life and allows us a glimpse into the cyclic life, death and rebirth process which we are entwined.

### **Role of the Healer**

Like other First Nations' conceptions of healing, the healing practices of the Saulteaux Bear Clan have the capacity to be either a solitary or communal process. The Bear Clan teaches that, as spiritual beings, all human beings possess the capacity to gather and focus spiritual strength and utilize this strength to heal ourselves in fulfilment of our life long journey to become whole. It is believed that as spiritual beings, who share a connectedness with all other spiritual beings and the spiritual realm, individuals have the capacity to reach out through the power of the spirit to heal others and assist them on their journey.

While the healer has the freedom to choose the extent to which they will participate in the healing process, the force which drives the healing process is beyond the control of the healer. This is because healing emanates, not from the healer, but directly from the Creator. For this reason, all people have the capacity to serve as instruments through which the healing forces may operate. This ability to participate in the healing process is a gift and like other gifts the ability to be utilized as a vessel of healing inexplicably shines brighter in certain individuals. When I asked Danny why some individuals are more gifted healers than others, he stated that the Creator gives the gift of healing to those that have faith in its power and the courage to utilize the gift. In this manner, healing is a matter of faith and believing in the healing power of prayer and prayer's ability to enact the power of the spiritual dimension by eliciting the Grandfathers' and the Creator's intervention in the healing process.

Ironically, by this definition the healer is actually not responsible, and cannot take credit, when healing occurs. The healer acts as a conduit or instrument through which the spiritual realm can impact the physical universe. Danny says that the Grandfathers need a conduit in the physical world through which they can direct their influence on physical reality. While the healers enable the spiritual realm to have a direct impact upon the physical world, the relationship between the healer and the Grandfathers is reciprocal. By allowing oneself to be an instrument of healing, the healer is accepting an opportunity to temporarily achieve perfection as an Anishanabe and is performing an act that

honours the Grandfathers as well as oneself. While the healing ceremony may be arduous, intense and at times painful for the healer, the healer is given insights and flashes of truth into the spiritual world that are not readily accessible to all. These insights serve as an affirmation of the healer's faith which allows the healer to develop a relationship with the Creator that is based upon tangible experiences. The healer is blessed with these insights and specialized knowledge in order to better facilitate healing. For example, healing ceremonies take on many forms and are not simply an invention of the healer. They are either taught to them by an Elder/healer, or communicated through dreams, visions or meditations. Through this process of reflection, healers are required to give physical expression to the will of the Grandfathers in a non-obtrusive manner. The healer, instead of designing the healing process, acts as a vessel who enacts the ceremony as instructed by the Creator. Because the healer is instructed on how to enact healing, the relationship between the healer and the spiritual world are of paramount importance to the healing process. The healer's relationship with the spiritual realm is like a garden that requires constant maintenance and attention. This relationship, if nurtured through prayer, meditation and fasting, will deepen over time and evolve into new and more complex understandings of self, the spiritual reality and the nature of healing and illness itself.

It is the deepening of this relationship and the understandings that arise through increased self awareness, through visions, through dreams and through

meditation that allows the healer to become a more effective instrument. By deepening one's relationship with the Grandfathers and the Creator, the healer may come to a deeper understanding of self and be better able to understand and empathize with others. This makes the healer a better counsellor and gives the healer a better understanding and capacity for insight into human nature which at times proves helpful to the healer in providing guidance to those that seek out the healer's assistance. As the healer's relationship with the spiritual deepens, the healer's knowledge and capacity to heal also grows because the healer becomes more in tune with the spiritual realm and the power that the spiritual world can exert upon the physical dimension. As the healer's journey progresses, so too should the healer's capacity to see into or relate directly with the world of the unseen. It is this ability of second sight that allows the healer to understand the nature of sickness and how to best effect healing. While it is important to remember that the relationship between the healer and the spiritual world is very important to the healing process, it is also important to remember that this relationship develops over time and that it has the capacity to become a profoundly intimate and insightful relationship. Danny's teachings discuss how our relationship with the spiritual realm evolved over time and how we all go through progressively deeper stages in our relationship with spiritual reality.

While some First Nations pray directly to the Creator, it is customary for Saulteaux people to pray to the Grandfathers. In turn, the Grandfathers cry for us to the Creator and serve as our voice in the spiritual realm. Danny states that

the Bear Clan believes that all human beings are followed on their personal journey by a Grandfather. Our personal Grandfather guides the individual in his journey and can impart knowledge and wisdom in an effort to keep us on the path back toward the Creator. In developing a relationship with the spiritual realm, we need to begin by establishing a personal relationship with our Grandfather because it is He that has been entrusted with the responsibility of accompanying us on our physical journey. Once we have established our relationship with the Grandfather whose name we bear, through prayer, meditation and fasting, we can continue to learn and receive guidance from an increasing number of Grandfathers. It is the knowledge and guidance of the Grandfathers that gives the healer strength and which the healer must rely on for answers or for instruction on how to perform various healing ceremonies. It is the healer's relationship with the Grandfathers that keeps the healer centered and in balance. It is this relationship that serves as the healer's anchor from which strength to endure can be drawn. According to Danny, it is the presence and protection of the Grandfathers that makes life in the physical realm tolerable. Ironically, as our relationship with the Grandfathers grows deeper we become more humble because we recognize how dependent we are upon the winds of fate. We come to understand that control is an illusion and that paradoxically we gain control in our life by abandoning our desire to control the actions of others and to a certain extent our own fate. We realize that life must be put into the hands of the Grandfathers.



As the relationship develops in this way, the healer learns to trust the Grandfathers with his or her fate and to depend on their protection and guidance. Ironically, Danny relates how there comes a time in our life when the Grandfathers abandon us and we are left, for a time, to face the harsh realities of the physical realm on our own. This hardship is a necessary part of the life journey, for it is at this time in our life that we must learn how to form a relationship with the Creator directly. While abandonment by the Grandfathers may seem harsh at the time, in reality it is an act of compassion because it is the Grandfather's who realize that the Anishanabe is prepared to make meaning of existence on a level of consciousness that is fostered by a relationship with the Creator. It is in this manner that the Anishanabe develops a progressively deeper relationship with all things spiritual. By the very nature of this relationship, the healer realizes his connectedness to all things and recognizes his place in the world. As a result, the healer gives his life over to the hands of the Grandfathers and the Creator. It is an action accented with humility and respect and an ever-increasing capacity for understanding the nature of existence and of the role of the healer in the healing process.

Healing ceremonies rely primarily upon the power of prayer and a communal emphasis which allows for the participation of the members of the circle. The communal nature of Aboriginal healing ceremonies is based upon the belief that the circle is strengthened by the prayers of others and that all participants in a healing ceremony bring with them their own particular gifts and

that their prayers add strength to the ceremony. A number of ceremonies, such as the sweat lodge or a healing ceremony, have the capacity to promote healing. These ceremonies are deeply intimate and spiritual in nature. They provide those present in the circle with a rare opportunity to touch their fellow human beings in a profound manner and to share their spirit and their spiritual energy. For example, during healing ceremonies spiritual energy possesses the ability to redistribute itself and to energize those who are most in need of rejuvenation and who are currently undergoing the greatest emotional, physical or spiritual stress. As a result of this flow of spiritual energy, one's reaction to participating in ceremonies such as sweat lodges can be unpredictable and dependent upon their state of mind at the moment. For this reason, participation can be arduous or refreshing depending upon what worldly concerns or troubles the participants bring with them to the ceremony. In a sense, when we attend a ceremony we may be required to suffer for others who are struggling with the harshness of the physical world. Conversely, we may occasionally require others in the circle to carry our pain for us and assist in rejuvenating our spirit so we can once again meet the challenges of the physical world and continue on our healing journey. In this manner traditional ceremonies are reciprocal in nature and participants are required to enter into a give-and-take relationship.

## **The Man From The West**

The images flashed vivid ribbons of crimson, orange, and black in his mind's eye. Like viewing fragments of a puzzle or flashes of long forgotten recollections, he saw his village ablaze as the serpentine flames leaped skyward as they hurled and coughed up black sooty breath. He saw masks of pain and despair painted on the visages of his family. Their bodies were distended, wracked and wearied by the forces of contagion. Partially clad, the open blisters on their pock-marked body lay exposed to the caustic air as they sat in spray-legged confusion. He watched helplessly as a wall of dark blue water surged over the village engulfing it in its froth before the vortex of foam and watery debris itself disappeared into an underground river buried deep within the earth. His mind was then assaulted by images of unfamiliar and strange faces that mocked and taunted him. He was both mesmerized and repelled by their eyes which transfixed both coldly and steadfastly upon him. He tried to speak but, as he formed the words he felt his throat constrict, trapping his words and leaving him mute. He watched in horror as the strangers danced upon the sacred earth and the ashes of his ancestors. Slowly a sombre face materialized and emerged from the midst of the confusion. As it took form, the man from the West recognized the face as that of his spirit guide who had been revealed to the man through dreams on two previous occasions.

The man from the West awoke from his meditation with a start. He was sitting bolt upright, his body taunt and rigid. Breathing rapidly he reflected upon

the images of his vision as he wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead. The haunting images concerned him for he felt that they could not bode well for his people. Yet, they could not be ignored. With determination he decided that he must go to see the community Elders to share his vision in an effort to seek guidance and possible interpretations of the significance of the dream.

The man from the West found the old one tending his garden near the centre of the village. The old man's face was well tanned and deep creases stood as testament to his years of experience. The old one seemed serene as he masterfully worked his hoe between rows of greenery. Upon hearing the approach of his companion the old man stopped his work and let his implement hang loosely at his side. As the man from the West held out his offering his eyes momentarily connected with that of the old man. His voice was soft and hushed as he humbly asked for the old man's guidance. "Grandfather, as one that knows I would like to ask for your help in understanding a vision that I have been given." In his ageless hands, the old man gently took the bundle of medicine, that was held out before him, before slowly turning and retreating towards his encampment. The man from the West followed in silence. For several moments no words passed between the two men. Finally, once they had reached the edge of the clearing the old one said, "I have been expecting you, but what you ask I cannot do alone. You must seek the knowledge of the old ones of the circle. Come to the ceremonial lodge tonight. I will ask the others on your behalf. We will discuss this business then...." After another moment of

reflection the old one added, "You will know what it is that you have to do my son."

Upon returning to his lodgings the man from the West spent the remainder of the day in preparation for that evening's ceremony. As he thought of the responsibility that he was undertaking, he could not help but feel excited, yet apprehensive of what lay in store. He knew that initiating such a journey would require great personal sacrifice and that the knowledge and understanding that he sought would be foreboding. Slowly, in four neatly stacked piles the man from the West laid out a number of herbs and medicines that he had picked and cured the previous summer. To each allotment of medicine he added a couple of personal items and a quantity of food. The man from the West then wrapped the contents of each of the four mounds in a differently coloured cloth. These bundles would serve as his offering to the members of the Elder's circle that the old one was organizing and from which he would receive guidance that evening. After preparing the bundles, the man from the West spent the remainder of the day in meditation and prayer for he wanted to ensure pure thoughts and a good heart.

That evening, as he made his way to the heart of the village where the ceremonial lodge stood, those that he met exchanged a knowing glance and a respectful nod of greeting. He knew that the circle could be quite large tonight for on such occasions no one was turned away and all who were compelled to attend would be welcomed to lend their support. As he neared the ceremonial

lodge the muffled sounds of singing could be heard in the wind. The hushed voices rose and fell with the rhythmic pulse of waves lapping against the shore. Upon entering the lodge the man from the West stood momentarily in the entrance way before taking a place just inside the door. He watched quietly as the old ones, sitting in their circle sang softly into the fire at the centre of the lodge which proved to be the only illumination. The rhythmic beating of the drum reverberated around the sloped walls of the lodge as the fire danced upon the faces of the young children, and family members gathered in the shadows of the lodge's outer circle. After the old ones had completed their song, they spoke softly amongst themselves in murmured tones for several moments before they acknowledged the presence of the man from the West. Without raising their eyes from the dancing fire or rising from the solid earth, they motioned for the man from the West to approach the circle.

Once the man from the West had assumed his position within the circle, the old one spoke to him gently. "My son, what is it that you ask from us? Why have you called upon us?" Accepting the old one's invitation, the man from the West made his offerings and began to explain the vision that he had received the previous night. He told of the images that he had seen and described the colours, the feelings, and the pain in as much detail as he could remember. The old ones listened quietly not taking their eyes from the fire. When the man from the West was finished recounting his story, the lodge remained silent for a long moment. Slowly the old one began to beat his hand drum and raise his voice to

the sky. The other voices of the circle followed suit and the plaintiff wail gathered strength with each repeating verse. Suddenly the old one broke off the melody and turned away from the fire to look at the man from the West. "You will find the answer within yourself. You must seek the guidance of your spirit helper, listen to the streams, the wind, the earth. Touch the stars with your mind my son. Listen to your brothers the animals. They will talk to you and they will teach you. In the morning you will begin preparations for a four-day waterless fast. You must do this for your vision is important and if you are to gain the knowledge contained within you must sacrifice of yourself and connect with the earth, your mother. I believe that what the spirits have revealed to you is a message for the entire community. I believe that unlocking its meaning is important to our very survival. This much I can tell you but the rest you must learn on your own. That is why I tell you that you must go to the centre and find the answer." The man from the West listened with his heart and when the old one was finished he recognized his words for what they were, the truth. After a respectful period of silence the man from the West thanked the circle for their assistance and pledged that he would fulfill his destiny.

The trek to the centre was long and arduous but the man from the West strode on tirelessly. His legs felt light and he felt great resolve well up in his heart. He maintained a steady quick stride until he neared the centre at which point he slowed his pace and his feet felt their way lightly upon the earth. The centre was marked by the merging of three sacred rivers to form a fourth great

river which stretched out well out into the distant horizon. The man from the West built a simple encampment on the bank of the Great river where he sat quietly upon the earth awaiting the coming darkness.

For the next four days the man from the West fasted and spent his time in prayer and meditation. As the old one had advised, he listened to the voices in the wind and for the voices that murmured and gurgled along the banks of the river. He felt a oneness with the earth in his hands and communed with the stars that danced around him in the night sky. He watched his brother the crow and his brother the bear who came to the edge of the encampment to observe his sacrifice and regard him knowingly before disappearing again into the depths of the forests. By the third day his body began to betray him. His throat was parched and constricted. His joints ached as his bones rotated in their dry sockets. No matter how he lay, or sit, he could not escape the crying of his body as it pleaded with him to forsake his quest. It begged for him to drink from the river to relieve its suffering. His body spoke in pleading tones to his rational mind, attempting to convince him that such harsh action was not required in an attempt to melt his resolve. Occasionally, as if to remind the man of its distress, the body would twitch, spasm or cramp in an attempt to persuade the man of its unnecessary peril. Many times he felt his eyes wander to the sight of the river or let his senses focus upon its moist fragrance as he listened intently to its melodious song. Each time he would gather his will to overcome the temptation and resume his regiment of prayer and mediation. He revisited his vision many



times in his dreams in meditations but the images played themselves out in disjointed, fragmented sequences. It was on the fourth day that the answers came to the man from the West as the vision was revealed in its entirety in his mind's eye. Sensing that he had fulfilled his obligation, he broke off his fast by wading into the great river and submerging himself. He allowed the cool water to pass over and through him as he gulped down long draughts of water. The cool liquid passed through his lips, into his mouth and over his gums before settling the dust in his throat. The man from the West emerged from the river weary and solemn. He had come to understand that which he had quested for, now he had to resign himself to the impact that the knowledge would have upon his life and those of the circle.

The following day the man from the West was sitting with the old one. No words exchanged between the two men for a long time. Finally, the man from the West broke the silence. "Grandfather, I have been to the centre. I have listened to the river, the earth and the stars. I have heard the voices in the wind and through my sacrifice I have found the answer that I went to the centre to seek. There is much that I have come to understand and there is much that I must tell you...."

## **Chapter III: The Insight**

### **Reflections & Realizations**

The term "conclusion" implies a termination, an end point or a finality which is irreversible and static. This concept runs contrary to traditional Saulteaux philosophy which views life as a learning journey in which we are constantly in the process of becoming. In traditional Saulteaux philosophy our awareness, perceptions, interpretations and understandings of the world are dynamic and subject to change over time. For example, while there is little doubt that the teaching of the Elders is a legitimate form of knowledge, it is important to realize that this form of oral transmission relies heavily upon the use of metaphor and the unspoken word. For this reason meaning is open to interpretation. In this manner interpretation of Danny's teachings, which are multi-dimensional and complex, are limited by my own experiences and capacity for understanding. Because these factors are in flux, the resultant interpretations of life events are dependent upon where we are in relation to our life journey. This flux is due primarily to factors that we acquire in our life such as experience, knowledge, patience and wisdom. As we gather these virtues, we are able to reflect upon our experience and arrive at a deeper understanding of the significance of certain events. Therefore, interpretations that are arrived

upon through reflection should not be termed as conclusions because they are not an end point but rather simply a point on the wheel of experience.

For this reason, I chose not to draw any "conclusions" from what I have learned through my experiences with Danny over the last several years. Instead, I will discuss what I believe to be true at this point in my journey. I do this with the understanding that my experience is limited by my personal knowledge and determined to a large extent by where I am in relation to my own personal journey. I also do this with the realization that this understanding, or way of knowing, may change and grow deeper over time as I mature and gain wisdom and knowledge. This is in keeping with the metaphor put forth in the story "The Man from the West" which can be interpreted as a description of the inward journey for knowledge encouraged by Aboriginal Elders. This metaphor depicts a journey based on a world view that looks inward for truth and which believes that the most important answers to life's questions are inside ourselves. For this reason, we must be reflective and introspective in our search for knowledge and peace of mind. As depicted in the metaphor, this journey into self must be conducted in a balanced manner which maintains harmony between the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of existence.

In comparison, the story "The Man From the East" can also be read on a number of levels and is open to metaphorical interpretation. For example, in this story one might interpret the main character's struggle as an outward journey, not unlike those endorsed by Western science, psychology and academia, which

views truth and knowledge as a foreign phenomenon which lies somewhere outside of the realm of personal experience. This approach emphasizes that truth can be objectified and, by reducing it to its smallest common denominator, can be understood in its simplest form. Unfortunately, this reductionistic manner of interpreting reality can lead to distorted conclusions regarding truth and experience. In regard to human experience, this is further complicated by Western psychology's tendency to devalue the impact that spirituality and emotion play upon human experience and in making meaning and understanding reality. This is in stark contrast to traditional Saulteaux philosophy which attempts to balance spiritual, emotional, physical and mental components of existence with equal weight and in a holistic manner. When I first began my journey with Danny, I think that I was like the man from the East in that I approached learning in an analytical manner and had many questions for which I wanted him to tell me the answers. To my surprise, each answer only prompted more questions and my thinking effectively stood in the way of true understanding. It was only after I started to trust my heart that I started to understand the profound meaning of Danny's teachings. I feel that this change in outlook was primarily due to the fact that my relationship with Danny was growing deeper and I was maturing and gaining a modest amount of wisdom.

While it is difficult to determine precisely how profound an impact Danny has had upon my life, as I reflect upon who I was and who I am in the process of becoming, I conclude that I have grown as a human being under his guidance. I

found that as I grew older, I found it increasingly more difficult to accept the duality of good and evil as depicted by Christianity. I always struggled with the idea that a loving God could knowingly condemn his children to eternal damnation for their sins. I remember one particular summer when I was a teenager and our regular parish priest was away on his annual leave. On this particular occasion, the diocese sent out an elderly priest who delivered one fire and brimstone sermon after another. After a number of weeks of being forced to endure the casternations of this holy man I came to the conclusion that hell is a fallacy created to enforce conformity and servitude amongst the members of the flock. I have a strong admiration for the teachings of Jesus Christ and I think I always will. When I recall his teachings I see a man who taught by example. He was humble and a model of forgiveness. He accepted people for who they were and willingly chose to live amongst the downtrodden and diseased. He shunned material possessions and put the best interests of others ahead of his own. In my understanding, to understand the teachings of Christ it is just as important to observe what he did as much, or more, than what he said. Unfortunately, as I grew older I came to the realization that organized religion has strayed from the teachings of Christ and emphasized their own agendas. It is this that I have always found problematic with Christian faith. Initially, when I started to listen to Danny's teachings, I found them to be somewhat fantastic, but upon closer reflection I discovered that they were not dissimilar from those things that I believed deep down in my being. Like Christ's teachings, the teachings of the

Anishanabe emphasize humility, respect, love, acceptance and communion with the spirit world. In these ways, philosophically they are not dissimilar, although each expresses these beliefs in a totally different manner. Once I came to this realization, accepting, understanding and internalizing Danny's teachings was simplified immensely.

I remember when my brother passed away several years ago. His death haunted me for a long time, and for a long time I tried to make meaning of his death. Hardly a day went by that I didn't think about him or expect to see his smiling face burst through the door. I agonized over the loss of his presence in my life. His death, like that of my father, five and a half years later, caused me to question my own mortality and purpose in life. Until I met Danny, I never put much credence in the meaning of dreams. As a rule I tended to dream only rarely and not very vividly. That is why one particular dream had such an impact upon me. It was about five months after my brother's death when I heard the phone ring. I went to answer it and heard Phil's familiar voice. His greeting was the same as always, "Hi, how's it going?" I remember a flood of joy filling my being as a big smile spread across my face. For this instance of existence, my brother lived, and I had my feet firmly planted in two worlds. My brother was alive and well although I simultaneously knew that he was no longer of this world. For this fleeting moment in time this presence was a reality as surely as my sitting here putting these words to paper. I awoke unceremoniously in my bed sitting bolt upright, my heart in my throat, a sense of joy vibrating throughout

my body. I had the sudden awareness that it was both a dream, but also much more than a dream. I knew that it was significant and although I had a sense of what it meant, I felt compelled to tell Danny of my dream and seek his insight. Sharing this with Danny served to confirm what I had already known in my heart. Whether one calls this life event a dream, a vision, or more cynically a delusion, is not important, neither does it matter whether one explains it as being spiritual in origin or a manifestation of a subconscious, the resultant impact upon my lived reality was the same. The event served to awaken me from my mourning and as a verification that my brother was happy and that his spirit had safely completed its journey. It was primarily through Danny's teachings that I began to view the world differently and I began to understand the importance of such experiences as the dream world. Danny's teachings helped me to understand my dream about my brother and they helped me to realize that I no longer needed to worry about him. This in itself was emotionally and spiritually therapeutic and was the impetus for my own healing to begin in earnest. Since this time, although my dreams have been infrequent, whenever I have dreams of Phil they arrive at a significant moment in my life and contain important symbolic meanings. In a way it is as if he continues to help me in death as he helped me in life. As fantastic as this may seem, I believe it has enabled me to accept, internalize and understand Danny's teachings on a deeper level than if I had not experienced it myself.

Because Danny spoke from his heart in a kind, compassionate, caring manner, and his teachings were not unlike some of the beliefs that I had been taught as a child, his teachings rang in my heart as the truth. For this reason, my struggle was not so much to understand Danny's teachings and that of the Bear Clan but with its implications in my own life. My struggle dealt with learning about self, my own limitations and my dependence and strong bonds to the physical world. Through the teachings I was given an increased awareness of self. This led me to see my own frailties and dependencies in a new light. I began to understand that we learn as much from our own weaknesses and failures as we do from our successes and that our weaknesses can be gifts in that they help us to better understand our true self, our limitations and our connection and purpose in the world. They serve to remind us of the importance of humility, community, and the necessity of communion with our fellow man and the spiritual realm. One's consciousness can be expanded by participating in the sweat lodge, the learning lodge and through having one's dreams interpreted. In my case, under Danny's supervision, all of these tools provided an opportunity for reflection upon myself and what is truly important in life. If properly used, this knowledge or insight can serve as an impetus for an individual to begin his healing journey. In other words, by knowing self and our limitations we begin to understand the enemy. Once we recognize the enemy whether it be our own greed, lusts or jealousies, we are able to work towards resolving these internal conflicts. This is far from an easy process. In fact it



may not even be completed during the course of this life. Therefore, we are a paradox in that we are both perfect beings and yet are flawed because of our close connection with the physical world. In this way life is a harsh journey of coming to know self and as human beings we are constantly in the process of becoming and fulfilling our destiny. As a result of this personal growth, I was becoming more like the man from the West in that my journey was becoming more reflective and introspective. My relationship with Danny, and the opportunity to learn from his traditional teachings, had a profound influence upon my life as it enabled me to better understand the meaning of relationship. It enabled me to come to know myself better and through achieving a better understanding of self and my relationship to others, I am better able to understand some of the deeper meanings of his teachings which have had a positive effect upon my life. I hope that I have been a good student.

While Bear Clan philosophy must be viewed as a unified whole, understanding the concept of spirituality is foundational to understanding its teachings. At this point in my journey, through listening to Danny's teachings, I have come to understand that prayer, meditation and fasting are methods of forming a relationship, or a dialogue, with the Creator. It is through prayer, meditation and fasting that we are reminded of our spirit's limitless nature. These disciplines remind us of the part of us that is infinite and not bound by time and space, or the bounds of physical reality. Danny says that the purpose of life is to learn knowledge which he defines as the Creator. Since the Creator

is in all things, the Creator is both physical and spiritual. Because the Creator permeates all of creation, when one learns anything, he is learning about the Creator. The view of the Creator as both physical and spiritual is but one of many paradoxes that are contained within traditional Saulteaux philosophy. Ironically, not only is the Creator both physical and spiritual, but the Creator unifies the physical realm with the spiritual realm. The large number of paradoxes contained within Saulteaux philosophy stands as testament to the complexity and depth of this world view.

In addition to the dualistic nature of the Creator, Saulteaux philosophy contains a number of other significant paradoxes. For example, according to traditional philosophy individuals are autonomous beings yet all beings and all things are interconnected and dependent upon one another. The teachings are instructional in nature and serve as a form of guidance and yet overall traditional Saulteaux philosophy is non-directive, non-judgemental and stresses the autonomy of the individual. Another paradox is the assertion that as spiritual beings we are limitless and ageless, while at the same time, we are confined and controlled by the limitations of the physical world. Another paradox that accentuates the disparity between the physical and the spiritual is the belief that as spiritual beings we are perfect, yet as physical entities we are somehow flawed by the influence that the physical realm imposes upon us. This paradoxical interchange between the physical and spiritual realm is further demonstrated by the belief that oppression of the spirit will lead to oppression of

the physical which will manifest itself in the form of physical illness. The large number of paradoxes inherent in traditional Saulteaux philosophy serve to remind us of its intricacies.

It is this complexity that makes traditional Saulteaux philosophy an indivisible experience to be lived in order to be truly understood. It is more than a philosophy. It is a way of life. One cannot hope to understand healing or any other aspect of the Saulteaux tradition unless he or she has an overall understanding of the entire philosophy as well as at least a rudimentary understanding of how it interconnects, overlaps and ties together. For this reason, to study the concept of healing in isolation is unrealistic because to understand healing one must understand the nature of creation, the purpose of existence and the nature of experience. We must also not view healing as an event. Instead we should view healing as a life-long process through which we come to an understanding of self and our relationships with the physical and spiritual universe. Healing is typically not enacted in isolation, but relies upon a communing of energy between two or more people. It is the nurturing of this connection which frees the spirit and enables it to heal the body and mind. Healing begins within the individual. It is the individual's will to initiate healing and one's ability to recognize one's spirit, and commune with the spiritual realm, that determines how dramatically and rapidly the process occurs. All healing is conducted with the understanding that we are merely privileged participants and

that meaningful healing occurs in the spiritual realm and enacted upon the physical realm through the use of conduits.

In this world we must also come to an understanding of the relationship between culture and the formation of identity, as well as the link that exists between identity and self esteem. It is my belief that it is more difficult for an Aboriginal person to grapple with identity if they have been assimilated by the dominant culture because the assimilation process forces them to interpret the world through eyes that are not their own. The final outcome of the assimilation process calls for either a denial of one's cultural heritage or a rejection of portions of the dominant culture's heritage, coupled with a return to one's culture of origin. Aboriginal Elders and academics like Albert Memmi, have foreseen the return of oppressed peoples to their cultural origin as the inevitable conclusion of the colonization process. This unavoidable reconnection to one's cultural roots plays a vital part in the healing process for both the community and the individual.

The term 'Anishanabe' refers to the process of becoming a better human being. While this process has its origins in Saulteaux philosophy, it is not exclusionary. It is a life philosophy, or path in life, which is open to all people, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. I agree with Danny who states that the process of becoming an Anishanabe is simply a way to God and God does not discriminate between the races. While the Anishanabe way is open to all peoples as a means of exploring self, because of its link to culture and history, it is of most

relevance to Aboriginal people, especially those of Saulteaux descent. In my own experience, I have found a tremendous source of insight in exploring the teachings and practising the traditional ceremonies. It is a transformational experience and I have come to believe that it can be a tremendously healthy growth experience. For my part, Danny's teachings have had a profound impact upon how I view the world and how I make meaning of life's experiences. For this, I will always be thankful.

Through both Danny's teachings and participation in fasts and sweat lodges, I have come to a deeper understanding of self, and have become a better person in the process. While I recognize that this process is far from complete, and is a life long journey, it has been a comfort to me. It has expanded my own awareness of the world around me, both physical and spiritual. While learning traditional Saulteaux philosophy and participating in traditional Bear Clan ceremonies have been a positive healing experience for me, they are not necessarily the path for all Aboriginal people. Just as the way of the Bear Clan does not exclude anyone, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, from participating, it also respects personal autonomy and the individual's right to choose his or her own path in life. For this reason, traditional Bear Clan philosophy and ceremonies are not forced upon an individual. Instead, the ceremonies are practised quietly and made available to those who choose to learn the ways of the Bear Clan as a means of becoming an Anishanabe, a better human being.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Story Telling and the Transmission of Knowledge**

Story and metaphor are a powerful tool in transmitting knowledge. This is particularly true for Aboriginal people who traditionally rely on the power of story and the oral tradition to pass cultural knowledge from generation to generation. While some people believe that story is a simplistic manner of cultural transmission, it is quite the contrary. Story, unlike the explicit writings of the Western world of academia, can be interpreted on a number of literal and symbolic levels. Therefore, the listener or reader is responsible for making his or her own meaning. This meaning is often determined by where the learner is in relation to their own journey and level of personal growth. As a result, the oral tradition contains many levels of knowledge whose deeper meanings can only be understood when the proper time for the learner has arrived.

Because the Bear Clan traditionally uses story and metaphor to transmit cultural knowledge, I have chosen to attempt to honour this approach in the manner I have approached my review of the literature. Towards this end I wrote two stories, The Man From the East and The Man From the West. I wrote these two stories after reading extensively about the differences between the Western world view and the Aboriginal world view. The differences between these two world views, and the manner in which each pursues and defines knowledge, formed the basis for the two stories. However, just as I believe that the use of story is a culturally appropriate tool for reviewing the pertinent literature on the subject, I also believe that it would be culturally inappropriate for me to explain the metaphor in an explicit manner. Instead, in keeping with the teachings of the

Elders, the metaphor and its implicit meaning should be left to be discovered and interpreted by the reader.

**Appendix B**

**The Voice of Elder Danny Musqua**

## The Voice of Elder Danny Musqua

Most of the knowledge that was conveyed from Danny to me, and upon which this thesis is based, was transmitted from within the context of the culture of the Bear Clan. It was through the ceremonies of the Sweatlodge and Learning lodge, as well as through my relationship with Danny, that his cultural knowledge was passed on to me. Over the years we have had many informal discussions and I have sat for many hours admiring Danny's phenomenal storytelling ability. However, as part of this thesis I recorded an informal interview with Danny where he discussed his people and their teachings. Although this form of research is somewhat artificial, I felt it important because I wanted this thesis to assist in developing a written record of some of Danny's teachings. I also wanted to ensure that Danny's voice, which has been so valuable in the development of my own thinking, comes through in the text of this essay. The interview was conducted in October of 1997 just before we entered the sweat lodge. Unlike the condensed version that appears in the text of the thesis, the following is a verbatim transcription of the interview in its entirety.

### **The Path of the Elder**

What the old people tell us is that we came from two different areas. One group which is my grandfather's, father's people came from western and central Ontario, International Falls, the Manitulin area, Thunder Bay area and beyond even further into the St. Lawrence. Those people arrived over here some six



hundred years and beyond. They arrived here because the conflicts that arose over there between the warring nation of the Southern United States to the south. It was one country at the time. The Iroquois were very war-like people and they were the first people to conquer those areas South of the St. Lawrence and even into the northern parts. Those were the ones who actually forced us out. That was the first migration that the old people recall with any certainty in their stories. Later, there was another group of people that came in larger numbers. As the migration continued some came because of fear, and then with the arrival of the Europeans, they came noticing the changes in their health, sicknesses, new kinds of sicknesses that accompanied the arrival of the Europeans. So, because they couldn't understand how to deal with these sicknesses, they moved, they just simply ran from these sicknesses, according to these old people. This was the only way that they could deal with what they didn't understand. They just moved. That is what the old people say. So there was a continuous migration, and as the settlers came into the country, they kept moving much, much, much further West. They had talked about areas. They had talked about the Rockies mountains, Senuitu. They talked about great rivers, great in-land seas and in-land rivers that were massive. They had the means to travel even before they had their horses. They had their boats. They learnt how to make their birch bark canoe totally without any string or thread of any kind which was very easy to repair. Everything was right there along the river. So they explored these lands further from the great lakes to the northern parts. They kept close to the rivers

and they went up these rivers. There was an abundance of food in all the river valleys all the time. So some say that they came a lot longer than six hundred years ago, but we know the migration that took place with my people in our area took place about six hundred years ago, but it was before that some of our people had come and explored the waterways.

The other area that the old people tell us that we came from was the Southern Detroit area, Wisconsin and Michigan. Another group came from there. So I was talking about the second major migration. It came after the conflict between the French and the English. That conflict caused a continuous migration to come up these rivers. Once they knew the way in which to come, they kept coming. So there was a great migration moving into the prairies because there was so much conflict and war even among the tribes themselves in the East because of the fur industry. That was the major commodity of activity. The Indians got into it too. Everybody in modern history knows that. Another great migration, especially among the Southern tribes, was in 1812 when the conflict took place between Canada and the United States. Many of the tribes that fought on the American side came to the West. My grandfather's grandmother's people came from there. Our genealogy, for our people, follows through our mothers to our grandmothers. We don't really follow our genealogy through our fathers like the European Society. For us its more important to find out the genealogy of your family through our mothers.

Women were very powerful in those days. There were women chiefs, women leaders. Ogimawqua we called them. Each in their own right being a chief or a sub-chief to a head-chief. We come from the Padiwami but Naconini is what we are termed by the Crees and this is what we call ourselves, Naconiniwak. So that is what we call ourselves. We don't really call ourselves Saulteaux. That is a name that was given to us by the French. They gave us that name because of Sault Ste. Marie where the Ojibwas use to cross the river. They were great big men and because they knew where the rocks were they use to hire themselves out to pack supplies over the rapids jumping from rock to rock. The name comes from the French word Saultaire which means jumping. So we are Ojibwa in a sense in terms of where we came from historically, but we changed when we came to these prairies. We began to associate through our marriages with the Crees. In some places we are called the Oji-Cree but we just call ourselves Saulteaux. We intermarried with the Crees for five hundred years, maybe more. This occurred much more so when we came to these prairies because the Crees were already here. So being a brother tribe we allied with them and we protected one another. They were protective toward us. We lived in close proximity. We intermarried with one another. So the Naconiniwak is what we want to be known as. That is what we want to be called. That is what we are. We are an offspring of both the Cree and the Eastern Indians that came from Ontario, Wisconsin, Michigan and that area. The old people tell us that we are a distinct tribe to ourselves. We want to be a distinct tribe. These is only

eight thousand of us. We are a very small group. Some of the old people are worried that we are going to be swallowed up by the Cree or swallowed up by the Ojibwa. We want to be who we are and who we believe we are, a child of both and to say that we are one or the other would be to profess our destruction. We don't want to be swallowed up by either one or the other. We are who we are. We have a distinct society and a distinct language. We are unique. We have a mixture of both the Cree and the Ojibwa ceremonies different from both the Ojibwa and the Cree. They are similar but different. At one time we were all just one big nation. As we moved further away from one another our languages began to differ, but we have common ancestry from the same nation. We call ourselves the Anishanabe. We are just human beings. We are made of the earth and spirit. Anthropologists and sociologists have just recently captured what they call the Algonquin Nation which they say is comprised of something like 50 tribes. We as a people call ourselves the Anishanabe. We have many common languages the MicMacs, the Maliceets, the Ottawas, the Ogawas, the Patawagees, the Crees, the Winebagos, Ojibwa, the Nakawaniniwak which we are, came from there. So that's what the old people tell us that we came from one common ancestry. The clans are part of the Anishanabe people. We set ourselves into clans under symbols of animal deities. So as to keep the Nation's healthy there isn't any intermarriage between members of the same clan, particularly if they are members of the same family. Sometimes intermarriage only occurred in the clan with those who were adopted into the bear clan.

Basically, there were seven major clans. It was divided into seven to reflect our spiritual teachings. All of our teachings and all of our disciplines and our virtues and our living principles of life, the skills that we get out of life, come from the teaching of seven, the seven disciplines, seven virtues, seven grandfathers, seven stages of life and seven levels of life. We decided that seven was a very important number so we use that process of seven in developing a government based upon the seven clans. We used it to more or less organize and keep order and keep the people strong and healthy. Each clan was also a government process. The Ojibwa people, the Algonquin people, the Patawami people all used the same process. Each clan would have its own chief, its own headman and their Elders to maintain the clan and the teachings of that clan were based upon the teachings of that symbol. The Bear Clan is basically warriors, the army, the policing societies and they were the most numerous because everybody was an honorary member because of the purposes of army. It was the military and the policing society so everybody at one time would be a part of it. But the Bear Clan is also a specific clan in itself. Those specifically from the Bear Clans are usually the ones that are the generals, who are organizers and leaders of the army, as well as the teachers. So that's how it was and the other clans I don't really don't know that much about them. The process is that we try to maintain the knowledge of our clan as specifically as we can. I would say that the three leading clans are the Crane clan, the Eagle clan and the Loon Clans. The Bird Clans are always the ones who are the chief

clans. The Hoofed clans are more the medicine societies. The Turtle clans associated with all the other sub-clans and the Fish clans. They were more or less the ones that know about things like dreams. They were great philosophers. The Wolf and Bear Clans they were the army. The Weasel Clans were also the ones that worked as artisans and craftspeople and there were healers too although there were healers in all societies. To say that I know the specifics about them is wrong, but I'm just trying to give you a little bit about what I know.

The Bear clan was supposed to maintain all of the stories of all the clans. We were supposed to keep the stories of all the clans intact. So there, in that sense, I would say that we are a failure because I certainly don't know enough about those clans to tell you what they are, and yet we are supposed to know. The difficulty there was that the old people, the grandfathers, could only tell us so much about our own clan because there was so much to teach about our clan alone in the brief time that they had to teach us which was during the summer months. I was just a little boy when I had most of my education from my grandfather, but I was one of those who was fortunate enough to be around those old people, but he was not the only one. It would be the unfair to say that he was my only teacher. I spent most of my time with him because he took care of me. He took care of us. I spent more time with him because I was a sickly little child and maybe I was his special little one. Every grandparent tends to claim one little one for himself. In that sense he more or less took me in because I was there and I was sickly. There was another old man called old Kewatin who came to

visit him a lot of times and another old man that was called the Wild Man. And there was another one called Blackbird. These old men were also there and they would speak and tell stories. All of them would tell their stories to the children that were there. It was very important that they tell their stories to the children because children have the capacity to remember things much better than adults. They can attain information much more effectively than older people. Children really have fertile minds. A child's mind is like a garden and the grandfathers would call us their "Gitigon" their garden, meaning that they would seed all of their information, their teachings, in the child's mind and it would grow. The children were called gitigone which meant the garden where they saved their knowledge. This was the term they would use, the old people.

What is really important in my life is to live a fruitful life. I was raised up in a very large family and most of my life was based upon survival and upon sharing things with one another. Mom and dad only had enough food to give us. Dad was a very good hunter and a very good provider so that was what was wonderful about my life with my family and my brothers and sisters. The time that I spent with my brothers and sisters was always wonderful. I grew up as a sick child. I was sickly. I had epilepsy. I had TB by the time I was four or four and a half years old. When I was five or six years old, I got healed. My grandparents kept me at home and looked after me. I had consumption which was a sickness that I had contacted from my deceased brother-in-law when I used his cup. We were deep in the forest and my father was working in a mill. He was cutting logs and

hauling logs from the bush to the mill which most of the guys on the reserve would do in those days. And this is where I contracted my sickness. My grandparents came and got me from there. I use to spend a lot of time back and forth between my parent's home and my grandparent's home. Most of the time I was with my grandmother because I would get sick, epileptic, and grandmother had the time. So I was always being borrowed from one place to the other. Grandfather would come and put up a big fuss when he didn't have me so they would let me come home with him. He would turn into a big angry bear if he didn't have his baby around. That's the way I am too when I don't have my grandchildren around, especially a couple of the ones that are very close to me like my baby daughter whom I call Cynthia. She is the youngest and the little boys are very close to me and I'm trying to raise them up. I can only allow them to be out of my sight for four or five days and then I go into a quandary and then I start huffing and puffing. I guess that's how my grandfather would have been too and I can see a very close resemblance between the way he would have spoken and the way I speak now about these kind of things. I spent a great deal of time with old people all my life because they were the first people I met and the first people with whom I had a relationship. I was always around. So I learnt a lot by just being there when they were telling their stories and I also learned how to appreciate life as thoroughly as I could because of my being sick all of the time. I know about being sick. I know about being alone. I know about being hurt, physically. There is one thing I can tell you and that is I know what being



physically sick is all about. Pain is no big stranger to me. I know about physical pain. Sickness does that, especially epilepsy and seizures. You're so helpless. It is something that I don't wish upon anybody. And having also suffered from TB, consumption, I knew pain and hurt. You know, sometimes all you could do was to hope them away and think them away. We didn't have pills or medicine for epilepsy or even any medication for tuberculosis. So my whole feeling and attitude had a lot to do with how well I would recover. I guess, how well I recovered was based upon my feelings and my faith in God, my belief that God would always be there and God is always there. My grandfather taught me that God is in all things. God is everywhere. God is merciful, omnipotent. God knows and has a plan for everything. Every person who has been born has been given a road and a purpose on this earth, even if it's a very wicked thing that he comes to live for. Even if his body wins over his spirit, even in that journey he is of help to other people by his misery. By his treachery other people learn how to understand what treachery is. He can serve as an example of these kind of people and so we can say don't be like that, and a lot of times treachery is a result of our own failure to know what goodness is. When we stray away from goodness, we have the companion of evil with us. Evil is always there. You can't be the companion of both. You can only be the companion of one. That's what the old people tell us. So I learnt that and I learnt to become a very fun-loving, happy child. I had to be because I didn't have very much with which to live. My whole happiness was dependent upon being around my grandfather, my

grandmother, my father, my mother, my uncles, my aunts. I spent a lot of time finding things humorous. I tried to find laughter in everything I did. Maybe that's why I survived. I always found humour in everything. I like humour. I like hearing a good story. I like hearing a good joke. I think life is far too serious a lot of times. Life is a very serious thing. It's a very serious occupation and you can end up being overly involved in the seriousness of it. You have to balance seriousness and being foolish enough to laugh at yourself and to laugh at your own failures. If you do that you will learn to be much more aware of the things that you do right and wrong. So that's what I was taught and that's how I grew up. I grew up around the sweat lodge. I grew up around the stories of the old people. I grew up in a place locked from the outside world on the reservation. We were locked from the outside world and we could only surmise and suppose what took place on the other side of the fences in the settlers' communities. We were fortunate to be living next to a couple old Ukrainian farmers who were very friendly to my father and his brother, uncle Bill. So our relationship with these old people was very good because they were very good neighbours.

I grew up learning to live as freely and happily as I could. I loved to go walking in nature with my grandfather. I loved walking out with my father and my uncles when they went out hunting. I was never much of a hunter myself but I loved hunting small game and eating wild food. I still do. I was not too exciting about killing anything, but yet I had to. I've killed my fair share of wild animals, but I've never really found it good to kill anything. Everything is so beautiful when

it's alive. It, like everything else, has the right to live and a place where it must be and, if animals are here to sustain humanity, we must use them only when we need to use them. That is why I despise the whole idea of hunting for sport. I think it's a bloody waste of good animal life. I think you should only hunt when you need to. I think it is a shame what they have done to our people, keeping us away from hunting and doing the things that we were born naturally to do, to live on the land, to be of the land.

These things I am very sorrowful for, but life goes on. We change with the tides of time. Like everything else we have to change with the things that come into our world. To have to change those things that are necessary to help us survive in the world. The world is changing. Even as we sit here the world is changing right now. Nature is changing. So everything has to adapt to fit into what nature is changing into. It is the natural instinct of man to fit into the natural world, but lately he has not done that. Instead, man has changed things in nature. The old people told us that we would have problems because of that. So I spent a lot of time in my life learning. I love to learn. I learned to read early in life. I know I will never be alone if I have a library. If I had a thousand books I would probably stay in one place and read all the time. That's just the way I am. But one thing I know is that books are fallible. What we write today maybe all wrong tomorrow. I learnt that man's knowledge is fallible. Man's knowledge is not exact. We use time to tell us how exact we are and some of the things we talk about today are totally wrong tomorrow. It could be all wrong, but that is

man. We are limited beings who are taught by our successes and failures, probably more from our failures than successes. Our failures bring us to success. I was looking at a documentary on aeronautics and all the people that died, the pilots and good men, so we could break the sound barrier, but when we did we understood the beginnings of the first stage of entry into space and beyond the powers of the gravitational forces of this world. So we learn through our mistakes, and we have to learn this way because we are fallible beings. I learnt that early in life. I learnt that as a child. I learnt that from the old people and I never stopped remind myself that I am a fallible being. Through their advise I have learned how to respect death. I'm not afraid of it. It is non-sensical for anybody to fear death because we are all going to die. The thing you have to do is prepare yourself as best you can. You know that at the point of death when death comes your going to suffer and your going to have to die and its as simple as that. Its much more important that you use your suffering as a tool of understanding the inevitable. That's what I learnt early in life.

I grew up in school always wondering why people sent their children there because we were so lonely and so far removed from the things that we loved. We were so far away from the people who loved us, the people that mattered to us. I could never really understand the purpose of people wanting you to understand God in a situation that was wrong and with people that didn't have the right to be there teaching you the things that they were teaching you because they weren't your parents. It was the result of their missionary zeal. It was their

attempt to try to help us understand Jesus as they thought we should. I understand now that this was their missionary vocation to do this but I don't really rightly believe that what they were teaching was true because, in the way they were teaching us, they were totally contradicting themselves in what they were saying and what they were doing, especially in comparison to what Jesus was saying and doing. Jesus was a wonderful loving human being and I learnt that from my mother. My mother taught me about Jesus early in life. My mother taught me about Christianity. Her type of Christianity I'll never forget and I will always embrace and love her teachings as I love all the things she taught me. I will always respect the great love she had for her faith. She never even really preached to me. She was an example of those teachings and from her I learnt to watch if people did the things they said. And so I try to live that way and I try to teach my children by the things that I do because my father and grandfather before me taught me that way. They taught by doing things for me and by living the things they were saying. It is so important to me. So there is little or any effect upon me by people who do a lot of saying and do very little doing.

We have to remember that God is the essence of all life. I have to totally rely on God's message in my life everyday. The message of God in my life everyday is all around me right here. I learnt that as a child as I walked into the forest and heard the birds singing, or I see a rabbit in the grass, or the beauty of a coyote sunning across an open plain, or the beauty of exuberant lively fox. It is all so beautiful. There are teachings in all of these things and I know that God is

magnificent and that he is great when I see all of these beautiful creatures. Creatures that are totally reliant upon God. They don't question him. They don't put food away or sow anything. I learnt that even before I read the good book. I learnt that from the teachings of the old people. These creatures are totally at the love and mercy of God and, if you can live like them, you will truly begin to understand who God is and what God wants of you. So I try to live that way and when I didn't live that way I fell on the wayside of misery, shame and pain. It caused a lot of misery and pain to be invoked upon me by people I did not understand, and I really can't do anything about that because it was another necessary experience in my life. I didn't like what took place, but I was never raised up to hate anybody. I was raised up to love and I was surrounded by love and mercy and understanding. So I cannot hate these people who hurt me, or who hurt my character. I cannot hate the religious people who did the things that they did to me because of their good intentions. I can't really hate these people because they had good intentions, but they just did it in the wrong way. I forgive them because that is the only way to become free. If you let hate and anger stay within you, it will eat you up and it will eventually consume you. If it consumes you, you will die of it. You will kill yourself, or be killed, or you will go out there and kill someone because you can't let the teacher of death be part of you. So that's the way I've lived all of my life.

I've lived everyday always conscious of the Creator's mercy that surrounds me. And every day I pray. I can't remember a day that I didn't pray. I pray every

day. I pray sometimes because I have nothing else to do and if I have nothing else to do I should pray. That's important because then I am doing something good. Even if I'm not good at least I'm doing something good, I'm praying. I think we are good when we try. I don't think anybody could really say he is good until he tries, and you can't try it, you've just got to do it. So I've always done the things that I believe that I should do and being true to those things that you believe in is the most that you can do in life because we are limited beings. We are confined by all of these limits around us. We are bounded by failure every day because we are limited beings. I understand my failure. My failures are much better reminders for me to do better next time. We live to do better next time. From one hurdle to the next. From one step to the next. A human being walks up the mountain one step at a time. And that is what my grandfather, and my father, and my grandfather's father said: Use all of your faculties to understand this world and to live the best you can. That is what you are here for, to fulfill your journey, to fulfill that which is given to you. He doesn't put it right there for you in an open book. You have to find it somewhere inside yourself. It's in your mind. It's in your spirit. It's right back in there somewhere. You'll find it as you do it, and as you do it, it becomes much more clearer what your destiny is. If this is my destiny then I am doing what the Creator wants me to do. Here we are sitting in this beautiful place. That's why He wants me to be here. He wants me to be happy to come here and to speak with you. And I am happy and I have fulfilled my destiny and His purpose in my life. And that is how I have lived most

of my life as a young person on the reservation, loving and hating it because we were so limited in what we could do. The government controlled everything we did and we were treated more like children. There was paternalism then.

Paternalism, for what I don't know. I think sometimes paternalism was more geared to protect everybody else around us, against us, rather than us against them because we were poor and I think we still are because of the way the reservation system is set up. The Indian agents were the predators then and our leaders today that have been taught by the department of Indian affairs, are our predators now. They are doing the same things that Indian affairs did to us.

That's what the old people tell us. They say that we will go from one state to the next, but we will not be vanquished by these things and by what these people do to us. The Creator has a purpose for our people. Our purpose is to teach people how to live in this world. The purpose of the First Nations' people, the purpose of the Anishanabe is to teach people how to live in this world, to live in the beauty of this world. We are a people. We are earth people. We are a people of the earth and, if anybody wants to understand the beauty of this earth, they can come and sit with me. That's what Mushum would say. Come and sit with me and love the pristine beauty of life thereon. That is what it means to be an Anishanabe.

I went to residential school for ten years. I enjoyed it and I disliked it, but it was a necessary part of my journey. It was not all bad. There were many good things such as I can read and write. There were some good priests and there were some good nuns. They weren't all bad. Like everything else the bad ones



made all the good ones look bad and the bad ones made it worse for all the good ones. Some of them should have never been priests. Like everyone else some of them should have been married. Why they did these things we will never know. I don't know. When I think about it in my mind, it is something I don't understand. So I continue to live by those teachings because I've learned even in that place. I learnt from some of the good priests. Just like I learnt from my grandfather, I learnt from some good priests and some good nuns. I've learnt some good things and there were some good people. There is nothing wrong with religion my grandfather said. If it is meant for you then you should follow it and live it well. That is all you can do and if it's not for you then it's not for you. But me I have lived both as an Anishanabe and as a Christian. I'm a Catholic. I don't necessarily believe all of things that I was told in Catholicism because I am an avid reader and I've learnt how to find out some things about the good book myself which don't necessarily fit with the things I was told. But I don't go around saying those things are all wrong. I keep it to myself. I don't go around saying you shouldn't believe in this thing, you shouldn't believe in that thing, this is what it says in this scripture, this is what it says in that scripture. I don't do that because I have this feeling that we don't understand what it is anyway. The old people tell us that the good book says itself that you can't understand the word of God. As a Christian, I would say that we can't understand the good book. He tells us right there. God tells us through his holy people that we couldn't understand his words and he said I will send you holy men and prophets to tell

you what this means. Nobody can tell me that you can spend four years, seven years or even fifteen years in some monastery or some bible school somewhere and all of the sudden you can become an expert on the word of God. I think many times those people come to realize that after fifteen years of study they know as little as they did when they started about the word of God. That's because the word of God has to be lived before it can be understood. You can't talk about the word of God until you've lived it. If there is one thing that I've learned from my grandfather and the old people is, do as little talking as you can, but do as much as you can. Then, once you've done it, you can talk about it because the only real truthful thing in this earth is what you've experienced. So you should talk about your experience and you should relate your experience. That is total honesty because you're relating to something you did and not to something that someone told you to do, that someone told you to talk about or that you read about in some book. That's what the old people tell us. So I live by the things that I have learned by observing what the old people do and other people do.

My mother was an avid church goer and I went to church. I still go to church. There is nothing wrong with my going to church. I loved it because my mother impressed it upon me. The grandfathers taught me to be a good human being. They gave me all of the Christian teachings and all of the teachings in the Anishanabe way. Both are geared towards helping one become a good person. To be disciplined, to be understanding, to be loving, to be good at what it is you

are to do. Anything that you are going to do you ought to be good at. So they gave you the tools, they gave you the teachings, they gave you the disciplines to do that, and they said if you want to be a good man come and fast and sweat, and fast and meditate and pray with me. You'll be a good man. If you want to be a good priest come and sweat and fast and pray with me and you'll be a good priest. You won't come to these lodges and lose your priesthood. You'll come out of here a better priest. You'll have everything you have. If you want to be a good Catholic then practice it well. If your not sure of yourself then go and fast cause we've got to fast. That's all we do. We fast to know who we are. We have the tools. The tools are there. The sweat lodge is only a tool. Its a prayer tool. It is very much like when you go to the church and you use the rosary or a holy picture of the holy book. The bible is a tool. That's all it is. They made no religions of it. Its not a religion. Its all discipline. Its all systems of self-learning and self-analysis and self-development - human development. That is what the old people said that these teachings were all about. The day that they begin to make a religion of it, that will be the day that you've lost the meaning of it all. Its only here to help you learn who you are and to help you make a better road for yourself in whatever you're doing. I say to these people, ok you want to be a better Pentecostal, come and sweat with me. It will make you a much better Pentecostal. This won't take anything away from you. It will only strengthen you and make you much more fervent in what you are doing. We never talk about religion. We never talk about faith in so far as my faith as opposed to your faith.

We talk about our journey. We talk about our healing. We talk about the things we do and that's what the old people did when they talked about themselves. They didn't talk about that guy. As soon as you start talking about that guy, hey, hey, that's gossip. We don't need that. We need human growth here. We need the things that you can see and things that you can touch to help me understand what that young person over there is feeling. There are no "musts" here. The only must is that you must worship God. God is the only one that is due worship. Nothing else. Everything else is a tool. Everything else is a means of learning. That's all it is. Only God is due worship. And we talk about the spirits and the angelic beings. Well, it tells you in the good book that they are at work in the universe and the old people believed the same thing, but they are not due worship because they too are created beings. Only God is due worship, but we can ask these angelic beings to pray with us. We can ask for them to sit down, and we can ask them to help me and pray for me. You are much closer to God my brother so help me. We can ask them for help. We can ask them to ask God to bless us. They are like a good court worker who can go and speak to the judge for me. That's the way these spirits are. You can speak and pray to them, but you cannot worship them like an infallible or an eternal God. That's what the old people say. That's what I think.

I have no difficulty being Anishanabe. I have no difficulty because all I've ever learnt is to be a good human being, a good Anishanabe. And if I'm a good Anishanabe I can be a good Catholic. I'm not necessarily sure that if I'm a good

Catholic I can be a good Anishanabe because I am bounded by all of their doctrines and dogmas and their whole idea of congregating and having numbers, and a bigger population, or throng, or big organization. Everythings been organized for us so we don't organize it. The world is too perfect to be organized. The only real organizer and master that I really want is God in my life. That's the most. That is what the old people tell us. He is the most. He is all. He is everything. That's how I've been taught so that is how I live. I've lived all over this land. I went to the north into the Yukon. I've worked in many Indian organizations. I've raised up ten children. I'm a recovered alcoholic. I'm also a recovered parent because I was an alcoholic, I neglected my parental obligation to my family for ten years in my hard drinking times. If it wasn't for my wonderful wife I guess my poor little children would have been lost. Today I try to retribute myself by trying to do good things with them. Sometimes people say I am spoiling them. Well, I was spoiled when I was a child. I was spoiled good with a lot of love. I don't mind spoiling anybody with love because if there is anything is going to carry you, the loving and understanding that you get from your mother and father is going to carry you. If your going to spoil someone spoil them with a lot of love. Constructive love. So when I give I give my children twenty bucks or five cents I tell them why I'm giving it to them. Because your a good boy or because I want you to go and do this for yourself. I don't want you to go and waste it. I worked darn hard for my money. That's what my Mushum said, " I worked hard to get this thing. I worked all over the bush so I don't want you to

waste it. I went over there and I got cold and I chopped trees down to give you this nickel.” That’s what my dad used to say. So don't waste it. “If you want to waste something go and get your own nickel and work and waste that, but don't waste mine because I'm giving it to you out of the goodness of my heart and because it comes from the goodness of my heart, I don't want you to waste it.” That’s how Mushum would say it so that’s how I treat my kids today.

I try. A lot of times we fail but I fail too. That’s because we are human. We’re limited beings. We succeed in spite of our failures. That's what it means to be a human being. We're not perfect. In life we are gradually elevating ourselves to that state of perfection that is going to come when we die. When we die, a door opens. Death opens a door. We have to elevate ourselves for that. The key in the end is always what you give on this earth. Old grandfather death will come and say it is time to go home. Yet we are always trying to make deals with him. People are lucky that know they are going to die. That's what grandfather used to say. They that don't know they are going to die we should feel sorry for them. But he who knows he is going to die is blessed with time because he knows his time has come. We only have so much time to live. So he has all of that time and he is blessed, he who knows that he is going to die, while others still aren't aware of anything about the end. That's what my old people tell us. I am sixty years old now so I'm happy. If I live another ten more years I'll be even doubly happy. I'm happy with every day I live. You have to be happy with every day you've got. That's the most you've got, twenty-four hours of

beauty. Who is so blessed to live in such a place. In this world there are people starving, children dying, people who don't even have a morsel of food, people that are afraid to poke their head out because somebody is going to shoot them. We probably live in the most beautiful country in the world. The most beautiful land in the world is right here. You're blessed! I'm blessed! Thank God for letting us be a part of this beautiful place. Thank God for your bringing me here because I'm truly happy, truly at my very best. This to me is where I'm really at my happiest time. This is how I was raised up as a child. I have done my best with the children that I have. If they failed then I have done something wrong. It is not their fault. It is not their fault if they failed for I have overlooked something and I'll have to deal with it if it ever comes. But I know what it is.

Well, like I say I wasn't a brat. For two years I went to Saint Joe's College then I went home and I farmed. I farmed for thirty years. Dragging and scratching with old broken-down equipment but always making enough to eat and feed my kids. I tell my kids that if there is one thing that I can tell you that is absolutely important its that you earn your bread. You earn your keep. There is no dignity in someone putting a loaf of bread on your table and giving it to you. If there is something that I would tell you is that I have always earned my bread. Even when I went out to the bush to bring an animal down, and it was cold and miserable out there, I brought it down and put that meat on the table. That's dignity. I never want anybody to take that away from me. I never want anybody to take my dignity away from me. Right now that's one of the most important

things that we can teach a child. Your land is your dignity! Your work is your dignity! Dignity is when you can buy that food, when you can work for it, and put the clothing on your back. I'm totally unhappy and grieved by what the government is doing my people. Even my own children. This welfare! Taking away all of our hunting rights. Taking away all the things that we use to live by honourably and feel dignified. If there is anything that this government is going to lose for, it will be that. This hidden genocide that they are practising. In the world of nations they are great, but by golly God is going to judge them hard for what they are doing to us. He is going to judge the churches hard. Our people say why are the churches in trouble. Because God judged them hard, they are being punished for what they have done to us. The next guy that is going to be punished is Mr. Government himself. The Canadian government is going suffer hard by God's judgement for what they are doing to the First Nations' people in this land. Putting them on welfare and keeping them there. Keeping them from the competitive world and not giving them the skills, and all of the sudden there are huge numbers of them and they realize, "Oh we got to make them pay taxes because they are getting everything for nothing." It's there own dang fault. They've done that for almost one hundred years. They've fed those guys and locked them inside the reservations without skills, and they took away all of their bread wampums and their bread storages. They took away the lands over there, the hunting lands and the trapping lands. That's where they were good. They should have left them there. They would have saved millions of dollars if they



would have let the people stay in their trap lines, let them keep on hunting in the forest and feeding themselves. Now their saying, "Oh they're costing us money." But it's their own fault. I say this to a lot of people but they just laugh. Still I say that Canada is under judgement. God says that I don't just judge individuals but I judge countries too. I judge Nations and Canada will be judged. They are already having their problems with the French wanting to separate. Well I say, "Ok. We want to use the beauty of what God gave you. God gave you this land to look after. He didn't want you to come and destroy people because of the land and because they gave you the land. They have to maintain their nationalities on those reservations, that's what the old people say." There's no reason why those reserves can't help us keep our national identity, our language and those things that God made us to be as a Nation. That's why they gave up the land so they could maintain their national identity. But anyway that's the things that my grandfather, and my father especially, taught me. They said that there will come a time when we'll have the means to stand up and tell the world about our plight. There will be a time when we have enough educated people like yourself and other Indian and Metis people that are just as educated as everybody else now. There will be a time when the government will respond. There will be a time when this will happen because our numbers are getting stronger. We're are not getting weak. We are going to unite. We are going to unite as a people. We are going to unite, not just the tribes, but the Metis people are going to unite with us and we will come under one roof. The government is going to throw us in one big

pot. They are going to succeed at doing that but it will be politically volatile. It will be volatile because the government won't accept what it has created. All of the sudden there will be people in government offices and our politicians will be sitting there on their doorstep and we'll be sitting beside them. They will create that. Pretty soon our people will start organizing and saying, "Ok you guys, all of you phone these houses on Riverbend or up in Riverside over there or over there in Confederation." We will band together to put one guy in city office. It's coming. I'm not talking like that. It is the young people that are talking like that. There saying wait, we want one candidate from all of the reserves. Where all of the reserves will come under one or two constituencies. We want people in office. That's coming. The people are starting to talk. It's not me. It's our young educated people that are learning this, and when they get into those places the government will have to listen. The government will succeed in uniting us, but it will not be to their liking. That's what the old people said. Isn't life that way? We have to do things we never like, but sometimes those things that we don't like are sometimes the best things for us. It will be the same for any nation. It is the same for the nation as it is for the individual. Nations are compelled by the things that we have to do in order to hold the common dignity of people and their need to be who they are. Who they are is important. Who they are as a people, and who they are as individuals. Hey!

**Appendix C**  
**Agreement and Consent Forms**

## Agreement and Consent Form

To Danny:

As you are aware I am in the process of completing my Masters of Education degree through the College of Graduate Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. As a graduate student in the Indian and Northern Education Program in the Department of Educational Foundations, I wish to focus my learning on the Saulteaux philosophy and its teachings on healing.

As the focal point of the thesis, I would like your permission to discuss the teachings that you have shared with me over the last several years. I would also request your permission to audio tape a number of informal discussions that we will have. I would also like your permission to share the story of our relationship and how your teachings have impacted my life. When appropriate, I would like to refer to the traditional beliefs and practices of the Bear Clan and discuss how these teachings can be utilized to foster healing in contemporary society.

It is understood that you will receive copies of all the information gathered while conducting research for the thesis. It is also understood that I will securely store and retain copies of all written and recorded research information for a five year period after which all information will be destroyed unless otherwise indicated by yourself.

In your role of mentor, Elder and teacher, I humbly recognize that you will have final authority on any or all material that is included in the final draft of the thesis and as such you will be able to determine how your knowledge is utilized. It is also understood, that once the thesis is published, that the content may be included in the research of others. However, it is also understood that you can withdraw your involvement and permission at any time, and that none of the knowledge that you have conveyed will be used without your full knowledge and written permission.

Thank you for considering this request.

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I agree to participate in this study:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Danny Musqua

If you require further information, please call me at 763-1129 or 764-1797.

Michael Relland: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D**  
**Data Release Forms**

**Consent Form**

I have reviewed the final draft of the thesis for its accuracy and interpretation. I have made all of the changes I feel necessary and agree to the release of this information for use in your thesis in the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Danny Musqua

If you require further information, please call me at 763-1129 or 764-1797.

Michael Relland: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_