

KEWETAN: WALKING IN THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEPS OF OUR WOODLAND CREE  
GRANDPARENTS

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of Health Sciences  
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Saskatoon

By

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## ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

**Background:** Storytelling is an important custom of Woodland Cree and important to understanding the Values inherent in the Indigenous health promotion of home life and housing. The literature on housing and health has been largely deficient in connecting positive health outcomes with housing, applying frameworks and methodologies, not designed to capture these important dimensions of dwelling places, and does not ask inhabitants to speak from the heart on what they enjoy about homes. Rather it separates the person from the house and rates all the negative characteristics of the built environment. The research question ‘What are the Traditional Values and customs that guide the stories of personal well-being, family, homes and communities of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band in Saskatchewan?’ informed the Storytelling. Implicit in the question is how we walk in the footsteps of our Cree Ancestral Grandparents when we carry out their time-honoured relationships with family and home. Home connotes a dwelling that is animate, alive with Spirit and feelings of Love, whereas house refers to the physical structure or container. In Cree culture, the body is a sanctuary for the Soul; likewise, a house or Tipi is a sanctuary for the Soul of individuals and families. A community is an extension of the individual and the family; how one contributes to community is dependent on the Spirit of the home in which one resides. Thus, the research objective of this study became to explore the healthy personal / family and housing strategies that ensure (d) the Wholistic well-being of Woodland Cree Peoples living in the Lac La Ronge Indian Band reserve.

**Methodology:** The Woodland Cree Lac La Ronge Indian Band (LLRIB) is comprised of six northern communities and 13 Elders and Knowledge Keepers lived in three of these sites. I am a member of the LLRIB and a former resident of La Ronge. I am not a fluent Cree speaker but was raised in the custom of Storytelling by my Cree relatives; therefore I chose Indigenous Story work as a methodology. Participants engaged in a Storytelling interview process yielding 21

transcriptions. Participants reflected on being raised in a hunting, fishing and trapping economy as well as family life in Northern Saskatchewan. Analysis of the data was through Story creation and thematic analysis using Wholism via the Tipi Teachings *and* the LLRIB Medicine Wheel to understand how houses were transformed into homes through Woodland Cree community and family life.

**Discussion:** Wholistic health is a foremost Value outlined in the Medicine Wheel of the LLRIB and is conveyed in the motto of their Education Unit as *kiskinwahamātotān*, which means ‘Teaching Each Other’. The data yielded four themes which align with the four goals of the Education Unit of the LLRIB: Culture, Pride, Skills and Values. The Wholistic health of the Woodland Cree encompasses not only the Spiritual, Emotional, Physical and Mental domains of Wholism, but can be understood in the strength-based activities and traditions that are taking place in Woodland Cree homes according to Culture, Values, Skills and Pride. These activities and traditions are the rich Medicine that connects the community. The cultural activities include language, seasonal gatherings, fishing, hunting, trapping, Oral Traditional Stories, Spirituality, and art. The Values of Love, Sharing, Faith and Kinship as per the Cree Tipi Teachings shape the daily activities of the Storytellers. Historical and contemporary Skills are discussed within the context of Pride. Pride permeates all the interviews as the Storytellers chose topics that were of utmost interest to them. They were proud of the Skills that they had developed in response to trapline life and a modern economy. They related how colonization impacted their ways of life, yet they held dear to them their languages, Customs and Traditions.

This portrait of Wholism that is reflected in the combined dimensions and Values identified in the Tipi Teachings and LLRIB Medicine Wheel is not evident in most of the scholarly literature. Questions about the ‘house’ or ‘houses’ were the entry point to our conversations, but the focus

quickly turned to the idea of ‘home’, maintained through strong Kinship relationships as the foundation to Wholistic well-being.

This research Story was inspired by the Pride I hold for our People and the rich Culture of the Woodland Cree. This research Story enhances a sense of Pride in a rich Indigenous cultural identity. It is one of my ways of *kiskinwahamātotān* which means ‘Teaching Each Other’. If I could fulfil a wish, it would be that all people live in well-built shelters that emanate the Spirit and Culture of her inhabitants. Thank you for joining me in this Ceremony.

<sup>1</sup> Following Greg Younging’s (2018) Elements of Indigenous Style, this dissertation capitalizes words ‘where conventional style does not’ (p.77). Terminology that is of a Spiritual nature is capitalized such as the Values of the Tipi Teachings or the domains of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band Medicine Wheel (Culture, Values, Skills and Pride). References to Participants or Storytellers are also capitalized as well as Medicines such as Balsam and Sweet Grass.

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To all, I offer my deepest Gratitude for all your kind and generous support, whether Spiritual, Emotional, Physical, or Mental. As the song goes, 'you were the wind beneath my wings'.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to Brooks McMullin, Andrea Still, Matthew, Martin and Logan

Nelson, Thank you for Being my Family.



**KEWETAN: WALKING IN THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEPS OF OUR  
WOODLAND CREE GRANDPARENTS**



Photograph permission of Frances Charles, April 4, 2024. Mooshum Mathew Charles, Kokum Lydia Charles, and sons Edward and Fred in front of their log cabin at Kitsaki Reserve, Lac La Ronge, Saskatchewan

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## GLOSSARY OF CREE WORDS

*Achimowin* – Storytelling

*Athikipisim* – Frog Moon or May

*Ayamihiwatisowin* – Spirituality

*Chapans* – Great- grandchildren

*Ciscekwahikanisa* – Relationships

*Eeyouch* - James Bay/Eastern Cree

*Ikwa* - And

*Iskotew* - Fire

*Iskwew* - Woman

*Iskwuptew* – Central fire

*Kanateyimowin - Pikisowin* – Cleanliness

*Kaskatinowipisim* - Freeze- up Moon or November

*Kewetan* – Let us go home

*Kewetin* - North

*Kici etataytamowin – Iyitateethitamowin* –Hope

*Kickisewin – Kanawethimikwisowin* - Ultimate protection

*Kihceyhtowin* – Respect

*Kimama* – Your mother

*Kinnikinic* – Traditional Tobacco

*Kipapa* – Your father

*Kisipisim*, - Great Moon or February

*Kiwihthiwsin* - Rich in Love

*Kiskinotahsowin* - Guiding Oneself

*Kokum* – Grandmother

*Kiskinwahamatotan* – Teaching each other

*Kitchimohkaman* – person from the United States

*Mahican* - Wolf

*Maskêkowiyniwak* - Swampy Cree

*Maskwa* – Bear

*Migawaps* - Northern prairie style of Tipi

*Migiskaw* - Freeze –up: November – December

*Mikisiwipisim* Eagle Moon or March

*Minoskamin* - Break –up: May – June

*Mitho-pimâtisiwin* -The good life

*Miyomacihowin* - Health

*Miyo opikinawasowin – Opikiyasowin* - Good child raising

*Miyowatamowin* – Happiness

*Mooniyaw* – White People

*Mooshum* – Grandfather

*Muchimunitoo* – Devil or evil spirit

*Muskihkiy* – Medicine

*Nanaskomowin* –Thankfulness

*Nanahitamowin* – Obedience

*Nikawiy* –Mother

*Nimis*-My oldest sister

*Nimitahamowipisim* - Rutting Moon or September

*Nipin* - Summer: July – August

*Nisipisim* - Goose Moon or April

*Nocikwesis* – Little old lady

*Nohcikesiw* – Old Lady

*Nohtawiy* – Father

*Nokum* – My grandmother

*Notaygeu* - When an old lady covers herself with a shawl

*Notegweu* -Old woman

*Opahowipisim* - Flying- up Moon or August

*Opaskowipisim* - Feather Moulting Moon or July

*Opawahcikinasis* - Frost Moon or January

*Opiniyawiwipisim* - Egg Laying Moon or June

*Opwamootinew*- Medicine Woman

*Osuganas* -Fish Tail

*Paskwâwiyiniwak* or *nehiyawak* –Plains Cree

*Pimâcihowin* -Making a living

*Pimamahowipisim* - Migrating Moon or October

*Pipon* -Winter: January –February

*Sakâwiyiniwak* – Woods Cree

*Sakihitowin* -Love

*Sâwanohk*– Direction from where the sun comes from –South

*Sîgwan* – Spring: March - April

*Sohkisowin* – *Sokatisowin* – Strength



*Tagwagin* -Fall: September – October

*Tapahtheyimowin* – Humility

*Tapowakeyihamowin* – Faith

*Teniki* – Thank you

*Thithikopiwipisim*, - Hoar Frost Moon or December

*Tikinakan* – Cradle board

*Wahkohtowin* –Kinship

*Wicihitowin* –Sharing

**Whitigo** – Flesh eating monster

*Wikowin* –Home

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CMHC - Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

CBC - Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

CHASR – Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research

CIHR – Canadian Institute of Health Research

FSIN – Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations

FNIGC – First Nations Information Governance Centre

FNLHP - First Nations Lung Health Project

INAC - Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

LLRIB - Lac La Ronge Indian Band

NCCAH – National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NAHRG - Northern and Aboriginal Health Research Group

OCAP™ - Ownership, Control, Access, Possession

PHAC – Public Health Agency of Canada

SICC Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre

SSCAP – Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples

TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Commission

WHO – World Health Organization

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## CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

The objective of my study was to reveal what Wholistic well-being in a context of house and home looks like for my people, the Woodland Cree of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band in Northern Saskatchewan, Canada. This chapter begins with a background to my life as shaped by my grandparents and the round of seasonal activities in and around the house and home that transpire in a typical year of Woodland Cree in Northern Saskatchewan. I then locate myself in this research through a discussion of Spirituality with our bodies as sanctuaries for the Soul, linked to a concept of our homes as Sacred beings. Next, I discuss the inspiration for the research question which is to bring a strengths-based approach to learning about personal/family and housing activities and traditions that ensure (d) the Wholistic well-being of Woodland Cree Peoples living in the Lac La Ronge Indian Band reserve and its other five communities of Stanley Mission, Grandmother's Bay, Sucker River, Hall Lake, and Little Red River, Saskatchewan.

### 1.2 Grandparent's Story

If I could fulfil a wish, it would be that all people live in well-built shelters that emanate the Spirit and Culture of her inhabitants. *Wikowin* (home) evokes fond memories of my early childhood in Lac La Ronge, Saskatchewan where my Grandparents resided on Kitsaki Reserve, Number 101. *Kokum* (Grandmother) Lydia and *Mooshum* (Grandfather) Mathew Charles raised seven girls and seven boys spanning 30 years in their beloved log cabin during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the Canadian Federal Government moved them into 'improved' housing in the late 1960s. It would be another decade before running water was added to electricity, thus heralding our family into the conveniences of modern life. Although these luxuries eased the

household chores, changes in the design and building materials disrupted the cultural mores of traditional Cree life. Prior to government housing, Cree dwellings were imbued with Spiritual powers and Values that ensured healthy families and communities. Life was and is a Prayer in these Cree living spaces understood as sentient as any animate being. Summer and winter homes with their long-held customs and traditions accompanied Cree people as they moved from seasonal lodgings to permanent dwellings on reserves. I lived in the village of La Ronge in the late 1950s with my parents and sisters, but often ‘camped’ at my grandparents’ place overnight or for a few days and enjoyed the rhythm of seasonal activities in their household of Love.

Unlike our Plains Cree and Willow Cree relatives in southern Saskatchewan, we have six seasons (break-up, spring, summer, fall, freeze-up, winter) in the northern part of the province due to our intimate relationship with the waters; our lives are governed by the seasons of break-up around May and the season of freeze-up around November when we cannot cross the lakes to get to the numerous islands pebbling the Precambrian shield. Distinct from the January New Year of the Gregorian calendar, some Indigenous Peoples recognize spring as the birth of a new year when our Mother Earth’s robe of snow melts to reveal a dress of new shoots preparing to decorate her flower print cloth.

### ***1.2.1 Sīgwan - Spring: March – April***

During *Mikisiwipisim* (Eagle Moon or March), a bird so highly revered in our culture for its ability to fly highest to Creator, the eagle, arrived to share in the raven’s carrion. Soon after, during *Nisipisim* (Goose Moon), the welcome sound of geese stirred our hunters onto the land while they looked for beaver and muskrats. My mom and grandmother liked to bake the criss-crossed patterned beaver tails into crispy salted portions, our version of the store-bought bacon rinds of today. During the Goose Moon, the family would prepare a fine feast for Mooshum’s

birthday on April ninth. On his hundredth birthday of 1977, he danced with Kokum at Kitsaki Hall, a testament to the healthy benefits of rural bush life in Northern Saskatchewan.

### ***1.2.2 Minoskamin - Break –up: May – June***

*Minoskamin* or break–up was a precarious time for travel in our communities. Bodies of water could hide beneath snowbanks, low lying areas and lakes. As the water became visible, *Athikipisim* (May) marked the Frog Moon and the frogs’ long-awaited voices quivered across the ponds. Their songs told my mom that soon the neon orange yolks hiding in the wild duck eggs would be ready for gathering during *Opiniyawiwipisim* (Egg Laying Moon of June). Until then, she had to be satisfied tapping the birch sap for her porridge. Once the lakes drank the clinking ice candles at the end of *Minoskamin*, she and the other women would launch their canoes to net pickerel, whitefish and trout.

### ***1.2.3 Nipin - Summer: July – August***

During the hot summer days of *Opaskowipisim* (Feather Moulting Moon in July) and *Opahowipisim* (Flying- up Moon in August), many of the women on the reserve would erect tents and move outside their wooden homes to sleep under the stars and savour the cool breezes wafting off the waters. In Kokum Lydia’s screened canvas tent, I loved the moist smell of the lake, the gummy scent of spruce trees, and the floral perfumes Mother Earth exhaled at the end of a long day’s work. Frogs chanted in the background while we prepared to roost along with the crows. In the distance, the lake lapped a lullaby as I snuggled next to Kokum. I floated upon voices to imagined places while relatives whispered Prayers, bedtime stories and softly laughed at each other’s embellishments.

Mornings came early with robins, chickadees, sparrows and crows celebrating the rising sun. The loons’ laughter joyfully skipped across the lake and we children were eager to get up and join in the day’s activities. Kokum Lydia would take me to the sparkling lake to fill pails

with chilly water, and on our trips, she pointed out different plants to me even though I was only four years old. Wild caraway stood out because some of my cousins loudly complained when she ‘ruined’ the bannock with the pungent seeds. Otherwise, the only other condiments on her table were salt, pepper, lard, margarine, ketchup and jars of homemade wild berry jams. I cannot ever remember a hungry day at their Blessed home since fish, game, berries and hazel nuts were so plentiful.

Although we spent some time of the day in the tent, we continued to use the cabin for other household activities as well. After my adult relatives went off to work at the lake, bushes, or village, my sisters and I were left behind with my grandparents, and I would watch Kokum Lydia washing laundry by scrub board in huge, galvanized tubs with Sunlight soap bubbles popping around her. After she twisted the water out of the clothes, she hung the laundry on the clothesline, and steadied it with thick forked branches out of the reach of wandering dogs. She then swept the rough floorboards and, on her hands and knees, scrubbed the floor with a gigantic bar of yellow Sunlight soap. She chased us to lie down with Mooshum Mathew who would proceed to tell us strange and fabulous stories while the floor dried.

In the afternoons, when Kokum Lydia took a break from household chores, I would sometimes accompany her to one of our many relative’s homes and serve the old ladies cold tea while they spread out a blanket on the grass to play a game of poker. They pulled out old socks filled with coppers (pennies) and took out a ragged deck of playing cards. They sat in a circle of cotton flowered skirts, their flower beaded moccasins peaking at the hems. On their heads were colorful scarves held in place with knots and bobby pins. Even on hot days they wore thin cardigan sweaters over top their hand sewn blouses, skirts, and dresses. They chattered about their families, events in the community, and laughed at familiar stories they enjoyed telling



repeatedly. How I wanted to join in the game, not understanding that my little girl's role was to be a helper. Sometimes I fell asleep next to Kokum under the spell of bustling bees as they danced from clover to yarrow to fireweed and back again. Whispering poplar trees seemingly laughed with the old ladies, and before long, I travelled into dream time. After they finished playing, I was awakened, sweaty and thirsty, and called back to duty to help clean up the site before everyone went home to prepare supper.

When we got home, other family members intermittently arrived after a long day of work at the fish plant, guiding tourists, hunting, and fishing. The women folk gossiped as they cleaned fish, gutted rabbits, patted down bannock and peeled potatoes. Mooshum Mathew had a garden nearby where he would take the family to weed the carrots, turnips and other root vegetables for the winter. We sat on logs surrounding the sparking campfire, enjoying stories about the day's events while fry pans sizzled bronze coloured bannock and kettles rolled the day's catch. Toward summer's end, blueberries and cranberries brightened our plates and were captured in sparkling sapphire blue and ruby jars on Kokum's kitchen counter. As fall drew near, thoughts turned to nestling into the cozy cabin for the winter.

#### ***1.2.4 Tagwagin -Fall: September – October***

*Nimitahamowipisim* or September was known as the Rutting Moon when velvet fell off the moose horns. It was the month my grandmother, her eldest daughter Jean (my Godmother) and I were born. We were privileged to have been nurtured in our mother's wombs when the *Nipin* plants and Medicines were most potent, and then born into a season of such abundance. *Pimamahowipisim* or October was known as the Migrating Moon, when our hunters left for a few days to bring back hides to tan for clothing. Meat and fish were smoked for the winter pantry. However, Mom said that Mooshum did not like the taste of moose meat at this time of year; it was as though the rut changed the flavor of the meat.

### ***1.2.5 Migiskaw - Freeze –up: November – December***

*Kaskatinowipisim* or November was known as the Freeze-up Moon while *Thithikopiwipisim*, the Hoar Frost Moon (December with Christian influences) became known as the Christmas Moon. As pedestrian societies, we needed to be mindful of weather and travelling conditions. The rivers were not completely frozen and currents below the lakes took the lives of some of our relatives. Everyone carefully tread on the land where women caught small game such as rabbits and spruce grouse while the men hunted the larger animals. Both my grandparents helped to construct snowshoes to ease the footsteps of their ever-growing family. Other than a picture of Jesus and Queen Elizabeth, the only things I recall hanging on the log walls were the snowshoes, other practical tools and outer wear.

### ***1.2.6 Pipon -Winter: January –February***

*Opawahcikinasis*, the Frost Moon of January and *Kisipisim*, the Great Moon February cast their icy light on the little communities under their watch. A typical day in my grandparents' home during the colder seasons began with Mooshum Mathew lighting the tin stove located centrally in the cabin. The crackling of tamarack and scent of smoke ignited our senses as we stirred on our floor mattresses surrounding the stove. His muffled voice gently greeted Creator/ God in Prayer, for he synchronized Cree cosmology with Anglican religion. We did not have to get up all at once; when our Dream time ended, we rose, and our mattresses were transformed into seating areas around the cabin. Soon, the kettle sang in preparation of the morning tea, and a large pot of porridge gurgled on the stove. If we were out of bannock, my Aunty Frances would stick store bought bread on the stove pipe for toast.

When I was a child, most of my aunties and uncles had married and moved into their own houses and left behind three generations of ten to twelve people living in the cabin. Eventually, the cabin would clear as family members dispersed to pursue hunting, fishing, and gathering

activities in the fall and winter months. While the men went hunting for moose, elk and deer, my mother, Elizabeth, and other women enjoyed rabbit snaring and hunting spruce hens. Elderly women like Kokum stayed home and multitasked as they babysat us, sewing, washing, and pressing clothes with flat irons heated on wood stoves.

After Kokum fed us lunch, we moved to her mattress where within easy reach, she arranged her red willow sewing basket brimming with moose hide, fur trim, beads, and cloth. She propped pillows behind her back, with another one on her outstretched legs where she lay down my baby sister, Dona. Here, she rocked Dona, and she placed my middle sister, Ruth, on her right side. I lay on her left side, and she whistled tunes through her teeth or sang until we fell asleep.

Kokum Lydia fell in her meditative state of beading and sewing until it was time to prepare supper for family and friends who happened to come by. When Mooshum Mathew was not gone away to his trapline at the Bow River near Meeyomoot Beach, he led the family in Prayers before we ate from the large pot of moose stew with a thick slab of bannock. Visitors often dropped by, and late into the evening, the little cabin burst with laughter, singing and storytelling. No matter the circumstances, at a certain time Mooshum became solemn and instructed everyone to form a circle where we knelt as he led us in Prayer. Soon after, all the children were tucked in bed, lulled to the comforting voices of extended family. Sometimes on quieter evenings, I looked up from my bed and watched the glimmering flame of the coal oil lamp by which Mooshum softly read his Bible in Cree. From my little girl's perspective, all was right with our world as I snuggled with my sisters, cousins, aunties, uncles, and grandparents.

### **1.3 Significance of Strength-based Research and Discourse**

While I have provided a positive sketch of life on my reserve in Northern Saskatchewan, life was not without hardships. Indeed, tuberculosis and other chronic diseases stole the lives of Loved ones and with the highway and airplanes came negative impacts associated with alcohol and technology. My Great Aunt Rosie McKenzie said that when she saw the first airplane fly overhead in Stanley Mission, she knew that bad changes were coming. At first, Traditional foods were supplemented with store bought foods and by the 1960s, a switch came when country foods became secondary to convenience products. Diabetes and cardio-vascular diseases crept in. The new substandard houses no longer breathed like the old cabins and a host of respiratory illnesses gradually permeated their walls. Eventually, in university, I would read cold academic descriptions of my childhood as a landscape of impoverishment, illness, and overcrowded housing. Today, I try to heed the voices of my Ancestral Grandparents as I relate our version of events, and how positive attitudes and humour saw us through life's challenges in a colonized world. I try to understand how and why systems of culture, identity and society changed, and the impact such changes have on our health. In hope of helping to address the respiratory illnesses in particular (my paternal Grandmother died of lung cancer), I now dance between two communication systems, describing past and present realities, humbly serving supports for personal and community health grounded in Traditional Teachings.

### **1.4 Locating Myself in My Research**

#### ***1.4.1 Ayamihiwatisowin – Spirituality***

My grandparents blended the foundational stories of Cree Mythology (Sacred truth of the people) and the Anglican Bible. As a child, they took me to the All Saints Anglican Church, now the oldest building in La Ronge. I excitedly marveled at the stained-glass windows, and my

grandparents gently touched their forefingers to their lips to hush me. I knew and felt this place was special, but I did not have the words to define it as Spiritual or Sacred, nor did I know that they were symbolically setting the foundation of my home as their Ancestors would have done by placing Balsam boughs on the floor of their *Migawaps* (Tipis.) Michell (2012) asserts in his Woodland Cree Teachings that ‘All of Creation is imbued with Spirituality’. A foundational premise of Indigenous Ways of Knowing is that one cannot sever the physical from the Spiritual being any more than one can sever the mind from the brain.

The notion of ‘Sacred ’is usually linked to Christianity and other religious denominations, a set of rituals, rites of passage, ceremonies and special people ordained to conduct Sacred practices with Sacred tools. When I think of my grandparent’s home, it was a place of peace. Just as Wheatley (2009) proclaims, ‘I experience sacred as a feeling that I belong here...It isn’t only the place that is sacred, we are.’ (pp. 136, 137). I clarify the concept ‘Sacred’ in accordance with the Cree Traditional way of life and its concomitant Values and customs. For example, when a visitor appears, I have been taught to offer that person something to eat or drink, because one never knows if that is the last time one will meet with the caller. One is not only taking care of the visitor, but more importantly, honouring the Spirit of that person. Another Teaching is that since Creator lends children to us, we need to ensure upon pregnancy that we keep our relationships positive and our homes clean and peaceful as these environments impact the developing fetus. These are Spiritual relationships, not to be reduced to simply visiting or prenatal healthcare. Sacred means that ‘Life is a Prayer’ (Martin Nelson, deceased son, personal communication, May, 1999) and ‘every action has a consequence’ (Esther Sanderson, deceased friend, personal communication, 1998), therefore, when we describe a typical day in our lives, we are narrating a Sacred event and how our choices created the feelings in ourselves and lived

spaces. Thus, the Stories about house, home, and health that research Participants share in my study are very personal and Sacred accounts of their daily lives.

### **1.5 Seeds of the Study**

In 2014, I worked as a research assistant on the First Nations Lung Health Project (FNLHP) which was a Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) funded project with the University of Saskatchewan (Pahwa et al., 2015; Katapally et al., 2016; Karunanayake et al., 2017). After visiting FNLHP focus group members and listening to their concerns and Pride for their family and community health, I realized that my home community bore similar cultural parallels. When FNLHP focus group members spoke of actions they could or should take to address personal and community health concerns, I heard Cree Tipi Teachings surface in their conversations. Even in some underlying expressions of frustration, I heard the participants speak the language of possibility in co-creating healthy families and communities. I was then inspired to hear more stories of how people build environments conducive to Wholistic well-being based on the Values inherent to Cree systems of culture, identity, and Spirituality.

I was inspired to research the answer to the question: What are the Traditional Values and customs that guide the stories of personal well-being, family, homes, and community of a Northern Saskatchewan Woodland Cree First Nation? However, in working with Participants I rephrased the question to one conducive to an Indigenous visiting methodology, ‘Would you please share with me, where you grew up, and what it was like growing up in your house(s) and the Values your family kept in your homes?’ Implicit in the question is how we walk in the footsteps of our Cree Ancestral Grandparents when we carry out their time-honoured relationships with family and home. Home connotes a dwelling that is animate, alive with Spirit and feelings of Love, whereas house refers to the physical structure or container. In Cree culture,

the body is a sanctuary for the Soul; likewise, a house or Tipi is a sanctuary for the Soul of individuals and families. A community is an extension of the individual and the family; how one contributes to community is dependent on the Spirit of the home in which one resides. Thus, the research objective of this study became to explore the healthy personal/family and housing strategies that ensure (d) the Wholistic well-being of Woodland Cree Peoples living in the Lac La Ronge Indian Band reserve and its other five communities of Stanley Mission, Grandmother's Bay, Sucker River, Hall Lake, and Little Red River, Saskatchewan.

The study is of interest to me as an Indigenous researcher because I am a mixed Woodland Cree Scottish woman from Northern Saskatchewan, and thoroughly enjoy partaking in emic research that is expected to be used and useful. I believe that my inherent interest in 'home' was sown as a child when Mooshum Mathew named me *Nocikwesis* which means Little Old Lady in Cree. I recall, at the age of four, while trying to sweep the floor perfectly clean in repeated circles, Mooshum and some other old men laughed at me and called me that name, which I did not find flattering. Later in life, I learned from Mary Lee, an Elder from Pelican Lake, Northern Saskatchewan that the Plains Cree word *Nohcikesiw*, in her spelling, *Notegweu* (Old Lady), refers to the Tipi's likeness of an old woman wearing a shawl with her children gathered within. My relatives have called me Little Old Lady in Cree for most of my life, but since becoming a grandmother to Logan Martin Nelson, my aunt said that my name is now, *Nohcikesiw*, Old Lady, a name I now carry with great Pride in all its connotations of warmth, welcoming, and steadfastness.

Most of my relatives refer to ourselves as Cree 'Indians' even though many people are offended by the term with its colonized inferences. We are 'located in north-central Saskatchewan, [and] the Lac La Ronge Indian Band is the largest First Nation in Saskatchewan,

one of the 10 largest in Canada, with a population of 11,843 as of March 31, 2023' (LLRIB, 2024). In this study, the term 'Indigenous' will be used in reference to First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples (Muckle, 2012) unless direct quotes cited from the work of others refer to the first inhabitants of Canada as 'Aboriginal' or otherwise. The term First Nations is 'an initiative of the peoples themselves, rather than a label applied by governments, anthropologists, and others of mainstream, non-Indigenous societies' (Muckle, 2012, p. 8) and is used throughout this dissertation.

A common proverb among Indigenous Peoples in Canada claims 'the answers are within us', and from my lived experience and listening to members from various First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, solutions to the challenges we arrive at should be Shared with other peoples, regardless of ethnicity, to support family and community well-being. While some answers are the fiduciary responsibility of the Government in compliance with Treaties, (Indian & Northern Affairs Canada, 1996) an approach not previously considered outside the domains of Indigenous communities are the Cree Tipi Teachings, a system of self-governance. Modern dwellings can be conceptualized in the same way as traditional homes in that they represent the kinship patterns and values of its peoples (Northern and Aboriginal Health Research Group, NAHRG, 2016).

I am interested in revealing those Values inherent in the *Migawap* /Tipi Teachings that have supported the continued survival of Indigenous communities, and how they can be promoted as Medicine today. As I listened to focus-group participants in the FNLH Project share stories about their experiences with health and housing, I recognized the Values that were surfacing and how these Values shaped participants' strategies to solve health and house issues. It occurred to me these Values were Cree Tipi Teachings that promote and maintain cultural



preservation and ensure the Spiritual /corporal survival of the generations. Thus, I was inspired to share in this first chapter, a vignette of my Grandparent's Story to illustrate how these Values were culturally transmitted to me and how I came to internalize them.

### **1.6 Research with a Vocabulary of the Heart**

Although a plethora of studies on Indigenous Peoples discuss the negative conditions of reserve life, housing conditions and determinants of respiratory diseases among others (Carriere, Garner, Sanmartin, 2017; Optis 2012; CMHC 2019) the question, 'What are the Traditional Values and customs that guide the stories of personal well-being, family, homes and communities of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band in Saskatchewan? is novel in that it inspires community led strategies, and it celebrates resilience and adaptation to social, economic, and political fluctuations. But a vocabulary of the heart paraphrases the question for Participants who share their Stories as 'Would you please share with me, where you grew up and what it was like growing up in your house(s) and the values your family kept in your homes?' as in keeping with the community ethos. While the question assumes that supports are necessary to address living and health conditions in First Nations communities, the question also challenges people to think about the strengths in their cultural Values that have served them well over millennia. However, it was also anticipated that the question may be met with unease since it could be likely that some of the respondents were residential school survivors whose home fires were extinguished by government policies; yet these Stories are critical to understanding the hindrances that prevent people from enjoying individual and community well-being.

Although I am personally interested in matriarchal ideals of family and home, this research could not ignore the stories of Cree men and how their lives intersected with Cree women throughout the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. This research describes Woodland Cree perceptions of

living in self-built dwellings and how federal government houses impacted traditional concepts of home in the Lac La Ronge Indian Band reserve and its other five communities of Stanley Mission, Grandmother's Bay, Sucker River, Hall Lake, and Little Red River. I used a Storytelling approach to explore the Values inherent in the Indigenous health promotion of homes. The research question gleans practices in individual, family and home health: 'What are the strength based personal/ family and housing activities and traditions that ensure (d) the Wholistic well-being of Woodland Cree Peoples living in the Lac La Ronge Indian Band reserve and its other five communities of Stanley Mission, Grandmother's Bay, Sucker River, Hall Lake, and Little Red River, Saskatchewan?

### **1.7 Overview of the Thesis**

Chapter One delivered an introduction on the topic of Woodland Cree life and the inspiration for this dissertation. In Chapter Two, the research question is located in an overview of the literature on housing, home and health research. Next, the methods by which I proceeded with my research are developed in Chapter Three. Following the methodology section is Chapter Four which presents a series of Stories on the lifeways of the 13 Storytellers who participated in this study. Chapter Five is an analysis of thematic findings organized according to the Values of the Cree Tipi Teachings framework with which I approached this study. A further analysis of themes is made according to the LLRIB Medicine Wheel in its composition of quadrants as Culture, Values, Skills, and Pride. Chapter Six locates my study findings back into the context of the literature – pointing to alignments, dissonances, and gaps filled. Chapter Six is also a reflection on the implications of my study-practically and for research follow-up, as well my research approach and methods.

## **CHAPTER TWO- OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This chapter offers an overview of the research literature regarding housing, home and health. As will become apparent, the literature is largely focused on deficiencies of infrastructure in relation to poor health. Further, home and health literature is largely Eurowestern in its conceptualization, lacking grounding in Indigenous Values and concepts. Here too much is deficit-oriented. This reveals a gap around intersecting healthy people and homes in a Wholistic way, as well as in relation to Spiritual connections between home and health. This chapter goes on to develop a concept of the dwelling as a feminine structure. Cree Tipi Teaching concepts and values through which the research was framed are discussed. This chapter concludes with an overview of the ecological and environmental context of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band.

### **2.1 Housing/ Home and Health Research – Overview and Gaps**

The literature on housing, home and health research is mostly born of a non-Indigenous perspective and is mainly concerned with the relationship between socioeconomics and poor health. In fact, Dunn et al. found that there is a ‘need to change the language and speak of housing as an investment rather than an expense’ (2006, p. S13). We are not only investing financially; in perceiving houses as homes, we then invest in our Wholistic well-being. According to Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and authors on the subject (Homeward Trust 2015; Larcombe, et al. 2020; NAHRG 2016) in the past, the notions of housing, home and health were interwoven. In contemporary times, conversations about housing focus on the expense and structures of dwellings, and there is abundant literature on substandard housing, housing shortages and overcrowded houses in relation to Indigenous Peoples. Riva et al. (2014) discuss the deleterious impacts of colonization on Indigenous Peoples’ lifeways, ‘Since the imposition of settlement living and history of environmental dispossession, poor housing quality, substantial

housing shortages and resulting overcrowding are commonplace in many Indigenous communities, threatening peoples' health and well-being' (para.6). Economic status further colors the impressions invoked of neighbourhoods and communities. These are then transferred to the people living in them and can impact self-concept with labels as cruel as 'trailer trash'.

In 2006, Dunn et al. (2006) identified an overall gap in the literature on the 'relationships between housing and health [which] points to a dearth of research on the impact of socioeconomic dimensions of housing' (p. S11). At the time, they argued that housing research should focus primarily on:

...understanding and addressing the policy and program impacts of physical and social environments on health, analyzing and reducing health disparities and promoting equity for vulnerable populations... Themes that emerged... centred on four priority areas of housing and health research: economic aspects; life-cycle and life-span issues; housing, social integration and income/ethnic mix; and the interplay between physical hazards and socioeconomic aspects of housing (p. S11).

The authors argue that 'housing is important for both its physical and social dimensions and, of all our daily environments, it is the one in which we spend the most time' and 'in the area of housing and health that we know very little about what kinds of interventions work to reduce health disparities for vulnerable populations and about the pathways linking this crucial social environment to health.' (p. S12). Absent from their discussions was a consideration of the impact of culture and identity in the relationship between housing and health, a gap that remained in the years that followed as researchers worked to fill those that had been identified.

There is also a gap in the literature on an intersecting concept of healthy people and homes in a Wholistic way. However, some published literature extends beyond the structural concerns of houses and integrates the social mores and cultural appropriateness of the inhabitants (Boutilier, 2013, Chagni, 1998, Homeward Trust, 2015, Northern and Aboriginal Health Research Group, 2016). The report, Housing as a Social Determinant of First Nations, Inuit and

Métis Health, alludes to the appropriateness of housing in reference to Wholistic health, although even here a reference to Spirituality is absent:

...housing quality, affordability, location, appropriateness, and accessibility are important in determining Indigenous peoples' health and well-being. Each of these elements, on their own or in combination, can influence physical, emotional, and mental health and well-being. Strategies to improve Indigenous housing for measurable health outcomes will require significant investments in housing and services that are congruent with population growth and with localized needs. (NCCAH, 2017, p.10)

Other Indigenous documents, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action (2015) miss housing as a concern to righting the wrongs of colonial policy makers and the National Report of the First Nations Regional Health Survey Phase 3 (FNIGC, 2018) focuses solely on household characteristics, composition crowding index and housing conditions.

The most significant gaps in the literature are in relation to Spiritual connections between home and health. I have lived in several types of structures since childhood; some felt like sanctuaries, imbued with deep emotional connections as in my grandparent's cabin and my current home, while others felt like temporary transitions as in apartments and houses in the city. As an Indigenous woman and researcher, I feel that I can contribute to communities' practices of Wholistic well-being in relation to their respective housing and health concerns. The homes of my Ancestors were built with Pride, Culture, Skills, and Values. Framed through our Values and Teachings, we can rekindle or strengthen these associations within our contemporary homes. The act of reaching into Ancestral wisdom and practices, I believe, is a viable intervention to reduce health disparities. This research begins to address the gaps, describing Woodland Cree perceptions of living in self-built dwellings, how federal policies impacted Traditional concepts of home in the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, and how we can return full circle to understanding the pathways to Woodland Cree concepts of health and home.

According to the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), Indigenous health promotion includes ‘the social, environmental, cultural, and economic determinants of our health and well-being’ (July 16, 2024, para.29). Housing is both a social and environmental determinant of Indigenous health promotion. The built environment has been the concern of health researchers in both Canadian and global contexts, whereas housing as a social determinant has not garnered the same attention in terms of conceptualizing the house as a home. Home refers to the ‘most cherished place for many people’ (Lawrence, 1987, p.165) and its psychosocial dimensions such as ‘personal identity, personal values, domestic spaces and objects, personal preferences, house form and construction,’ (p.164).

The cultural identity of a home’s inhabitants should figure in the construction of a house, but this has not been the case with Indigenous Peoples living in Canadian settler designed homes. Larcombe et al. (2020) have illustrated how housing for two northern Manitoba Dene communities could look like when the residents select the use of cultural space and locally available natural resources in the building of homes:

The projects recommend that the homes designed for Dene communities should take into consideration the lifestyle of the various family members living in the homes. Activities which help to transfer history, skills, traditional knowledge, and cultural identity should be strongly encouraged through flexible spaces and appropriate utilities and resources within the home (i.e. sanitary areas for meat preparation, waste and water locations, and proper ventilation to support food production activities). (p.4)

Indigenous health promotion of homes is also addressed in research on Inuit overcrowding and sense of home whereby ‘social activities in Inuit households present a need for highly integrated spaces, open and connected, conducive of a sense of ‘togetherness’ (Perreault et al., 2019, p.6). This collective sense of identity is also found among the Māori of New Zealand who see that ‘securing cultural identity is an important determinant of health from an indigenous perspective (Reweti & Severinsen, 2022, p. 251). Cultural identity also figures prominently in

housing with the Torres Strait Islander First Nations people whose health plan ‘notes that implementation across each priority area will need a holistic approach that considers the cultural determinants across the life-course... to ensure the health and wellbeing of First Nations people, contemporary housing must embed culturally-responsive design, including consideration of kinship, family and community living arrangements’ (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024, para. 5). Baron et al. (2020) assert that health and well-being among the Inuit of Baker Lake includes familial ties and that Elders in particular benefit by aging-in-place, ‘one of the most important observations developed in this project was the necessity to have facilities promoting aging-in-place, i.e. allowing Inuit elders to age among their family, in their community and close to the land where they grew up’ (p. 148). Thus, the Indigenous health promotion among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, New Zealand and Australia is Wholistic in nature and includes the home as a psychosocial factor to well-being.

## **2.2 Cree Housing – Historical and Contemporary Context**

‘Home is where the heart is’, an old European adage (Cambridge, 2006), aptly describes the concept of family and community among peoples the world over but can be an Indigenous framing that ‘heart is also where the home is.’ This conveys the Love which flows from the heart and permeates the Tipi or wooden homes of Cree peoples in North America. In Cree, *iskwew* is woman and *iskotew* means fire. The root word ‘isk’ indicates that a woman’s heart is of fire, she is central to the wellbeing of her family, and the centre of her dwelling is warmed with fire. Similarly, the Tipi or home is a feminine being. She, the Tipi or dwelling, is not simply a place of shelter. She reflects the Wholistic systems of culture, identity, and Spirituality. Although there is not one Cree culture that conveys a specific set of values for all the various Cree Nations in Canada, members carry common values of the diverse ecological contexts of Saskatchewan.

Each of the following subgroups of the larger Cree Nation would prioritize certain values depending on their environmental circumstances and are named according to the primary ecological features of the land:

The main divisions of Cree, based on environment, language and dialect are: Plains Cree (*paskwâwiyiniwak* or *nehiyawak*) in [Alberta](#) and [Saskatchewan](#), Woods Cree (*sakâwiyiniwak*) in Saskatchewan and [Manitoba](#), Swampy Cree (*maskêkowiiniwak*) in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and [Ontario](#), and James Bay/Eastern Cree (*Eeyouch*) in [Québec](#); Moose Cree (in Ontario) is considered a sub-group/dialect of Swampy Cree. (Preston, 2018, Cree section. In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*)

In the beloved homelands of Cree Peoples, varied expressions of common Values are in response to Mother Earth's bounty. Like her, women are revered for their life-giving capacities, and egalitarian Cree societies deem the private sphere of the dwelling to be the domain of women, while the public sphere of politics and the hunting economy are usually the domain of men. Each gender perpetuates the Values and rites of passage of Cree society. Relationships between humans and their sources of sustenance are tantamount; both are Sacred. At present, some Cree men, like their Ancestors, continue to enter portals of Dreams, Prayers, Songs, Fasts, and Sweat Lodge Ceremonies, where animal relatives showed themselves before offering their flesh in the physical world (Martin, 1978, p.115). Similarly, Young describes how women who take their families berry picking are not simply gathering food; a socialization process is at work as children are taught gathering Protocols before contributing to the communal berry pot (Sinclair & Cariou, 2012). Just as Young describes her mother's and grandmother's influences in her upbringing, the focus of this research is born of a woman's Cree way of knowing, Thanks to my beloved grandmother Lydia Charles and all our Ancestral predecessors.

If the Values of the Cree teachings are lived and the Kinship system is secure, then the inhabitants of the dwelling will flourish Spiritually, Mentally, Physically and Emotionally. A symbiotic relationship exists among the women, the feminine dwelling, and their families.



According to Mills & Kalman (2020), ‘in addition to meeting the primary need for shelter, Indigenous structures also served as expressions of spiritual beliefs and cultural values’ (para .4). In Saskatchewan, Woodland Cree reside in the Subarctic region, while the Plains Cree live in the southern Plains of the province, and these locations meant that the ‘dwellings and structures differed vastly from nation to nation, depending on their purpose and function’ (Mills & Kalman, 2020, para.1). Cree practices of well-being are interrelated with their respective housing and Wholistic health concerns, whether the lodges were called Tipis on the plains, or *Migawaps* (the northern prairie style of Tipi). Responsibility for harvesting Tipi poles rested with the Women. The feminine qualities of Cree lodges were culturally transmitted as ‘women erected and dismantled these dwellings, and they specialized in cutting and sewing the bison hides so that they would fit the conical frame (Gadacz, R., 2017, para.5).

However, after Indigenous Peoples were moved onto reserves, social constructions changed, and the colonized home became the domain of men. The proverb, ‘a man’s home is his castle’, attributed to Sir Edward Coke in *The Institutes of the Laws of England*, 1628 ( an Englishman’s home, para. 2) became the bane of Indigenous women as their matriarchal powers were undermined by the patriarchal Gradual Civilization Acts of 1857 and following iterations of the Indian Act of 1876. Although Christianity solidified the transfer of ‘home ownership to men’, Cree social mores continued, and women carried on their time-honoured positions as central agents of socialization within their *wikowin* (home). The difference is that men were expected to build the houses or cabins, but after their return from hunting and trapping, they were now welcomed by their families in permanent wooden structures rather than seasonal homes. The permanent dwellings that were provided by the government were substandard in materials and not designed according to the cultural mores of the people.

## 2.3 First Nations Housing and Health – Contemporary Circumstances

It has been well documented in Canada that inadequate and overcrowded on-reserve housing is linked to respiratory and other health diseases, (Adelson, 2005; Kovesi, 2012; Larcombe et al., 2011; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health [NCCAHA], 2010; NCCAHA, 2017; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples [SSCAP], 2015; Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC], 2013; Stats Canada, 2010). First Nations Peoples could benefit by rebuilding their lived environments to reflect Wholistic health (Northern and Aboriginal Health Research Group [NAHRG], 2016). In an interview with CBC news Dr. Kris Stewart, the clinical lead for Tuberculosis Prevention and Control Saskatchewan, indicated statistics similarly pointed to the relationship between housing deficits and poor respiratory health explaining that ‘...about two-thirds of [tuberculosis] cases are among Indigenous people... infection rates in Indigenous communities are mostly driven by poorly ventilated housing and overcrowded living conditions,’ (CBC, 2017, para.2). Stewart said the biggest challenge to fighting TB in the province is addressing the housing issue and the barriers to seeking and accessing early treatment. Poverty associated with damp and mouldy dwellings is understudied and could be even more significant to respiratory diseases:

Other circumstances, including socioeconomic disadvantage, additional chronic conditions and remote location, have also been identified as key factors... Analysis of the relationship between housing conditions and respiratory health must also consider the possible confounding effects of social determinants such as income. For example, a 2011 study found crowding and poor indoor air quality to be associated with tuberculosis in First Nations communities, but the role of income was not examined. (Carriere, Garnier, & Sanmartin, 2017, p.9)

Vice- Chief Kim Jonathan of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (formerly Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) echoes the abundant research that ‘overcrowded houses on First Nations have been a serious issue across the country for years’ (Jonathan, 2017,

para.4). As the first Indigenous woman sitting on the board of directors for Habitat for Humanity Canada, her dual positions could very well help amend ‘the deplorable condition of First Nation housing’ in Saskatchewan. In her leadership roles, we can applaud Jonathan for standing in the traditional Cree footsteps of her Ancestral Grandparents as she dedicates her heart connection to family, community, and home, ‘Having a safe and decent place to call home is a basic human right and the foundation of a healthy family and healthy community" (Jonathan, 2017, para.5). Although modern houses are often built with materials not suited to northern environments, people like Jonathan are looking at more practical ways to address the built environment by using locally sourced materials (Northern and Aboriginal Health Research Group [NAHRG], 2016).

## **2.4 Knowledge is Spirit**

A Wholistic approach to personal/home well-being and housing needs to be revisited in the intervention of lung diseases and other health issues (NAHRG, 2016). The Cree values embedded within the framework of the Tipi ensure the health of the people by their relationships with cosmology, earth, community members and self, (Sanderson, 1991) and is an important model by which to conceptualize healthy homes. *Miyomacihowin*, a Cree word for health (Willie Ermine, Cree Knowledge Keeper, personal communication, 2016), best describes how the dancing particles or life force of the inhabitants and a home interact, thus reflecting the health of the shared space. These particles in the Western scientific world are conceived as molecular construction of animate and inanimate matter, whereas Indigenous epistemology recognizes a complex interplay of powers at work:

Aboriginal paradigms include ideas of constant flux, all existence consisting of energy waves/spirit, all things being animate, all existence being interrelated, creation/existence having to be renewed, space/place as an important referent, and

language, songs, stories, and ceremonies as repositories for the knowledge that arise out of these paradigms. (Little Bear, 2009, p. 8)

Thus, if the people are healthy, this will be felt in the built environment as interactions among strong particles of energy and through health promoting Values such as the Tipi Teachings of Obedience, Respect, Humility, Happiness, Love, Faith, Kinship, Cleanliness, Thankfulness, Sharing, Strength, Good Child Raising, and Hope. Conversely, just as the body wanes or becomes diseased, the particles of energy slow down until one transforms into a complete Spirit being.

Bio-medical terms and concepts usually do not include Spiritual transformation and have therefore rendered the Western interpretations of health as a one-dimensional process for Indigenous Peoples. The objectives of Western led scientific research focus on the quantification of health disparities and how to address these, whereas Indigenous research includes a wellness approach which emphasizes the harmonies between physical and Spiritual dimensions of being. In recent years, Canadian university research ethics guidelines, the Public Health Agency of Canada, the First Nations Information Governance Centre, and the Tri-Council Policy Statement indicate that Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, all require that the principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP)™ flow throughout the inception to completion of the research process involving Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Embedded in OCAP™ is the understanding that Indigenous Knowledge is considered a Spirit, and therefore ethically, cannot be dismissed as unscientific and unnecessary to the research process. Likewise, Wilson (2008) insists that any endeavor into research is an endeavor into Ceremony:

I hope that you will come to see that research is a ceremony. The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world. Let us go forward together with open minds and good hearts as we further take part in this ceremony. (p.11)

Research and Ceremony are therefore inseparable. Over the years, I have engaged in numerous and various Ceremonies with the thought that I was there primarily to give Thanks for past Blessings and to seek help in solving issues that cropped up in my life. Until I read Shawn Wilson's book on Indigenous Research Methods, I did not realize that I was inadvertently engaged in research. My Prayers were the method by which I sought answers to questions that I pondered. The periods of enlightenment were messages from the Spirit world as to what I needed to do next. In exploring Cree Tipi teaching concepts, I was further convinced that I was not only intellectually understanding the Teachings, but on a deeper Spiritual level, or on 'a raised level of consciousness' as Wilson states (2008, p.11), coming to know what these Values meant.

## **2.5 Cree Tipi Teaching Concepts**

Cree Tipi and *Migawap* teachings are the foundational Values of self-governance and self-determination since they are the ethical codes of conduct that guide the people. However, in the Spirit of non-interference, everyone is a self-determining entity who has the free choice to follow the community norms of behaviour. According to Elder Bill Ermine, (personal communication, 1995), there are only lessons, not mistakes; because one has an opportunity to learn repeatedly until s/he understands the Teaching(s).

Cree Peoples of the Plains and Northern Prairie provinces know their animate dwellings, the Tipis and *Migawaps*, as their mothers. Science teacher, Dr. Herman Michell of Reindeer Lake, who speaks the 'th' dialect of Woodland Cree, draws Elder Mary Lee's interpretation of the Plains Cree Tipi values together with his northern Manitoba *Migawap* Cree teachings explaining that 'a *Migawap* is a traditional dwelling of the northern Cree. It is shaped like the modern Tee Pee that is found amongst the plains people of the North American continent' (Michell, 2012, p.19). He explains that women, like the central burning fire in the *Migawap*,

were the central figures in their communities because they were givers of life and the first teachers of the natural world. He recalls how his mother taught him Woodlands Cree bush etiquette for the first five years of his life after being nurtured to the rhythm of her heartbeat in her womb (Michell, 2012, p.19). Blue Quills First Nations College in collaboration with Homeward Trust researched the Intergenerational *Impact of Colonialism and Aboriginal Homelessness in Edmonton* illustrating relationships among the Tipi, community structures, and Cree women:

The base of the tipi is understood as the base of the woman's skirt bottom, as it touches Mother Earth. The top of the tipi represents her dress top, and the wind flaps are the woman's arms and hands, reaching out, her arms outstretched. The shape of the tipi represents the woman giving thanks to the Creator for the sacred gift of life-giving, of creating life. The tipi is the woman's gift, her place, her lodge. She is the owner, the keeper, and the caretaker. (Homeward Trust, 2015, p. 14)

My adopted father, Bill Ermine (Deceased), similarly described the Tipi as a feminine being whose flaps lift as arms to Creator, whose body is the dwelling, whose ribs are the pins above the entrance, and whose entrance is to the womb of her body. She is to be as revered and respected as any woman in Cree society.

## **2.6 Tipi Raising Ceremony**

On September 19 of 2019, I was honoured to participate in a Tipi Raising Ceremony with Elder Mary Lee and others at the Gordon Oaks Indigenous Student Centre, University of Saskatchewan. After reading about her Tipi Teachings in various articles, I was excited to finally meet Mary and join her in Prayer. We partook in a Sage Smudging Ceremony and each of us was given Tobacco which we were instructed to Pray with and place by trees in front of the Gordon Oaks Centre. There was a pile of spruce poles that Mary had harvested, and she instructed each of us to carry the poles to the Tipi site. Here she spoke of the Prayers she offered in gratitude for

all the materials used to build the Tipi. Three poles of Obedience, Respect and Humility were laid on Mother Earth and tied together. They were then raised to make a tripod and the top symbolized an Eagle's nest. Each of us then took our pole and placed it in a circle without crisscrossing other poles. Everything was done in the direction of the sun and as each pole was raised, one of the women tied a rope to bind each pole. It was very beautiful to witness as she, in her long Ceremonial skirt, ran around the circumference of the Tipi site to situate the poles evenly in a circle. We then helped Mary lay out the Tipi covering that she had sewn, and we covered the poles with the canvas shawl. Each of us took turns pushing a wooden stake through the bottom of the shawl to affix it to the Mother Earth. Afterwards, we lifted a small woman onto a horizontal pole that was used as a ladder, and she inserted wooden pegs above the door. Mary then invited a young man to raise the last two poles and insert them into the flaps. After the Tipi was built, we went inside the lodge and Mary taught us that this Tipi Raising Ceremony was a Blessing, and that the Tipi Teachings are Sacred Teachings that take a lifetime to learn and cannot be rushed. A Feast followed the raising of the Tipi, and this Ceremony was one of the most profound experiences of my life. I hope to help build many more Tipis in the future.

## **2.7 Cree Values**

While there are varied interpretations of self-governing principles among Cree Peoples of the prairie provinces, (Ermine 1995, Makokis, 2009, Michell 2012, Lee 2006, Sanderson 1991, SICC Elders in Sanderson, 1991), common to all are 15 values which are necessary and important to the survival of individuals, communities and nations: Obedience, Respect, Humility, Happiness, Love, Faith, Kinship, Cleanliness, Thankfulness, Sharing, Strength, Good Child Rearing, Hope, Protection, and Relationships. It was/is the primary responsibility of the women

to convey the Values in Cree society since they were/are central to the inner and private sphere of home life:

In our language, for old woman, we say, Notegweu. Years ago we used the term Notaygeu, meaning when an old lady covers herself with a shawl. A tipi cover is like that old woman with a shawl. As it comes around the tipi, it embraces all those teachings, the values of community that the women hold. No matter how many children and great grandchildren come into that circle of hers, she always still has room. (Lee, 2006, Centre section, para.5,)

In the Tipi raising Ceremony described earlier, Elder Mary Lee explained that each of the 15 poles of the Tipi represent a Value and was tied with a rope which was ‘a sacred bond, binding all the teachings together until they are all connected’ (Tipi structure section, para. 6). The first three poles are tied into a tripod and are called Obedience, Respect and Humility. Once the three poles are bound, the shape of a nest appears at the tips of the poles that ‘also resembles a bird with its wings up when it comes to land, and that’s another teaching: the spirit coming to land, holding its wings up’ (Tipi structure section, para. 6). The Tipi then, is an animate creature and carries with it deeper cultural significance beyond its form and function as a shelter. The Tipi Teachings, as described here, is the conceptual frame that informs my research on housing and health with the people of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band.

## **2.8 Ecological Context**

Prior to European contact, Indigenous shelters emerged from the resources of the land (Belanger, 2018, NAHRG, 2016). The Woodland Cree of the northern part of the province and the Plains Cree in the south both subsisted on hunting, fishing and gathering, which required these transhumance societies to live in summer and winter camps. Since their lives were governed by the seasons and availability of resources, their homes were impermanent structures associated with healthier outcomes (Daschuk, 2013, Pahwa et al., 2015) than the substandard permanent housing that contributes to today’s burden of higher mortality and morbidity rates,



rates of asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (Pahwa et al., 2015; Katapally et al., 2016; Karunanayake et al., 2017). Contemporarily, families who engage in a mixed bush and modern economy have adapted to permanent house structures, snowmobiles, boats and computer technologies; the issue is that the houses are constructed of materials that cannot withstand the frigid temperatures. Furthermore, the separation of Sacred space from the home to the church and the influence of residential schools culturally disrupted the notion of home as a Sacred space. Previously, offerings were made to the trees and animals that gave of themselves to shelter people. Attention to balanced Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, and Intellectual domains of well-being ensured healthy homes and communities. Carriere (2010, p. 69) found that people from Lac La Ronge try to reconcile Traditional and colonial tensions by holding onto Ancestral practices:

A main challenge for community members is maintaining or going back to their roots in order to carry on a healthy lifestyle grounded in the framework that guided their ancestors' lives. Many participants have maintained traditional activities and ways of life passed on through generations; some continue this lifestyle, and others combine it with modern conveniences and resources.

It is within this ecological context, the context of the Sub-Arctic region, that the Woodland Cree's world view shapes all activities of the inhabitants. The system of Cree Spirituality is an Earth-centered philosophy permeating the physical or corporal world; whether animate or inanimate matter holds Spirit.

In the Indigenous world view, there are four levels of importance in life: Creator, nature, others and self. The four priorities of Indigenous philosophies behold Creator and other Spiritual entities in highest reverence followed by the natural resources gifted to human survival. The relationships developed and maintained among the community members take precedence over an individual's needs and desires. In practicing humility and taking care of others before oneself, a reciprocal relationship is formed, and a person can rely on others taking care of them during

difficult times. The environment shapes cultures the world over as the Earth's resources influence the kinds of food, clothing and shelter we use. Belanger (2018) explains that the land and Indigenous political economy are blended and:

...help us discern how the forces of politics and economics influence community development, and (2) inform us how community-based ideologies related to consumption and leadership are structured to help preserve a sense of political and ecological balance while ensuring the prosperity of community members (p. 27).

How each group of people responds to their surroundings becomes Culture. Indigenous societies consider not only the physical environment, but more importantly, the impact of the Spiritual environment on our life ways. Usually, in contemporary society, we envision our physical environments as natural surroundings, our built environment in terms of housing and other buildings, or we think of how our communities are developed and organized. We may also consider our social environments and how in Canada, we are structured as Indigenous chiefdoms, tribes, or bands. Belanger (2018, p.31) develops the characteristics of each type of Indigenous society in Canada:

Note well that while the continent (Turtle Island) itself may be referred to in and of itself as an ecological context, especially when discussing the ideological differences between, say, European and Indigenous philosophies, there have always been pockets of identity internal to North America, which suggests that multiple ecological contexts existed from which various cultures emerged. That Canada has six main geographic zones (Arctic, Subarctic, Plains, Plateau, Northwest Coast, and Northeast), which in turn can be broken into various subzones, supports the assertion that hundreds if not thousands of communities developed in relation to the land, creating along the way vital social processes reflecting these territorial rhythms.

In Saskatchewan, due to the Subarctic and Plains ecosystems in which we live, Indigenous peoples are all politically and socially organized as band societies. Band societies are customarily characterized by social structures, which are egalitarian, and gender divided according to hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering duties. The availability and procurement of

large game resources shaped the low-density populations of the Dene, Sauteaux, Dakota/Lakota, Assiniboine, Cree and later, Métis Nations.

However, during precontact times, resources were so plentiful that it is said Plains societies equaled in size to the tribes of the Eastern Woodland Nations who numbered a thousand and more members (Daschuk, 2013). It is hypothesized that these Plains tribes were reduced to smaller band units when a climatic change event named the Little Ice Age resulted after the explosion of a tropical volcano around 1259 AD (Daschuk, 2013, p.5). The Little Ice Age between 1275 and 1300 AD (Daschuk, 2013, p.5) would have challenged the physical, social, and personal environments of our Ancestors. Today, we are similarly challenged by changes to our physical and social environments. The difference is that a volcano of foreign institutions has dramatically shaken our personal environments in terms of health and well-being. However, just as our Ancestors responded to natural disasters, contemporary Indigenous Peoples similarly choose strategies that are amenable to their survival.

### ***2.8.1 Environmental Context and History – Lac La Ronge Indian Band***

King et al. (2009, p.81) explain that ‘Indigenous notions of an environmental or land-based psychology’ is directly connected to a community’s ‘mental health and healing [which] can be powerfully affected by eating country food, hunting, and camping off the land’. Land-based psychology is the Mental domain of Wholistic health, and when people are dispossessed of their homelands or industrial/weather events scar the land and poison the water, the other three domains of a community’s Emotional, Physical and Spiritual health are similarly affected. The land is our Mother, and we have a symbiotic relationship whereby she shapes our identity, and reciprocally, we as stewards take care of her.

The environmental context of my homeland has been altered since the fur trade made its entrance in Cumberland House in 1774 (Ray, 2010) and spread westward and northward to

capture our Bands in its net. According to my family in Northern Saskatchewan, in our personal environment we are Rocky Cree, and we speak the ‘th’ dialect. Some of us adopted the ‘Woodland’ Cree name which our southern Saskatchewan Plains relatives named us. We live in a constellation of the Boreal Forest, Pre-Cambrian rock shield region and numerous lakes teaming with all the flora and fauna necessary to provide us with food, Medicine, clothing, and shelter.

I cannot imagine that it was ever possible to be hungry, poorly clothed or homeless with such a sweet abundance of natural resources; in fact, old timers speak of fish so huge that they had to cut them in half to fit them in the boxes at the fish plant in La Ronge. Yet, we signed an adhesion to Treaty Six in 1879, shortly after the 1876 signing at Fort Carleton and Fort Pitt (LLRIB.com, 2017). Perhaps our Chief had the same foresight as his brothers in southern Saskatchewan that we would be facing unimagined environmental challenges. Much of the literature on Indigenous history states that due to starvation and disease, Chiefs Big Bear, Poundmaker and Sweetgrass among many others felt it was necessary to sign treaty with the colonizing government due to the depletion of buffalo and the end of the fur trade era in 1870. Regardless, Lac La Ronge Indian Band Chief James Roberts was astute, when in addition to negotiating for land in Stanley Mission, Grandmother’s Bay, Hall Lake, Sucker River and Lac La Ronge, he included land in central Saskatchewan at Little Red River so that we could grow and harvest grain for our annual supplies of flour. Even to this day, the LLRIB provides each family with a ten-kilogram bag of Robin Hood flour each year at Christmas.

When Treaty Six was signed, our very perceptive Chiefs noticed that the previous five treaties fell short of meeting many basic needs, including accessibility to health care. Consequently, they decided to include a Medicine Chest Clause whereby signatories and their

families would be entitled to ‘a medicine chest [that] shall be kept at the house of each Indian Agent for the use and benefit of the Indians at the direction of such agent’ (Long & Dickason, 2000, p. 454). Considering that vast tracts of land were given up in exchange for a few treaty benefits such as education, housing, tax exemption on reserves, and health care, these remunerations were by no means free; in fact Indigenous Peoples have paid dearly for what so many Canadians call ‘free’ health care. However, just as with many broken treaty promises, what our Ancestors asked for and what they received were two very different outcomes. Instead of universal health care, they were provided with a miserly little first aid kit to be held at the house of the Indian Agent. Considering the onslaught of foreign diseases, for which our ecological complex held no medicine, I can see why so many people met with untimely deaths back then. Years later in 1947 Saskatchewan Premier Tommy Douglas introduced universal hospital care followed by the announcement of a Medicare plan in 1959 (Munroe, 2017, para.1) for all Saskatchewan residents, and a decade later this care was extended by the federal government for all Canadians. Unlike the Treaty Six Chiefs’ quest for medical aid for everyone which in essence was universal hospital and healthcare, Tommy Douglas succeeded and was titled the ‘Father of Medicare’ in Canada. Healthcare for Treaty signatories was and remains separately managed by the federal government. Cuthand, an Indigenous journalist, in 2002 commented in the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix* newspaper that the Spirit and intent of health care was envisioned thusly:

Our leaders maintained that the treaties were living documents meant to grow and evolve to meet contemporary conditions. As technology and other circumstances change, so do the treaties. The medicine chest, therefore, would evolve to mean universal medical care. Medical care was rudimentary at best in 1876, so a medicine chest was appropriate. Today, medicine has moved a long way from a medicine chest, but for the spirit and intent of the treaties to remain intact, medical care must be seen in contemporary terms. (Cuthand, 2002, para. 3, 4)

Since so many diseases such as smallpox, influenza, measles and tuberculosis had reduced tribes of hundreds of people on the Plains to bands of perhaps one or two families together in the winter and small congregations of 150 band members in the summer, the Chiefs anticipated that more strange diseases could be introduced, and therefore it was wise to ensure that assistance would be ready at times of sickness, famine and pestilence. However, in the northern part of Saskatchewan, people tended to live in small family groups and a fair distance from each other.

...the small and dispersed population of the boreal forest limited the spread of disease...this was especially the case in winter when family- sized groups often travelled into the forest in search of solitary game animals such as moose. In summer when plentiful food resources brought hundreds of people together, disease was much more likely to spread.' (Daschuck, 2013, p. 160)

Environmental challenges, therefore, varied for different groups of Cree. The Plains Cree, whose lives depended on the vanishing buffalo herds, did not fare as well as their Woodland Cree relatives during the 1880s. Big Bear, a Plains Cree chief, resisted signing Treaty 6 until his family persuaded him, 'the sight of Big Bear and his hungry people was a surprise to the agent, but he was even more surprised when the by-then famous holdout chief said he would sign Treaty Number Six in exchange for food' ( Long & Dickason, 2000, p.59).

However, as more contact transpired with European settlers, environmental changes crept in, impacting the health of Indigenous societies. These changes included foreign foods, shelter and permanent settlements. Ross Cummings, an Elder trapper born in 1888 at Buffalo Narrows in northwest Saskatchewan, was a firsthand witness to this shifting world:

...as far back as I can remember, the people lived off the wildlife and there were few problems and little sickness...The way of living in the past was a lot better. People were strong and healthy but now they are sick and weak and always have to go to the doctor. We used to have our own doctors and medicine men and they could cure us. (as told to Belanger,1977, para. 3)

Part of the healthy lifestyle has been attributed by other Elders to traditional shelters. I often wondered what type of homes my great-grandparents lived in. Some said lodges, which did not

present a clear image in my mind, and I was surprised to read that we also lived in Tipis like our southern relatives. I always thought that Tipis were part of the Plains culture complex, but now I understand the heart connection I hold to this home space. According to Elder Mary Lee (2006), a resident of the Woodland Cree Community of northern Saskatchewan, we began living in lodges which evolved into Tipis:

For us, the word tipi doesn't mean anything. There is a Cree word we use today; we say migawap. But traditionally, when my mother was teaching me about the tipi, she would say Kitche Migawap. In the beginning, it didn't come in the shape of a tipi. It came in the shape of a dome, which we still use today. It's known as a Sweat Lodge. When that lodge came to us, you couldn't make a fire in there. The people would gather the rocks outside, heat them up, and then bring them into a pit in the middle. This would keep them warm during the night. But they couldn't make a fire in there to cook. They had to do all their cooking outside. So when the lodge became bigger through the structure of the tipi, they could make a fire inside. My mother said that the women were named after that fire in the centre of the tipi, which brought that warmth and comfort. In the Cree language, the centre, the fire, is iskhwuptew. (Centre, para. 2 -4)

Not only in the Oral Tradition, but in several local newspapers or newsletters, we can hear Elders reminisce the good life in their northern Saskatchewan homeland and dwellings:

A lot of old people living today can remember living in teepees when they were kids but since then they have built log cabins and more recently live in government built houses. During the 50's there were still mostly log cabins with no electricity. In the night, the town was specks of dim orange light. The settlement looked lonely, isolated and beautiful. (McLeod, 1970, para. 3, 4)

The settler peoples likely described our lived environment as impoverished, but we were oblivious to whatever hardships they ascribed to us in our beautiful Love imbued cabins:

Inside the homes of the people, there was very little that could be called luxury. As you went inside one of the cabins, the stove was usually in the middle of the one-room house, the pipe reaching up and out through the roof. (McLeod, 1970, para. 5)

I can picture, though, a common scene of Love, Happiness and Health within our modest dwellings.

The cabins then appear to be extensions of the Tipi, except the circle became a square or rectangle and the fire nestled in this pit is now captured in a metal stove. Later in the 1970s, I visited my grandparents who by this time had moved into a government-built house with an adjoining kitchen and living room, four bedrooms, and what would have been the bathroom if there had been running water. It seemed to me a fragmentation of space and that something beautiful was altered as everyone headed off to separate rooms lit by harsh light bulbs dotted with fly excrement; for me a metaphor for bright lives dimmed in poorly built houses.

Substandard housing, medical care, education, and expropriation of lands followed the decades after the Indian Act disengaged the treaties of their promises to maintain traditional lifestyles, self-determination and governance. A century and a half later, the headlines announce cases of over-crowded houses, inaccessibility to health care services, underfunded education and a myriad of unresolved land claims. Yet the rich ecological context of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band shapes the resiliency of the Band membership in its expression of Pride, Culture, Skills, and Values.

The Lac La Ronge Indian Band is located 241 kilometers north of Prince Albert and lies within the Subarctic region of the province where the Boreal Forest and Pre-Cambrian Shield is marbled with large lakes, streams, rivers and blended deciduous trees and evergreens. Montreal Lake was once a part of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, 'In 1889, the Montreal Lake Cree Nation and the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, then known collectively as the Green Lake Indians, signed an "adhesion" to Treaty 6' (Willick, 2014, para. 1). The people from this region are also known as the Woodland Cree and speak the 'th' dialect of the Algonkian Cree language. Although the rich flora and faunal resources have supported the Woodland Cree for millennia, the people have contended with some flooding and forest fires in this region. One of the worst



fires occurred in July, 2015 when 13,000 people were forced to escape the dangerous event. Figure 1 is a map of our six communities as well as a map of Saskatchewan to locate our homeland.

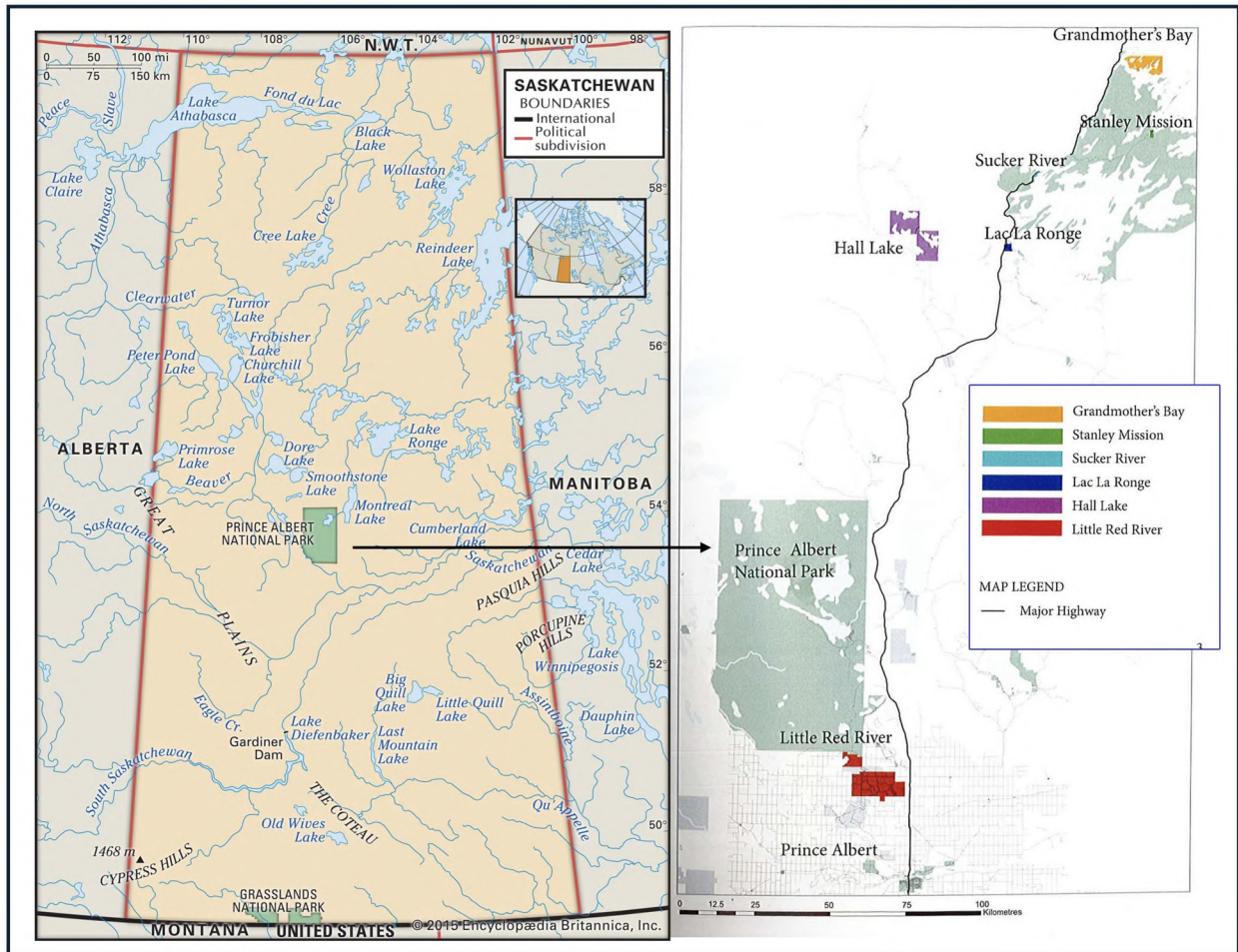


Figure 1. Map of Saskatchewan and Map Showing Lac La Ronge Indian Band Communities. Saskatchewan map from <https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Saskatchewan/276911>. Terms of use: <https://corporate.britannica.com/termsfuse.html> Lac La Ronge Communities map <https://llrib.com/our-communities/> used with permission from LLRIB

In painting a picture of this geographic region, we see that the physical environment can adversely affect the inhabitants' health due to natural causes such as floods and fires.

Furthermore, the social environment that was once primarily shaped by their Motherland became subject to the artificial context of settler societies who were ‘largely removed from nature’ (Belanger, 2018, p. 29). The alterations of lives long steeped in their natural contexts were adversely affected by foreign institutions of politics, justice, education, and health services. These systems determined deleterious health outcomes that multiplied over the decades and contemporary researchers seek to find solutions to escalations of pathologies such as diabetes, cognitive dysfunction, drug-resistant tuberculosis, cardio-vascular and respiratory diseases.

This chapter summarized the literature on First Nations housing, home and health research in historical and contemporary contexts. Sub-standard housing has been found to be determinant of poor health outcomes. The largely deficit-oriented western research literature does not look at the Physical, Mental, Spiritual and Emotional domains of self in relation to housing and people. The significance of the Tipi as a feminine structure was discussed, with the Tipi Teachings advanced as an appropriate conceptual framework for a strengths-based approach to undertake research on the associations between housing, home, and health for First Nations People, like those from my people of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. The chapter concludes with an overview of the ecological and geographical context of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. The next chapter provides an overview of my research methodology.

## CHAPTER THREE- METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the steps taken to explore the research objective and question. The significance of the study is stated, followed by the process of Indigenous engagement. Next, Participant recruitment and the consent process are described. Confidential practices and data /security measures are detailed. Data collection, analysis, and guiding questions are outlined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of mutual benefit of the research to the community, and the role of Elders and Knowledge Keepers is acknowledged.

### 3.1 Research Objective and Question

The objective of this study is to explore healthy personal/family and housing strategies that ensure (d) the Wholistic well-being of Woodland Cree Peoples living in the Lac La Ronge Indian Band reserve and its other five communities of Stanley Mission, Grandmother's Bay, Sucker River, Hall Lake, and Little Red River, Saskatchewan. Balancing the Spiritual, Physical, Mental and Emotional domains of self leads to well-being; therefore, finding out and sharing the healthy decisions and practices that Indigenous Peoples carry out in their homes would be very useful.

The research question under study was 'What are the Traditional Values and customs that guide the stories of personal well-being, family, homes and communities of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band in Saskatchewan? To counter the dominant Eurowestern deficit framing of research around house and home, I formulated the following strength-based over-arching question for participants to glean positive practices in individual, family, and home health: 'Would you please share with me where you grew up and what it was like growing up in your house(s) and the Values your family kept in your homes?' Answers to this question allude to homes as places of health and well- being, and in keeping with Oral Tradition, I used an Indigenous Storytelling method in a two-phase approach with a first interview eliciting story and a second interview to

review transcripts and create a space for further stories. Originally, I had planned for this second phase to be a collective reciprocal learning circle as an effective and appropriate way to explore the Values inherent in Indigenous health promotion. However, the COVID- 19 Pandemic prevented this group-centered method from taking place as the Elders were one of the primary vulnerable groups to possibly be affected by the disease. Furthermore, during the pandemic the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board set restrictions consistent with public health orders on conducting face to face research with participants. Consequently, all data collection activities were conducted virtually or by telephone.

### **3.2 Significance**

The significance of this study is to celebrate Elders' recollections of the values and survival strategies which sustained them during a time of technological and social change during the mid-twentieth century. Their Stories highlight strength-based practices of home stewardship, correct colonizer stereotypes of dependency, and positively expand perceptions of Woodland Cree identity.

The Storytelling approach explored the Values inherent in the Indigenous health promotion of home life. The question Participants were asked is novel because it invites the Participants to revisit Wholistic strategies which ensured the survival of Indigenous Peoples in Saskatchewan for millennia, connects to contemporary society, and aspires for application in the future. Much of the literature on housing does not ask inhabitants to speak from the heart on what they enjoy about homes; rather it typically separates the person from the house and rates all the negative characteristics of the built environment. Stories shared with me were centered on the experience of Participants regarding personal, family and community health in relation to home

housing environments, and Participants were asked to contextualize their Stories with cultural values. What follows is an excerpt of the Vision of the LLRIB to which the study aspired:

Educational activities reflecting Woodland Cree culture and Cree language are to be integrated into the provincial curricula to provide the educational foundation from which the individual student can learn to live successfully and happily in any society.

By providing educational experiences that interconnect the child's community, Cree language, history, and culture, the provincial curricula, and the world at large, our children will acquire the skills, knowledge, and strength to enable them to assume productive roles as adults. (llrib.com, 2024)

In developing this study, I anticipated that the dissemination of Knowledge and experience of those Teachings that support the Vision of the LLRIB could be shared through community presentations, reciprocal learning circles, newsletters. Also this sharing could inform the education curriculum for our children. The Cree values, foundational to Cree *Migawap* /Tipi teachings described in chapter two that underpin my research support the goals of the LLRIB 'To provide educational programs that will develop pride in our students, to provide educational programs that promote and uphold the traditional values of the members of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, and to restore and maintain Cree language and culture' (llrib.com, 2024).

### **3.3 Indigenous Engagement and Community-Based Participatory Research**

On December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019, I presented a Power Point summary of my proposed research to the LLRIB Health Board. I provided copies of my slides to everyone in attendance and answered questions posed by the Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Community stakeholders and staff of the Health Unit. I was then advised to exit so that internal discussion could take place, following which I would be informed of next steps.

After the proposal presentation, the Health Board contacted me to set up a meeting with the Chief and Councilors where I would present and discuss my proposal. The second presentation took place on February 21, 2020. On March 6<sup>th</sup>, I received a motion of approval

from the Executive Director, that all 10 attendees voted in favour of my request to perform Elder interviews.

On September 2, 2020, I presented a copy of the information sheet, consent form, Sharing Circle consent form, Storytelling questions, transcript release form, and audio/visual recording release form to the Coordinator of the Cree Language and Culture Unit of LLRIB, who in turn was going to review the documents with the Committee. She sought approval from Cree speakers that the documents were understandable in English. The Coordinator also presented the documents on October 2 at a Cultural event to Elders for their approval regarding reading comprehension. On October 19<sup>th</sup>, I was called to a meeting of the Cree Language and Culture Unit to hear that all documents had been approved. I was also provided with a list of Elders who might be interested in the study. Institutional Research Ethics Board approval followed in June 2021, the end of an 18-month process following which I could begin data collection.

### **3.4 Recruitment**

#### ***3.4.1 Participant Inclusion Criteria***

To honour the Sacredness of the Storytellers, the word Participant is capitalized. The criteria for including Participants were age (60 years and older), membership with the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, and having lived on one of its reserves.

#### ***3.4.2 Participant Recruitment***

Similar to Carriere (2010), in her study on the Lac La Ronge Indian Band: *Pursuing pimâcihowin (making a living) to achieve mitho-pimâtisiwin (the good life)*, I employed the methodology of snowball sampling (Atkinson & Flint, 2004) which begins with the primary researcher who invites a person previously known or related to them, and they in turn network the researcher with prospective participants known to them. I provided my Aunt Frances Charles

and my Uncle Miles Charles (Deceased) with drafts of my proposal and my Grandparent's Story, and they were both enthused with my plans. They were both fluent Cree speakers, Elders, and lifelong residents of Lac La Ronge, and they readily volunteered to be Participants in this research.

Once the Behavioral Ethics Board approved my proposal on June 2, 2021, I advertised for Participants via Facsimile through each of the six community Health and Education Band Offices on two separate occasions. As I interviewed Participants, I asked them to spread news of the study by word of mouth to their friends and family. I also advertised on Facebook and the Coordinator of the Cree Language and Culture Unit gave information sheets to her staff for distribution (Appendix 1).

I had hoped to document the Sharing Circles and Stories of four Elders or Knowledge Keepers (two women and two men) from each of the six communities to capture the broader LLRIB. Ultimately, however, the COVID pandemic limited recruitments; 13 Storytellers shared their Knowledge about home and housing. Seven women and six men who participated are listed by name or pseudonym in Table One, along with their home community, and status as Elders or Knowledge Keepers. Participants who were in their 70s or self-identified as Elders were categorized as such whereas Participants who were in their 60s and contributed Traditional Knowledge of trapline life were classified as Knowledge Keepers.

The ages of the Participants were between 60 and 84 years old. They had lived in both home-built shelters and government housing. One Participant lived in Stanley Mission, two Participants lived in Sucker River and 10 people came from Lac La Ronge.

**Table 1:** Name, Reserve and Community Status of Participants

TABLE 1		
Name	Reserve	Elder/ Knowledge Keeper
Elsie Ermine (pseudonym)	Stanley Mission	Elder
Frances Charles	La Ronge	Elder
Miles Charles	La Ronge	Elder
Roderick Sanderson	La Ronge	Knowledge Keeper
Annie Sanderson	La Ronge	Elder
Miles D. Ratt	Sucker River	Elder
John Halkett	La Ronge	Elder
Alvina Halkett	La Ronge	Elder
James Eninew	Sucker River	Knowledge Keeper
Elizabeth Charles	La Ronge	Elder
Kathy Bell	La Ronge	Knowledge Keeper
Matthew Charles	La Ronge	Knowledge Keeper
Jeannie Smith (pseudonym)	La Ronge	Knowledge Keeper

### 3.5 Relationships with the Storytellers

Since I am member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, I was related to six of the 13 participants. The other seven participants knew of my family ties. This Kinship was an asset to the Story-sharing process, especially since it could not take place in person, as they felt at ease with me. To honour the relationship between myself as researcher and the Storytellers as Participants, a Gift Giving Ceremony had been proposed. Due to the COVID Pandemic, local



Protocols of Gifting Tobacco, Earth Medicines and food products could not take place. However, honoraria were mailed to the Storytellers in the amount of 60 dollars per session.

### ***3.5.1 Individual Story Sharing Consent Process***

After introducing myself and my connection to the LLRIB and University of Saskatchewan, I introduced the information sheet, individual Storytelling consent form, Storytelling questions, transcript release form and audio/visual recording release form (collated in Appendix 1). Once I reviewed all the documents by computer/phone I asked the Participant if they were still interested in following up with the Storytelling interview. I also asked them if they were comfortable with me recording our conversation. All responded affirmatively. I then mailed the documents along with their honoraria to each of the Participants.

### ***3.5.2 Second Interview Consent Process***

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no Sharing Circles were held. Instead, a second Individual Storytelling Interview was offered to verify the contents of the initial Storytelling interview and to give the Participants the opportunity to add further to their Stories. Eight people agreed to a second interview.

## **3.6 Storytelling Methodology, Duration and Location**

Although an interview guide was used (Table Two), Participants were encouraged to answer the questions as though they were telling a Story about their lives. A rationale follows for the significance of Storytelling among Indigenous Nations:

Storytelling, *achimowin* ...is an important aspect of Indigenous Knowledge as it embodies life's lessons and shows how knowledge is transmitted to all. Stories are the cornerstone of our cultures and need to be an essential part of learning in order to ensure cultural survival. Stories have great importance in oral cultures. In many First Nations, stories are not only dimensional but are told to convey several different lessons depending when and where they are told and by whom (Cruikshank, 1999). In oral cultures, storytelling is a powerful medium for life

instruction, and is a means of conveying values, which are important links to the past and a means of surviving into the future. (Settee, 2013, p. 56)

Storytelling, as an Indigenous research method, is the sharing of information through Oral Tradition otherwise known in Eurowestern academia as ‘the dissemination of results’ which to Indigenous Peoples is ‘usually very boring to non-researchers, very technical and very cold’ (Smith, 2002, p.161). Storytelling is a Sharing of Knowledge from the Heart as opposed to Knowledge from the head: ‘We are all speaking from our hearts, knowing that our actions today enact the timeless and relational storyworlds of our ancestors of tomorrow. For story is the most powerful intergenerational manifestation of hope,’ (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 13). I Hope my Grandson and future generations will understand this dissertation to be not only a mental exercise of academia but as a Story of inheritance. This dissertation includes my Story as part of the Storytelling research methodology. I hope that the Storytellers who contributed to this research will enjoy each other’s Stories as it is presented in an Indigenous communication system. Wilson, (2008) encourages Indigenous researchers to write as Storytellers in contrast to researchers:

...I present the information in this study in a way that is more culturally appropriate for Indigenous people by taking on the role of storyteller rather than researcher/author. Indigenous people in Canada recognize that it is important for storytellers to impart their own life and experience into the telling...When listeners know where the storyteller is coming from and how the story fits into the storyteller’s life, it makes the absorption of the knowledge that much easier. (p. 32)

Kovach (2010) advises to place the power of the research into the hands of the Storyteller. Even though the researcher may have an interview guide on hand, ultimately the discourse is led through the unfolding of the Storyteller’s voice: ‘When asking participants for their stories, the researcher must be an able listener and be comfortable with the fluidity of story. The onus is upon the researcher to honour this more exploratory approach and try not to interrupt the story through repdirectional (*sic*) prompting (p. 125). For example, the probing questions used the

terms 'male /female' but Participant responses clearly indicated these words were conceptually understood by them as gendered, meaning men and women. My intention as a researcher was to use a gender lens rather than a sex lens to view the Participants. The conflation of terms represents my own linguistic and conceptual navigation between Cree and English as well as lay and scholarly meanings.

The Indigenous Storytelling methodology is a conversational method with Kovach (2010) describing 'the similarities between story within Indigenous methodologies and reflexivity within existing qualitative approaches' (p.18). Jamieson et al. (2023) explain that 'reflexivity is the act of examining one's own assumption, belief, and judgement systems, and thinking carefully and critically about how these influence the research process' (p. 1). The research process for this study was deeply influenced by my Cree epistemology and cultural grounding. It allowed me to co-create Story with the Participants, which is part of Indigenous Story methodology in that 'story is not only a means for hearing another's narrative, it also invites reflexivity into research' (Kovach, 2010, p. 100).

The initial Storytelling interviews lasted from 32 minutes to 72 minutes. The second interviews yielded similar data and were considerably shorter, ranging from nine minutes to 32 minutes. Participants were at their homes for the telephone/computer interviews.

### **3.7 Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Because some Participants wanted to be credited for their contributions to the project, their names are honoured and associated with their words in the presentation of findings that follows. Participants who did not want their names disclosed were assigned a pseudonym.

### 3.8 Data Collection and Analysis

The guiding questions for this study (Table 2) focused on the Storyteller' recollections of Cree home life and how the Values and Customs flowed into contemporary homes and housing. Future aspirations were also explored to maintain or improve homes and communities of health and well-being.

**Table 2:** Guiding Storytelling Questions

	<b>Guiding Questions</b>
	Past
1.	Would you please share with me, where you grew up and what it was like growing up in your house(s) and the values and customs your family followed in your homes?
1.	Was there a difference in female /male influences in the design of your home?
2.	Was there a change in your family life when you moved from one room cabins or smaller dwellings to houses with more rooms? (Probe female/male power structure, e.g. tipi is a female structure to 'a man's home is his castle)
3.	How did people take care of each other in times of sicknesses such as tuberculosis? (Probe female /male experiences, who took care of the sick)
4.	How did residential schools impact your home and family life?
	Present
5.	What does house and home mean to you? Is there a difference?
6.	What do you like about your house?
7.	Would you please share with me, how you create your home as a place of health and well-being?
	Future:
8.	What would you change about your house?
9.	What is your vision of an ideal house and how would it reflect your values?

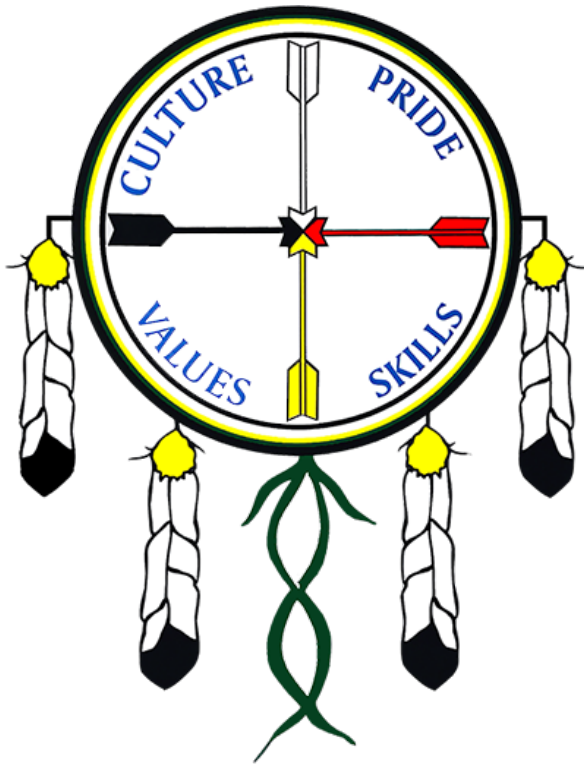
Four digital audio recording copies of each Storytelling interview were made. I kept one set for analysis which was stored on my password protected computer. A second set was archived to secure Cloud storage where it will be kept for five years after the study is complete. For those who consented, a third set is housed at the Cree Language and Culture Unit of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band office to be owned and used by the Band. Recordings were provided to each of the 13 Participants as well.

### ***3.8.1 Data Analysis***

From an analytical perspective, I drew on Western thematic analysis in chapter five after I presented the Stories in chapter four, consistent with Indigenous Storytelling methodology. To analyze Storytelling, stories are not taken apart but presented in their entirety. Thematic analysis was conducted following a Braun & Clarke approach (2022) because I had the Tipi Teachings framework through which I wanted to understand Participant responses to my questions. In taking these two approaches to understanding the research data, I am trying to navigate an ethical space (Ermine, 2007), but I intentionally privilege Indigenous paradigms in doing my work. I am an Indigenous person, and it is appropriate in the Indigenous community context for this research to use Indigenous paradigms. Thus, Storytelling methodology comes first, as the first impression of findings to leave a reader of this work. My approach included an Indigenous conceptual framework, the Tipi Teachings, that lent itself well to a Western thematic interpretation of the data.

Transcriptions were inductively analyzed for emergent themes and Participant reflections on how Wholistically healthy home environments enhance the Culture, Values, Skills and Pride of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. I transcribed the first four Participant recordings and contracted the Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research (CHASR), at the University of Saskatchewan, to transcribe the remaining 17 recordings. The 21 recordings represent 13 first

interviews and follow up interviews with eight of these Participants. Each of the 21 transcripts was inductively coded and themed. Key words, phrases or concepts were first identified from each transcript and a tracking sheet captured the emergent themes in rows down a left side column in association with each Participant organized in columns along the top. Themes were colour-coded according to broad categories such as Medicine, Teachings, Cultural Stories, trapline life, social life, housing, economy, transportation, and colonization. Subsequent readings of the transcripts drew on my conceptual framework to associate the Tipi Teaching Values reflected in the Stories. Although many of the details shared in the Stories could be associated with two or more of the Tipi Teachings, I chose what I perceived to be the most significant Teaching to link with parts of each Story. I then organized the data a third time following the four domains of the LLRIB Medicine Wheel, an approach I had not built into the original study design but came across as the study unfolded.



**Figure 1:** Lac La Ronge Indian Band Education Medicine Wheel. “kiskinwahamātōtān” Teaching Each Other.

Reference: <https://llribedu.ca/>

Retrieved April 13, 2024.

### ***3.8.2 Data Security and Storage***

Data were kept in a locked brief case and transported by myself to my house, which is armed with an alarm system and protected with security cameras. Findings will be published in journal articles and/or a book. I anticipate presenting findings at LLRIB Education and Health conferences, or at Elders’ Gatherings and Culture Camps. This dissertation and findings are intended to inform a curriculum resource kit for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve, and research articles/book may be useful for University Indigenous Studies courses.

### **3.9 Risks to Participants**

Because some of the Participants attended residential schools, it was possible that some of them may have experienced emotional or psychological trauma. Also some Participants may have endured hardships in some of the places they grew up. As a residential school survivor, I have empathized and comforted people who have wept in memory of past harms. Although I could mitigate the effects of past harms through Traditional Ways of Smudging, I had a list of free local resources to which Participants could be guided.

### **3.10 Benefits to Participants**

When children were severed from their connections to family and homes because of residential schools, their communal bonds were fractured, and Wholistic health depleted. After this research concludes, plans are to build a curriculum resource kit designed to maintain or rekindle the fire of Cultural Values that warm their homes, the Pride and Skills with which homes were/are built. In building the resource kit with community stakeholders, this study speaks to a recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, '10. iv. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities' (p.2).

### **3.11 Community Engaged Research Ethics**

The six Woodland Cree speaking communities of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band and their past/present ways of living in Traditional and contemporary home dwellings are the primary focus of this project. As an emic researcher, I share a clear sense of people hood with these Cree communities and I try to navigate the ethical space between our community members and university by weaving Indigenous and western research paradigms.



Because there is an intention to draw Indigenous-specific conclusions from this project, I am following the principles of First Nations control of research, which permeates all stages of this study from preliminary visits to data collection, and beyond as the community sees fit. Elders and community leaders guided the ethics application, examination of data and approval of final reports in accordance with the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP®) (FNIGC, 2018), and Chapter Nine of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada 2014).

This study employed a community-based participatory research approach that honours Cree Protocols and is congruent with Indigenous research methodologies (Archibald et al., 2019; Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2010). The University of Saskatchewan Human Behavioral Research Ethics forms were used in consultation with the Health/Education Directors, and with Band Council approval of this study. A consultation was undertaken with community members to ensure the letters of information, consent forms and questions were clearly understood. Data collection, although pre-scheduled, followed the rhythm of community and personal circumstances of Participant volunteers. However, data collection plans were heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **3.12 Limitations**

It could be that the COVID 19 interfered with the number of Participants willing to take part in this Storytelling research. Data collection was limited to telephone and computer conversations, and Participants may have had more to say in a natural setting such as their homes and with the customary Protocols of in-person Gift -giving of Tobacco and food. Most of the interviews were limited to Lac La Ronge despite advertising and connections with the other local

Lac La Ronge Indian Band reserve communities of Grandmother's Bay, Hall Lake and Little Red River reserves. The remote communities may have yielded different results than the more settler-populated Lac La Ronge. Furthermore, Little Red River reserve which is located 214 kilometers south of La Ronge is characterized by an agrarian economy and the residents' notions of house, home and health may have differed considerably to their northern boreal forest relatives. Study participation was limited to Elders and Knowledge Keepers 60 years and older. It is possible that younger Participants may have experienced a sense of individual versus communal space much differently than their grandparents.

### **3.13 Mutual Benefit, Capacity Building, Role of Elders/Knowledge Keepers**

The voices of the Elders and Knowledge Keepers will be preserved for future generations as they described their past and present realities of personal and community health grounded in Traditional Teachings about home and house. The Storyteller's identification of Cultural influences that will promote personal/home health in First Nations populations will guide the development of curricular materials. The findings from this study may support First Nations communities in effecting changes in their communities, as well as assisting in determining provincial and national policies and priorities. Therefore, this study also speaks to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations pertaining to Health and Education (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. (2015). In particular, Action 19 -24 calls upon 'medical and nursing schools in Canada to require all students to take a course dealing with Aboriginal health issues including... Indigenous teachings and practices (p. 3). Furthermore, Call to Action 63 on Education and Reconciliation states, 'Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students' (p. 7).

Collectively, we LLRIB members and Participants of this research project will benefit by building curriculum resources and educational experiences which celebrate Woodland Cree Culture, Values, Pride, and Skills within the context of personal, family and home health.

### **3.14 Customs and Codes of Research Practice that Apply to LLRIB**

This research is an emic perspective that reflects the Cree voices of my Ancestors and the community members of the LLRIB reserves. Prior to researching and writing the proposal for this research, I followed the primary research method of Indigenous Ceremony. One of my mentors, Norman Opikekew once advised me to ‘say what your Ancestors would have you say’ (personal communication, 2006). Through Prayer, Ceremony, and Dreaming, I have opened my heart and mind to their instructions. The wisdom conveyed in the Cree teachings of the *Migawap*/Tipi have compelled me to listen to positive messages as people share stories of pain, healing and celebration in both personal and academic settings.

### **3.15 Final Project Results**

Any articles and conference posters will be co-authored or published with Participant and community (Health /Education Board) sanction. Project related reports will be compiled and submitted to Band newsletters and meetings. Curriculum products will be reviewed with LLRIB Education and Health.

### **3.16 Chapter Summary**

This chapter developed the steps taken to explore the research objective and question. The significance of the study and guiding questions were outlined. The process of Indigenous engagement and community based participatory research was developed. The Participant recruitment and the consent process was described. Confidential practices and data/security

measures were detailed. The mutual benefit of the research to the community, capacity building, role of Elders and Knowledge Keepers were acknowledged.

The next two chapters present findings. Chapter Four presents the Stories of each of the 13 Participants, as they were told to me. This Indigenous approach allows for a Wholistic read of the data for readers in a manner consistent with the intent of Indigenous Storytelling (Archibald, 2019, Kovach 2010, Settee, 2013, Wilson, 2008). Chapter Five organizes findings following the Tipi Teaching Values framework that informed my research, as well as also locating their significance for a LLRIB Medicine Wheel framework.

## CHAPTER FOUR - PARTICIPANT STORIES

This chapter summarizes the words of each of the 13 Storytellers with interview questions removed. The Stories are the essence of this dissertation and represent the life force of each Orator. In Chapter Five, excerpts of the individual Stories are taken to illustrate the Values of the Tipi Teachings and the four components of the LLRIB Medicine Wheel of Culture, Values, Skills and Pride. In that chapter, the Teachings of the Cree Tipi and the components of the Woodland Cree Medicine Wheel serve as frameworks by which the Stories are analyzed. First, as is appropriate to Indigenous Storytelling, readers walk with each Storyteller in turn, hearing a yearning for strategies that worked toward a Wholistic society, Hope for their Cultural transmission into the future, and the centralities of house and home to both. Although eight of the 13 Storytellers participated in a follow up Storytelling interview, only 13 Stories are presented here as the eight follow up Stories bore similar information to the initial interview and were thusly combined as one story per Participant. Storytellers all held connection to the Boreal Woodland Cree environment and were classified as Elders or Knowledge Keepers, depending on their age and status as Elders in the communities. The Stories are organized according to the sequence in which the interviews were conducted.

### 4.1 Elsie Ermine (pseudonym)

I'm 67, I'll be 68 next month. I grew up in Wapaweka in the 60's. Yeah, we moved over there when I was 11. That was in '66. No, '65 we moved over there. Before that I lived in Big Stone and Big Stone is near La Ronge. That's where my dad is from. But when my parents split up, that's where my mom took us cause that's where her parents were. She grew up over there too. I grew up on Big Stone Reserve until I was 11 years old, and I got moved to Wapaweka Lake which was Pipestone back then and we all lived with our grandparents. We were taught, we helped out with the commercial fishing when we got older, and I helped my mom with my siblings cause there were seven of us so I learned early how to be a mother. Even before we left

my dad, it was the same thing. I stayed with my grandparents till I was 20. I went back to school for two years then I went back over there and then they sent me back to town to do something because I liked the bush life because I liked to trap with my mom and commercial fish with my grandfather and grandmother. In the summertime when everyone was home from the residential school and mission school, we ate the same, we gathered cause there was a lot of us, and we ate together. They used to spread canvas on the ground if it was nice and they put servings for everybody and then they called us and everyone sat down cause everyone was equal, no one got more food than the others, so we learned how to live together. We had a few spats here and there as siblings and living with uncles; I have an uncle the same age as me and another uncle so they kind of helped out. We all helped out as one big family.

In the summertime when the fisherman would be fishing, we would all move from one place to another cause the fish moved. When the fish plane came, the older ones, the bigger kids used to help pack the tubs and the men loaded up the fish. Back then, everybody was equal we were treated; my grandfather wanted us to do the same work as my uncles did. So, it was good for me because I liked doing outdoor stuff and I told my uncle that one day I wanted to make fish because it looked interesting. I was only about 12 or 13 years old and 'you're too small' he said, and I said, 'no I'm not, I really want to learn cause it looks like fun.' That one day, he made me go to where they made fish, he made me a little step to stand on so I could reach the top of the table then he showed me how to make fish so that was my next job was to make fish when the fishermen would come in and all of us helped out except one of my siblings because he was different.

Other than that, we lived together, and everyone was equal. You know, my grandmother didn't say we had to do this, and my grandfather the other thing, we listened to both grandparents and my mom. And we all did laundry with the tub and washboard and hung them up and it was nicer because the water was warm and all we had to do was dip the tub and pull it along the shoreline to get it out of the water and we'd start washing and we used to enjoy washing clothes. We used to wash first thing in the morning after we did the fish. We used to go out three o'clock in the morning to check the nets and by eight or nine o'clock everything was done, even before that, and then we would do laundry. As soon as we were done everything then we had a chance to go for a boat ride or do our own thing. And we had a two-way radio, so I used to be the one

who called the planes after I learned how. It was interesting and I learned a lot from my grandparents and my mom and my uncles, I guess. We just lived one big happy family. We lived at Bigstone, it's out over here, for a flight it was a 15-to-20-minute flight by plane which we used to use. Now that the road is all the way to the landing, it takes us an hour to an hour and a half. It was called Pipestone back then, towards Pelican. That's where we grew up. My uncles and my sisters all still have cabins out there, they still do but they kind of left that cabin we grew up in at the far end run down cause my uncle got sick. My uncle was given my mom's fishing license when she passed away. He only used it for maybe two summers and that was it, he let it go. Two of my uncles are still fishing but not full time because they are getting old.

We did commercial fishing in the wintertime too. My grandfather would get mad at us cause he used to get mad at me because I go the wrong way to listen to that jigger, in the wrong spot. And then he'd have to do it over again. But then later on, I learn how to use it. A jigger is that big thing that goes through the ice. They tie a rope to it. And then you pull it and it goes over and it makes a noise on top of the ice. They have enough for rope in there for one fish net. Like hundred feet. And then at the end, when that rope – it's almost the end of that rope, they usually put a pole – I'm just using my hand even though you can't see me. They put a pole in the ice beside the water hole, beside the hole that they make. They put a stick there. And then when the jigger goes, another rope, they just put it over that pole. And then they go to where the jigger stopped, and they make a hole there and then they use a hook. Long ones, that's what they use. They catch that line on that jigger then they pull it up and they make their hole. That's where they put that rope back in. And then when that's done, they come back to the main hole where they put that jigger through. They make the hole a little bigger, not much. Then they tie the net to that rope that they put over that stick. And then one or two people go back to where the jigger ended, to where they made that other hole, then they pull it. It's not fun when it's cold. It's almost the same as summertime, but then it's easier to put the net out in summertime.

In a net we would catch maybe a tub, sometimes a tub and a half. A tub would hold about 50 fish. In Wapaweka, we had white fish, jack fish, pickerel, and suckers. And of course, mariah, an odd mariah here and there. But what they show was the white fish, the northern pike was either jack fish, or the pickerel. Those are the only three species they sell. The rest were for eating or for the dogs, when we had dogs the first time.

Pipe Stone, it's Wapaweka, it's the same thing. I think that's always on the map, but it was known as Pipe Stone Lake to us, to the people of Wapaweka, it was always Pipe Stone. And on our trapline on my dad's side, on the Stanley road, it's Pipe Stone Bay. Yeah. Where we grew up, the island was called – what was it called? Bird Island? Yeah, that's what it was called. That's where everybody used to live. I remember going to go visit over there and my late uncle. And then we just used to live not too far from where my grandpa's cabin was at the point there. And then you go walking, there's a bay there. And over there, they had – our late grandparents. And all their kids, I guess. Grandmother's Bay has points. It's got one, two, three, four, five, six points. And different people live in different points. I used to live at point three. That's how the trapline used to be on that one long island.

When they used to bring in the fish, it used to be on one island where the icehouse was. All the fishermen brought their fish there. Before, I learned how to make fish to help with the fish – I was one of the cooks. Even though I wasn't that old, but adults were doing the fish, so we learned early how to cook. And it was for everybody, not only for our family. And you're looking at about 30 to 40 people in one day at lunchtime. I was about 11. But I used to – sometimes I used to go and see what they're doing and how they made fish. And then I got curious, later on, I wanted to do it. But they told me I wasn't tall enough. I wasn't tall enough, I wasn't big enough to do it, in other words. And then I used to keep bugging them. Then finally my uncle, one day, said to me, "We're gonna go make fish, come," he said, "come with us." Him and my late aunt. So, I went down there with them to where the fish were in those tables. And he said, "Okay, you're gonna learn how to make fish today," he said to me. He made a thing for me to stand on. And that's the day I learned to make fish, open it up for the fish place to sell them, gutting the fish. That was the very first time. I didn't learn how to really make fish until maybe I was 15, 14 or 15. I was scared to cut myself. I always used to say no, no, no. I didn't want to do them, but I told them, "I didn't want to make the fish, but I'll cook them." And after a while, my mom said that I had to learn to do it. Yeah, "You have to know how to do it cause me and Kokum are not always gonna be around to do it for you."

But anyway, I remember my grandparents both – my grandfather had a license. And then later on, my grandmother got a license. And they got seven commercial fishermen. Even though we were Treaty, we still had to have a commercial fishing license cause it was through the co-operative. The co-op fish plant, that's where they used to sell their fish. At first, we used to have



the fish plane come in maybe two, three times a day. And then they tapered off to once a day or every other day. Now it's only, since the fish plant closed, my uncles goes out in PA. And then they – and a guy from La Ronge opened his little fish plant there. So, they didn't want to travel south, that's why they go sell their fish. Yeah. My uncle still does that even though he's getting old. He just turned 80. He's not very healthy, but he's like my late grandfather, he won't quit until he falls.

When we lived at Big Stone, it was my dad who designed the cabin. We had a big one room house, you know where there was no bedrooms, just a partition between the two, where we slept on one side with our grandmother and my parents slept on the other side with the two younger ones. It was an open cabin. Most of the cabins in those days were like that, open cabins. The men designed the houses cause they built the houses. When we were at Big Stone, when they rebuilt our cabin, it was the men from the community that helped my dad. We never moved away, we just stayed there.

When we moved to Far Reserve, my grandparents had a government house at Far Reserve and it was only a two-bedroom house, real tiny, but we all managed to live there, my uncles and us. My mom had one room and my grandparents and uncles, and cousin had one room. We felt crowded for sure. I did not feel crowded in my first home though, like the one my dad built, it was when they started partitioning. I felt that I was being pushed away when that door would close, you know what I mean, that barrier? And when I was growing up, it was all open, we all did stuff together. It was all equal, there was no boss of the house.

The women took care of the sick. I'll use my grandmother as an example. Long time ago, people used to go and help. They used to visit each other every day and help each other out. We'd have these ladies from the reserve come to visit and if something needs to be done, they'd just be there. We did not have any taxi service or ambulance back then. So, there was only one taxi, Northlands Taxi. So, when my sister got sick, we lost her in 1960, she was two years old. My grandmother looked after us when before and after she had her babies. Me and my other sister went to our auntie's place at Big Stone. We walked over there and told our aunt that our sister was sick and then she sent one of her boys over to Morin's Hill to get a taxi and then my grandmother took her in but of course the doctor said 'give her a couple baby aspirin and if she's still like that tomorrow I'll see her cause I don't work on Sundays.' We lost our sister around one o'clock that night. When we lost our sister, we had to walk; it was in the wintertime.

We weren't that big, our grandmother dressed us warm, and we told her sister that my sister had passed away. We walked through a trail in the bush; it was a short cut instead of going around the road. So, they came there, and I don't know how people knew but my aunt came over that morning and she found out that my sister had passed on and shortly after that people were coming in and out of our house. I guess they look after their families at home and try to make them feel better but, when need be, they used a taxi. But it was just like that doctor didn't really care, especially if he didn't work on Sunday. Just imagine how many people never got seen on a Sunday cause they were sick, so it was up to the family to make them feel better.

I remember when we had chicken pox; my grandmother gave us a sponge bath with oatmeal. She mixed oatmeal in that water, and later we felt better after she put us to bed instead of scratching. They had their Traditional Medicines and ways of doing things, yes, they did and some still do. There's a lot of people who are now picking Traditional Medicines. A lot of the things they pick help a person instead of taking all those pills that you take. For myself, I'm a diabetic. I didn't try Indian Medicine for my diabetes, but I'm using an ointment that I was given to me because I have a pinched nerve on my spine and that really helps. When I broke my ribs three weeks ago, I'm still suffering a little bit, but that ointment really helped. That's what I used when I got my COVID needle. My arm was sore, first time I had to rub my legs and then I thought maybe it would help if I rubbed my arm and within an hour the pain was gone. The second time I did the same thing, I used Indian Medicine. I believe in it, but a lot of people don't, it's just like they are picking just to show off, that's what I heard anyway. I notice too in the years that I was growing up, when the men got sick, they used to act like babies. I used to think because you know when we get sick, after a few hours or the next day, we are active again. The men go to bed, they want to be served in bed. My dad used to do that, and my mom got mad at him.

When the residential schools came along, it really impacted my family because my mom was always taking care of us, we were always with our mom. I remember that plane landed at Wapaweka to pick up us four school aged girls. That pilot said that my dad was waiting at Norcanair and so we were happy because we all thought we were going to live with my dad for the school year and here we dropped off my dad at home at Big Stone and that guy that was driving the white car, cause there were four of us in the backseat, and he let my dad out and said that we were going for a ride. Our next stop was Timber Bay Mission School, so he tricked us.

Also, you don't realize that you can't speak your language cause I got into trouble within 10 minutes after I got there because my cousin was over there and we started blabbing away in Cree cause we hadn't seen each other since we were little girls. We got into trouble, 10 minutes in a Mission School and I already got the strap. It used to be about a foot long, maybe longer and I always think of that strap when I see a cut tire, you know when you see a tire being cut, that's how that strap looked. And my sister and the three of us understood and spoke English cause we'd already been in school but sister number four only spoke Cree and she used to swear a lot in Cree, she didn't go to school yet so when we were at the Mission School she stayed with the girl's dorm parents. She was six years old and the youngest of the four school aged girls. When we got back after Christmas, they moved her to the boy's dorm parents. We still had other sisters at home. It was hard for us. We used to sneak and take turns sleeping with her at night and when the first whistle blew downstairs, we moved to our own beds. We comforted her because she missed home. We didn't go home the first Christmas; we went home at Easter time for five days. That's the only time we got to go home to our mom and in the meantime, we lost our youngest brother at the trap line, he was nine months old. We didn't know anything about it until three weeks later my grandmother wrote us a letter and told us cause there were no mail trucks way back then.

We did not get compensated for that school at Timber Bay. We went to court and appealed it but now after Kamloops when they found those 215 kids, they are working on getting it recognized as a residential school because they have opened a new case. We lost our cousin Bobby Bird to that in '69, he ran away from the Mission School, they just found his remains in 2001, and he was still missing a thigh bone when we buried him. He ran away from Timber Bay. There were three boys they caught, they got into trouble because they took off that elastic from their gitches and made slingshots and were shooting birds in the garden. The other two got caught but he didn't but to this day we think the superintendent did something to him cause a little guy couldn't run that far. He wasn't very big, he was only nine years old, so there's a question mark there.

Residential school did not change how we felt about our families and our home life. Nothing changed. It was still the same, a wonderful place to live. Us girls were at the Mission School and my uncle, and my cousin were at the residential schools in PA, and we all came home the same day and we only spent a few hours in La Ronge and we flew out the day before

we were to go back to school. None of us complained, we were so used to that kind of life that we didn't want to change anything. I try to teach my kids and my grandkids about it. I don't commercial fish or go hunting but I always tell them Stories about it when we were growing up. Everything was the same, my uncles eventually fell in Love and got married but they brought their wives back to Wapaweka except one of my uncles. Our cousins too, they're a bit younger than we are but we got along and helped out.

My house feels like a home, it is except you feel closed, I don't know, it's just that feeling I get when they close the bedroom door. I don't know if anybody else feels that way. I live with two of my grandsons and when they close the door, it's just like 'Kokum don't come in here and interfere, this is my room.' I like my house but that's the only thing like I said I feel they don't want me. I end up sitting in the living room and they hardly come out cause they're playing their games and we never had games when we were young, the outdoors was our playground and these days it's their bedroom that's the playground for them. And then they wonder why these kids are so different and they don't listen when they're at school, it's because they're playing electronics at all hours of the night and then when they go to school...well since COVID started last year they all have Chrome books now. They get a chance during the day to use their Chrome books but during the night they play their own games.

I don't allow drunks in my house, so we're drug free, so my *chapans* (great grandchildren) come to visit and no one smokes in the house when they're here, we do smoke when they're not here. I have enough space, but my house needs quite a few renovations. I have my renovation form ready, but I haven't handed it in because I have to find my own place to live, and my own storage and I have lots of stuff. It would take me forever to pack and I'm not very mobile, so I'd have to get my kids to help me out, which they do.

If I could build the perfect house, I would try to make it how our house used to be but I'd still have rooms because they're adults I live with now and I would make a bigger space for the living room so my grandchildren and my great grandchildren could enjoy the living room. When I lived in Grandmother's Bay for a few years, we did have TVs, but they were in our rooms. The living room was for visiting and family time, for doing stuff together. So, people, when they'd come to visit would ask 'Where's your TV?' and I would say in our rooms because this is a family room. But a lot of times when I go visiting, they're watching TV and they're barely

talking to you so what's the use to go visit them if they're not going to talk to you and just watch TV?

I was at the Youth Haven this week and I noticed the kids there don't want to do stuff because 'I should have stayed home and finish playing my game', you know, stuff like that and we tried to motivate them to start stuff so some of the summer students and chaperones that were there played ball with them and different kinds of games. And yesterday was the last day so we sat in a circle in the Tipi and me and that other Elder talked about how it was growing up for us and these kids listened and after we were done, they asked 'Is that how mean that teacher was? And 'Did you really drive a boat?' They were really amazed that I could drive a boat. It was amazing how well they listened when we were in a tent in one big, small space. They all went to the Little Hills Cemetery. They had four boats that took all the 20 kids, but I didn't go because of my rib is still bothering me. One girl stayed behind because she was on her Moon Time (menstruation) so I sat with her at the gazebo and we had started lanyards the day before and she finished. I gave her some beads to take home to make another one at home. Then I gave her my phone number in case she ever wants to talk to me or needs some beads. She was happy.

I want people to realize that we can still keep our Traditions using the Medicine and teaching the kids about hunting and canoeing so they can see the land. We now have land-based learning places for each school in La Ronge. Sucker River has one and we have one at the Youth Haven and they build gazebos outside the schools where we can do Traditional Teachings, so it's really come a long way and I'd like to see that the language is kept, and we've got to teach these kids how to speak Cree. I know some of them are shy and my daughter was like that, and I said, 'let them laugh at you, you learn from your mistakes.' Now she speaks and understands Cree and that's how it was at her house they speak Cree. My grandkids understand Cree, but they can't speak it, just little words.

Respect was taught not to call a person by their first names. We couldn't say Sarah or grandmother or Jemima. We had to say *nokum* (my grandmother). We weren't allowed to use their first names. Especially when they're older than you. My siblings, I'm the oldest and they couldn't call me by my name. I wasn't Elsie until I went to the mission school, I was taught that's my middle name. Then the three of us sisters, our names were changed at the mission school cause they had to use our first names, I don't know why. But anyway, my sisters couldn't call me by my name, they had to say, "*Nimis*" which means my oldest sister. Yeah. That's a way

of Respect. That's when you – how do you say that? You had to say please and thank you. And then when we used to – we were taught how to Pray since we were knee high to a grasshopper, I guess. My grandmother would Pray before we ate, say Grace. And then before we went to bed, she used to get us to Pray, kneel down and Pray. And then when my dad wasn't drinking, they did the same thing, him and my mom in the room.

There weren't any rules about talking to your uncle or men. As long as you talked in a proper manner to them. You know, instead of being rude. And there was usually no yelling. My two sisters used to fight all the time when they were small. I don't know, it was something they always did. But I was not allowed to stop them. As an older sister, it was up to my parents or my grandmother, cause we lived with my grandmother, when we were growing up. The one that raised my dad. It was up to them; we couldn't do it. And if it was elsewhere, we were – like if we were outside and they were fighting, I couldn't stop them. I'd have to go inside and tell somebody. Cause they'd beat me up, ah! Just kidding!

I don't remember any Moon Time Teachings growing up. You know what? I wouldn't actually know about that because I did not get my Moon Time till I was 16. My two sisters got theirs before me. I don't know, I guess I was always late in doing things. But my mom was saying that when I was baby, I had that jaundice, is that what it's called? You know, it affected a lot of – it gave some of the boys impotency. And then the girls who were sterilized by them, I guess. I don't know. I think so and we were small babies. But anyway, my mom says I had it really bad, they almost lost me. And they used to say that's the reason why I was a late bloomer. [Laughs]. You know, where I never got my period right away and I never had kids until I was in my 20's because of that. Yeah, cause when I had my first child, my sister next to me already had two and next to her, my other sister, she was on her second one cause my sisters were pregnant at the same time.

We grew up with our uncles too and one of our cousins at Pipe Stone when my mom took us over there. And we were taught how to Respect each other. You know, if you're gonna change your clothes, go do it in the tent. And just let people know that I'm going into the tent to change my clothes, please don't come there. And then you hear others saying the same thing, even my uncle. Me and my uncle are the same age, my youngest uncle out of my mom's siblings.

And another value is Thankfulness, Oh, that family togetherness thing? Being a Happy family. That's how I try to bring up – well, I brought up my kids that way. I guess I didn't want to let them go. And then they had their kids of their own and they slowly moved out of my house. And I show them how to – I did not allow any swearing in my house. Because they were starting to have kids and I didn't want my grandkids swearing. Because when I noticed that the language that you use in the house is the language that kids are using these days. Like if we're swearing in the house constantly, then my grandkids would be swearing all the time. And now, my grandkids are – my youngest grandchild is what, seven years old? You don't hear them swearing. They'll use the 'f' word once in a while, but they'll look around to see who heard them. They're – I guess you can say they're alert with their swearing. They know that it's a bad word even though they're older. That's what I like about my kids. I'm friends with my kids. Yes, I'm very Thankful that we talk to each other in a – how do you say that, equally? Yeah, in a good way. And you hear there's one family in La Ronge, I'm not mentioning any names, but they have those anger issues. They also have hatred within them. It's very hard for me sometimes when I'm with one of them, "Oh I did something," you know, they just. And then they'll name that person. I don't want to know who got you mad or who you don't like. One of them even hasn't talked to their son in 13 years cause he left his wife when the baby was newborn. That's – I don't know. I'd never be able to do that. Even my kids, if they get mad at me it's only about 10, 15 minutes at the most. Then they'll text me or inbox me or call me that they're sorry. And I do the same thing with them. If I get mad at them, I cool down and I apologize to them cause that's how I was taught. But I was Happy with my upbringing. Even though we didn't really grow up with our dad. But he was there when we come home from holidays from the school, he'd be there at the house. And him and my mom were good friends.

My late brother got adopted by my aunt and uncle. All of us, there was eight of us. And he was the only brother we had at that time. And my mom had my little sister, when she was pregnant when she left my dad. And my brother was always sick, and my auntie worked at the hospital. So, she said she'd take him home when he got out. And they ended up taking him as their own cause they never had any kids. So, he was adopted out later – well, they told him – they didn't adopt him right away. They waited till he was nine years old to ask him if he knew anything about adoption or why he lived with them and he didn't live with Mom. And then after he knew what it was, they asked him if they can adopt him, and they agreed to it. They talked to

him, they didn't talk to my mom cause they already told auntie that they can have him. But he was always sick. We didn't need a lawyer or anything. People just adopted how they wanted. But when he got older, he used to call my dad his grandpa and they used to laugh at him. And then later on, I'd say he was about maybe four, maybe five or six years old, they told him that was his dad. My late uncle gave him a picture of my dad. I remember that day cause my brother kinda got mad. "Look at yourself in that picture and look at him," they told him. So, he sat there for a long time, and he started crying. And my auntie said, "What's wrong?" But you know, in Cree, he said "I have a twin brother!" Cause he knew twins, eh? But then the next time my dad came to visit, he went and hugged my dad extra hard and called him papa. So, he had a dad, and he had a papa. And then he had a mom, then he had everybody's mom. So, everybody, even auntie and uncle, that was everybody's mom, my mom. His biological mom. [Laughs].

We have first cousins in Ontario. My dad's late sister, her kids are in Ontario. And they're – what do you call it? They're White people. My auntie got her Treaty rights, her Treaty back when it wasn't that long ago before she passed away about six years ago. I think she got her Treaty rights two years prior to that before she moved to that Elder's place in PA. And then she became a Treaty Indian after that.

That confused people with these Treaty rights and Bill C31. Well, I guess the first time, you know, we have a Treaty number but we're Bill C31 and you are Indian, you got a Treaty number. I guess it was kinda confusing what the difference was. And then they explained it that it was the next generation, you had to – like my kids. Their dad had to be a Treaty Indian to sign that paper for them to become Treaties. And then the next generation after that, they just automatically their kids, my grandkids were Treaties. I mean, yeah, my grandkids were Treaties. And then my great grandkids are Treaties too just automatically, no questions asked. Because when was that? They combined Bill C31 and a Treaty Indian together. It's not separate anymore, it's the same. You get the same rights and everything, just like you never – just like you were always a Treaty Indian. Which we were, I guess because it was our parents when they got married that some of them lost their Treaty rights. Or grandparents. It's really complicated to try and explain it to a young person these days. And then they said they're gonna stop at the fourth generation after in '85. I got my Treaty rights in '85. And then my kids got theirs a year later. My grandkids still had to get both – no. Just my kids had to get both. Then my grandkids just



automatically got added on to their parents'. Same with – and then my grandparents, they all have different Treaty numbers. They all have their own Treaty numbers.

## 4.2 Frances Charles

I grew up on the trapline and sometimes we would come into La Ronge and we lived at 101 reserve. What I remember of trapline life is that we had a small one room log cabin...with my sister and brother and sometimes your mom until they started going to residential school. I was there with my mom and dad and I remember my dad used to sing Hymns and I'd lay beside him and listen to his Hymns and every morning and every night he would kneel by the bed and say his Prayers for us and sometimes there were lots of owls outside by the cabin, and my dad said 'come on, let's go out' and we went out and there were owls right around the trees there and they were white owls and he said 'oh, somebody came to visit us, somebody is visiting us' and the owls were hooting and after a while they flew away. What I remember about the trapline is that most of the time we ate moose meat and that one time I went with my dad, he was going to make a hole in the ice and he had a line with a hook on the line and I was holding that line and it started pulling and we couldn't get that fish up through the hole because it was so big.

One time my brother was there with us, and I don't think he went to school yet, but we always had dogs. My dad had a dog team, and it was in the springtime we were living in a tent, and it was getting late, and the dogs started growling. My dad was just going to start saying his Prayers and we heard a terrible scream by the swamp and the dogs just growled like they were really scared. My dad said 'Don't be afraid, nobody, nothing will hurt us', so we started Praying and three times we heard that terrible scream like a woman screaming and there was nobody living near us. It was just us. It was a Whitigo or something like that. The next day, where my uncle and his family lived, we'd get visitors once in a while on their way to La Ronge. So, in the springtime, before the ice melted, we'd travel back to La Ronge and my dad would go on the ice with the dogs and we'd be walking along the shore and I think we had a canoe with him too and then we would all go in the canoe and started paddling to La Ronge.

*Mooshum* (grandfather) and *Kokum* (grandmother) kept me out of residential school because I think they wanted at least one of their babies left at home. They didn't want to be left alone because it was so lonesome. It was really awful when they (my sisters and brother) left because I was so lonesome but after a while it got easier cause I had things to do which I can't

remember but I got used to it. When they came back, I was so happy to see them, and they didn't seem different. My brother was more kinder because he resented me when I came along. He was jealous but now it's very different, it's like I take care of him because he's going through such a hard time.

In La Ronge we would stay for a while and go to church and my siblings started going to school. There would be a covered army truck would come to get them and I cried for them, I wanted to come with them. I shouldn't be telling this part; my parents were hiding me. One day my brother who was a Special Constable, he came by dog team with the Indian Agent, and he said to Mom, 'Mom, my sister has to go to school otherwise you guys will be going to jail.' So, we came back that summer and I went to school after that. I was nine years old when I went to school, I was the biggest and the tallest girl in grade one. In La Ronge we had a cabin there and my brother and sister would come home for the summer, and I was so happy, but I still wanted to go with them, but I wasn't allowed because I was going to school by now. They went to residential school, but I went to Gateway School, and it was a day school. I was in grade five and a few of us girls ran away and where that main highway was by Big Rocks, we ran over there cause there was no road there then. We were hiding in the muskeg, and we could hear the truant officer yelling 'I can see you girls, I can see your heads little girls, come on out of there', but we weren't that little. We came out and he took us back to the school and we got straps with a leather strap and my wrists were bleeding and I didn't wipe them or anything I went home like that with that dried blood on my wrists and my mom said 'let's see your wrists what happened?' and I said 'we ran away and I got a strap' so she took me back to the school to see the principal and she just argued with him and told him 'my daughter will never come back here'.

So, I was pulled out of school at grade five but later on I went back to school, I took a grade 10 vocational training course and I passed that. I was almost 18 cause when I took that course, that's when I had my daughter. And from then on, I was working at the fish plant but most of the time we still went to the trapline but now my dad had moved the trapline to Mayamoot further and there was the road that went to Mayamoot Beach, and we lived in this beautiful place by the river, and it was up on top of a little hill. Oh, I Loved that place, and I haven't seen it for about seven years because they destroyed the bridges. So that's where I remember growing up too, and most of my brothers would come with their wives to trap beaver and the women would be sitting around working on skinning the beaver. And that was really

good cause all my brothers would bring their wives who would come there so it was really good with all the family and tents all over.

We had that house at Kitsaki Reserve all the time and then we'd go back and forth and then I'd go to school and then later on the government started building houses and they built us a house too but there was no inside plumbing .Before the government it was *Mooshum* who built the original house, I don't know if anybody helped him but he built a two bedroom house. So, when my brothers came to visit, they'd stay in the little house. My dad had a garden by the marina not far from our place. There'd be a big potato garden and my dad after he dug up the potatoes, he'd start getting ready and we were gone to the trapline before freeze up. When *Kokum* and *Mooshum* were building their houses, it was your grandpa's design. Cause, they didn't really have a design, it was like the one that they had at the trap line. It wasn't a log cabin; it was made out of boards, the one in La Ronge. I remember too we didn't get sick; I don't remember ever getting sick.

There was one story of TB in our family Frederick I think his name was, that's the only one I know who had TB, that's the only one I know about. I didn't know him because that was before my time because most of them (brothers and sister) passed away when I was born. Cause my brother was only five years old when I stole his throne. He was going to be the baby and then I came along.

I had a long braid and my brother- in- law who we'd call *Osikwunas* (Fish Tail), he'd say here comes *Opowamewithiniw* (Medicine Woman). It means like a Medicine Woman, and he'd say '*Opowamewithiniw*, you can dream, and your dreams would come true,' that's what he called me. And my dad said, 'You know why he calls you that?' I said 'No'. He said, 'because there were 14 of you and you were the seventh girl and Miles was the seventh boy, so you got Gifts,' he told us, and that's what this Medicine Man always tells me. That I got a Gift cause when a family member, or even people that I don't know that good, I always get a sign that I'm going to hear something. When I'm sitting alone and I see these white stripes in the hallway, from the corner of my eye I see these white stripes and I asked this one Medicine Woman and she said those are good Spirits but beware of the black stripes. That's what she told me.

I used to be – I wasn't able to talk in front of people. Now, big crowd, when they ask me to do an opening Prayer as an Elder, I can just do it without looking at anything. Do the Lord's Prayer in Cree and then I'm not nervous or anything. Just last week, my brother and I were asked

to be Elders at an event for the Missing and Murdered Women. So, that emcee said, “One of you will do that.” It was a two-day event and he said, “One of you can do the Prayers today and tomorrow, the other can do the Prayer,” and I said, “I’ll do the Prayer today.” So that’s one Gift I have that I’m Thankful for. Then I have Gifts, too, that I learned I can – if somebody has a boil, I make this paste and then the Medicine I make, it pops the boil. And then from there, it heals fast. I’ve done that quite a few times already. Plantain, that’s what I used.

There was a change came when we moved from one room cabins to houses with more rooms. There was more room. When you’re in the cabin in the trap line, you can’t really keep it clean cause of the flooring, there’s no floor, it’s just the Earth, but we used lots of Balsam branches to clean the floor and sometimes *Kokum* would put Balsam branches on the floor just like a rug, so it kept everything clean and smelled good.

But I hardly remember sickness except that one time my oldest brother and his wife were living in another cabin and she was pregnant and she knew the baby was coming and there was no way they could get help because there were no radios, no phone so my youngest brother started running from Maymoot where we lived at the mouth of the river and that’s quite a ways and he started running to La Ronge to get help and he made it and he got help, it’s a long ways from La Ronge to Maymoot. But I don’t remember who came to help, I’m sure it was a small plane because she was ready to give birth but I’m not sure, so I don’t really want to say. But that’s what I remember most, I never got sick, nobody got sick.

People started getting sick when we moved back to Kitsaki. So, on the trapline they didn’t get sick but when they moved back to town. Yes, like diabetes, of course there was alcohol and that was bad, that alcohol, but lots of diabetes. This was around the 1960s that the changes started coming for my family and my community, oh, I Hope that they’re drug free and alcohol free. There’s just so much alcohol and drugs in this community. But with the wellness center opening soon, I guess I Hope that makes a difference. But it’s so hard cause even if you go for treatment and come back, you’re back with the same people you were hanging around with. They don’t leave you alone.

When the housing came, well everyone knows how to clean a house, so we knew how to clean our houses, but we still used an outhouse. That one time there was a birthday party, and it was really windy, it was storming outside, and someone missed my dad. My brother said, ‘Where’s Dad?’ and someone said someone better go check on him. I guess the outhouse blew

over and he was trapped in there. It's a good thing my brother went and checked on him. He put his foot up the outhouse and my dad was in there, he was laughing. He was really stingy with power cause they had to pay for power so every time there was a light left on my dad would go and shut off the switch.

My mom was the boss of the house and *Mooshum*, well, he'd go get the groceries and he'd still take off to the trap line. So, he was the provider and when he'd come down the lake with his dog team his sleigh was just full and we knew what was in there and we'd go meet him, my cousin and I and we'd jump on the sleigh and have a ride. When he came home the elderly women would be coming because they knew he'd be bringing moose meat and everything. They'd just come to pretend to visit *Kokum* just to get some moose meat. But *Kokum* used to tell us that when *Kimooshum* (your grandfather) killed something, a moose, we can't step over the blood or the meat. And then even if we didn't have our period, we're not supposed to step over the meat.

*Mooshum* was a lay reader at the church, he didn't go to school, but he taught himself syllabics and he'd read the Bible at the Church and sometimes he'd go to PA to a meeting at the Diocese. Remember when he was there when we travelled from Edmonton? And we didn't have nothing to eat. *Mooshum* was having his meeting at the Senate Office and he ...we just happened to get there, and we were so hungry, and we managed to find him there and he gave us money. We came on the train with a family friend cause he was our guide. I was a little girl too, not even a teenager cause he was good enough to guide us coming on the train.

I remember my dad had his own Medicines that they picked from the land and my oldest sister knew a lot about Medicines and my mom too. When women got sick with childbirth or their menstruations, *Kokum* had Medicines that they picked from the land. It was both of them knew the Medicines of the land to take care of people. *Kokum* was the midwife. She brought lots of babies into this world; I think half of Hall Lake they named their babies after her and she was the Godmother to most of them. So, in La Ronge she was the midwife, and she got her help from three other women. That one time, she used to take me with her when she went to take care of a woman that's having a baby. So, this time we went to 101 there and she took me with her, and I didn't know what to do so I crawled under the bed and every time that woman screamed in pain, I would scream too and that one lady said, 'Where's Frances?' And my mom said, 'she was

sitting there', so the woman screamed again, and I screamed again and *Kokum* said 'ah, she's under here' and she pulled me out.

And she would go to people who were deceased, and she would go clean up the bodies because at that time they didn't send the bodies to PA. So, my dad and two other men, they would make the coffin and my mom would put black cloth around it and white lace around it. And she'd take me with her when she was cleaning the bodies. So that one time in Big Stone an old man had just passed away and so I was helping her clean and dress the body. But later that night my sister and brother were playing with me, and my brother said to me 'lie straight on the floor and pretend your hurt and don't bend your knees or anything' so I was like this, and I remembered that old man. He just jumped on the bed and said 'she's seen that ghost' [laughs]. It was funny. I was pretending that I was hurt, and he was going to help me.

So, this other time a teenage girl froze to death, and she had been sitting like this on a log, that's how she was found. So, the RCMP came to get *Kokum* to go and dress the body and we went with her. My niece came with us, so we went there, and *Kokum* was cleaning the body and getting the clothes together. At that time, they had these tan-coloured stockings, and the body was still like this [sitting position] so that cop handed me that one stocking I was supposed to put it on, I don't know why cause the body wasn't even thawed out yet. I was just starting on the foot, and it went like this, I guess it thawed out or something, but the leg straightened out, aaiiii! I was just screaming, and the cop was standing behind me and he was just laughing, he said it's just thawing out. I was about between 10 and 13 but she taught me early about these things and I'm not afraid now, of bodies.

So, all this time I started working...my first job was at the fish plant. And then I started working for ECIP, that's' Early Childhood Intervention. That's children north, that's for children from birth to five years old and I had a rickety yellow Cadillac and I'd go to Hall Lake and Sucker River and the kids would be so Happy to see me because I'd be bringing them goodies like toys and clothes, and they'd just be looking out the window watching out for me. And then we'd fly out to Southend and we were working with kids that were Special Needs so there was this one girl in Hall Lake that I used to go to see, she was a baby and she couldn't crawl, and I would work with her and pretty soon she was crawling and she'd look in the window when she was getting bigger and her mom said 'Your mom was looking for you' and I said 'My mom?' and she said 'that's what we call her cause everything she wants you give it to her' so I Loved

going to there. And then we'd travel to Pine House and then to Weyakwin. So, most of the kids I worked with, they have their own families now.

So I worked there at ECIP for a while and then they needed a Cree health educator at Northern Health, so I went to work there and a health educator is just like those CHRs (Community Health Representatives) that work at the Band Office at La Ronge Band Health. So I worked there for about two years and then they had an opening at the La Ronge Band Health Services so I applied and I got the job as a home health aide. Part of the time, the new hospital was being built so I was working there part time as a liaison worker translating and working in the long-term care. And after that I was working part time at the hospital and part time for La Ronge Band Health Services. Later on, I just stuck to La Ronge Band Health Services, and I worked there for 12 years, and I retired in 2008 and they called me back to help out and I went back, worked for another year and after that I retired. Then I ran for the Health Board, I forgot to mention that in the early years too I was in the Health Committee and Education Authority. We travelled to Utah to see the Band Schools. So altogether with all the Boards I was on the board for nine years with the Education Board for 16 years, I was on Boards.

I've travelled to most of the provinces except for New Brunswick. We went to Ontario too to the Parliament. So, in the first part of this year in 2021, our terms for the health board, we had to run again, so I put in my application, so I don't know when the elections will be, but my name is in there again.

So now when COVID came, I didn't know what to do cause I used to play games on the laptop. And then I remembered my late sister-in-law Bilancheets, she used to teach me how to bead, so I went and got a few beads, and I started beading, my beading was not that great but as I went along, my beading really improved. Then I've been selling card holders, I've sold about 10 already. I sent one to the States, I have a friend there, a midwife and she wanted one. But these are some of them I made. But there's a woman that, as soon as I'm done a card, she asks if I'm done and then she comes and grabs them cause I sell them for thirty. I make unusual designs cause every time I'm walking around, if I see something that catches my eye, it sticks here and then that's what I use for my designs.

How I create my home to be a place of health and well-being, I do Smudge and once a week if I have time, I Smudge my house to get rid of the negativity. At least once a week I Smudge cause I didn't use Smudge or Sweet Grass and then when I was working for the Jeannie

Bird Clinic there was a four year Medicine course coming up in Peguis, Manitoba , it's a reserve so we were picked , seven of us, asked , so we went there every year for four years and we got our certificate, our Eagle Feathers, so I got a Rattle from one of the students and she adopted me as her sister cause that's the time I lost my sister, so she adopted me cause she had lost her sister too.

So that's when I got into Traditional stuff. I used to drink a lot but then when I went into this one Sweat in the '90s in Sturgeon Lake, there was this Old Lady sitting there and she said in Cree 'You can't make it' and I went in anyways and I felt like I was burning so I had to come out. They did four rounds and my buddy said, 'How come you came out?' and I said, 'My face was just burning and that old lady that was sitting by the Sweat told me that I couldn't make it and that I wouldn't be able to make it.' 'What Old Lady?' 'There was an Old Lady with a black dress there' and my buddy said 'No, there was no old lady there'. I guess I was the only one who saw that Old Lady. So when we started that course I was alcohol free and our teacher asked if I wanted to go in and I said 'I'll try but I want to sit close to the door in case I have to come out, so they sat me by the door and I managed to sit through the first whole round and somebody kept touching me on my side because something here was hurting so there was a Medicine Woman there and I went to see her and she had an assistant and she said ' I can't, I can't do it ' Try it again', that assistant said and so they tried again and they sucked out a quarter sized gray stuff and said that's what's making you sick so she said 'You can come here and your colours are white and blue' and I can't remember the third one. And she gave me my Spirit name which is *Mahican* – The Wolf that Looks Around and I'm from the Eagle Clan so the second year we went, and I went in again and I was good. Cause that alcohol –if there's drugs or alcohol in your body, if you go in a Sweat you'll burn. I don't go to the Sweats with too many in there. But I sit outside and as an Elder, what the experience is in there, I can hear it outside. So, I usually sit with that *Oskapew* (Helper) or whatever they call it.

Did I tell you about my daughter? If you ever went to her house, her house is full of wolf knick- knacks and wolf pictures. So, I guess I didn't tell you about her and *Kokum*. When she was about three or four years old and we were in the trapline and they were gonna go check their snares, but *Kokum* forgot the 22 cause she usually took the 22. And I guess they started off and they seen a wolf come running towards them. And I guess *Kokum* said to my daughter, "Well my granddaughter, I guess this one, he'll rip us apart and kill us." And the wolf was coming towards



them, and it was slowing down, and my daughter said, “*Kokum*, don’t be afraid. The wolf is my friend.” And she stuck out her hand and the wolf licked it and took off. From that moment on, she was just always picking up stuff or if it had anything to with wolf. And when I came back from Manitoba, I told her my name and she said, “Oh my goodness, I just got the shivers all over,” she said.

There’s one story about *Kimooshum* when he was dying. But he didn’t have dementia or anything like that, his mind was clear. But he was there, he was in his bed and then Bilanchees, you remember my brother’s wife? She was there and taking care of him and he said, “I want to eat pickerel before I go to the hospital. I hope that’ll be my last meal,” he said. So, we happened to have some and Bilanchees boiled it and I said, ‘Bilanchees, do you see those white lice on his head?’ And yeah, there was white lice on his head, on his pillow. And he was putting them in a little paper bag and put them in the fire and I said, ‘I don’t think you’re supposed to do that. I don’t think you’re supposed to burn them. Cause you and I are the only ones who can see them, nobody else could see them.’ So, after his meal, and then we took him to the hospital, the old hospital. And he was laying at the hospital bed, and I could see those lice on the pillow. I said to that nurse, ‘Do you see those lice on the pillow?’ And she said, “No. I don’t see anything, there’s no lice.” And then this one guy when we were at that Missing and Murdered Women’s event, this one guy came and talked to us, and he was teaching us. He had a flute and a guitar. And he was teaching us about stuff – he was talking about all kinds of stuff, and he said, “White men think that lice are filthy. No, the lice are not filthy,” he said. “They’re Sacred, and even if you dream of lice, that’s good luck,” he said. Then he said, “When you’re a baby, you have that fontanelle,” he said, ‘what do you call it? That soft spot on top of a baby’s head?’

Yeah. He said ‘well you see those spots. But when an elderly person’s dying, the fontanel is back again. And the lice come out of there.’ Cause I was asking him where the lice would be coming from *Mooshum*’s head and he said, “That’s the Spirits coming for him.” White lice, that’s what he said. Cause the only ones that seen the lice and nobody else seen them. So that was one thing, too, that me and Bilanchees seen but nobody else seen. So that lice came from the fontanelle.

So, I quit drinking long time ago and I quit smoking for three years now and I used to Love bingo, but during COVID there wasn’t any bingo. I took my niece to the bingo, and she forgot her dabbers in my car, so I went there to deliver the dabbers and this guy kept saying ‘check it out, check it out’. I couldn’t even go near the door, there was something barring me, so

I haven't been to the bingo even once. That's amazing but I still like doing my scratch and win tickets.

There is a difference between a house and a home. Well, a home is where there's a mom and dad, there's Love there and Prayer and there's lots of hugging. And I had so many different names when I was just starting to remember and they called me so many different little names, my mom and dad and I felt just being so Loved. That's what I call a home, where there's lots of Love and a mom and dad. I never felt poor when I was growing up. I like my present house, well it's nice and roomy and I got myself nice furniture, it's all paid for. On my birthday, my daughter and my son-in-law cooks and then they bring their older kids who bring their kids and I get to invite who I want, and we all sit together, and we eat.

If I built the ideal house, I think I'd build a log cabin, not a big cabin, with at least two bedrooms and a large living room and a medium sized kitchen and I'd decorate my walls with Traditional stuff. Cause now I'm very Traditional and it helps me when I sit with young people, I talk to them, like this last time, when they talk at funerals, but I didn't want to offend them but I wanted to say that it shouldn't only be when there's a funeral, or it shouldn't be when there's a wake, or it shouldn't be when there's a baptism, it shouldn't be the only time we go to church. It should be every Sunday, every Sunday go to church, not like I'm bragging but I do go to church a lot. But I see these people when they lose a loved one there's lots of them there going to Pray, going to the service. And when there's a baptism there's lots of babies there and the church is full. Otherwise, most of the time when there's nothing happening like that there's only a few people at church so they shouldn't be waiting for a special occasion to Pray and be together. They should Pray at home too and talk to the young people and talk about the dangers of alcohol and drugs and not when there's a death and everybody's sitting there. I was going to say that, but I didn't want to offend anybody. Cause I noticed that a lot. In times of hardship, I get my Strength from God and from *Kokum* and *Mooshum*. That's where I get my Strength from. But I would make my home really Loving. When there's a Culture Camp, they ask me to go there as an Elder. If they have a meeting, I get to sit there as an Elder. So, it's really good. I just Love the little kids that go there [to Culture Camp]. Two weeks ago, there was a big Culture Camp in Wapaweka but for some reason I didn't want to go cause I had been there before and I said I don't want to go cause there was another Culture Camp in Sucker River so that's where I went and I got to come home daily. I got to make a Ribbon Skirt there and I started working on a

Star Blanket. But the women were using sewing machines and me, I was doing it by hand. On the last day, that lady that was teaching us, said ‘since you did everything by hand, I’m giving you this little Star Blanket ‘. I’ll show it to you. And then last Saturday, I was asked to go to a Women’s Wellness Day at Youth Haven just for one day, so I went there, and I managed to finish one more Ribbon Skirt, so that’s what I’ve been doing.

### **4.3 Miles Charles**

I was born in 1943 in the month of January, and we were living along the shores of La Ronge at the time and later on when summer came people moved to one area called Kitsaki and that’s where most people came from the trapline and that’s where they set up camp for the summer. Most of the people had their children and mother- in- laws, daughter- in- laws, son- in- laws, and their children; they lived as a family in two or three big tents. My mom and dad had a fairly big tent and that’s where I remember most of my siblings were raised. During the summer when the berries were ripe the people would move their families to where the berries were plentiful and at the same time the men would go hunting. They would camp at their trap lines that’s where they went back during the summer season for the berry picking and towards the fall, they all came back to La Ronge to pick up their winter supplies at their trap lines. So, around the first of October they’d all leave for their trap lines. The ones who lived close by moved last because the ones from up north left at the end of September because it took them a lot of days to get to their trap lines up north. The next time they came around would be Christmas, they came at Christmas.

There weren’t too many people who had houses on the reserve, just a few one room cabins, large one room cabins. Then after my dad had moved us into the cabin, he had built; my mom was very much involved in how big the cabin was. After Dad finished, when fall came, it was only my dad and I and two other siblings who were much older than I who would go to the trapline till Christmas season and my mom and the girls would stay behind at the cabin. But when spring would come my mother and the others would come and stay for the spring season until we came back again.

Whoever came first would camp with them and there was a lot of times the cabins, there were a lot of people who set up tents in the snow, they came to town to come to church and as soon as the church was over after New Year’s they would all go back to their trap lines but at the

same time they would bring their fall kill, the animal pelts, to the Hudson's Bay to get their supplies for the trapline . So, we stayed at the trapline all this time until the month of April. So, the people, for the month of April, they all came back, coming along the shore. Sometimes it would take us about two weeks to come from the trapline along the shoreline because it wasn't safe to travel. At the same time the men would kill muskrats and beaver along the way. Our first stop would be at the Bow River where we had an aunt living with her boys and daughters. Her old man had passed on, so she looked after her boys herself, but her boys were old enough to look after themselves. That's the way things were. Young men had to sometimes stay past their 20s till they met a girl or were offered a girl to marry. From the Bow River, we traveled again along the shore, my dad had a boat that he dragged along with a sleigh with a few dogs we had.

Our next stop was at Potato River which was already a settlement at the time. There was a lot of people who lived there; the Charles's, the Roberts, the McKenzie's and Ratt's that lived there. They also had trap lines going south from there, from Fox Point and up into the bush that way. So those people would be on their way back. So, after we camped at Potato River, it was easier to come upriver to the Potato Lake and already the highway was there. My dad would bring the boat and us at Potato Lake and he would come to town to get the Indian agent that had a truck to pick us up and haul us back to our cabin in La Ronge. Sometimes when we didn't take that route, we would come all the way back from Potato River and come back to La Ronge here and that would take another two or three days but once you came around the point you could see the houses in La Ronge. Because of the travelling along the ice, along the shore, the ice would open up a little bit, now and then the men would use their canoe to paddle that little distance and then it would close up again, so that's how it was travelled in those days along the shore.

I'm talking about the 1940s to the 1950s. So, once we got back to La Ronge here, Mom and Dad cleared the cabin area, there was a lot of growth of tall grass and some other people came to their settlement at La Ronge, they were not too far apart. There were two or three or four families but my dad had a large family which was camped at Kitsaki. He had two sisters that were married to the Métis side and these sisters stayed in town while their men went trapping. They pretty well had everything all ready, when my dad got back, they all had gardens, and those two sisters had my dad's garden prepared so my dad could plant potatoes for his family and other vegetables like turnips and carrots and other stuff. I remember all the families helped each other, if you ran short of anything, they would help you out. Also, if you got sick, they would help you,

and if you ran short of food, or if you needed help building a cabin the men would help each other hauling logs and peeling logs and erecting the cabin. Throughout the summer, pretty well every man had a fish net in the bay, they had one place, after they checked their net, they all put their catch in one place and everybody helped themselves to the fish, to as many fish as they wanted, and everybody got their fish.

As soon as I was old enough to – well as soon as we were able to watch people moving around, that's when your learning starts. Growing up in a trap line, watching every movement, watching your parents' every movement. Old Mathew bringing rabbits and that, I'd watch my mother prepare all the stuff that Mathew brought in from the bush. And as I grew older, Mathew taught me survival, a lot of surviving in the bush and set snares and sometimes set up traps and how to prepare them. But I'm getting ahead of myself. I did learn how to prepare them right away. I learned to prepare them by watching *Kokum* preparing the animals. And after that, *Mooshum* would stretch the fur for finishing and put them in storage to bring into town later. And all that stuff, I learned from Mathew was how to survive in the bush and how to trap and how to hunt. And as I grew older, I practiced all those things, right up to the state I'm in right now. I can hunt and prepare animals if I have to. But we're living in a pretty modern world now, I guess. That's been put away for a few years. It's just pretty well in the summer, in the winter you go out to the trapline just for recreation and the only thing we probably do is snare rabbits for the sake of old time, old time's sake to continue the Traditional ways of living. And we teach our children that too, and the grandchildren that we take to the trap line.

And I'll go to *Kokum* now. She taught us how to take Medicines and all that. Before she took the Medicines, she had to prepare a Thank You to the Creator and that. And same with my dad, when he'd go out on the trap line, he had to put out an Offering. He'd make Offerings. And if you didn't have the Tobacco, but there was other ways of bringing, just Praying and that to the Creator. But *Kokum* was the one who taught us all the Medicines in the summertime. And she always taught us not to over harvest, just to take what was needed. And then in the fall, we would do the same thing. Just take the things that you can to get through the winter, but you don't take a whole bunch, just the Medicine that you would need if a person gets sick. Cause they made an ointment out of herbs and that mixture of animal grease and stuff like that. And she brewed herbs, too, for drinking to cleanse the whole system of your body. That's how Mom

taught us, and she continued to be a Medicine Woman right through till she died. And stuff like that.

And I go back to my childhood now. Growing up, it was quite – I remember there was 14 of us in the family. And that one time, I think there's three family members I didn't see them cause they had probably died when I was born. But I remember there were seven boys and seven girls, but at least most of them were married off or got married and the amount that was left at home for Mom and Dad to look after, there were four brothers and myself, and on the woman's, side was three sisters and your mom. So, there was about seven of us that were living in a big house. Dad had bought a big house from the Merasty family, that's where we lived. I remember, as soon as the boys got married off, they built their cabins not too far from the family home. And that's where they raised their families, my two brothers. My older brother didn't have such good luck with his marriage as his first wife died and first child. His wife died and the child died. And that was the second marriage, so he didn't have too much luck with raising the kids. He managed to get two sons and a daughter. But he had more too, than three children. But they died too. My other brother, most of his children are still alive, except his oldest daughter died back in the 70's. I think there's about 12 kids total, grown-ups that are still alive. But I was the youngest of the family, before my youngest sister was born. It was quite the big deal cause I pretty well got everything I needed, I wanted from Mom and Dad. If I didn't get it, the boys, my brothers sort of tried to get me in trouble all the time. Not real trouble, but they get me into trouble just for laughs. I used to get real upset with them with things like that. But that's about how we grew up. But we grew up real good. My mom and dad were real good providers for the family.

We had a lot of Respect for our parents. There's nothing like it as far as now. Everybody Respected the Elders. Not only the parents, but even you had to – the older brothers, the older sisters, you had to Respect, the young ones. Like my older brothers, they were mischievous ones and tried to get me into trouble all the time. They hated when I got everything I needed from Mom and Dad. They were jealous of me cause I was the baby. What the heck? And when my little sister was born, I did the same thing. I got really jealous of her. See, I was five years old when she was born. She took my kingdom away. I was king then. [Laughs].

I had happy memories of growing up living along with my brothers and sisters and playing. I mean, my brother made a lot of things for me, wooden toys and things that were really good. Cause there was no such thing as buying toys, it was all homemade. So, my brother was a

real good craftsman for making wooden toys for me. And my other brother, I remember in the – later on, this was about when he was 17, he spent most of his time in jail. But later on, he managed to pull himself together, straighten himself out. He raised a family. There were a lot of problems with alcohol in the family with him. Later on, most of the brothers all wind up having troubles with alcohol. I have troubles with alcohol, but I smartened up when I was 60 years old. It was 20 years ago.

But out in the trap line, I remember *Mooshum* always making Offerings and things like that, but I didn't see a Drum or a Rattle or anything like that. But I saw *Mooshum* making a small Sweat Lodge where he'd go in and I'd hear him hum – doing chanting in there and I asked Mom one time, Dad would do this on our way to the trap line, where we camped. And I asked Mom once 'Why does he do that?' And Mom told me, "He's talking to his Higher Power," she said. Cause *Mooshum* was a Medicine Man. So, both good and bad. Well, that's about all I remember.

Oh, when I was a teenager, as soon as I finished school at 16, we weren't allowed to go back to school because when you're 16 that was it unless you wanted to continue with school, but you had to be grade nine. I only had grade five education at 16. So, at 16, I looked for work right away and then I went – cause I spent three years in Prince Albert in residence and after three years, I came back to La Ronge. The residence was all over filled. So, I had to go to school in La Ronge which was very terrible because I went to school with young kids. I was 14, I was going to school with 11-year-olds. They're already in grade four and I'm 14 years old at grade four. I didn't do very good. And me and my youngest sister were really bad at the day school. It wasn't an Indian school; it was a provincial school where we went to school. Me and my sister were the first Treaty Indians to go to day school here in La Ronge at Gateway School.

But after that, I went to Prince Albert to join the army, but they didn't take me in cause I didn't have grade nine. Only had grade five, so that didn't pan out. So, I came back and looked for a job in La Ronge and I found a job at the mink ranch where I stayed for three years, and I worked at watering the mink. We had about 3000 mink to water every day. Three dollars a day plus room and board, which was good for me. At least I didn't depend on my family, my mom and dad to look after me. Every time I'd get paid, I'd go give my mom 30 dollars of my pay. And later on, after the mink ranch, I found better jobs, higher paying jobs. And in '62, I believe, I got married. At that time, upgrading came up, but I had a family to support so I didn't take upgrading class. I had a family to look after and the funding they offered wasn't enough to look

after my family, so I stayed working. But to this day, I had a grade five education, but I worked in some trades, which comes with a lot of – I managed to do electrical, plumbing, and carpentry where I was able to be a foreman of carpentry, journeyman carpenters. I didn't have a journeyman license, but I had enough experience to be a foreman. And I can do electrical and plumbing. I did electrical for some friends of mine. I wired my own house and did plumbing on my own house, and I built my own house where I'm living right now. A lot of people when I tell them that think I'm bragging but they want to know what I did, and that's what I did.

The size of the house all depended on the size of the family. *Mooshum* remembered some of the summers he stayed there before he got married, before he decided to build a house. Where our camp was in the summer, not very far from there was a big house where the Merasty's lived and later on in the years I don't know how *Mooshum* managed to buy that house, but the girls had their own room, my brother had his own room. There was also an upstairs. My sister had pictures of that house so whoever has Aunty's pictures have pictures of that house. We lived there probably until 1954 for a good 10 years. And then *Mooshum* decided to take the building down and build a smaller wooden structure that stayed there for a long time with a steep roof, about a 24 foot by 24-foot log house and they lived there until they got the house from Indian Affairs. The houses from Indian Affairs were much bigger, two bedrooms and a big kitchen and living room mixed together, but that's what they used as bedrooms too. After the bedrooms were filled up, they used the kitchen and living rooms as bedrooms when morning came, we would put our sleeping stuff into the bedrooms. There is a difference between a house and a home cause the home I lived in was Indian Affairs and it was very crowded. I slept till morning, had my breakfast and then I left. I didn't come back until it was time for bed unless I found someplace else to spend the night with one of my friends, like a tent or something.

When people were to get sick, my mother was a Medicine Woman of all sorts, like if you were going to have a baby, my mom would be the one that would be called. Most of the time, after people knew she was staying in town for the winter, there was a lot of ladies that were left behind that didn't want to have babies on the trap line. When it was time for them to have a baby, they would call my mom for it wasn't too far for her to walk. There were not too much sicknesses at the time except for tuberculosis that was going around at that time. When somebody got that sickness, they usually flew them to Prince Albert to get cured over there. After the trapping was done and the travelling from the trapline back to the home community,



around town now, before La Ronge was a town, there was a lot of people who lived along the shores of Lac La Ronge. And some lived on the island too, the people who only came to town for the summer.

When the road came to La Ronge there was another thing that started, the tourists wanted to go on the lake where most of the trappers had their canoes and they would take them out fishing and charge them a certain amount of dollars for the day. Some White people knew what was happening in La Ronge and they started to move into La Ronge and within five years in the 1950s there must have been about eight outfitters in La Ronge that had boats and motors and cabins that took the tourists out.

From there, when people saw how easily the cabins were built, they started building their own homes on the reserve and these were fairly small houses, enough to fit their families and if they had a fairly big family they had to build bigger homes. Later on in the years Indian Affairs came along and built bigger houses which were two bedrooms and a big kitchen and dining room which were pretty well used as sleeping quarters too. When morning came people packed up their blankets and took them in the bedroom. That's how they made way for the kitchen and living room for the visitors. There were hardly any chairs, there was a makeshift table and I remember they would cut a fairly large log and make it, cut it so they were high enough to sit on, they cut the log with a Swede saw. There used to be a lot of women that stayed home.

I forgot to mention that the boarding school was still going and the people that stayed behind made their house so they could be close to their children. My mom had all of her eight children there before the school caught on fire. From there, the school kids were sent to Prince Albert. I didn't go 'til four years after they started school in Prince Albert, and I only went for three years and after three years the fourth year came, and I couldn't go back cause the residential school was overcrowded. So, me and my sister went to school here in La Ronge from '55 to '57. I think Frances went on to '67.

Then our house changed from a log cabin to a government Indian Affairs house which they'd stayed for 10 years at a time, and they would get another one. Cause they got a bigger... when most of the family left there were only four of us. The other siblings got married and when they had children, most of the grandchildren came and stayed with Grandma and Grandpa while the mother and father would work when there was work available at the fish plant or the men went guiding tourists for the summer. My two older brothers, one worked for the RCMP and the

other worked for the Saskatchewan Timber Board and the rest of us stayed home where Mom and Dad looked after us of course. Dad was at the trapline when all the rest of the kids were at home. The kids that were too old to go to school stayed at home till they got work at the fish plant. My mom got to work for a nursing home in La Ronge. She looked after the people from there too. *Mooshum* brought in the groceries and the food and *Kokum* looked after the inside and the cooking and making sure the house was tidy. *Mooshoom* was the provider but of course *Kokum* was too because when *Mooshum* wasn't working, *Kokum* was working as a nurse.

From there, for myself, I built my own home after that, and I sold it to a nephew of mine and from there I built another one, but it wasn't too big. I got a job with the government, and they gave me a government house which I stayed there for about six years. During that time, I started building my own home and I've owned my own house since then. I built a newer house, and I built it to my own standards, but it still had to pass Sask. Housing. This one was called Build to Own, it was a program that Indian Affairs put up here. The bank gave you a loan and you build it. We finished paying for it, now the Band put up 28,000 and I got a loan of 260,000 to build the house that covered the labour and materials. I built it to my own, to the way I wanted it. My home is a place of health and well-being. I made sure that, especially, I still have my family I made it so they like being here. My first home, I bought a small house from town, and we moved it this way to the reserve. In my present house, I wouldn't have built a second floor cause it's hard for me to get up and down the stairs.

I remember my grandmother, Mariah, but she stayed with us in La Ronge for a while and she was getting sickly, but I do remember the grandfather. His name was Edward. That was on *Kokum's* side. Dad was an orphan when he got married to Mom. He had brothers and sisters, but he didn't have no mom and dad. In terms of Strength, well, talking about a long time ago, there was such a thing as people visiting to help each other for the healing. But today, that doesn't happen today.

#### **4.4 Roderick Sanderson**

I grew up around the reserve 156 B Morin's Hill where the Band Office is now, that whole area is 156 B. So, I grew up at Morin's Hill around the 60s and 70s where the street is now named after my grandparents called Bird Street. But that's where I grew up most of the time, with my grandparents. They did have a log cabin here on the reserve, it looked like a log

cabin on the outside, but on the inside, it was kind of flattened trees, and the outside was round. Every fall before it got too cold, we used to get the clay from down the lake, and we would put it in a tub, and we would mix grass with it and fill in the cracks in the cabin to get ready for winter. I remember doing that with my grandfather.

We used to do that even at Wapaweka or Pipestone Lake. That's the other place I grew up in the spring and the whole summer there and we would come back for school and pick up a trapline kit and go back out there. That was pretty much my life there. But yeah, we had small cabins there, they were just peeled on one side so it would be nice and light inside the cabin, but the bark remained on the outside. Those weren't squared off on the outside like on the reserve. When we were getting crowded in the small cabins, my grandfather used to build those domes. They were almost like a Tipi, they were round, and the poles are bent to the centre and they used tamarack for the poles that were bent on the ground to let them dry like that so they would bend inward to that smoke hole of that dome.

They looked something like a Sweat Lodge that's what I was thinking, but this dome you could build a fire in there and it had a door that faced the south. It was like that with all doors on the domes, they were always facing south. Sawunohk, (south) that's where the sun walks or the direction of the sun where the sun comes from, they were always facing south, and it was usually close to a tree line guard for the winter time.

Well, the Cree language was never written in stone so if you write it the way it sounds to you, it's good, that's all that's required. It's only the church and the education system that are trying to keep the Cree language written in stone just because they only have a few people to show them how to write it so now this is the way, like our language is adaptable, it's not written in stone.

Okay, yes, it was always with 12 dead poles that kind of got attached on the roof where they had six set of ribs to connect those poles to the ground so there were six ribs to hold that whole frame and then the bottom part of that dome was always made with pine trees, branches kind of woven together along with birch bark, the white part of the birch bark was facing the inside while the rest was holding it up and you either tied the birch bark up along all the way around the first two ribs up from the ground. Then from there it was hide and it was usually hide where the flesh was taken off and then dried like that cause the hair from either a bear or moose was used to insulate. It will hold the snow in place and insulated the dome in the wintertime and

then it made a good run off for rain. So that was pretty much that dome. There's more to it, like the ribs on it were the six seasons for the lake and the twelve dead poles were for the twelve moons. The door was facing the south where all good things came from the south at least in our Teachings.

You know my grandfather never mentioned anything like the poles having a meaning for Love, Honesty and Strength as they do in the south cause all that is taught every day and used, they didn't need to be signified by a pole or anything like that. I think that was the only difference between the Tipi and the domes. Cause when you had the domes and you needed a bigger place, they kind of made a log house, eh? But they were not that long like our other neighbours, they were just enough room to have two or three families all together or even to make a meeting place for it. Everybody lived in those domes before the church; even when they destroyed those and told them to live in four squares and four walls. I guess that would be in the late 1880's and 90's. Cause when the church started coming around, they were tearing them down. They didn't want the Native people living in those things. They were constructing and showing them how to make log cabins.

Yeah, my grandfather used to talk lots about that while we were at the trapline sitting by a campfire. Cause he even remembered that you know when a person passes they have that four day thing but that's to be grateful to the four directions for each day you are grateful for that one direction and you Feast on that then you do all the four directions so you have the four days and the body would be put up on stilts, they were never buried right away, they were put up on stilts for one whole year. And there was always somebody in their clan that counted the days, that had that skill to count the days and count the moons so that when that one year was up then they'd take it down and tie up the bones and they would either bury them or since we were in rocky parts of the Precambrian Shield they would drop them in big crevices on our south shore of La Ronge, that was another interesting part that my grandfather told me.

But as far as the cabins, that is all that I ever remembered since they started building houses. But I was here when they used to have the square blocked off trees for cabins those were the first cabins they had on the reserve, each family made their own and when Indian Affairs started making cabins they were with round logs, they didn't chisel them flat or into squares that way. They didn't square off the logs, they were round. So, there were a lot of houses with the square logs and then I remember the new, this was in the 60s, they were making these round logs

for cabins. The only thing that was made with sheets of plywood were the outhouse or toilet that came with that house. They only used the flooring and the roof. Sometimes these older houses didn't have glass windows they had plastic. I knew a lot of houses on Morin's Hill that had the plastic all year round. These were the houses that families built for themselves plus the ones Indian Affairs built for extended families. They were all plastic. But I don't know, I don't remember until the late William started building houses they started building glass windows.

There was not a difference in male or female influences in the design of the home, no not that I can recall. The only thing I remember my grandmother having a say was in the curtains covering the three windows in that cabin and where the stove would go. Cause they did have this huge cast iron stove. It had a shelf on it and on top of the shelf was another little opening where you could store stuff to keep warm on that stove. And one side of the stove had a water tank to keep the moisture circulating and we used that water for washing too. The stove was centered almost in the middle of the house because the way my grandparents' house was, as soon as you walked in, cause their door faced east, and as soon as you came into the cabin, maybe five feet away from the door is that huge stove and off to the right is where the pail would be where you went to the potty and to the left would be where the table and your cupboard would be and the other half of the whole building, it was all beds all along the wall. It was all open, I never did remember or see any walls, you know even just around the beds. I think the only responsibility the women had was the flooring of the dome. The women went out and got that flat Balsam, that's what was used for the floor, first it was layered with straw then it was that Balsam pine that was layered on top for insulation to keep it from getting cold from the ground.

In terms of Medicine, everybody picked and was knowledgeable about Medicine. It's just that there was always one person who knew all the Medicines and so whoever knew the Medicine would tell whoever was nearby, knew what plant to go get it, there was never one person that knew, everybody picked Medicine. Cause we all picked Medicine when we were getting ready for the fall and winter. Everybody picked Medicine, my grandparents, and they told us what to pick and then we stored it in... back then in flour sacks. So, the plants would be breathing so the dried plants wouldn't get moisture. We'd even dry the blueberries that way, put them in the sun and in Indian summer we would put them out to dry and store them in birch bark containers. The blueberries were no good this summer, there's hardly any cause it was too dry this year so we didn't have that much rain. We did have some early in the spring, the waters were

up but then as soon as July kicked in everything went up in a puff of smoke. But we were almost evacuated twice because of the smoke. Most of us over 60 were in a wait and see moment, we were first on the list of evacuees.

Way back when, there were no problems with forest fires growing up. No, I don't think so cause it was nature clearing up, it was not needed to put out, cause they burnt themselves out anyway. It's the government that wanted to control all forest fire for the wood cause that's their tax base so fires, you just got out of the way, that's it and they would burn themselves out. It's just like when there gets to be too many animals, they will die out cause of overcrowding and not feeding. Cause that's what my grandfather used to talk about too you know, once there gets to be too many people, half of us are going to die out whether we like it or not. He used to say the Mooniyow (White people) are bringing us all kinds of diseases that we have no control over, but we do have the Medicines, that's how we're staying here.

I started going out to Wapaweka I think when I was four years old, starting in the spring and I remember bouncing along in a bombardier going to the trapline and going through Wapaweka portage and that's where our first cabin was and that was our spring trapping cabin. The winter cabin was further south of the lake, so we were always at the first spring trapping cabin we'd stay there until the lake opened and then we'd move onto the main cabin where all the nets and stuff were for commercial fishing. So, I was there from probably September to March – April and hunting and fishing and trapping, fishing all summer. On occasion, maybe three times, I went out in the fall and stayed until Christmas. Three times I did that with my grandparents. We would take two days to circle our trapline and that would be half ways up Wapaweka Hill. We had a lean-to like in the fall we'd fill that lean-to with straw and we would use that in the wintertime. We didn't have another little cabin up there on top of the hill, we just had the lean-to where we rested and ate, did our fur by the fire, then came down. It was easier coming down cause we'd slide down with the sleigh that we were pulling so it didn't take that long to get home.

I went to Timber Bay cause at the time I was a non-status Indian. Cause I never got my status until 1985, cause my mom was a Treaty and she lost her status marrying my dad, cause my dad's family gave up their Treaty status to purchase alcohol. So that's where I ended up being non-status and back then Social Services would only allow you to have four kids, any other kids

you had were apprehended and put in a residential school for non-status Indians, and I went to Timber Bay. Yeah, I was nine years old when I got apprehended.

Well, I think that my grandmother had to relearn her Culture when she was done with that residence. I believe she went up to grade seven which was the allowable grade you could go up to and this was in La Ronge. My grandmother and my mom went too. She didn't go until she was nine years old because she was tongue tied and she couldn't speak until some nurse came up north and they cut her tongue loose so she could speak. Some of my nephews are kind of tongue tied, I guess that's my mother's gene working in there. They were cut too, they slit the part where they were getting tongue tied.

Yeah, I remember your grandfather, every Sunday he would walk to church past Morin's Hill cause I know at 101 they had a house and he would walk from there, maybe around nine o'clock or nine thirty he would walk by, he always walked with holding both his hands in the back behind him. He just took his time walking; he was in no hurry to get to church, and he would stop to visit too.

Yeah, I was kind of in a conflict with my grandmother being religious with the Anglican Church and my grandfather being Traditional and retaining his Culture cause he never went to the residence, my grandfather. In terms of where I get my Strength from, well, they taught me to accept death. There is something else beyond when you get buried. Your Spirit goes to another dimension – well in my words it would be dimension. In theirs, it would be another Happier place where there's no sickness and sorrow. But I kind of find that part of grandmother's religious aspect of it. She tends to quote the Bible as she speaks about my grandfather's words. There was those two that were in there, but I kind of lean towards my grandfather's Teachings. That's pretty much where I was at with that. And there was a lot of the Cree words, the old Cree words were forbidden to use cause they were put into the Bible. So, you can't use them. They use the more White man version with a sloppy translation to them. A really good example would be the *kimama* (your mother), *kipapa* (your father). Those were given by the church to say, whereas you can't say *nikawiy ikwa nohtawiy* (mom and dad). Those were put into the Bible and referred to as Godparents to the child that was getting baptized.

There's not a High Cree that is being spoken, not anymore. There are a few Elders I know that are my age, that still use some of the words. But using what's been used by the Bible still leaves them apprehensive to use it. Even though they're still slowly switching to their own Native

Values. So that's where we're at. I was never afraid to use my Cree and the Cree I was taught. I was kind of a rebel to that cause. Even when I was teaching Cree immersion, I refused to teach Cree syllabics cause that's now our written lettering that was by the church. I've been teaching Cree off and on now for the last 15 years, maybe.

What I Hope and wish that my grandchildren would want to learn their Native language, which is Cree. I pursue and push that they want to learn it cause the ones in their 30's now are willing to learn. Cause their own kids don't understand it at all and here I come and kind of start teaching my grandkids how to speak Cree and then their parents don't know how to speak – quite understand it. Well, they say they understand, but they just can't speak it or they're just too shy to speak it. I say, you should never be shy to speak Cree. You're not shy to speak English and that's not your Native language. Yeah, but that humor is part of the language too. You know, nobody ever considers, everybody's too serious about the language. There is a lot of humor within our language and it's very descriptive too, which brings out the humor in learning the language. So, I've never really thought of it as funny or be critical about being laughed at about it. A lot of people would laugh at me cause I'm using the old Cree, and they don't understand what I'm saying. They prefer to continue using, I always call it the bastardized Cree. But no, I keep going. I wouldn't slow down.

Well, the one that's going around now that is finally being recognized is the residential issues. You know how the different generations felt they lost their connection to their Culture and their language. That's all starting to play now and they're finally starting to open their eyes. And I said yeah, I was in the residence too, but that didn't make me give up my language. They tried, but I said no. In fact, when I was going to high school here in La Ronge, I got kicked out in grade seven for refusing to take French. The first year they failed me, so I had to do grade seven again. And they tried to make me take French again, and I said no. So, there was a few of us – there was a few others that joined what I was doing. So, we, all us guys ended up taking home ec. We had to take a class to make up the credits, so they put us in home ec. And we beat all those young girls in sewing and baking. We had higher marks. But then, as Native people, we've been taught how to cook outside and inside. So, we won there. That's about the only issue I have is with the residence.

But I'm doing my part helping with that. There's lots of Culture events being revived now. We have the spring, summer, fall, and winter Culture events now that are going around on



our reserve. It's kind of a cycle. It took about 10 years to get it going, but now it's full circle, it's ongoing. It's, the wheel it hasn't stopped now, it's continued. There's hunting parties, fishing parties, all to feed or maybe preserve the food for the next event, so it continues like that by season. And when I'm teaching too, I go by the six seasons. But it's mostly the language I do, not the Cultural events. But I do participate in the Culture events here cause I have to go in there and start translating the items and what they're doing and, naming the tools, passing that onto the youth, helping some of the instructors that don't know the names of the tools they use.

Yes, a home has Loving and care in it, a house is just like an object, a possession. I have a home cause I have three generations living here, my granddaughter and my *chapans* and my great grandsons are here. Yeah, I used to be married but she had residential school issues and she left 10 years ago. This is my home. We have lots of love, I'm rich like my grandfather would say *kiwihthiwsin* (rich).

That's the thing I remember is, we only had what we needed we, weren't materialistic to be considered rich. My grandfather bought what he needed. So, he bought a canoe and a little two horse Johnson to get him to and from Wapaweka Lake. That's all he needed; he didn't need anything fancy. And he never had a skidoo, he had two dogs that would tow my grandmother all the way to the cabin while he ran behind them. So, by the time my grandmother got to the cabin, she'd have the fire and a meal going and when my grandfather got there, he'd have tea and something to eat.

The only thing that I have is a TV and this cell phone. I have my family pictures and that's pretty well much it. I have a couch and a loveseat and a shelf where my TV goes and whatever is safe to put on the shelf cause we have a two year old. But any pictures that I have on the wall are some puzzles I put together and glued together, those are my pictures and my family pictures and that's it. I don't need anything, I used to have a car until I went blind in one eye so I couldn't drive so now I rely on my son or my daughter to take me out but that's once-a-week cause of this COVID.

No, there is nothing that I would change about my house. I've had this house for about 25 years now so I'm Happy in it. Yes, I have a bush behind my house, I don't have a fence. I have a tree line that cuts out my neighbours. My neighbours to the east has a fence that's behind and to the west there's another fence. And then I have the tree line in my back yard cause my house faces south, that's why I chose this house. It reflects the days of living in the dome, I kind of

thought that when I was asked by the Band. This is a CMHC Unit, so it was rent to own. So, I looked for a house on this street where the front door faced the south and this house is at a T section where the traffic ...the traffic doesn't come up this street, it just goes by the other direction.

#### **4.5 Annie Sanderson**

At the log house we had, my dad and my brothers and you know how people used to help each other when they were building a house? And people would come and help him. So, we had our own house, log house. And the first house I remember was given to my dad from, I guess the government. I'm not sure. It was like a trailer, but we all stayed in there, my siblings, my brothers and sisters. We all lived with our parents. And my dad knew how to make log cabins. And you know those ones by La Ronge area there? He used to do log cabins for wages. The people were given those houses. They didn't have to pay for them, but my dad got paid for building them. La Ronge had their own lumber yard, as far as I know. It was my brothers who used to work in the lumber yard, making lumber there. There used to be a sawmill not too far from across the bridge service station. That's where we used to live. That was my grandma's land. Yeah, that's where our neighbors were, near *Kokum* and *Mooshum*. That's my *Mooshum* and *Kokum* too. In the spring, in the fall, we all lived – we used to go out to the trapline with our parents. And in the fall, my dad and brothers would leave around when it froze up eh? And they stayed there till just before Christmas and they'd come home. Once they get over there, then they'll come out to La Ronge for groceries on one day and they'd go back, one would go back, and the other one stayed over there. Yeah. And they'd go back, and they'd come home just before Christmas. And they stayed back till in the spring.

In the spring, we used to – my brothers had made a house tent over there for the spring trapping. So, we usually spent our time in that tent with boards right around the tent. And they used tamaracks? No, Balsam. They used Balsam for the flooring. We used to haul those. We used to make them – cause that Balsam has Medicine in there, eh? It's Medicine. So that's what we had for the flooring, was Balsam. So, you could smell that Medicine and that was what we used. Of course we smelled like Balsam. But we enjoyed it. But it was warm cause you had a big stove in there. One of those old, old kind. But it was good.

My dad and my brothers would go trapping and my mom and me and my sister, we'd stay back and wait for them while they went trapping. When we went trapping, we were in Hunter's Bay. My dad had a trapline over there, and that's where we lived 'til – we'd be home about in April. April or May, May or April, we used to come home. Yeah, cause the ice was already gone in the spring. We used to send my mom home in the plane. That's when they were cheap, was 15 dollars from the trapline to La Ronge. And there were towers over there. There was always somebody in there. And that's where we, one of my brothers went over there and sent for a plane so my mom can come home in a plane. And my sister and me and two of my brothers and my dad would come home in the canoe. We used to travel along the lake cause you can't cross cause there's still ice. So, the ice could move any time. We stayed close to the shore where there was water. And we used to see *Mooshum* on the way.

On the way back, we used to see him, see him for a while. Him, he was alone. He was always alone. He trapped by himself. And we'd see him, we'd look to see if he was alright. So, he'd follow us home, too. He did good. A trapper. A lonely trapper. [Laughs]. And of course, we came home with him, and we used to laugh at him, he said, "Come here, I'll take you guys for a ride." How can you take us for a ride? "I'll show you," he said. So, he showed us. He tied a canvas, like a sail, a sailboat. And he used to put it on the sleigh, and we'd go out where there was ice, and the wind would blow us. [Laughs]. He used to laugh at us cause we got scared and that's how he travelled! So, he followed us home. He had his canoe on top of the sleigh and that little sail thing on top, and he'd make it! But he – I've never seen *Kokum* over there. Just *Mooshum*. And it took about three, four days to come home cause we had to go along the shore way, this water, and we used our canoes to come home. We couldn't just cut across cause there was still ice. But we, all of us lived in the tent. But we had a stove in there. Those big old stoves, we used those. And my mom used that stove to cook soup or whatever she was cooking. And when she cooked bannock, she'd be cooking by the open fire, make a big fire, make bannock there. So, we lived good. Those were the best days of my life. I thought, [sighs] we were so poor. I thought, to think back and I would say to myself, those were the best years of my life.

Now that we're living with White people, when they took the Indians over. Might as well say they took the Indians over, eh? We couldn't do anything. Even my dad, when he passed on, he had a trapline over, that was his. And those White people sold his trap line. And that was a nice place, oh my goodness. And that was – what's his name now? That bought that land. Yeah,

that's the one that bought it. And my family never sold it. So, I don't know how they got a hold of it. And they sold my *Kokum's* land. My grandma that was our *Mooshum's* sister. Yeah. We were closely related, our family, your family. But those were the best years was when you pick your own thing instead of the White people interfering and taking what the Indians had. That's half where my *Kokum's* land was. So those White people that are living at that gas station by the river there, that's my *Kokum's* land. And the motel there, that's my *Kokum's* land. And they were thinking of trying to check on it. I don't know who cause everyone in my families gone. Just me and my sister are alive, and all the rest are gone. That's where she lived after she got married, that's where they lived most of their lives, but her husband died too. And there's some more we lost. My sister's husband and he died in March. We lost three in a row, five years ago. None of my brothers were ever married. Really, my mom didn't want them to get married. I don't know why she didn't want them married. They had girlfriends, but she wouldn't let them get married. I don't know why – I guess that was their way of trying to keep our boys together. Yeah. But those were the best years of my life. And now I have five boys and one girl. The oldest one is a girl. And they were so proud of their grandpa that he wasn't – he didn't get the rations. He didn't ask for welfare, no help. He worked all his life. Working man, yeah. Never got – just his fishing and trapping, that's how he raised us. Those were the happy days. It's all so different now. Yeah.

We had our own house in LaRonge cause my dad had built a log house and that's where we were all raised, in that log house. There were no rooms, and it was open upstairs. So one, two, three, four beds down the main floor. And my brothers used to live upstairs. So that's how my dad made that house, that log house and they went and cut those logs out some place by – I don't know where they even got them, and they hauled them, pulled them by boat and canoe and the motor 'till they had enough. Yeah, we all pitched in there. If he wasn't building houses, he would be building canoes. Mmhmm, that's how he lived. He was a busy man! He was not the kind that asked for help either. A proud old man. [Laughs]. So, when I got married, I didn't take my husband's name. I stayed with my dad's name, because I'm the only one that gave him grandchildren. We had kids and the rest never had any. My sister had one, but she lost it.

Oh, housing was poor. I remember when there was – when living and part of the reserve further down. And this woman used to live in a real old, old house. All she had for a door was canvas. But that old lady, she lived in that little old house and just canvas for a door. Like in the

winter, if we went to school and we were cold, we'd stop in there and warm up. Her house was always warm. She had one of those big stoves. And we used to stop and warm up, stay there till we were nice and warm and go to school. We used to stop to warm up cause we lived at the bridge, close to the bridge, was quite a run to go to school like a couple miles. We used to live across the lake that ministry called it. They used to come to school from over there. And by the time they get to school, their bannock would be frozen. Their oranges, whatever they took, it froze by the time we got to school. And all of a sudden, they started making soup for the ones that had frozen sandwiches. I don't know where that one come from, but he used to serve us a bowl of soup at dinnertime cause our sandwiches were frozen. Hard life back then, but lots of Love. There was lots of Respect of each other. People Respected each other. Now look at the people nowadays.

They (government) never asked us if we wanted a house to be given to us. We didn't – my dad didn't, he made his own house. It was hard living, but those were the good years, eh? The best years of my life. Now, everything changed. They started telling my dad they had to pay school tax cause we were going to school. And every year, the school tax would go higher and higher. So, we had to quit school when we were able to work or do something. We had to quit school cause my dad was getting old and couldn't afford to work anymore. We had to quit cause we paid for our pencils, our crayons, our erasers, our books, our textbooks, we had to pay for them. No, we never lived on the reserve cause my dad was a Half Breed, but my mom was Treaty. When the White people had forced the Indian woman to marry a Half Breed, or married to a Half Breed, so she had to change into a Half Breed, she lost her status. And us, we stayed Half Breeds. So, we couldn't afford to go to school cause the government – we had to pay our tuition and everything. So, we had a poor schooling, us. So, when my dad asked my mom to become a – what the hell do you call them? My mom was Treaty, eh? And she became Half Breed, and we became Half Breed too, we had to. We were forced to be Half Breeds. So, we didn't get no Treaties, nothing. And when the Treaty men, about three or four years ago when they went to school in La Ronge, day school money, we couldn't get it. Cause I went to school with White kids, Treaty, and we're Half Breeds.

And the school there was three mixtures of people, like Indians and Half Breeds and White people. So couldn't get out of Treaty, so I don't know. How mixed up, eh? And I even used a lawyer. He couldn't do nothing. When they were getting their day school money. I never

went to residence cause I was treated as a Half Breed. But I couldn't get the day school money cause I went with three different – I went to school with the Indians, the White kids, and Half Breeds. I knew my teachers and everything. Remember all, but still, I couldn't get it! No, so I ended up with nothing. Yeah. And when Bill C31 come in, that's when I changed to Treaty. That was quite a while ago, 1985. That's when I went Treaty. But still, it's just the same as we were when we were not Treaty, we still don't get nothing! [Laughs].

Back in those old days, that was the best time of my life, people took care of each other in times of sickness. Oh, they helped each other. Everybody helped each other. And the old ladies would be making Indian Medicine to give to who's ever sick. And we used it well. Now, you have to take about 10 Medicines to try and get better, 10 different pills. And all we lived on was wild meat, fish, bannock, stuff like that. That's what we had. We never went and bought a whole bunch of groceries, all kinds of groceries. No, we didn't. We lived the Indian way. Now, there's – all the Indians got sugar diabetes, cancer, stuff like that. But long time ago, they didn't have that. They lived on the bush, trapping, and fishing. I remember when they had TB, but we didn't. One of my brothers got it. I don't know how he ever, how he got it. But we didn't – the girls never got it. We were okay. And he stayed in the San for eight years. When he came home from the hospital after eight years, he didn't like Indian food. We used to laugh at him cause he wanted White man food. [Laughs]. And we didn't want him to be like that. But he got used to it anyway.

In this house, I've got one, two, three, four rooms, living room, and kitchen. Now it's my son who lives here cause everybody's married out. [Laughs]. And I still live with my house. I never left my house when my husband died. I'm an Elder for the reserve, eh? And I did go to meetings and get my old age pension and my widow pension. So, I manage. And I only got one boy left at home, who lives with me. So, we manage. We manage alright. But it's not the same after the old man left. They're all good kids. I have two teachers. The one I'm living with is a teacher and my daughter's a teacher. And my other son, he's a counsellor, and one is a carpenter. And they all have good jobs. They all went to school, they all graduated. Mmhmm. And I worked when they were going to school, I worked. So, I got them all through the high school and now they're all on their own, they left me. [Laughs]. They got married and they all have their own little families. But they come out and see me and phone me. And that's how I live.

Yeah! That COVID goes up and down. I don't know what the heck is wrong with it. Once we'd be down, nothing. Now it's back again. The fourth wave they call it. It comes in waves. It disappears – not disappears, but the numbers go low for a while and then it comes up again. Yeah, that's how it's going. Up north they're having a hard time, hey? Such a rough time.

When the government started building the houses on the reserves, that's when everything changed in the 50s. It was my dad that made those cabins at those other reserves. Where my *Kokum* lived is a piece of Treaty land, eh? She had to buy the land. I don't know how much it costed, but that little piece of land. And that's where all my uncles lived, eh? That little piece there. I don't know how they – maybe a person would have to look at their land titles, eh? So, nobody bothered. After we heard that one of my uncles sold my *Kokum's* land, that's how come we had to move out of there. And I don't think she sold it for very much. He never sold – shared the money with my dad, or my uncle – just him, he was the greedy one.

Oh gees, when I was 19 – 18 or 19, I moved to a southern reserve near Prince Albert. Cause my daughter just turned 60. I had her when I was 19. So, when my old man died, I had lived with him for 57 years already, he passed on. I'm going to be 80 in June. But I still get around. I still go to town. I drive, go to casino. Yeah. But I don't play bingo, only at home. Radio bingo here, so I'll play at home. I'll go to a casino maybe when I get my pension, I have spare money, then I go. I didn't even get any of my husband's pension. He worked at the residence for a long time, 36 years, I think. But that residence is at Treaty land, eh? So, they didn't pay into those when you work with White people, they get your superannuation, stuff like that. Nothing came out of that one. So, in other words, he left me flat. [Laughs]. But I'm Happy cause I got lots of kids, lots of grandchildren.

When I talk about my home as a place of health and well-being, it's all about the Love of family. Yeah. We all got along. We Shared everything. Yeah. So, we had a Happy life. Good neighbors. Yeah. And now, we don't pay nothing for our house. Of course, we are in the reserve now. I don't mind my house. Now I'm used to it. Now, I told the old man I'd never leave it if he ever – if he, when he dies, I'd never leave the house. So, I would never. Cause a long time ago, people didn't leave their houses when their spouses died, eh? They stayed there till they died too. Now things changed. Now they just go out and find another one, another man. But no, no such luck for me. I would never do that anyway.

If I had a perfect house, I'd put cement on the ground. They used to build your house on the ground. I'd have cement for sure, but no basement, no nothing if I were to have my own way with the house. But now, the White people take over and they tell you how to make your house and whatnot. Have no say. So, we already had the upstairs and the downstairs with my mom and dad, and all my brothers and sisters who lived in one house. Yeah. And I remember *Mooshum* and them, they had – I don't know what kind of a house they had. They had one of those, must have been a Treaty house, eh? I think so but *Mooshum* used to build his own houses all the time. Yeah. So, theirs was different. Their house was different. It used to be so nice to go visit *Kokum* there cause they had a tripod outside where we used to hang out meat and stuff like that, our fish. Hang your fish. I used to like to go in that. We had our little own path, just from my house to their house. Anyway, we were close to them. Of course, that's my *Kokum*'s brother, your *Mooshum*. I guess we're pretty close in that way then. But if I were to go back to the way we used to live, I would. I'd go back and live like that. Oh, them days were good, long time ago. Way, way good. Were the happy times. When you were poor, that's when you were happy. But now you're always worrying, living the White man way.

And now it's *so* different, my goodness, my cousins, I'll never see them. People don't visit like they used to. No, they just won't. That's how they visit each other, phone. A long time ago, you just go and visit each other. At their house, visit each other. Go out on the lake together. Go picking berries. And we used to be about four families going together to go picking the blueberries towards where your *Mooshum* had his cabin. They lived in a tent or a cabin. But we used to stay about five days in the bush and pick berries. One time me and my cousin stole some blueberries from the old ladies. [Laughs]. They were picking berries, so me and my cousin snuck home. We didn't want to pick berries, so we stole their berries. Oh, did we ever get into trouble!

Oh, it was so nice. Used to be nice. I'd live like that again. And nobody ever got sick. If somebody got sick, they'd use Indian Medicine. And now you have to go to the doctor, and he gives you a whole bunch of pills, and you get better. No, we never got sick. Remember, we had measles one time? And I was sick and yeah, measles and chickens. My mom used to say, "Watch your chickens!" Yeah. "Look after your chickens." And my grandma was 108 when she passed on. That was my dad's mom. And we made her a cake and we all got together and my dad's there and made her blow her candles and put all her candles on her cake. 108 candles on her



cake. And after, my mom said, “Now, blow them out.” She tried, and you know what happened when she tried? She blew all the candles out. She laid back on her pillow, and she died. So, my mom used to keep – used to take turns keeping *Kokum*. My other aunties, they would be doing something else. My mom was the last one to have her. Respect her last day with them, her birthday. And those were homemade cakes we made, putting together, we made a big cake. I just remember like that was yesterday. She never drank in her life. She never smoked – no, she smoked a Pipe. But she made her own Tobacco, *Kinnikinic* (Traditional Tobacco), that’s what she used to make. She used to have a little Pipe. I still wonder who has her Pipe.

I went to the Medicine Camp. It’s good! Never too late to go to school. Never too late. Yeah. But it’s good to learn how people lived long time ago. Like, you should have been here about a month ago. We made a Sweat Lodge, all the ladies. It’s usually men that make them. But we had one man teaching us how. Oh, you would have loved it, just to be there.

If you get a cut or something, it was always Mint. My mom used to chew it up and then put it on where we got cut and for three days and take it off. And it closed. It didn’t – it wouldn’t open. It stayed shut and it healed like that. But then I went to school at Peguis and the teacher said, “Okay, we’re gonna go look for Little Root today. Everyone, come with me, we’re gonna go look for Little Root.” So I went, we all went, the ladies. And some went ahead and of course I couldn’t walk good cause of my bum leg; I had my bum leg then. And I think I smelled something as I was walking, I was walking behind. And as I went closer and closer to where I could smell them, and I knew that was the Little Root. So, I stopped, and I took one off, and I smelled, sure enough it was. And all the ladies passed it, they didn’t smell it. I don’t know why they didn’t. [Laughs]. Cause I told them to come back and here, I think I found it. They were so surprised they all passed it. It has a powerful smell, hey?

And their Sweet Grass is different. It’s real long, their Sweet Grass. And it’s still got that powerful smell like we have here. This year there was no Sweet Grass because of the drought. But I got some Sage. My grandson went picking for me and he found some. I don’t know if it’s still any good though. We went looking for that – what do you call it? Rat Root? Yeah, we went over there about a month ago and found some. But we had drought this year and it’s way on top now, so we just had to go and pull it out. But it’s still good. Still has a powerful, real powerful smell. Yeah, we went and got some. And then they make their tea – the old people. They make their tea and they put Mint in there. That’s how they live. They didn’t have milk or fancy stuff

like that. Tea and Mint. Mix it together. It was good. I still like some whenever I feel like drinking Mint tea. I take about four leaves from the Mint and make a cup of tea! It's good to make yourself sweat too, when you drink that. It makes you sweat. When you kind of have a cold and drink it. Yeah.

But anyway, it was nice to remember long time ago. And when we were at the trapline and the snow was all gone, taken to go away and my mom used to tell us, "Go check! Go down to the water, the rocks. Go down there. You might find the wild onions." So, we'd go look at the shore and find wild onions. There's wild onions between the rocks there. Just like those ones you make salad with, those skinny ones. And then when the snow's gone, she'll say, "Go look for Cranberries. Cranberries must be out already cause those last all winter. They freeze and they're good in the spring." So, we had jam, Indian jam. [Laughs]. That's at the trap line. So, you would've loved it.

I'm glad I got to talk to somebody. I don't get to talk to anybody. My son lives downstairs by himself too. He stays in his room. I'll make him stuff to eat and stuff like that, but he likes it downstairs. He teaches but they're not teaching right now cause of the sickness, that COVID. But somebody went in there with that disease and now the school is shut down again. That's the second time they were closed. They went to school for about a month, and they had to close it again.

When I came over here to this reserve, that's when I started learning real slow. We don't have those [Ceremonies] in La Ronge, nothing like that. It's just lately now their picking up their Culture, too. I slowly — I was scared to go in a Sweat Lodge at first, but I tried, and it was okay. After I went in there, so, I started going to Sweats. They came and asked, "Have I got my Pipe?" I went to that school in Peguis. Indian Child and Family Services had paid for my tuition over there to go, so, I went. I learned lots; different Medicine than we have here. Theirs is different. I saw an old lady over there and she shook my hand. "Give me your hand," she said. I shook hands with her. "Oh my," she said, "Your hands are warmer than mine. You've got power in your hands," she said. "What you're doing is good for you." She said to make some kind of a salve and when somebody wants a rub or something, to rub them with my hands when they're hot and they always come out pretty good. One of my sons, he had a growth on his back, so, he said, "Look at this, I have a lump here." So, I Prayed, and my hands started getting hot, so I took it out with my hands. Kind of just a little wee hard, just like a marble, I don't know how it got there. When I

finished taking it off, but then I put my hands on it, and it didn't take long to heal. That's how I knew that I had some kind of Gift for rubbing people. Sometimes when some people need help or want some information or need help or something bothering them, they come to me and I talk to them, and they always felt better after. I don't charge them anything, all I ask for is a package of cigarettes; Tobacco comes first before you heal somebody. You know, when you're picking Medicine, you put your Tobacco there, then you can pick. So, I learned lots. It don't take long though. Now I know what that Medicine is called and what it's for.

Usually, if people want some kind of drink I made for them, Medicine drink, I make it if I have the herbs. One cigarette is good enough or four cigarettes: there's four seasons. You follow the seasons as they go and, in a year, you are only supposed to get four Sweats, cause there's only four seasons. Once you start a Sweat, you have to keep going until you finish your fourth one, then you're done. When you do your Sweat, you learn lots in there and you can hear the fluttering of the Eagle feathers in there. It's like an Eagle flying in the Sweat Lodge, or you can hear Grandfather's voice talking to you inside, when you're in the Sweat. The first time I went in a Sweat, I heard a woman singing, just like it was under the ground. I would hear them ladies singing and nobody else heard them, just me. It kind of freaked me out but I asked the Elder here and I said, "Well, why did that happen to me?" He said, "You're one of the chosen ones," he said. "Someday you are going to get the Pipe, cause if you believe in Culture and everything. "Now where's it going to come from?" and he said, "You don't know where it's going to come from but it's coming to you," he told me. "I'm just going to go outside and smoke at the healing lodge," and he stopped me and said, "Come here, I want to talk to you." I was, "Hey, what did I do now, eh?" So, I stopped, and I came, and he said, "Sit down, I want to talk to you." That's when he told me that I was getting a Pipe." I asked him "Where is this going to come from?" He said, "You'll know," he said, "It'll come, but you will pick one." See, and I got a Pipe now.

I got my Pipe when I went to Peguis to that humble school. I always wondered if all these people that were taking that course were given a Gift. I said, "Oh boy, they must've forgot about me because I didn't get anything; I was wondering that when the last time they called, "Come here's a Pipe." I cried. I cried. They talked to me. I was surprised. I felt good. Now I'm a Pipe-Carrier too. Something good came out of it. My kids are all healthy, my grandchildren are healthy. I Smudge every other night in the house, Indian Smudge, Sweet Grass or Sage or Cedar.

There's four things in there to make yourself a Protection when you're Smudging. I can make that. I learned lots, oh my goodness.

This guy comes to my house, and he had scabs on his head, he said, "Could I —" puts his head and I said, "I'll try," I said. I told him to come back later while I mix my — it's very simple, all you need is Bear Grease and Spruce Gum and melt them together and it turns into a salve. So, he came back, and I put it all over his head and I told him not to take that off. I put some White Cloth on his head, and not to take it off until three days' time, then take it off. Don't take it off for three days. Then, he did take it off in three days and all his scabs were on that White Cloth. Now his head is good again. We learned lots, once you make up your mind you want to help your people who are sick, but it drains you, you know, yeah, your energy, it takes over when you fix somebody. But it's a good feeling to know that you're able to fix somebody. Eczema, I can fix that. I know how to mix that one too. But now, I'm 80, I'm not able to go out and walk around. If I fall, I'll fall in the wrong — I won't be able to get up [laughs].

So, I don't pick Medicines anymore. No, I don't. Just Sage, I pick, 'cause I can bend to pick it up. Sage and Sweet Grass I can pick — and Cedar, I'll just get some from somebody if they have extra, they'll give me some. There's one time in the summer I got a call and this woman said, "Can you come and meet us at Spruce Home, I have something for you here." I didn't know who she was. She said, "We come from B.C. looking for Annie." So, I went to Spruce Home to meet them. They were there already when I got there. I went to their vehicle, and they said, "So, you're the woman." I said, "Yeah, I'm Annie." And they said, "We have something for you here." I looked at her and I don't know her. I said, "What?" "One of our Elders in B.C. sent you 26 Eagle feathers. You're the only one that can bring these feathers back alive." I looked at them, there's 26 Eagle feathers they brought from B.C. to give it to me. I didn't even know who they were, how did they find out who I was? I took them and that lady said, "Now, I have something for you too." She bought me a salmon, they made salmon, and they stored it in a sealer, handed it to me. That's what she bought me. To this day, I don't know who they were. So, whoever I know deserves an Eagle feather, that's the one I passed it on. Some graduates I gave some to, so, I gave away all the Eagle feathers and they were so glad that I gave them Eagles for their grad. To this day, I don't know who they are. It blew me away anyway. And who did they get the information from? They never said nothing, just that old man sent me all those feathers. I

always have a feather on my table, an Eagle feather, with my Smudge. It sits on the table; my little frying pan where I Smudge.

And all the things, my family's good at — they all have good jobs; my grandchildren have good jobs. I'm a fourth generation *Chappan* so, I'm rich. Oh, *Chappans*, I never count them. One Elder told me, don't ever count your *Chappans*. But I can't help it. On Christmas, when I give them something, I have to put their names now, but it doesn't bother me after. I never count all of my children, my great grandchildren. Great, great, great, great — I've got one great, great, great, great, and he lives in La Ronge with his mom. The Big Stone area, that's where they live. Oh, I'm rich, I feel rich. When you think you're so poor when you are growing up, we were poor, we were a Happy family. We were close families, eh? You guys were close too. You know, *Mooshum* and *Kokum* they were close; we were close to them. We lived next door to them.

Your uncle is trying to go into herbs now, I don't know if he is still but he's getting old too. My mom used to do Medicines too, good Medicine, no bad Medicine; trying to help people that were sick. I even seen that pool where they pick up that Heart Medicine, it's between La Ronge and Stanley Mission. I went with one woman, my auntie, they were going to go picking, so I went with them. It's just like a well but it's in the bush and the water's just pure, pure water. The water, in the bottom, there's little Heart Medicine — looked like little hearts and they're white. They still use that Medicine, but I wouldn't know where. It's a long time ago, I was a young girl too. I wish I could find it, but I couldn't know, now, I'm getting old and — I used to tag along with my mom when she used to gather her herbs. So Indian Medicine helps, that's good Medicine. There's others that are bad Medicine, they call it. I know where that is, and I know where the Love Medicine, I know how they look like. I'm going to look for a man too — Love Medicine [laughs].

Last year was in Sandy Bay where they had the camp. So, I don't know where this year though. Pretty soon, I guess, in August. That's when the Medicines are ready. I never heard where they're going now. More of them go, they get chosen to go, the younger people. We have lots of Medicine on our side too. Just that they didn't teach anybody, just a few knew. If you're close by another Medicine Camp, go to learn more. Yeah, and how to cut your Medicines too. That's all I do when they do Medicine stuff, I show them how to cut their Medicines. So that's how I became an Elder, Pipe Carrier, Healer. To this day, that's where I'm at. It's good to learn.

See, your grandpa was a Medicine Man, too, eh? He knew his Medicine too. It's funny how he used to live by himself a trapper, trapping. That was my grandma's brother.

Aww. I used to listen to our grandfather outside. He used to have a Tipi outside his house, and I used to go listen to him talk, me and my cousin. He was trying to teach us, but we didn't listen. Now, we're back where we started from. I'm done my picking now. We have our own Medicine Room at the Healing Lodge. Oh, you've got to go in there and see all the Medicine, whenever you have a chance. Go to that clinic that they're all there. It's a Sacred place but they would let you look at their herbs and everything. Lots of Medicine. They even have little Rat Root there, you cut it up small and you have a sore tooth and you put it there, bite it, and it always helps your tooth, if you have a sore tooth. Or babies that have thrush, they have that thing to rub it on their gums. There's lots of stuff, you Love it, learning. You want to learn some more.

#### **4.6 Miles D. Ratt**

I was born in La Ronge but I grew up some in La Ronge, and some in Sucker River. And a great deal of time I spent in the bush, on the trapline where my parents lived. So, growing up, these three places, I remember a little bit of each. I went to the day school from La Ronge. I was in school for eight years. I went up to grade eight and then I had to help my parents in the trap line. And I didn't have a place to stay when they moved up there, and so I had to go with them. So, I grew up in the trap line. I learned to live off the land, I still do today. And I know it's very healthy to live off the land because the food that I ate is more healthier than what I buy in the store. But the stuff you buy in stores is good. I can almost say it's made for us. It's not good for us, but it's good to eat. But when a person lives off the land, it stays with them. I'd rather eat fish and meat and stuff like that. As I grew older, I learned that. And I still live off the land. I go out there to harvest wild rice, and that's what I eat is fish when I catch. I have a fishing rod for pickerel, and I have a net for white fish and stuff like that.

I don't trap lots anymore, but I used to quite a bit, but I never made money, but I enjoyed it. It's a tough life, but it's healthy. I walk 10 miles a day and that's very healthy instead of – maybe thinking now if I wanted a job, if I had gotten a job in the city, an office job, I don't know if I'd be healthy today. Today, I'm 70 now and I don't take any pills, I'm not diabetic, but I'm very close to having high blood pressure but it's because I don't exercise that much. The older

you get, the less exercise you do. But I still live off the land. I go out there. I like it cause I do a lot of work there for myself. I cut my own wood; I haul my own water like I used to. I remember I used to haul water from, you know, growing up in La Ronge. I cut wood for both from my grandparents, my parents, that's what I learned, that's what we did. It was a tough life growing up in the 60's. We didn't have much, but it was very healthy, too. And we used to work a lot to eat. And we had to hunt. We didn't have any money. We didn't have welfare in those days. We did have, probably once a year, the five dollars we get. That's all I remember. That's all we ever got. And if there was welfare, I can't remember in those days. So, we pretty well had to trap to eat, to buy stuff like sugar, salt, and tea, coffee, like that. We had to trap it to get that. And in the summer, my dad commercial fished the lakes from here, Nameiban Lake, Clam Lake, Morning Lake and Crooked Lake. We stayed there all summer, commercial fishing. We lived off that in the summer and then trapping in the winter.

I did help my dad commercial fish and we used to take it to the fish plant here in La Ronge. From there I think it was frozen — I think it was hauled to Winnipeg where, I don't know, it was probably sold over there. But that's a long ways, so, they must've — somehow, they had to keep it cold in the summer. In the winter it would have been okay, but they fished right through the summer. I know I used to help my dad out in these wild lakes there but three, four of them — one of them is Calm Lake, Triveet Lake, Morning Lake; those three lakes. We used to build ice houses and before spring we used to pick that ice, pile it. I think it was 10 tons for those smaller lakes and 20 tons for the bigger lakes. But still, that's—they'd go by knowing how big the building is, I don't know, I forgot how big. It was a lot of work. We used to use big saws like the one you use for cutting those big trees in BC, those long blades, saws. That's what we use, we used blades, and we went through the ice and that's how we cut it by hand. It was a lot of work.

And my parents didn't go to school, so I helped them a lot. I spoke English because I was going to school, and I did help them a little bit in that area because they couldn't speak for themselves in English. And I had to speak for them. So, it was tough for them, and it was — but again, I'll say it was healthy. I went to Old Gateway, New Gateway, Pre-Cam and then Churchill. They added that, the Churchill school, I think the gymnasium, they built after that, and I ended up working there after I quit that school there. I quit because it was pretty hard. I went to school from here, Sucker River. First it was taxi that used to haul us and then bus, and you know you have to get up early in the morning and we had to walk half a mile through the snow

sometimes in the winter. It was tough, it was tough going to school. My parents had to go through the trap line, and I didn't have nobody to keep me here, so, I had to go help them out there. That's how it was with me, so, I ended up going to just grade eight. That's when I dropped out. I could've been in grade nine, but I was getting — I was starting to miss school quite a bit — because of my parents didn't go to school. None of my parents went to school, so, it was a struggle for them also. They couldn't find jobs in the White man's world, so, they had to go to trap and that was the only — it was healthy, it was very healthy.

We hardly ever got sick when we were up north. It's northwest where we were, towards Pine House area, between Pine House and La Ronge. That's where we have a trap line. We still have a trapline there. And it's still very healthy over there, the fish are still good, water's still good. Everything, everything that we get from the bushes, it's very, very healthy. The food that we eat, the berries. Some of them are very — you know, they're very healthy berries that you eat because some of them contain a lot of the Medication that we buy from the store. It's Medication. Lots of wild Medicine that we pick from the bush that we use, and that's at no cost. As long as you know.

We've got teachers now that come from all over that they come here to teach us. Right now, we have one that's in the Jeannie Bird Clinic that comes to Culture Camps and teaches that stuff, the Medicine. You see, when you go up in the bush, it's like a pharmacy out there. It's Medicines all over, which I didn't know growing up. But now I'm starting to find out that there's so much stuff out there that you don't really need that western Medicine, except for maybe a broken arm, stuff like that, you need to go to the hospital. Hospitals are still good, but for a lot of people don't know that there's Medicine out there that no need for Aspirins and the drugs that they feed us. No need for that. There's so much Medicine out there that we can use while we're out there. So I learned that. Growing up, I know a little bit about Medicine, but they didn't teach me. There's so much of that stuff out there, I know what it is, but boy, what do I use it? That's what I mean. I know the Medicines, but what are they good for? Are they good for headaches? Are they good for aches, when you're tired? Stuff like that, there's Medicines out there for that. Bee stings and all that, there's Medicines out there for all that. So, so much out there that I learned and that I'm still learning cause there's so much stuff out there to know, that I didn't really know this from growing up. When you're young, you don't really notice these things unless you're taught. I wasn't really taught anything about Medicine growing up.



And also, today, we depend so much on welfare, and you know, welfare's something they switched the name given to the Indian people. That money that we're given, the welfare that people get, they're entitled to that money. And I say that because this is their land. And when somebody comes in here and starts using your land, you have to pay for it. You have to pay for what you – you don't steal. If you steal, you pay for what you steal. So, you pay for our land, and it's not even *enough!* People, they call it welfare, it's to put people down. But it's not really welfare, they're entitled to that money. Every cent and even more they should be getting because of the land that's been used. Because this is not the White man's land, this is our land. And whatever they take from the land, they should pay for it. But they call it welfare cause they put people down. That's a misunderstanding for a lot of people. They use that word to put people down, but really, it shouldn't be like that. People should know that it's their money right there, what they get from the government. They're entitled to that. They should've been – they should get more besides what they get.

Housing should be free. These people that come to our land, they're paying for what they give us. It's like when you go into a place, even a hotel, you pay, right? That's the same thing. They come here, they come to visit, they're like visitors. They're refugees almost, like refugees. They come to visit, and they have to pay to stay in this land. That's what it is. People should know that, understand that, young people. But that welfare word is just to make us look bad. So much stuff out there to make us look bad and really, this is our land. They're the ones that should be looking bad, not us, it's just to put us down. Yes, it's a misunderstanding for a lot of people. And it passes on from generation to generation. It makes us look bad, but really, it's not us.

I go to a lot of meetings and trapping was the first industry ever to be introduced to Canada, and fishing. And you know, logging came later on, but trapping was the first one. And that's what made Canada. They got so much money from the Indians that it's not even funny. It makes me sick when I read what so much land has been taken out for hardly anything. When I read the books, like buffalo. They wiped out buffalo. It's very – it makes me – why this happened, I don't know. Just greed, I guess. They just took over. Greedy people. And it's still going on today. Our land is being stolen today as I speak. When you go out there, they're logging, mining companies. All that stuff, peat moss, all the stuff that's been taken out of our land and we don't get nothing out of it. Maybe a little bit, but not much. And we live off that land. The berries we pick from the land are being destroyed.

I go to Besnard Lake, that's where my trapline is, towards that area, and they're doing logging there right now. And it's sad. And I've talked to a few people that have worked in those areas cause they use big machines, eh? Heavy equipment to make trails, roads into those areas. And they use big, big Caterpillars to plow the land there, knock the trees down. All that stuff, it's different. They move hills, they flatten hills. And this one guy was telling me that while they were doing that in the winter, "I come across, I was driving a big diesel Cat," he said, one of those big heavy equipment machines. "I was backing out of an area, there was guts in there all splattered on, it scared me, I thought I ran over a person, so I went to check, it was a bear." Asleep, I guess he ran over it and a couple of young ones, killed the mom. That's happening. That's happening all over. Animals that are asleep while they hibernate, they just run over those animals like nothing and then squirrels, same thing. Squirrels, everything. They're killing everything in their greed. There is a sad story if you care to watch it, and I've been watching it for the last I don't know how many years, the last 40 years I've been out there, they've been doing that. It's – it's something, I don't know.

People are starting to wake up a little bit, they're starting to speak out now. We're getting lawyers. These guys have to pay. If they keep going, there was a guy that was talking to us about what's happening with our land, what they're going to take, how much logging they're going to take. And in some of those areas, he mentioned the species that are moving away from there, they're going to be extinct pretty soon. People were complaining that cause they're wrecking the land so much and all these species of animals are going to be extinct because of their habitat being destroyed. And I said, not only animals, it's us, we're next. What you're doing, we're going to be next. We're going to be extinct too. Include us in there too, not just animals, I said. Cause that's true, that's what we're seeing today. Climate change, that's what's affecting what they're doing. Because of what they're doing, it's not only animals, it's affecting the whole world, not just the animals.

You know, I sat on the Chief and Council for three years and we're starting to – people come to ask us where they can start mining and stuff like that, and the Band is, they are part of that. They buy into that. Part owners, a lot of these companies and that's happening. So, I don't really know if they're trying to help or – they do – there's economy there for a lot of people but that's not enough. There's so many young people that need to work and it's mostly White people that are out there. But I'm starting to see a few people that are working out there that have nice

jobs, they have First Nations people. Not enough for me, it's never enough. What are our kids going to use in the future, and our grandkids? I want them to enjoy what I enjoyed growing up and it looks pretty bleak right now. So, I think I'm talking too much.

Well, I remember, my grandparents, they had log cabins in the bush, in the trap line. But we didn't have tents. Cause we had to trap quite distances, eh? And we couldn't do it all in one day, so we had to set up our own tents out in the bush. We spent a couple of nights out there, trapping and then go back to the main camp in our trap line. Cause there's about four or five cabins. We had one whole big family. My grandfather's brother and their family. We used to – families like that used to live together. So, there was about four or five cabins in that main camp from there where we trapped, I remember sleeping, in the really cold weather I used to sleep out there. And growing up, I learned how to sleep alone. Sometimes I'd sleep out in the bush without even a tent cause I couldn't make it home cause sometimes it gets too rough, slush out there and you get so tired you have to camp. So, just make a lean to and then you rest for the night there. It was rough, but I enjoyed it. Somehow, I went back over there again, and I don't know what, but I Loved it out there. Even though it was rough, but I enjoyed it.

So, cabins was, like I said, we had lots of nice big timber out there where we trapped. It was rough. All we used was axes and swede saws. You know, those hand swede saws? We used to use that. That's what we used to cut logs with, axes. So, it was a lot of hard work. Today, we use chain saws, but they never had any of those in those days. Before that, I don't know what they used. I slept in a place like that where it was like a Tipi, but they covered it with spruce boughs, and they brought in a bunch of that moss that you pick from the muskeg, and they cover that. They use that for insulation, so it was – they never had canvas like you see those Tipis today. They covered it with spruce boughs and moss, and they stayed there right through the winter, that one family I remember but I did stay there a couple of nights with them. Cause I used to travel right through there. And sometimes I'd be there by nighttime, and I didn't want to travel at night, so I'd sleep, I'd stay in that place. It's very neat, a fireplace in the middle and they sleep around that. It was round, eh? Like a Tipi. Yeah, *Migawap*, yeah. That's what it was, yeah. That's what they used to have. That's what they used a lot. Before cabins, I guess that's probably what they used.

Men put up the shelter. These guys, they left their families probably in Sucker River. These guys were from Sucker River. One old guy and his son stayed there. Three of his sons

stayed there, so they left families, the women in Sucker River. Lot of them did that too, woman stayed. For some reason, maybe the kids going to school, I don't know. Some families, not all of them went. So, I remember those times. It was rough, I say. Not easy, but we enjoyed it. At least I did. So, the housing started off as *Migawaps* and then changed to cabins. And then after the cabins that were hand built by the men, then it turned into that government housing. Yeah, yeah, used to have cabins out in the bush, but now we have government housing. I remember here in Sucker River; they had nothing but cabins. Not log cabins, they were probably from – cause they had sawmills, so they had one by fours, one by sixes, those planks for housing. And they made nice houses with those two by fours. There was no plywood then, yet.

Maybe the women had a say in the design of the homes, yeah. They were the ones that lived there, so they probably had a lot to say in the design. When a person is used to a place, like when you're used to the weather, you have to acclimatize yourself. Once you're used to the weather, that's good. Same way for staying in a cabin. You had to – when they moved out of those log cabins, it was different for them. They didn't feel comfortable in the really nice, beautiful house because of the heat. The heat is different, it's run by power and it's dry heat. They didn't have that in the cabins. They always had water in the stoves and that water used to boil most of the time. They had to keep the stoves going. But the moisture there, they were used to that. When those new houses came in – I still get nosebleeds from that dry air at night. I'm not used to that electrical heat. I guess I'm not used to that. Body's so used to what I grew up in. People were healthier in the old houses, oh yeah it was healthier, a lot healthier. Because fresh air's very healthy for you. I notice that when I go to these Culture Camps. The kids, they play lots and that's the fresh air.

Well in our family, there weren't too much sicknesses like TB. But we used to come together, and our Elders knew Medicine. They're the ones that would – the people that knew Medicine. They were the ones that took care of our sick. Both women and also men, they knew their Medicine. Yeah. And I remember my mom telling me a story about there's a young man who had hypothermia and there was no doctors there. The only place, La Ronge, but that's way too far already. All they had was dogs. So, a Medicine Man came in and he told the young guys to go out in the bush in the snow and dig for Cranberries, low bush Cranberries cause they're there all winter. So, they went looking for those and they found them. They got a few, maybe half a cup and he went to work on his Medicine. That juice he gave to that guy with hypothermia

cured that guy! [Laughs]. Sounds simple but might be something else in there. So, that low bush Cranberry is very good for that. When you sweat, eat that stuff, you don't get that hypothermia that's very easy to get when you sweat lots. So, simple Medicines like that for deadly – that's deadly, that should kill you, hypothermia. And stuff like that was very important. A lot of them kept Medicines like that, like berries, they'd keep them. But that time, this family didn't have it, I guess. TB, my grandfather had it and I guess it runs in the family too. My grandfather had it and then about 20 years ago, I had it. Might run in the blood or something, I had it. They caught it early, so they gave me pills to cure it. That's it, that's all. I took pills for six months and that was it, they fixed it.

I went to day school. Well, it did have an impact in a way on my home and family life, in a way cause they had to go to the trapline and sometimes they couldn't find us at home, at the place they stayed. So, our education was kind of we didn't get that much education, me and my brothers. I have a brother and a sister, and two more brothers came, and they spent most of their time in the trapline too cause they liked it better over there than they did – but they did go to the day school here in La Ronge and Sucker River, the younger ones went to Sucker River school here. So, in a way I'm glad I didn't go to that residential school cause I was most of the time in the trapline those days. I didn't go to school till I was seven. So, I was late going to school. That was about the normal age at that time, when I was growing up to go to school. The kids don't get to be kids no more. They start too early. They have to give them time to be kids! They grow so fast and that's something else that – when I used to go to the trap line, I'd go from here sometimes, it was walking most of the time, and dog team.

It would take sometimes two nights to get to our trap line. That's not that far, but travel is sometimes very hard when it's brushy out there, deep snow. All that stuff together, it was tough at that time. Sometimes you had to stay out at night. Like I said, I stayed, I slept out in cold weather because I couldn't make it home. But they had cabins along the way where we could stay, trappers, along the way. And today, I can go there an hour and a half. That's how fast everything's going now. Used to be two days, now it only takes an hour and a half. Everything's moving so fast cause I use snow machines and I have a vehicle that I can go to Morning Lake and from there, use snow machines. In the summer, I use a boat motor. That's where I harvest rice. I go there a lot in the summer. Especially the fall, this time of year, but we're done now. I was travelling back and forth quite a bit, hauling rice and stuff like that.

It's pretty hard for me to say when the wild rice harvest began because I was about grade — I think I was 12 years old then when I started helping my dad. Now I'm 70, that's about 50 years ago. There wasn't always wild rice in La Ronge, somebody brought it up from down south, I don't know where. They tried it a little bit in one area, in here, I think it was in Jackfish Bay in Nemeiben Lake. From there — it seeds itself, eh? Every year grows more and more and more and then people started harvesting and they're seeding it in other places. That's how it grew. Right now, it's a multi-million-dollar business they have. That's how it started over here anyway. From where it came, I don't know, down South somewhere. Kaz Parada started La Ronge Industries that was who we worked for. He's the one that ran that. I think he was the first one that started that business and that's how it grew. It was there already when he started but somehow, he found out that it was worth something. Maybe somewhere else it was selling already; I don't know how — but he was the one that got it going.

I have a really good life. Yes, I enjoy it. I can't complain. But you know, it's what's happening to our land. That maybe I can complain about. I was lucky to take out a biologist here a couple of years ago. They did a study on fish. And I was able to help them because they didn't have a boat right away, so I took them. I used my equipment and took them out. And they did a study. Every place, every rapid we went to, and there's lots of them out there, fish were spawning at that time. And they did all kinds of stuff cause they're biologists. They had a net, they put a trap net. And every morning, we'd check those nets. There'd be about 400 suckers. They'd count those suckers, they'd measure them. They'd check on them, see if there's anything wrong with them. They took eggs out of them. Stuff like that. There's so much stuff, I never thought — I never noticed. Even those rapids. They turned a few rocks over and there's ugly little creepy little creatures stuck to those rocks, little marine bugs or whatever. All kinds of them and they took a few of them out and they put them in bottles, and they said, "If these things disappear — if they're not here, that means there's something wrong with the water." So, everything is with a purpose, eh? And that meant the water's still good, it's still healthy. And they counted the fish eggs and the rapids, they knew pickerel eggs and sucker eggs and all those fish that spawn, they counted those, and they said, "Still good. Nothing wrong with the environment, yet." But it's good for them to keep an eye on stuff like that. It's a Band owned company. It's called CANORTH, owned by the Band, but it's good that they monitor stuff like that. It's nice. But I told them a few things that I noticed are missing, like mayflies. I don't see those out there

anymore. And those mayflies, we don't eat them, but the fish live on them. And we eat the fish that live off the mayflies. That whole chain is kind of disturbed too, I guess, in some way. Yeah. So, stuff like that, keeping an eye on. I didn't mind that.

You know, I often hear, "We didn't give up the land, we didn't sell the land." When they signed Treaties, you'll find what the conditions were. They didn't really like what they had to sign into. They had to compromise, I guess. They didn't like what the deal was, but they could live with it. And there's a story, you probably heard it a lot. In those Treaties, when they signed it, they said, "As long as the trees grow, the sun shines, the river flows, and the grass grows." That becomes law, the document they signed. And that's forever. And those laws that they signed, it's forever and they've been broken time and time again. And that's something. When you break the law, you have to pay. And stuff like that is just – it's kind of sick when you think of it. How much they take our land and not give anything. So, it's good to teach Treaties in our school cause people have to know about that, what does it mean. The Treaties are being signed even today as we speak. You know about the NATO they talk about in our countries? North Atlantic Treaty Organization, I think that's what it is. So that's the Treaty that was signed by countries, different countries coming together, signing a Treaty, they're going to work together to fight wars, to fight anything, to work together. That's how Treaties are, that's what they mean, to work together. Fight wars together, that's what it's all about and stuff like that should be taught in school so they know what Treaties are, what Treaties mean. They're very important for them to know. I know a lot of people, I worked with SERM, and a lot of stuff they'll tell you, "Treaties don't apply here," but no. Maybe there's a misunderstanding on their part because Treaties apply everywhere when it comes to land. So, it's something that has to be applied for people understand. Especially the young people, the ones that are going to be fighting for our land yet in the future.

At the time I was growing up, we didn't have everything like we do now. At the time I thought we were kind of struggling to make ends meet but when I think of it now, yes, it was a struggle, but it was healthy. We had to do things physically all the time in order for us to survive. Today you ride all day but then you had to walk all day to get what you wanted and today — I don't regret today because of that I'm still healthy, that's probably why. That's the good thing about it, is you stay healthy out there when you're doing things physically all the time. You're mentally and emotionally healthy when you're out there. That's one good thing about when I

think about it now. Yes, it's a little bit easier today but it's not that healthy, it's the different stuff that we eat, it's not been too healthy for us but when you live off the land, it's very healthy. I think I did mention that already. It's the best place to be, it's very healthy to be out there. Even though if you struggle a little bit, it's good for you, it's very healthy. We're always doing something, not sitting around doing nothing. In order to survive out there you had to move around. The animals that you lived on, they're very healthy animals because they're the same thing, they're on the move all the time, they don't stand around like cows, those moose run around all the time [laughs]. Cow meat is very tasty, very good to eat but I don't know if it's healthy. Those are the questions I ask myself. The cows, they just stand around and we eat them the same. We end up doing the same thing, we stand around, unhealthy. But stuff like that, when you think about it, it's all the chemicals that's put into the food that they eat, it's not very healthy.

We practiced the Anglican religion and Cree Spirituality, we did both. My grandparents were role models and my parents also and that way — they believed strongly in Christianity, that's how I grew up. I didn't look too much in the other way [Cree Spirituality] that I see that more and more of that's being practiced up from down south from this way more. But you know, I don't mind that either, it works for them, that's good. I always tell people that is, "Whatever your beliefs are, use them, they work for you." I use mine, it works for me. Let's Respect each other; let's not hate each other because of our beliefs. That's what I always tell people. Christianity, that's how I was brought up so, I still use that. I'm an Elder now, I do Opening Prayers in our communities. I use what I was taught by my grandparents and my mom and dad. We just had a Culture Camp here a few miles down the road here. We opened up a Culture Camp down there and it's very healthy. They call it Base Camp, Land-based learning. There's a sign there that says, "*Kewetan* ", it sounds like *kewetin*, but it's not, 'cause *kewetin* means north and "*Kewetan* " means let's go back. That's what it means. We're teaching kids, let's not forget what was behind us, let's go back to some of the Traditions that have been given to us by Elders from the past; let's not forget that, let's use them. They're very healthy and the food that we eat back out there is very healthy and the fresh air is good for you. Those are the things I always notice the kids when they're out there; the wonders the fresh air will do to them, they play outside, they don't do that in school here. Yes, school is nice to learn but out there they see the real thing.

In school you'll see squirrels in a book or T.V.; you don't see the real thing. Over there you'll see the real thing. They'll see moose, caribou, the land, all the Medicines that are out there.



Some people come in here and teach a little bit about Medicines. It's a pharmacy out there, it's full of Medicines out there and that's what they — these kids, they learn a lot about that stuff too. It's very good, I think.

In the spring, they'll go out and, what do you call that sap they get from the willows? They'll take that and then the teachers will, I think they boil it for two days, for sure, to get the syrup out of that stuff. I don't know what they call it, but they'll do that. I've seen it done; my grandparents have done that. You make syrup out of that birch tree in the spring. All that stuff, all those old Traditions that my grandparents used, we teach them that. They'll do beadwork, make dream catchers, whatever it is that's available out there— we make snowshoes for them, but they'll learn how to do the, what do you call that, it's like making dream catchers that stuff you put in there. Once you learn how, it's very easy, like in a snowshoe, when you're braiding them? It's a good thing for them to learn if they're willing to learn. It's something different. You don't learn that in school. All that stuff, they learn, these young kids. At the same time, their language is being practiced; they're starting to learn a little bit of Cree. That's something we don't want to lose either, our language. A lot of things happening out there in terms of what was being practiced a long time ago and we try to bring it back because if it's Traditional, it's good for them. I know a lot of these kids they'll say, "I'm a First Nations kid, how come I don't speak Cree?" That's not being taught at home, so, they have to find a place where they can learn that. Somehow, in a way, they're lost in that sentence.

The language has been lost or forgotten, some of it, I guess from the past but today there's so much alcohol and drugs out there and parents don't take time to look after their kids. I'm a grandfather. Me and my wife we raised our grandkids now, we're raising our great grandkids, so, it's something that we have to babysit them. Some of them work but not all of them. There's so much of that stuff going on and it's what's taking away everything what they should be learning not coming from the parents because of — I didn't go to residential school, my wife didn't, I went to these day schools in La Ronge here. In a way, I guess I'm lucky in that way. I still feel the impact of those residential schools because it's a sad thing that happened. I feel for them.

There is not really a difference between a house and a home. I think it's the same thing. But you know, I have a house in the trap line. I always say home away from home. When I come here, this is another home away from home cause when I grew up, I want to be there all the time. It's different here, this house, but I built my own house out there. I used to build houses for the

Band, so I took a bunch of lumber out there. I threw out some and I hauled some. What I like about my house is at least I have a place to stay in the winter. [Laughs]. That's all I like. I got friends that come here, and they always visit me here and I enjoy that, but I enjoy watching my grandkids grow up. Yeah, it's nice out here. I like it. I've got a fireplace outside where I smoke meat and fish. It's how I did it in the trap lines, I can do it here too, I guess. Well, if I had a chance to change my house, I'm thinking about it. I want to make it bigger. It's too small right now cause I have grandkids. I got lots, so they come here all the time. Not enough room. I got a three-bedroom house but that's not enough. And I think about in the bush when I'm out there too. They like the bush; they like the trap line. They do okay. They like to fish, fish through the ice in the winter and the summer, out in the boat, they fish from. They enjoy that. They like that because they eat fish, they're not going to go hungry.

As First Nation's people, that's something that's probably everywhere, we have about three generations living in one house. We stick together a lot. We don't leave the house and take off to England or Russia like others do. We don't do that; we stick together. That's been like that from the beginning, I guess, for First Nations, small communities living together, growing up together.

The Elders usually stay home until they pass away, yes, now they do, but they never used to, they'd end up in the hospital and that's where a lot of them died. Now, they have a choice, they can stay home now. A lot of them, like my mom, she died at her home. That's about two months ago. I'd been blessed with a mom for a long time. At 70, I still had a mom, she was 89. She was the oldest in our family. We still have a few Elders but not — we're the Elders now. I've sat with Elders trying to figure out when can you become an Elder? Who can become an Elder? All those questions flying around, and they couldn't come up with anything. Chief and Council, I sat down with them 'cause I was with them for three years and at that time it so happened that that question came up and we had meetings about it, and they couldn't come up with anything. Who becomes an Elder? What age? And some of them, they asked me, "When did you become an Elder?" I'm 70 years old now, I can't go back to 50 years old, there's no solution around that, I'm an Elder, there's no way around it. So, you get old, and you become an Elder, I guess. Depends on, too, a lot of older people don't want to be Elders. They don't want to Share their Knowledge. Me, I like to Share mine, I don't want to keep it, I don't want to be stingy with whatever I have, I'll Share it with others. That's one thing about Elders is there's a lot of

knowledge like, "Where you are right now, at your age, I was that age at one time," so, stuff like that. I've been there but we don't know everything; that's something else. We might know different things than others, different Elders. Bringing that Knowledge together from different Elders is a nice thing because there's so much Knowledge out there that people should know. It's for their safety sometimes, it's for them to be careful in a lot of ways; we've been through so much. Sometimes we're lucky to be here, and stuff like that. They have to be told that it's not that simple out there.

I want to say thanks for the interview and it's always a pleasure to try and help out a little bit in a small way for others to try and understand where we stand because we're not poor, we're rich, but yet we are poor. But people, when they're put down like that, it makes them feel bad, so they don't want to do anything because of what they're perceived to be, but there are not – they should understand that they are rich people. They're not lazy, they're just put in the position to be who they are now, hey? So, it's not their fault. It's not us that's the problem.

#### **4.7 John Halkett**

I grew up on the reserve near La Ronge area, Kitsaki Reserve, 101. I knew your grandparents, but I knew the Elders around the area. The Métis lived around close to us in that area there. I grew up around my grandparents also. My *Mooshum* on my mom's side, my grandparents lived at Big Stone. And at 101, my other set of grandparents, my dad's parents, that's where they lived. So, I grew up around my grandparents, my aunts and uncles. And my other relatives live around there.

My dad was a carpenter. So, he built houses and he built where we lived in, in the cabin. So, all our houses were made by him! Basically, they were one room cabins, but you had to keep it sort of opened cause the heat could go around faster.

Basically, everybody around us, that lived around us, we were all related one way or another; uncles, aunts, and some of my other grandparents. My grandparents' brothers and sisters, I grew up around. My grandparents were pretty well the ones that were the go-to Elders at that time. And my great- great- grandmother – what was her name? She was one of the oldest members of the Band. So that's where people went to for advice and things like that. The Elders and the Teachings we got at that time was Respect, mainly Respect, and to look after the Elders. We used to go over there and help out a little bit with what they had to do. And they would make

us go into the cabin and feed us. [Laughs]. And they would lecture us a little bit. So that's basically how we got our Teachings was from the Elders, guiding us on certain things. And to this day, I still remember those Teachings. [Laughs]. But they were not too much on a Traditional side. They were strong Anglicans, eh?

So, I was brought up in that area until later on in life when I became a teenager. That's when I started asking questions about who I was as an Indigenous person. And some of the things they used to tell us was Spirituality was not good. And that's when I started thinking, I asked myself, how can – some people said that Spirituality was the work of the devil. So that's when I started asking questions. Does the devil have a power to create people? You know, I started asking those questions. How was it like before Christianity? And then later on, when I got a little older, when I was a teenager, I sort of got involved in AIM, the American Indian Movement.

So, I wasn't really involved in AIM, sort of helped out a bit here and there. It sort of gave me a reason why I was First Nation. How the other race took over, so, we sort of lost it so it sort of opened my eyes to who I was. There weren't any Ceremonies involved, well, maybe Smudging. They said it was okay cause all those things we lost. I suppose I got to be involved in this. AIM happened in the early 70s around the time I became an artist. I do mostly paintings of life, like on the reserve. I guess how it is living out at the lake and some of hunting season. And a few of travel, people travel by boat.

So, I started realizing who I was as an Indigenous person. Cause I remember as a child, whenever a White person was coming to our house, people would panic. They would say, "Clean the house! You, you didn't wash your face, go hide in the bedroom!" All that. [Laughs]. So, it was different. But I have a lot of good memories with all the Elders, my relatives, and being brought up in that area, I think it was good. You know, we were shown Love, and we were Respected as children until alcohol came in the 60's. So that's when things went upside-down; lots of neglect, people fighting, arguing most of the night, couldn't sleep. After when alcohol came onto the reserves, I saw kids being taken away in the 60's scoop, I guess you call it. Two of my aunts, their children were taken away. So, it was a sad time. So that was when it turned upside-down. It was around the same time that government housing came in, yeah, it came in around the 60's. Yeah. So, basically, I think people, they lived on the reserve, they still lived off the land to make ends meet.

I never really got into trapping— my dad didn't have a trap line, just my grandparents. So, I never really got into that area. Just basically later on, I did a little bit of it, but not much. I didn't see any purpose for it unless you're gonna eat the animal. Other than that, I didn't bother animals.

I didn't go to residential school. I wanted to go but my parents didn't let me cause both of them were there, so, they probably knew what it was like. But I seen my friends get on the bus to go. And I really wanted to go. They said, "No." So, that was that. I went to Gateway School, but I didn't last long. I quit at an early age, couldn't handle it. So, I had to get a job. [Laughs]. So, that's what I did. Didn't get around to graduating. Well basically, I met a couple of people that sort of helped me out, took me under their wing. I got involved in the community and learning all the tech stuff, and at that time, photography and art. I'm actually an artist, so I did a lot of art. So later on, I took some courses, art classes, art courses. Went to the Banff School of Fine Arts for film animation and then the Culture College in Saskatoon at that time, '76, I think. It was the Saskatchewan Indian Culture College; I think it's named different now. So, I was there for a bit. But then, me and alcohol. [laughs] So, I came back. And then I got into a teacher training program, NORTEP. But I didn't last cause my academics weren't the greatest at that time. So maybe a year at the most. And then I started working in the schools. They needed a Cree language instructor. So that's what I've been doing mostly, a teacher aide. But just recently, I am an in-school Elder now at the Bell's Point Elementary School. So mostly I worked in the Cree language area in the schools around the early 80's, by the 90's, part of 80's.

I think in the 80's I started working on myself as an Indigenous person in regards to Native Spirituality. So, I started working on myself in that area. That was the year I got married, 1980. I had two boys and would've had three, but one went to the Spirit world. So, it's been quite a journey so far. But I'm glad I was able to grow up around the Elders for the past—they're pretty well gone now, same with my parents, my grandparents.

I learned Cree when I was small, I was a child, I remember. One of the things I remember was I think I was just a baby. I was hanging on a tree, and I seen my mom running. She told me a Story one time. Yeah, I guess it was that time I was in a *tikinakan* (cradleboard), so she hung me in a tree while she was picking berries. But she's deathly scared of frogs, and she seen a frog, so she started running towards my dad, shouting. I guess it was that time he saved her. [Laughs]. So, I guess my dad just gave her heck and telling her not to leave me like that.

I think at that time, back in the old days, men and woman had their role. Part of survival, I guess, by instinct. So, they were – they'd take care of the children, make sure everybody was looked after, not even their children, their relatives' children, everybody was looked after. And then we were sent to bed early. You could hear the woman calling their children when it was getting dark, so, we knew whose mother was who. They were calling and you could hear the late Elder Rosie McKenzie, they lived in Morin's Hill, but you could hear her calling, "*kitchimohkaman*" (nick name for person from the United States) [Laughs]. So, it was a good journey.

I think for a house, when a person builds their own house, it has a lot more meaning to it and their children and even relatives with them. You can see and feel the Love, might not have running water or electricity, but the sweat that was put into the house, everybody used to take part, eh? Some people will peel logs and do this and that. It was put together. I think it's something like setting up a Tipi. So, I think for that Band housing now, some of those people, they knew they were gonna get a house, they should actually put a little bit of effort into that house, help build it. Well, this one, there's only two of us here. My children have moved on. And I'm glad that I received this house, so I don't have to keep renting houses, apartments, or stuff like that. So, it helps. Yeah. And you know, if I live in town, I have to pay a mortgage and everything like that. On a reserve, don't necessarily have to do that so that part really helps.

Yeah, the only thing I guess I can really say is, the difference between now and before, they got to build their own houses. Still, some people do that, but there's lots of money involved eh. Before, you just had to go out in the bush and cut your logs. They used to take their time, and now they rush it. So, I guess what people got to learn from that, it's part of the work ethic, what it takes to get something done. So, a lot of that used to happen. The Elders, the old men would be sitting out, carving a paddle or fixing something, sharpening their axe and tending to the garden. And they would go set a net, check the net, smoke fish too. That was a good life. If I were to build my own house, I think I would make it our own shape. And a stove. And built out of logs. But I'm too old to do that. [Laughs]. Yeah. I guess a log house would probably be good.

To make my home healthy, mostly me and my wife are non-drinkers, and we don't do drugs. And I guess we like to have our grandchildren around once in a while, sometimes they sleep over. But they all live in PA now. Right now, me and my wife are waiting until we do Sweat Lodge Ceremonies and we take part in Sun Dances, usually around the summer. We went

to Sandy Bay last year and the Hall Lake one. So, that's where we're at right now. And we make Medicines for people and do Healing. We Heal people in a Traditional way. We had one of our late Elders, Catherine Charles, she encouraged us. We used to have a Sweat by her place. But hopefully things get better with this COVID, lots of people passing away.

I got involved with Sweat life through Traditional Elders, Traditional Healers. They showed me what to do and that's what I do now, Traditional Healing. One of them was from Sandy Bay and the other one was from Cross Lake, Manitoba. So, I had a few Teachings from them. What they did was they took me to a Sweat and they taught me things that, well, we seen things people don't really usually see. So, they taught me through that, Dreams. I see things they said I was going to see. I have Visions. They taught me through that. Their Teaching was different. I had to experience it myself. But they're both gone now. Yeah, over here, there's quite a few more people getting involved in Sweat life and I'm not the only one that runs Sweats, there are other people; other local Healers. Sometimes I go sit with them cause we have to support one another.

#### **4.8 Alvina Halkett**

I grew up at Reindeer Lake. We had a one room house. It was a log house, my dad built it, my dad and my grandpa. I had a big family, there were 11 of us in that. Everything was in one room, but we had our own beds, but Sharing, like I Shared my bed with my sister. And my brothers, they Shared a bed and my bigger sisters too. And my family, my dad, my mom and dad had their own. So, there's a stove at the center. That's the heat we had for our house. There was no electricity or running water. So, I remember when I was a small girl, I used to haul water, haul water from the lake, and then also, the wood. My brothers will cut the wood, would bring the wood in. That's how, we helped each other in our household there. Everybody can do something, help out.

My dad was a trapper, fisherman and a trapper. That's how we grew up. That's the main thing my dad did. But we never went to a trap line, just by himself and other men. And also, I didn't see the fur he got. Everything he did was at that camp. Cause we were not Treaty. So, he couldn't bring anything out, too much stuff, too much animal, things like that when he traps. He has to do everything on his own at the trap line. So, I didn't see much stuff, like how you make furs, things like that. When my mom and dad used to leave and go do that kind of stuff, like

moose hide, things like that, I didn't see that part. Everything wasn't allowed in our – because we were not Treaty people.

On the outside, the Treaty people were really looking at us, what my dad was doing. So, that's how we grew up. He had a dog team. And even the dogs, we weren't allowed to go in where he has his dogs cause those are working dogs, you can't go and play with them. So, he was taking care of his dogs. So, we weren't allowed to go play with them, things like that. He kept everything – to stay away from dogs. And it was – it was good.

My family – my mom went to a residential school. My dad never went to school. Just my mom. So, everything, family mostly – I had aunties and uncles, but we weren't allowed to go out from the land. I guess my dad, my grandpa bought that land, a strip of land where we were living. So, people around us were watching what we do. We can't even go out from that. "You go back. You're not Treaty. Go back to where you're supposed to be." Yeah, it was kind of rough, rough for us. So, we didn't have any social life to associate with kids. Only time we go is when we go to the school, to be around kids. We weren't allowed to go out. And my mom and dad said, "Better stay. Stay in our area." Cause the way we were treated, that's the only thing. Right now, I'm working with kids at school. I was an Educational Assistant. And then I'm an Elder now. My second year here as an Elder at Bell's Point Elementary School.

But before that, when I was younger, I used to babysit. I think I started baby sitting around seven years old with my niece, my nephew. I was around kids all the time, all through growing up, taking care of my nieces, my nephews. And also my sister was working at the school as a janitor. I used to go help her. They paid me a little extra money to go help her. That's how I began to budget my money, because my dad used to say, "When you have money, don't go spend it all. You need to save; you need to budget." So that's what I was taught by my dad, budget.

It was a big cabin that we lived in. So, when my sisters got married, when they moved out, so my dad built another cabin for us, just behind where this big cabin was. So just a small – there was about six of us at that time, so he built another cabin, just a smaller cabin, but we had that stove in the center. That's where my mom cooks. The stove was a really big stove. Yeah. I remember from when I was a child there until my dad built a new cabin, I was about 13 when we moved to the other cabin. My mom and dad, both of them designed the home. When we moved there when I was 13. And then 14, my mom passed away.



There was two brothers younger than me, two brothers and a sister. So, this younger brother was about six, six years old, the other one was eight. And my sister was about 12 and I was 14. So, after my mom passed away, those two brothers went on in their lives, so just my dad and myself. And I had another sister, but usually, you used to go help other sisters in other communities. My other sisters will be married and then they move to other communities. And then my older sister used to go and visit them. So, most of the time, just us, me and my dad. So, I was older there, I looked after my brother, my brothers and my sister. My parents both Shared the responsibilities of the house. Right after my mom passed away, so my dad was the boss.

There were Medicine People. And also, my mom used to help other people because she went to school, and she can talk English to other nurses in the nurse or doctor comes in. She helped them. She was an interpreter. Men and woman both Shared that role, we had Medicine People that come. Then, in the other community, when they heard somebody get sick, they come and help out. I had an uncle who was a Medicine Man. I was quite sick. I remember he used to give me to drink, Medicine to drink. So, I really believe on that cause I was grown up given Medicine to drink and getting cured from that.

I didn't go to residential school. My mom and dad – my mom said, “No,” right away. “Not a good place.” She used to tell us that, “Kids are going to school,” and she used to hear kids crying. And then there's kids dying. And then we ask her, do they send them to wherever they came from? And she said, “No, everything was done where they went to school.” And I remember those things she was talking about because one time she said – we had a priest, at South End, eh? And she said, “Don't be alone with him.” And I didn't understand what she was saying. And I thought, he is a priest, he is working with God, I thought to myself. What would happen? So, she said, “Never go to the priest alone.” So, I kept that in my mind. Why did she say that to me? And then one time, this priest came. We were playing at the playground. And he wanted somebody to help him to bring wood in his cabin. There was two of us girls there. We looked at each other and I told that girl, I said, you know, my mom used to say not to go with the priest. I told, that's what I said to the priest. “Never go in the priest's house.” And he said, “No, no. This is not gonna be – I'll be outside because I'm throwing the logs in and you guys put them in a shelf there,” he said. So, after he said that, and I said okay. And then after that, I went home, I had a chocolate bar and my mom said, “Where did you get that?” And I said, I went to help the

priest bring wood. Right away she said, “Nope. Put that chocolate down. I told you not ever to go in there!” Yeah. I left it like that. I didn’t understand that time. Yeah.

We had a good life in our one room house cause everything was good, heating and my bedding. Even the beds, I remember my mom used to make those from feathers from the ducks. I remember we used to collect those when we cleaned, I guess the ducks. And everything in a bag and then later on, she will make a blanket from those feathers. They were nice and warm. Yeah, we used to keep everything in there and sit there, wash everything. All wash these feathers and dry them, and she did that in the wintertime. She kept everything and then at wintertime, then brings them out and makes blankets from there. We used to work so hard. Yeah. Not just us, even the other communities will come and ask her to make stuff, blankets, and things like that. Even their clothes, if they’re getting old, they will cut them into little pieces and make a quilt from there. We didn’t throw anything away, just make stuff from there. Yeah. Mmhmm, yeah. I’ll say that too, it was Loved. Everything, we would take care of. Yeah. We were taken care of like food and clothes and also helping each other, Sharing each other, Sharing stuff.

It’s only two of us [Laughs] in this house now, It’s kind of lonely. It’s a Band house but we got this house through CMHC housing. We paid it up, it’s our own now. We didn’t design the house, they built it. And then we moved in, and we paid them monthly and so many years, they said we own the house now. I would like to get a wood stove, but they won’t allow me to put a stove in. It would have been in the middle of our house. Oh, yes. I don’t know how many times I’ve been thinking, this is a good place for the stove. Especially in the evenings, whenever the lights off and they see the stove going. Yeah.

Before my boys moved out, they had their own rooms. Yeah. But before we moved here, we had a smaller house. They used to share a bedroom. And then when we moved in here, they [the boys] were separated. And I find it was just like we were moving away from each other but we’re still in the same house but it’s like we’re moving away from each other. It is how I felt when I moved here. My grandson, when he comes over, he wants to close my bedroom door, and I said no. No, leave it open, can’t sleep when the door’s shut. I leave my door always open. I don’t know, I just feel like smothered if I close my bedroom door. When we moved in, you know, my boys used to never come in our bedroom. They would ask before they can go in my room. That’s what they – I don’t know. I asked my son, why do you do that? We are family. You can go in there whenever you need. He said, “No, that’s you and dad. Your place,” he said.

Yeah. But when they say – I allow my grandchildren, their children, they come in my room. They said, “Mom, what is that when we couldn’t come in there?” I said no, I didn’t say that. You guys made it that way. [Laughs].

As an Elder, like school today, they have Elders now, hey? Before they didn't have anybody. Probably, guidance counselors that they came, they took the guidance counselor out and then they put a social worker in our school, and then the Elders. I find that Elders, for me, like kids, they talk to you. The only thing we can do is, sometimes there's things coming up and then the social worker steps in. It has more things to do with that child. But like that everyday thing, they come there just when they have a bad day and then they talk to us, and they feel better after that. I was an Educational Assistant for about 15 years and then I retired.

I only took two years of the Northern Teachers Education Program - NORTEP. I was a non-Treaty before when I took NORTEP and then when I got married, I became a Treaty. My Mom was a Treaty before, but she lost her Treaty when she married my dad. That’s how my other siblings, they had to apply, but I got married, I got my Treaty when I married into Lac La Ronge Indian Band. I applied through the Band but, I guess, they don't see me as a Treaty person. So, I never — when I applied somewhere, they're the ones that have to agree if I want to take training, but they never gave me — they won't give me money to go. I tried to get back to NORTEP, I tried three times, but got turned down, so I thought about it. I really like to be involved with kids so, I stayed as a teacher's assistant. There's two Elders from — we have an elementary school that's from pre-kindergarten to grade four this year: this coming fall. Last year they had pre-K to grade five but it's getting too crowded so, they moved those grade fives to high school.

We get invited when they have Culture Camps, we're invited, especially my husband gets invited, so, I get to go with him; I help him around. It's good. This past three weeks, the kids had a summer thing going. The first week we went with five to nine and then nine to 12. This way we finish with 13 and up. It goes by age group like five years old to nine and then nine to 13 and up. Now I’m with the teenagers. Actually, there's eight. Last year we only had three, now we have eight. We had six girls and two boys. Oh yeah, another one came, so, there are nine altogether. The Culture Camp is at the Youth Haven, you have to go by boat. Us Elders and they have chaperones but us Elders, we start off with a morning Prayer and a Circle, Sharing Circle. Then the others, with crafts; activities. We still help each other around that. They go out boating,

swimming, picking up Medicine. This other man was talking about Medicines and what they are. It's where you get involved too. All other things like that. We get the kids involved. They like it and they're so well behaved, too. They have time to listen, time to play, things like that. From five-year-olds to nine, there were only about six. I know some kids were kind of scared to be away from home. Nine-year-olds, we have 25, they stay overnight. That's a big group, but it worked out, everything, they listen, there was nobody misbehaving, everything was working right; they listened.

There's one thing I usually say something about it. We have a portable for Cree-language; one person teaching, and the other person do the Culture thing. Our portable is not good safe. Somebody came and looked at it, it's supposed to be demolished, it's not a really good safe. That's the thing, too, they don't usually have a Cree-class or a Cultural classroom, they're being pushed around. If the teacher needs it in another class, the people have to pack up and put their stuff somewhere else and teach from there; go to each classroom. And they said that's the reason we have our schools, the Band, that's the thing we're supposed to stick to. Main thing was Cree, Cree language and Culture. But they still push it aside. I don't know how many times we have meetings, and they say, "What would we like to see?" and they say that every meeting. They said they were going to get a new one this fall but I still don't see that demolished, that trailer there. They're supposed to get it, maybe they won't get it right away; maybe later on. Now, even us as Elders, we don't have a room to work from, so, we have a room, not too big that room, we're going to be four of us to be working from there; a Cree language teacher and a Culture and ourselves, us Elders. There's going to be four of us there. It's a little crowded. And then, on top of that, you're supposed to look after the kids inside that little space. That's the main thing. For me, I would like to see more for our language and our Culture. Every year, I said, "Am I coming back? You have money for it?" But they say, "Yes, we have money."

So many times, I wanted to finish my teaching, but I'm stuck to this, not getting any funding. Maybe going back to school and upgrading myself, I didn't get any funding. Then, the CEO was the one that we were good friends, they said, "I'm going to let you go to school, don't worry about any funding, you can now finish your grade 12." That's what happened, I finished my grade 12; took me three years to finish it. Sometimes in between, I have to make gas money for myself. I had to go sub that time and pick up the classes I need. He let me do that, so, it took me three years.

Before that, as a kid, you were told that you're nothing, like that, put down, but I didn't speak up. Later on, went back to school and start being myself, "I'm a person, I can do this." When I see a kid like that, I don't push, I don't try to push there but, I talk to them and finally, they start to talk, I see myself, I said how to be that way and someone to acknowledge me and starting to — I usually tell them, "I went through that as a child," I said. They just looked at me and blinked their eyes, "You were small, too?" [laughs]. Anyway, it was good to see even the kids I work with, they graduated, these learning disability kids. I'm so glad they stick to the school, and they graduated. Here I have two of those were chaperones. They just graduated in June, and they come to work with kids. One of the chaperones was trying to put down this young man, he said, "He's not doing anything." He's not paying attention to the kids. I said, everybody was there, even the superintendent was there and the one that's coordinator. I stepped in and I said, "That young lady wanted that young guy to be out of that program." I stepped in, "Nope, you can't do that. I know he's a bit — he has disabilities, he needs reminders. I would like him to stay cause this is a learning process; we have to help those kinds of people; they need our help." I was so glad to see him the next — this week. That was last Thursday that we had that little meeting, what we see and how we see kids doing. That is what I said, I want to be working with this kid at Bell's Point; I was the tutor. He just needs some reminders. I don't want kids to be put down if they have disabilities. We need to help them and then they understand that they are people that disabilities. They need to understand that they need a little bit of help. I'm glad he was back, I said, "I'm so glad you're back in your summer job; your first summer job," I said. Those kind of kids, I always have to say something, I don't want any other kids to be able to put down.

#### **4.9 James Eninew**

I was brought up in Sucker River. We lived in a small home, small cabin. When we first started out as a family, we didn't have a cabin of our own. So, we used to go from family to family, stay at their homes. And at one point, we actually lived in an underground storage building and from there, my father and my uncle built a cabin. So, it wasn't a very big cabin. And if my dad worked, he was gone for weeks at a time and then he'd come back, and then we started going to Prince Albert. And that's how we wound up in Prince Albert. But that cabin, we didn't have electricity for the whole of the community, no one in that community, no one had

running water, no one had sewer, no one had anything except small cabins, had two houses that were perceived as being modern. They were made of boards and were well insulated. And our Values and our systems back then were simple, basically to survive, help one another. I started as a young child of five years old, helping Elders with their water and their wood. And then I'd get up at five in the morning and then I'd go help them and then get ready for school, get back and then I'd be at home doing chores. And then I do my homework and get to bed. During the summer, we just get up, have breakfast, disappear, we wouldn't be back home until it would start getting dark. And that was okay with my mom cause there was lots of us. Five of us stayed there, but two of my brothers stayed at our grandparents'. There was – well, my brother was born a little bit later. So, there was five of us, but we wound up being five and then six including my mother and father, that'd be eight.

We were always crowded. In fact, our sugar intake was probably a lot less than the average person. Everything that we ate, drank, was watered down, was really thin. Our Tang was always watered down, had no choice in the matter cause there was lots of us to take care of. We understood and we accepted our food intake. And I think to this day, that helped in the sense that none of my family members have diabetes or anything else sugar related in terms of getting sick. Values that we learned back then was hard work, and healthy behaviors, walking, running, working. Those were instilled in us, so a lot of us are still very healthy, even though we're in our 50's and 60's. That stuff that we learned as kids, we kind of passed onto our kids. But also, I had a grandfather who we had as an Elder who was a Storyteller. So, every night, he would be our television. A lot of us kids would sit in a little audience, and he would recite Stories of Wesakecahk, and he was our television. We didn't have television there until our father paid for a generator and bought a TV. And that was a modern way, and we didn't have a telephone until we had electricity in '72 and '73, we got our first telephone service. And in the seventies, I remember we had a party line which was very inconvenient, but we learned to live with them. And we learned not to touch the telephone if it was for somebody else until we got a little mischievous, but that's a different story. And other than that, life in Sucker River before electricity was very interesting. I guess you can say that we worked outside, we played outside, we were outside all the time, which is very healthy. The forest around the community, within the community, were our playgrounds and they kept us happy and active.

I have three kids, two girls and a boy stuck in the middle. My two daughters were raised by their mother, and I raised my son. Tried to instill as much as I could of the Values and Customs that had been taught to me especially, and with a lot of help from my mom, I was able to do that. She was able to instill a lot of discipline alongside myself. She taught me how to be a Loving man without the need of violence. I appreciated that, I appreciated that very much. Bless her Soul, and my son is doing very well. He has three boys and a wife, and they've been together forever.

Actually, my mother was very head strong, hands on when it came to us kids. She was our leader. My dad was always gone and when he was home, he was drinking, and he was very violent. But for the most part, my mother was our leader, and continued being so until she died. And she died, she had a major impact – she's been gone for 10 years now, and weird as it may sound, I still think of her before I make any major decisions, life altering decisions. And my son is much the same way, my brothers, my sister is also the same. We think about her before we make any decisions, you know, what would she think? She played a major role in our life. So, she was the matriarch. Yes, she was. Not so much my dad cause he was always gone. So, he would be violent and then we'd break up as a family and then he'd show up again and there would be the honeymoon stage, and then finally, they just stayed apart. They were together as a married couple, but they preferred to live separately. And so, they stayed married, per se, but apart.

In the 70's, they started making Indian Affairs houses and hiring, had started some training programs or carpentry training programs, and then they started building houses and many houses in Sucker River. That's about the time they opened up the school in Sucker River, which was the first Band operated school within the Band. But they started in Sucker River in '73, I believe. That's when they started building houses too. And we started moving away from the log cabins. I don't think there's any more cabins in Sucker River. Well, there's one more cabin that I know of in Sucker River, the rest of them are Band, CMHC and INAC, I think it is, that built houses down there. It's been quite a few years now. Each house they've built has to meet a specific standard. Back in the day, they'd be two by four walls and the wind would have blew right through the walls. It was horrible conditions. I lived in one of those houses. Actually, the heating system was one stove in the living room. And the bedrooms were poorly, poorly heated. There's no heating system in there. The living room would be just hot, the bedrooms

would be cold, cold in the winter. An open concept, with one big room, the heat was evenly distributed. That was probably the only advantage. Other than that, living in a more modern house, had more room. There was four bedrooms, the bathroom, kitchen, and the living room. So, we had more room. But I guess we would spend most of our time in the bushes anyway, so we didn't really – we just go home and sleep and take off. The Indian Affairs houses were poorly built. There was 10 of them, about, they were very poorly built. My grandparents on my dad's side actually lived in one and they loaned me the house for a couple of months. And you could face the wall and you could feel the wind coming in from the wall. And from the floor's corner and from the corners, you could feel the cold wind coming in through those in the winter. They were horrible little houses.

They didn't have mold, not in the winter. [Laughs]. Spring and summer, they did. Houses in Sucker River, 10 years ago, when I was part of the housing committee, we still had problems with mold in several of the houses. And there were three or four who went around repairing the houses that had grown this mold. And I joined them later on, but even so, after six months, I said, well the breathing difficulties, problems, I lost my voice for a couple of months. So that mold is very dangerous and it's still a problem today.

Actually, during the flu epidemic of 1919, 100 years ago, I was reading a little while ago that a priest and his guide went to Sucker River for a year, and the majority of the people disappeared into the trap line, and the people that were left behind were sick and dying. They went from house to house, and they were searching for the sick people, sick and dying. And they went to several houses where the one house they walked into that's one of the local churches now, but anyways, there was a kid dying there, so they took the kid out. And another kid was laying on the ground, on the floor, and a woman was lying beside her, and they were both ready to die. They were both at the point of death. And they left them there and when the two died, they went there the next day, and they burnt the house down with the bodies in there. And the next day they go there, and they dig a hole where the house is burnt down cause this was in the winter and the ground had been thawed out sufficiently that they can dig a hole and bury the bodies. They would leave them like that. And that happened in quite a few cases. That's just in Sucker River, I can imagine there's quite a few Stories like that. But they wouldn't have been able to determine who took care of who cause everybody was sick. But in the majority of the cases on the rez, it is the mother that usually takes care of the sick. In my case, my mother took



care of us all the time. But we were fortunate, we were hardly ever sick. But I guess my brother, was very sickly and he passed on when he was 16 years old. And my mother tried to take care of him, I tried to help out as much as I can cause I was one year ahead of him. And I was kind of his hero. He followed me all over the place and he was my trusty side kick. So, I was there for him as much as I could, tried to lead him. But my mother did all the work if anybody was sick. My brother was sick, one time he had appendicitis. My mother took good care of him. And like I said before, my dad was always gone. If he wasn't working, he was working at the trapline or he was out guiding, and it would take him away from the community for months at a time. And he was also always working at the Anglo Rouyn mine. He would be there for a couple of months at a time too. So, my mother did all the work, when it came to sickness.

The mine shut down 1972, 1971, '72. It started in the mid-60s, '65, '66. It had been going on now under research – under exploration, I mean, since the 50s. They started producing copper and other metals around the mid-60's. And my dad worked there all through the six years it operated. As a matter of fact, they hired quite a few people from Sucker River to go and work there at that time. And then when they were demolishing that place, I was working, I was 13 and I stayed on there, the summer employee until '76, I believe it was.

I was 13 when I got picked up at the trapline to go to residential school. I was actually skinning a beaver. And all of a sudden, you heard a plane landing and my uncle said, "Oh, I think they're here to pick you up." And sure enough, I was picked up. Actually, four hours later, I was at the student residence. I still had my trapline clothes on, I still smelled like beaver. I had some spilled blood on my hands. And the principal at that time was James Roberts and then he just mentioned, "You smell like my grandma!" And no, they didn't cut my hair cause my hair was already cut short. That was in Prince Albert. I went just for the year. Just for the one year. I was in the senior's dorm. That's all I remember. I think I was about seven or eight, grade seven or eight. And we were very fortunate. Our supervisor was Reverend Jim Isbister. And he taught us Cree and he allowed us to speak Cree. He spoke Cree with us. And he treated us very, very fair. So, we were in a good place. I had no qualms, no bad experiences at all that I'm aware of. I was already accustomed to being away from my family. I'd already lived in Prince Albert, so it was just – it was no big deal.

I have a house in Sucker River, right now as we speak. But it's just a house. Just a house cause my ex – I loaned it to my ex. She's using it till she moves out in a couple of months. The

house I'm living in is a 10 by 14, but it's my home. It's my home because if I didn't call it a home, it would be just a shack. You see, a house is just a building, a home is where your heart is. And to be honest, I've only lived in a house once where there was an actual fence. [Laughs]. Fences are not an Indigenous concept. It blocks other community members from yourself and so you pretty well isolate yourself by building a fence. That is one thing our Indigenous people never had is fences, walls. It's a whole new concept cause we've always been open to one another.

I like my home cause it's cozy! As a matter of fact, I enjoy the independence. I enjoy – I was invited to go and shack up and spend time in Stanley Mission, that was kind of drilled through my brain cells, like it sounds interesting, but that means I'll have to get rid of my independence and means I'll have to get rid of this little cabin. I'm not really interested in doing that cause I'm happy being where I am. I am helping Elders get subsidy for their living allowance for their rent and power. I'm happy doing that and I'm happy where I ended at a good point in my life. My house is right in La Ronge just about 100 yards from Kitsaki Hall, right by the highway where I get to listen to the ambulance about six, seven times a day, or sirens, it's horrible.

I create my home as a place of health and well-being by just going along with the Teachings. Most of my Teachings, I follow from my mom, but she got them also from the community. I just do my best to help people, to help people that are grieving, to help people within the community, and do as much as I can to help people. Then I come home, and I'm satisfied. I Pray to the Creator, and I thank the Creator for the opportunities that I've been given, Thankful for all the Blessings I've been given. And I've been given lots, and I don't take them for granted. My mother was actually a Jehovah Witness. She probably rolls over in her grave every time I go to church. [Laughs]. So, when we sing these hymns at church, I had no clue from past experience cause I never needed it. I learned them and they're a lot of fun. If you don't have a background in singing, not even knowing the songs.

I'm gonna be moving to a house that's under my name in Sucker River this coming winter. And that's the only thing I am planning for the immediate future. But I do have plans on building my own log cabin. I was taught at an early age as to how to build log cabins. I did that for a living for several years. So, I just go as – it depends on what kinds of logs are available. If there's not any suitable logs, I'll just stand-up logs, have eight-foot logs and all stood up and

make it about 24 by 24. But if there's good logs, then I'll have them laying on the side by side and I'll make a real nice cabin. Large patio. I know exactly where the – someone had built a house on that one lot where I'm going and that was many, many years ago but you can still see the foundation. And I want to – of course before I do that, I want to go there and do a bit of excavation to see what kind of interesting stuff I can find on that specific area where I want to build. So first, I want to get that done and then I'll build myself a house where I can live under my own conditions, under my own terms.

#### **4.10 Elizabeth Charles**

Well, I lived in the boarding school for four years. I was in the boarding school for about two years and then *Mooshum* took me out of there so I can babysit for *Kokum* cause my little sister was going to be born. So, they had to take me out of school. And I never went back to school 'til after you kids were grown up and I went to that community college. Then I passed my grade nine and that's when I quit.

*Mooshum* made the cabin I grew up in out of logs and we had to help *Mooshum* keep it warm for the winter, so we had to get some mud and grass and cover the cracks between the logs. And it was nice and warm. That was when I was very young. That was before I even went to school. That's when we were living in the trap line. Yeah, I wasn't even married. I think I was only about six years old cause *Kokum* put me in the school when I was seven years old, to the boarding school.

The cabin was very, very warm. One thing I hated though, there was no flooring, just gravel. And we had to put thick rabbit bed rolls on the floor, and I hated that cause I was falling asleep one time and a darn mouse ran over my face and I just screamed! So, I wouldn't sleep on the floor. So, I had to sleep with *Mooshum* and *Kokum*. There was no lumber on the floor, so they actually used Balsam branches for flooring.

Well, there was just my brother, and my sister had to go to school, so just me and my brother and *Mooshum* and *Kokum* lived in that little cabin. I think *Kokum* was more the boss than *Mooshum* because he was away at the trapline quite a bit. At Christmas, *Mooshum* stayed home for a few days. When we were at residential school, we went to our parents on Christmas days. And sometimes *Kokum* would feel sorry for the kids from out of town, like from Pelican Lake or

her sister's kids, and she used to bring them to the house. It was real crowded. So, we'd be about 10 children sleeping across the floor.

They heated the house with wood. Just wood. The stove was in the middle of the cabin. They had those big thick, potbelly stoves, they called it. They were thick. I remember *Mooshum* slapping us cause we were having fun, we kept spitting on the stove and we could hear the sizzling on the stove. [Laughs]. And so, he gave us a licking. Just a few slaps.

There were no visitors at the trapline cause there's no people. And at Christmas, there used to be lots of people coming in and out just to say, "Hi." But *Mooshum* made sure we had candy for Christmas at the trap line. That's what he called it, my sister's sugar bowl cause she was so spoiled. There was a big hole on the log there above where she slept. She slept with *Mooshum* and *Kokum*. And she used to fill the candies in her sugar bowl. And we used to steal some.

We had all sorts of stuff to eat at Christmas, stuff like moose meat. But *Kokum* always had a turkey cause she was working for White people and they always gave her turkey. She used to work five days a week in private homes, cleaning for White people that came to town. So, she just went in and cleaned their houses. That's how she made her living.

People took care of each other when they were sick, well, they usually Shared some Medicine. I don't know. Cause there was no nurse. *Kokum* always had lots of Medicine cause the nurse used to give it to her to give it to the other people when they were sick, like cough syrup and stuff like that. I don't remember her making cough syrup. She could've cause she used to – I don't know what kind of Medicine, cause if we coughed a lot or have sore chests, then she gave us some Medicine to drink. *Mooshum* looked after the men when they were sick, and *Kokum* looked after the women cause she was the midwife. She delivered babies any time of the night or day. They used to come and get her to deliver babies. And she was also a mortician, cleaning bodies when people died. She used to go and clean the bodies up, and then she used to go and talk to the people that lost their Loved ones and give them comfort. She was a really wise woman.

*Mooshum* was a Medicine Man. He had all sorts of roots. He'd go and get some roots and make Medicine. He could cure the guys that got into trouble. He went and picked three kinds of roots and boil them in a big pot and he used to give that to those guys to flush them out of venereal disease. Yeah, he cured them like that.

*Mooshum* and *Kokum* moved out of that little house from Kitsaki reserve when the government started giving out houses. The guys built the houses. People moved in there, older people. They were nice houses. There were more rooms in the new houses. They had two bedrooms instead of one big room.

The first house that *Mooshum* built, it was really short, and it wasn't very high. That was the one on the trap line. It was only about five feet high. It was made of logs and *Mooshum* built that by himself cause the boys were all over the place, going for work. My brother was an Indian constable. He worked for the RCMP. And the other boys, they used to move all over the place to work like in Candle Lake where they were picking logs.

*Mooshum* was a hunter and a trapper. People used to also make a living logging, they used to go and cut logs and sell wood. There was a mill where they made lumber. I don't know who was in charge of it. *Mooshum* took me to the bush to learn how to trap. So, we set some traps, and I had two little traps myself. So, I put some traps under the log. So, I put it there cause *Mooshum* said, "There's mink tracks there," and mink was worth a lot of money. So, the next day we went and checked our traps and I saw that bushy tail and I said, oh Dad, I got a mink. And I was so happy, I ran over there, and I pulled my trap, it's a damn flying squirrel. [Laughs]. Well, I guess I was disappointed cause 50 dollars was a lot of money and that's how much the mink was worth.

*Mooshum* was not a big lucky trapper like most trappers. But the trappers that live farther north, they had more luck. *Mooshum's* trapline was just a small line, a small forest. He managed to do enough fur to support us. His trapline was at a place called Bow River. Well, I can tell you it was very lonely growing up on the trap line. And once I got to be 10 years old, I was very bored because *Kokum* and *Mooshum* took me away from school. And therefore, my sister and I were just in the trap line. But there was always trappers going by that lived at that place called – I can't remember now. It's a place where people do some fishing, to make a living, you know, like commercial fishing?

*Mooshum* was involved with the Anglican Church. That was his life. When he was in town, he had to go to church and arrange the programs, the Prayers that they're supposed to say that day, so they had to plan those, and he'd act as a priest. One thing I remember, he never married any couples, just the funerals, he did.

*Kokum* was real important in the community cause when it comes to delivering babies, sometimes she delivered three kids in a day. The only White people that she said she delivered were some very poor French people that came to La Ronge, somewhere from the boonies. I used to work at the fish plant when I was old enough to clean fish, my first job was cleaning fish. And then I didn't like it and *Kokum* was a chambermaid at the hotel, so she got me a job there to clean cabins and rooms.

I had a Happy childhood. *Mooshum* and *Kokum* never fought. They would argue over little things like when *Kokum* was using that flour and lard. She was always giving it to other people instead of using it at home. *Kokum* was generous. She really liked to Share. Yeah, when those poor people came, almost every morning they would come and one time, one of the boys came with a large jar and *Mooshum* said, 'Here comes those bums again, coming here to bum sugar, bum all the flour.' And *Kokum* ran out there and *Mooshum* said 'You, you go home! No store, this is no store 'he said. He was trying hard to talk English, 'this is no store, go home!' *Kokum* was so mad at him and she told that boy to come later when the old man is not around. (Laughs). I guess *Mooshum* was more careful with his supplies. My home was Happy, yeah, I would say that 'til people started drinking and they used to fight or argue, otherwise, it was perfect.

I live in a small apartment. As long as I have a nice bed and a place to put my clothes. And a stove to cook something if I'm hungry. That's about it. Otherwise, I don't crave any fancy things like some people do. I'm happy with a bed and a place to cook my food, a stove, I mean.

#### **4.11 Kathy Bell**

My grandparents used to have a homestead out at Bell's Point, it's called, part of another reserve. But I don't know what year they moved to La Ronge, the other side of the lake. But my first memories, we were living in two shack tents put together because I think they were waiting for my uncle's house – my uncle was in the war and I think he was getting some kind of pension payment or something from the veteran's and he built a house.

But in between that, we lived in the two shack tents. I can remember them. A shack tent, it's got a plywood floor and plywood sides, and a canvas tent on top. And we'd have a four-hole camp stove inside there to heat the place and the cooking and everything. They're a rectangular shape. They're not the tip top heaters, they're square shaped. And there was my uncle and my

grandmother and my two uncles and my aunt with her two kids, and my mom and me, we lived in the two shack tents. And we lived in it all summer long and in the winter, we moved into my other grandfather's house. It was across the street. While they went to the trap line, we stayed in their house, and it was just a one big room house or whatever. I think one bedroom, I can't remember. And then we lived in my uncle's house. It was a three-room house, two bedrooms with a big open area and of course there was no water and no electricity. I didn't realize at the time that there was such a thing.

But my grandfather, when he was younger, my mom used to tell me that he used to run teams of horses with freight from PA to La Ronge but when they had their homestead, they grew their own vegetables. And so, they survived on whatever, the wild meat, the fishing. They didn't have a trap line, per se. We didn't have our trap line, but we lived – they lived off the land. Everyone had pretty well their own little boat and net and if you needed fish, just use your net and bait the fish and Shared whatever because there's no refrigeration system. And then they'd smoke some of whatever. And then there was muskrats and the rabbits and sometimes, somebody would kill a moose and then everyone would Share it cause like I said, no freezers. But I can remember going with my grandmother. She didn't have a trap line, but she used to set little traps and we'd go with her to check her traps all along the shoreline in the spring and stuff. Sometimes we'd walk right across from Charles Street down the lake there and we'd walk across, we'd end up by the creek in La Ronge there. So, we'd walk a long ways for her to check her traps.

And she was a very active Medicine Woman. She'd go in the bush and pick her roots and leaves, whatever. She'd dry them or use them, and she was a midwife. She delivered over 100 babies is what that woman had said at her wake when she had passed. She did the eulogy, and her name was Jean Bird and she said, "She delivered me when I was a baby and she delivered lots of babies." I think just over 150 babies that she delivered. So that is what the Jeanie Bird clinic is named after. She spoke at my grandma's funeral, and she said that my grandma delivered so many babies. Her dad was a Chief at one point, my grandma's dad was William Joseph Charles, I think his name was. I can't remember what year he was the Chief. But he was the Chief.

But anyways, my grandparents raised us because our moms would go out and work and they'd be gone. And our grandparents would look after us and we'd have to help with the chores

and hauling water and sawing wood and chopping wood cause we had wood heat. And it was always lots of work and then you'd get to go play after you did your work, helping with the dishes and sweeping and whatever. But it was very crowded. Like I said, even in the house after we moved in there. And there always seemed to be – no one ever, ever did get turned away from your door if it was cold. Like I said, there was no homeless people sleeping outside anywhere cause someone always let them in to stay warm, always made a bed for whoever was there.

Mom would be out cleaning, and my aunt was working at the fish plant, and she'd walk to work every day from Charles Street to Police Point, she'd walk to work. And I don't know how many years she worked there, but my mom would be the one going out to cook in bush camps and then she would also go work at helping farmers, working at a farmhouse with the community, whatever they do at the farmhouses. She had to go south to do that. And my uncle was – one of my uncles would be guiding in the summer and working in the winter too. My uncle, he'd come back from the war, and he was always helping the prospectors, he'd be working with the prospectors. They were prospecting for different kinds of minerals, I guess. And as he got older and he couldn't go out in the bush anymore, he would help with that. The transport would come, and he would help them unload at the different stores in town and he did that for a lot of years. And then my other uncle ended up working for the Department of Natural Resources, it was called. And he was working at the park for years, until he retired.

And then my aunt started living with her latest man and then she didn't live at the house anymore and my cousins moved out, so then it was me and my grandma. I think I was 13 when mom too went and lived with her man. And that was it. The nest was empty. In the summertime too, our grandma would take us to go camping and pick berries and that's when she'd be snaring rabbits too. So, I always helped with gathering the berries and we always went along with her when she was picking her *Muskihkiy*, Medicine. And I should've paid more attention to what she was doing, but you're just a kid and you don't know, you're just following along and playing, I guess. We learned to – and language, Cree. My grandma could never speak English, just a few words here and there, so we were raised talking Cree. And it wasn't until we went to school that we learned English at school.

I went to the old Gateway School and there was not many White kids. There was mostly Native kids in the school and the sad part is most of the kids would drop out of school. There was no incentive for anyone to finish school or graduate. I never did graduate. I dropped out



when I was 17, I think. But not many graduated. I look at the old yearbooks and there's just a few Native kids that graduated, not many. A big difference now with the school system where you have big graduating classes. There was always two or three, not many. Everybody dropped out when you hit a certain age. I dropped out because I found a part-time job, and that was it. I liked the money better than the school. [Laughs].

But when I look back on it, it was really an interesting way to grow up. And everyone had good heat cause wood was easy. If you run out, you just walk in the bush and your uncle will cut a tree and you'll be hauling the wood back. And no one kept the fire going at night, so at night, you're all bundled up with a pile of blankets and there'd be frost all over the place in the morning. And my uncle would always be the first one to get up, like four or five in the morning and he'd make a fire and heat it up in there and then you get ready to go to school. And you'd walk to school. We used to have a school bus, but a couple of kids – while you're standing there waiting for the bus to come, a couple of kids were fighting there. So, then the bus driver wouldn't stop there anymore, so then everyone had to walk to school. So those two ruined it for everybody. [Laughs].

The men probably put up the shack tents and I don't know, they just – I was really small. I remember the thunderstorms and they tell you, "Don't touch the tent," eh? Of course, you're a kid, you're gonna touch it. And then of course, it would leak there. I remember standing – we were standing in a row in the middle part of the top cause it was just pouring and thundering and whatever and we were all standing kind of in the middle and didn't know what was going to happen. And there was hot, hot sunny days. I remember my grandma cleaning fish in the shade in the heat. Be cleaning the fish and we couldn't cook inside, so she had a – my cousin, he would go diving down at the lake for clay. And he'd haul it up for my grandma and she'd shape a cooking stove outside there by the rocks and that's where she would cook in the summertime. Cause it was just way too hot to cook inside.

My one uncle ended up getting a Band house, and my extended family, a lot of them lived in Band houses. But we lived in my uncle's house. We called it the army house. That's what we lived in, and we never ever got welfare. And my grandma tried to get help because she was raising us kids. I think one time they gave her 32 dollars, you know, for looking after us kids. But mostly, it was on their pension cheques. I think they got 65 dollars a month. I remember she used to get – to feed and clothe all of us and our family allowances were like five

dollars, you know? Which was lots back in the day because you could buy a blouse for two dollars and pants for two. If she ever had to buy anything of value, you had to save up your money. And it all went to groceries, and there wasn't many cars on the reserve either because every time our moms would come home with groceries in the taxi, all the kids would run towards the car because there was no cars on the reserve, not that I can remember. So, we were all running to the car, and we were all excited to see the car.

I think that's why a lot of people, kids didn't make it through school. They would rather – we didn't have a trapline, but a lot of families had their traplines, and they would go to the trapline in the winter and then make their money like that, or fishing in the summertime, and guiding. That's why I think a lot of the kids never finished school, because it was easier to help the family with working instead of going to school. But back in those days too, people were more self-sufficient. Because if you run out of food- everyone could go and set a net, you know? If you wanted to go, you would go set your net and catch your fish. I'm sure they must have had permits and stuff for their trapline and stuff. I don't know anything about that cause we didn't have our own trapline. I know my uncle had a trapline and he would go to the trapline, and he would go by dog team. And I remember we always used to have to help him feed his dogs when he'd come back. And they'd all be outside and be feeding them frozen fish and whatever you could. But it was a very different way of life. I forget how old my grandma was, she still would have her potato garden, but not all the different vegetables and stuff. But even in her old age she still had her flowers and then she'd plant her potatoes.

If someone got sick, they would come to my grandma. And I don't know who else was doing the Medicine. But whatever, they'd come and get her leaves or whatever. Or my grandma would go there and see. And the hospital, if you were sick, not many times you – you had to be really sick before they took you to the hospital. They didn't take you if you had a stomachache or whatever. My grandma would always ground up her Medicine and give it to you and it would taste horrible, so not very often you would complain about a stomachache. [Laughs]. And people would find their own way to the hospital, whether it be by cab or whatever, and that was it. Nothing like it is today where you just call medical transport and they pick you up, drive you. You found your own way.

The men were usually the boss of the house from what I can remember. Not many women went out and worked. The only reason my aunt and my mom worked is because they

were single back then and they had – of course, the three of us, we were illegitimate and whatever. We'd get teased by the White kids and teased by the Indian kids, so we were stuck in between lifestyles. So that's a different part of the Story. I don't know how to say it without sounding awful. Well, we were outcasts by the Natives cause we were illegitimate, we were bastards. And then the White kids would tease you cause you don't have a dad and whatever, on and on and it was hell in school, for the three of us anyway, that I remember. Well back in those days it was shameful and took a lot of courage for women to keep their babies, cause you're supposed to be married, have your kids or whatever, I don't know. But that was another thing, back in those days, everybody went to church. Everybody went to church. The church was always full. And the singing was in Cree, and I can remember, like I said, everybody walked to church cause nobody had cars. But the church was always full, every Sunday.

My mom went to residential school, and I think most of her siblings. My aunt went and my aunt would never talk about it. Mom would tell me a few things and then my uncles all went, except for my one uncle. I think he was too old already; I don't remember. But of all my grandma's family – this uncle, he drank a lot. My two aunties didn't drink. But then my uncles, they all drank. And my one aunt and my mom drank, and I think it was because of the residential school. I don't know what it was called. All Saints, I think, it was a residential school in La Ronge. But I've heard some horror stories from some people that survived it, but mom didn't say that much about it, just that she went. And she said that some boys burnt it down. She only made it to grade four. I heard it was two guys from Sucker River cause they were beaten every day. And then another guy from Big Stone. My friend, she's passed away now, and she said her dad was one of the ones that burnt it down cause – two other guys, I can't remember their names. But she said they were beaten every day. Cause there wasn't much food going around, I guess a lot of work. I don't know, the wood and the cleaning and the horses and I don't know.

A home is where you feel comfortable. It was always my uncle's house, but we always called it my grandma's house cause she was the head of the household. The only time – a lot of times, we would run in the middle of the night cause my uncle would come home drunk and he'd be mad. He never hit anybody and his was because of – his trauma was because of the war. But he would get drunk, and he'd yell and bang his fist on the table and my grandma didn't like drinking or alcohol or anything, so she would take us kids and we would go sleep- in the middle of the night, we'd just go to one of the neighbors' houses and spend the night there. Like I said,

nobody ever turned you down when you were at their door. They would let you in and make you a place to stay.

Well, my last relationship with my hubby is he built me a nice home and I'm comfortable in here. And I'm not on the reserve, I don't ever plan on moving and living on the reserve because there's no home ownership and there's no nothing. They can kick you out of there if they want to. It all depends who's on Council and who likes you and who doesn't. So, I haven't lived on the reserve since I was 17 or 18. And I haven't tried to live on the reserve. There was no help when I was growing up, so what's gonna make them help me now? You know what I mean? But I'm comfortable in my own space here and it's a struggle a lot of times cause I'm only living on a pension, and you don't get enough pension to survive or whatever. But I'm surviving.

My home is a place of health and well-being because, first of all, there's no alcohol or drugs. Because I never did any drugs. I drank in my time, but I was never a violent drunk or whatever, you know what I mean? And I won't let that in my house because I've seen that alcohol violence, and I just don't want to live it. I know that there's a lack of housing on reserve, waiting lists of people needing housing. So, there is a lot of off reserve housing. But I was always independent when I was growing up cause that's how my grandma raised you, like "No one's gonna help you, you have to do it yourself." And she raised us to be independent. And my other two cousins haven't lived on the reserve either. So, our lives were very different from the other reserve kids that grew up on the reserve cause they would have both parents there and a lot of them had the Traditional lifestyle. But I try to keep my home safe. Like I said, there's so much alcohol and drugs right now and it's a very scary situation.

What is it, last month there was a murder down the street, a woman that was living alone and she was murdered. And I'm very Thankful that – I should have said, my nephew lives with me. Cause his parents moved and he had a job here, so he's staying with me, which is good. I'm not living alone. And before that, I had my brother living with me cause that trailer that burned where he was living. And so, he had no place to stay, so he lived here for a while. But he got – he drinks, so there was a lot of – I didn't want him drinking. So, I told him that, so then he ended up staying somewhere else. So, he hasn't lived here for just about a year now. It's not like the old days where everybody gets hammered and whatever because of the way I raised them, I guess too, and the way I was raised. It was – it's not a good thing!

I just drank the one night that was it. There was people that would drink for days and I never could. And that was another thing. I remember when I was growing up, the reserve was dry and there was no booze on there and if they brought booze on, they would have to hide it or they would get in trouble. And then there was no – the Treaties weren't allowed in the bars or something. And then I remember, women weren't allowed in the bars either. That was the 60's and then I remember when they said women could go in the bar and my uncle says, "Oh, there will be trouble now, there will be trouble now!" [Laughs].

And a lot of times, our entertainment was the radio, the transistor radio and have the rabbit snare wire outside or whatever and you could get hundreds of stations. That was our lifeline, we didn't have TV or the TV shows or whatever, we just had the radio. Life was better then without the TV cause then there would be the card games and whatever and different kinds of games and people would talk. [Laughs]. Like I said, we used to go visiting with our grandma on Sundays or Saturdays and she'd take us to go visit her friends and if you walked in the door, they would set a place for you right away for you to eat. And if you didn't eat, you had to eat what was put in front of you. It was a sign of Respect; you never refuse it. But that would be it, they would set a place for you right away. And it changed now. Same with the hunting and the moose and the deer and whatever. Now that people have power and freezers and not much gets Shared. I know they've got good programs out now. They'll go hunting and give to the Elders and share the meat. But the personal, personal ones, they just don't share the meat whereas before, everyone got some meat. They shared the food.

And another thing is I don't know how old, I was 21 or something when I ended up – I started living with this guy, a White guy. And I was with him for 25 years and a lot of the years, it was abuse, mental abuse. Not physical abuse until close to the end, and he did end up committing suicide in '99 and here he had mental health problems, and he wouldn't seek the help or whatever. But abuse was – it creeped up. You know what I mean? You don't realize it until you're right into it. It was not a good experience. And then a couple years later, I started living with someone else and he was good to me. And he wasn't abusive. He helped me and supported me, and he was good. And like I said, he passed away four years ago. And now, like I said, I've had to scrounge and scrape and whatever to – I'm trying to survive on my pension.

I'm very self-sufficient. I've done some, like crocheted some and sell products, and try to do a bit of beading but my arthritis is killing me in my hands. Some of it's really bad, it's painful

to do anything. And I used to do some cleaning and this COVID has hit everybody hard, and it's really hit hard. I can't go out and make extra cash like I did before. So now, it's been a struggle. I used to do cleaning, help cleaning or whatever, you know? And I haven't been able to do that. But we are in our own bubbles. So, we spend our meals together, we spend a lot of meals together and my granddaughter is celiac, so much more money. Everything's that gluten free, it's just about twice the price of the regular stuff. And it's been hard. We're surviving and we always try and have family meals. But there's only four of us, five of us. So that's – like I said, we can gather in the house here and have our meals. But I don't – like I said, I don't venture out unless it's for shopping or the mail or the bank and that's pretty well it.

I knew so many of the people over the years and they were happy that I could talk in the language, their language cause so many other places, they didn't have Cree speaking people. So, when I started working at that little store I could interact better. And they used to say, “Count that in Cree then! Count that in Cree!” And I would give them their money in Cree, and I knew the numbers of all cause that's how my grandma raised me and that's all I knew was the Cree and they were just happy. And they would just laugh cause I would say their money in Cree.

#### **4.12 Matthew Charles**

I grew up in La Ronge as far back as I can remember. We lived in Big Stone reserve, along that river, Montreal River there. We did live right across from *Mooshum* and *Kokum's* too, but that was after our house burned down in Big Stone. The airport was right across the river from where we lived. I had three brothers and a sister. One brother passed on here a few years back, he was about 48, 49. He was pretty quiet and used to always kinda stay behind Big Stone when we were visiting the grandparents or other relations.

I don't know if I should call myself crazy or not, but I've lived all over the place. And I've been right across Canada into United States. Yeah. 25 years I've been working for the Saskatchewan government as a firefighter, and they get exported all over the place. Oh yeah. And I was also a small motor mechanic for 13 years. I used to work for Quant's Enterprises they used to call it. I worked with him for 13 years. And I got my brother working with us too. I don't know how many years he stayed on after I left. Yep.

Our house, it was lumber. I think that was the first one that the Band had – well, I don't know if it was the Band – that was Indian Affairs actually that supplied the lumber for the

people, so they could build their houses. We lived in that house in the 60's. Yes, as far back as I can remember, we stayed in that house and then when it burned down, there was another house that wasn't occupied, which was right across from our grandfather's place, at 101 there. So, we got that house, and my dad fixed it up and we moved in there. Yeah, this was about '68, '69.

I believe my father built those houses. I think it was the second houses that the Band had gave – were offered to the people, the material to the people to build houses. Because there was only about – maybe I'd say about five of those houses, the ones we lived in. There was another about eight houses that were log houses in the area and the rest of them were – a lot of the families built their own cabins. And there was also tents in that one area where we lived, in that Big Stone area. As soon as you walked in, it's a big living room area. It was just one big room with the kitchen. You got a stove and then there was a wall. Behind on the other side was another long room. It wasn't a separated rooms like you see in a two-bedroom house. These houses were just one big room. All the other houses I went to, you might have one bedroom in those log cabins. And the rest is just open. And families would sleep on the floor. We didn't have no beds. We slept on the floor. My mom and dad had a bed and their mattress, but us boys were on the floor with blankets. And sometimes in the winter times, it was pretty cold. It was tough, my mom or my brother would get up in the middle of the night to make a fire if it got too cold.

We had one of those airtight tin airtight stoves and we used to just go get the wood in the bush. It didn't matter how cold it was because in those days, you were looking at the temperatures were 40, 60 in those days. So, it didn't matter what temperature it was, we were sent out to get wood. And even water, we got the water right from the river. That was our job to get the wood and water. And also, in the wintertime and summertime, we'd be out there snaring rabbits and hunting for chicken and stuff like that, ducks and whatever we could. We lived off the land, a lot of this stuff. To give you a sense, sugar and that stuff would be my mom and dad bought from the store.

My dad, at that time I remember he worked at the Anglo Rouyn mine. And after that shut down, he went to work for the Band, building houses. They were mining for copper and nickel, I think. And my mom, when they built that Handy Craft store, which is really close from the church, there used to be a store there that's called Handy Craft store, that's where my mom worked. They made moccasins or beaded moccasins, gloves, and leather jackets, stuff like that.

The thing is, later on in life, like when I was about in my teens, when I was in that house by myself, I was going to bed, and you can hear somebody walking towards the door. But the thing is, my mom always had the Bible to keep in my room. And then it would stop at the doorway, the footsteps stopped at the doorway. And I thought it was my dad coming home, late, drunk. And my mom always stayed away when he was drinking because my dad was very abusive when he was drinking. So, she stayed away whenever my dad was out drinking. I thought that it was dad that came home drunk. So later on, I went out and I checked, it was nobody there. And this happened quite a few times. And then one time, that happened when I went and checked on the old man. He was sprawled out on the floor. He was passed right out. So, it wasn't him. So, I went back to the bedroom, and I locked it and that was it.

But anyway, when we were a little bit younger, me and my brother, my parents were out somewhere, I don't know what time because it was already dark and I heard something crashing, like a loud banging noise. So, me and my brother went and checked, looked out the window. And they had these big white spruce on each side of the road right beside Grandpa's. And there was a car that smashed into it. So, I ran over there and here it was – I believe it was what's her name? I'm related to her. I think that was her and her husband that time that crashed into that big white spruce. So, I ran across the road to that motel there, Riverside? But anyway, I went and banged on the door cause the lights were off already, so he came out and I told him about that vehicle. Yep. So, I went back home, and we went to bed after that, they didn't know what happened. That was quite a while back.

But anyway, when we were staying there, that one winter, my dad had to go to Stanley Mission, took my mom with him and left us at home and one of my aunties came over and stayed with us, my auntie, my mom's late sister. Anyway, I always had that one room on one side cause this house we moved into; they had made a wall to make two rooms. Yeah. So, there was two bedrooms in that house. So, me and my brother always had that one room to ourselves. Anyway, one of my cousins was staying with us too, him and his wife – well, common law at that time. They had two kids, one boy and one girl, and they went out partying that weekend. And my auntie and his common law were drinking in the living room, and me and my brother were in my room, but the other two kids were in the other room. Two little ones, they were asleep and then all of a sudden, they ran out of that room screaming! Like literally screaming, saying, "Oh," like something was in there with them. That was another incident there. Well at that time, I didn't



really think about it. But later on, when I was talking about it with some other people, they said, “You know, that house could be haunted.” And sure enough, it was haunted. It wasn’t the only house that was haunted because there was another house close by there and both of the kids that were in there and the mother – I forgot her name. They lived in that house, and they said at the end, the kids from over there, they used to – we didn’t get along with the brother. We got along with the girls, so we started talking about this. And they started saying, “Yeah! That’s happening to our house too. There’s something in there,” they said. Yep. Yeah, and I told grandpa about it. And he said, ‘Yeah, that’s the *muchimunitoo* (devil or evil spirit) that’s gonna take you guys if you don’t behave!’”

So anyway, we used to live right across from Grandpa. We used to go and visit them. He used to tell us a little bit of Stories here and there about his travels. He used to trade with the Hudson Bay Company, and he traveled all over the place with his dog team, and he said he always had to carry a Medicine Pouch because in those days, there was some people that knew how to use Medicine to hurt other people. Bad Medicine People, they called them. But these Medicine People weren’t all bad cause there was other people that knew Medicine and they used that Medicine to help people, like cure them, make Medicine to help them. You also have your bad ones. Yeah. But anyway, the late grandpa was telling me that one story that he had was camping. He had to camp, he said. He didn’t want to camp in that area. He said he felt uneasy. He felt uneasy and he didn’t want to camp there, but he hit a storm and he had to camp. Anyway, he said he was at the campfire there, making tea and supper. I guess it was already late. He said he seen a woman come towards him a woman that was dressed in white buckskin. And he said, “That woman is so beautiful.” And he took his Medicine Pouch and started Praying. Oh, by the way, he was a Medicine Man too. Yeah. So anyway, he’s got his Medicine, started Praying. I don’t know how he Prayed in those days, because he wasn’t religious at that time, I don’t think. But anyway, he said, “When I opened my eyes, everything was gone. That woman was gone,” he said. That was one of the Stories that he had told us. Maybe somebody was trying to do some bad Medicine to him. Yeah, somebody was trying to do something to him through the Vision he seen. Yep. Yeah, I used to see that old man standing out in the road there. There wasn’t very many vehicles in La Ronge area. There’s only a few of them.

But anyway, the old man would go stand out in the road and somebody would always pick him up and take him uptown. That’s how he got to town. But he was in his 90s already.

Yeah. And when we were too busy playing or forget to get wood, we come home, it's already dark. And my dad would look at us and says, "Where's the wood?" This was in the wintertime, and we said, 'oh we forgot to go get wood. 'He said, "No, you're not supposed to forget. Now it's gonna get cold tonight." So, me and my brother said 'Oh, we'll go get wood.' And then we laid outside and then all the lights go off at Grandpa's. We'd sneak over there, and we'd go steal wood off of our old man cause he always had the whole pile of wood! Yeah. So anyway, we went and stole it. It was twice we did that. The last time, he caught us. [Laughs]. So, we ran home with all we were carrying, but anyway, the next morning he was standing out there looking at us. So, we went across, me and my brother and he just said, "You guys are gonna chop that wood, you're gonna bring it in, all that wood you've taken." So, we were there all day chopping and then we brought it in for him. Yeah, we had to earn those logs of wood we had stolen. So, he was a strict old man. So that evening, when he told us to go home, he was out there counting those logs. [Laughs]. I'll never forget that. He was out there literally counting his logs of wood, see how many they are.

Everybody had to work hard. Yep. Yeah, there was a lot of times too that we had to go to the trap line. My dad was a trapper. We used to go to Grandpa's trapline at Mayamoot and he'd trap beaver out there and some other stuff. Our uncle had a trapline, but his was right on the road by the river, whereas Grandpa's trapline was further in, towards the lake. It was quite a ways from the road. So, we'd go over there and once you get there and if it's snowed in, you're not getting out. Yep. So, we stayed there for quite a while. My mom went to the trapline too. I remember it was only me, dad, and mom and our uncle and aunty.

My mom and dad were at the residential school in La Ronge, but they never talked about it. I think dad mentioned it once. I think he was sent south, my dad. When he was talking about being at that residential school and area where they had to do hard labor every day. Like he said, it wasn't a school, it was like being in jail. And then if you didn't do anything, they said they had a big rod like a stick, and they'd whip them across their backs. Yep. And then they would have nothing to eat. I think he said two days they didn't eat. They were locked up cause they ran away. There was my dad and three other boys. I think there was four of them. He said that they ran away and well, they got caught. They came back, got whipped, and then put to work and then thrown in that room without food. So, they were in there for – they were treated like that for two days, and after two days, they were put back to live at the dorm.

I went to Prince Albert residential school. I was there 1970, '71, '72, '73, I think. Yep. I was there for three years. When I went back, they let me do grade four. So, I did four, five, and six over there. And then in the end, some boys ran away. But anyway, before I ran away, I used to get into trouble at school, like literally, mostly every day. The school I went to, it had two sides. The side I was on, there was no Natives on that side. There was only one – no, there was two other boys on that side. The rest were White people. This was at King George School. But anyway, we used to get into fights with these boys because they would provoke me to fight. And I was a small guy, but I'd fight back. And you know who got into trouble. Me. Yep.

When I went back to La Ronge, I tried. I tried to go back to school. That was at Churchill, Churchill school. It was the same. When I left – when I used to go to Churchill school before, I went to the residential school. It was the same there, fighting. But the Churchill school was Métis people. Yep. But I got along with them after we fought. I earned their Respect. There was a lot of White kids too that I was friends with, but there's the odd person that wants to fight. And that happened when I got back, after, when I came back from residential school and by that time, I was 13. I was 14 when I tried to go back to school. But no, it didn't work out. So, what I did after that was I told my parents, I can't make it in school. They kind of understood because I guess, well my dad can visualize what I was going through, I guess. But anyway, they asked me, "What are you gonna do?" I said I want to learn how to trap right, like literally trap by myself. There's an old man there, he was one of my dad's cousins on the Halkett side. So, I asked him if I could go trapping with him, like teach me to trap. So, he did, I did that for a few years. In the wintertime, I'd be out there in the trap line. In the summertime, I'd be looking for construction work. That's what I did. And then yeah, that one time, our late uncle brought a chainsaw to the place there and said, "You can have this." It was a new chainsaw. He said put sand in there, "I don't know what he did with it," he said, "but if you can fix it, you can have it." So that's when I started to tinker around with small motors. So, I got it all cleaned up, cleaned out, everything. Put gas in it and it ran. I cut wood with it. I had it for a week and it went missing. And my dad finally told me. He said, "I was running out of booze, so I sold it for a beer."

I was disappointed but what could I do? Nothing. Yep. And then afterwards, I moved back to Big Stone. I was living with my cousins. They had built a log cabin. There was three of my cousins that lived in that cabin so that's where I stayed with them. And later on, my brother started working for the fire cache. He bought a skidoo, an old Mercury. But anyway, that one

winter, he couldn't get the thing going. So, I took that motor out of the body, and I brought it inside, started tinkering with it. There's these – I didn't know what they were, but the – every time you turn the crank, they'd open up. These were points. They're called points. They open up and when they come together, it sends a spark, and it ignites the gas in the cylinder. That's what kept the cylinder going up and down. But anyway, one of them wasn't even opening up. They were held on with a little screw. So, I loosened that screw, and I started fiddling around with it. And I tightened it. And I turned it around again and it was opening up. But too much so there was a little gap in there, so I loosened a screw, and I turned that a bit, tightened it, and I got it to the same amount it was opening as the other one. But anyway, a kind of fluke, I guess. So, I put it back together, put it back in the chassis and poured gas in there, the cylinders and I put the spark plugs back on and we pulled it, and it fired right away, and it worked. So anyway, my brother asked me to go to somebody's trapline to deliver some stuff for them.

And it was my uncle at Pitua Lake. He said, "There's a skidoo trail all the way there, just follow it." I said alright. I was young, I was gung hoe. I could go anywhere. So, I followed the trail, and I knew where I was going because I used to go up to Hall Lake on a trail when I was trapping with that old Moses. Cause he trapped that way; he trapped across Egg Lake. There's a river there that goes into Sikachu Lake and there's a community there. And this community, these are some of the people that used to live in La Ronge. The name of the community was Sikachu. These are the people that used to live at La Ronge before they started moving. But anyway, Sikachu and Hall Lake, all those people that moved over there, they were originally from Big Stone reserve. And I know every one of them because they're on my mom's side, that's her family. Yep. My mom's family comes from that side cause that's where they all trapped, on that side. So, they moved close to over there. They had built two communities. The Sikachu and Hall Lake. So that's how those communities come up.

So anyway, I took supplies to my uncle's cabin. And on my way back home, at that time, I picked up a trapper coming in from Emaline Lake. I gave him a ride; I picked him up on that trail. And we got to Hall Lake there, they were building this rehab center. My dad was there, my late dad, our late uncle, they were all there. So, my dad said, "You guys stay the night, it's getting late. Don't travel at night." Okay, we'll stay a night. So, we stayed a night and the next morning, they got me to haul logs from across the lake. So, we did that until one o'clock in the afternoon. I hauled logs with that skidoo. They provided the gas. But anyway, me and this other

guy, after we were done hauling logs, we came to La Ronge. And after we were coming out from Portage, Egg Lake, that would be the west end of Egg Lake, there was a caribou herd standing there. And I had a sleigh that was empty. He said, "How many do you want?" I said, let's just take one. He said, "Oh, we got some people to feed in Big Stone." Alright, it's up to you, I said. He shot two. He shot two of those and then we gutted them, and we quartered them, and we put everything in the sleigh, and that wasn't a wasted trip. We had a lot of meat for everybody, cause in those days, when somebody killed something on the reserve, everybody got something. You know, back in those days, you walk into somebody's house, you always had tea, bannock, soup, anything. They'd tell you, "Help yourself," or they'd serve you. It doesn't matter where you went. If they had something to Share, they would. Nowadays, I don't see that. I still have that. I still keep that. Whenever somebody comes to my house, if I have something ready, I'll feed them.

So that's how I keep my home as a place of health and well-being, I follow those old Traditions of Sharing food. And I fed a *lot* of kids. Cause my daughter's friends and my son's friends that used to come over here and eat, I'd make sure when I cooked there was lots. Cause I do a lot of cooking. I like my wife's cooking too, but I like cooking.

I live in Bell's Point now. When I left Big Stone, I stayed in Stanley Mission for two years. Then I went to PA for four years. Back in '94, I came back home. And I had my dad's old house at far reserve. That's what – yeah, when they got a new house, my dad got that house. So, after my dad left that house, I got it. They moved into that new apartment building. So, I stayed in that – I had that house, and I was staying in PA, but I was paying the bills. The power bill, I had somebody living there cause I was trying to go to school in PA. I was taking adult education, ten.

Back in '94 I came back home and stayed at my house, cause the guy I had staying at my house, he was trying to claim my house. So, I had to come back home, so I kicked him out of there. After that, me and my late brother started working on small motors. He had a little shop. We had that going. We made good money, and she started making cheques. Making cheques out there to herself, I guess. Stealing money from his account. So, I got out of that, and I started working for the Band. After Christmas of '94, I started working with the Band. I did the right-of-ways in the Bell's Point area...we did all these lots, we cut out the lots and we cut out the road to the lagoon. We cut the lagoon with chain saws. Yeah, and then summer of '95, all these fires

broke out. So, we asked the counsellor, I told him can we go to go fight fires. He said, “Yeah, by all means. Yeah, you guys can have the summer off and go fight fires, so, we can save money for the winter,” he said. So that’s what everybody did, we went fighting fires. The summer of ’95.

And in the fall, we came back and started cutting again. That’s when that one weekend at the Zoo [local hotel], one of my boys, cause it was a crew up there of 10 guys, one of my guys introduced me to their cousin. And she was a beauty! But anyway, it was about four months after that we started dating. We dated for six months and then I told her, after my accident – cause I was in a bad accident over here. And when I woke up in the hospital, she was the one sitting there. So, she’d come over the weekend and stay with me. And then that one weekend, she said, “I gotta take some of my clothes home to wash.” And I looked at her, after you wash your clothes, bring ‘em all back. Move in with me, I said. This was about six months after we dated. And she was so happy. So, another six months went by, and we got married. She was four months pregnant when we got married.

I did not build the house I’m living in now; it was a demo house that was built by the Prince Albert Penitentiary people that had less than four years to come out, they had them building houses. And this was one of the demonstration houses that they had given to the Chief of La Ronge cause I had a new house over here at Elder’s Road. The one I had at Far reserve, I had to put an addition on there and they figured it was worth 48 grand. So, they offered me a newer house at Elder’s, and I said yes, I’ll take it in exchange for that house. But I have to pay the remaining \$60,000 into that other house. But anyway, we moved over there with our kids. We had a boy and a girl. And then we – yeah, our son was still – I don’t know, about three, three or four years old. I had that house all fenced around, but the other people on the other side threw over their garbage. There were needles and that. Good thing he didn’t jab himself. So, when I went to facilities, I asked for this lot, and see if they could build me a house. And the facilities people said, “Oh, we can’t give you that lot cause there’s a house that they have given the Chief.” The Chief had gotten a demo house from I don’t know, the government or some other company? “And he’s gonna go there,” he said. And they asked me, “Well, we could put your name down.” I said yeah, sure. So, when I seen the Chief, I said, yeah, I put my name down for that house that’s coming. He said, “Oh, good.” And I had to write a letter why I wanted to move from that new house. They liked my letter because we never drank in our houses, eh?

I keep my house healthy because we don't drink in my house. Yep. Because I grew up in an alcoholic family and to me, to bring up my kids in an environment like that, I can't see it. You know, I resented my father for the longest time for the way he brought us up. But now, I think back, you know, if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be where I am today. Actually, what he did was he made us Stronger. Yeah. To think before we do. Well, he raised me a wise man.

If I was to build a house, well, I would have a basement for entertainment like exercise equipment for the boys, but I have that upstairs. I have one room upstairs where I got weights, and I got a Bo flex trainer. But for me, I would build a house that just had downstairs, not upstairs. I would have one big area for the kitchen and the living room and maybe a couple of bedrooms. They'd all be in the same level. So, this way, like the upstairs, like today, I hardly see my sons cause they're in their bedrooms. I got a 17-year-old son that keeps his door locked. I got a 13-year-old son, he hasn't locked his door yet, but I knock before I walk in. And then there's another extra bedroom. That's for my daughter whenever she comes home. She's in Saskatoon, taking university.

She's taking something to do with social work because she had worked for Indian Child and Family Services here in La Ronge and in Saskatoon. Oh yes, I am very proud of her. And I got an older son. My prodigal son. He's out and about and I don't know. He's living his own life. He'll call me when he needs a ride, that's about it. And then he'll come and visit once in a while. And I'm raising his son. Yeah, we got a grandson that we're raising. We have three generations living in our house.

I like a more open concept style house because this way, you're more interacting with your kids. You do stuff together. You watch TV together, you eat together. Nowadays, you don't see that. Nowadays, they'll come downstairs, they'll take their food, and they're back upstairs. They're on their games or their phones or TV., and that's my fault because that's what I gave them. I thought when I was growing up, I never had anything. And to me, when I started a family, that's not gonna happen with my kids. I'm gonna give them everything I can. And my first two, my daughter and my oldest boy, every time we had the chance, we'd go camping in the summertime when I'm off work, when I'm on days off. Now today with these two boys, they're already growing up and I don't know if they would do that with me now because I'm so busy working. Even on my days off, I hardly ever have time to do nothing. I'm either working on a vehicle or doing something else. I forget my family. And I'm realizing now that I never made the

time to take these boys out, like hunting like the way I grew up. When I grew up, I grew up with my brothers and my cousins. We'd always be in the bush, either hunting, snaring, just to get something to survive. But nowadays, it's so different. And you can just go to the store and buy stuff. But I still do. I still do get the odd wild meat here and there, like fish. And some moose meat. It's not like I've forgotten everything.

#### **4.13 Jeannie Smith (pseudonym)**

From the beginning, we lived at 101 reserve in La Ronge in a small two-bedroom house with Mom and Dad and eight of us children. Later on, when I was 12, we moved to Far Reserve, that's part of Lac La Ronge again and we had a four-bedroom house then. There was 12 of us children by then, but of course the two, three oldest ones had moved on with their own families, started their own families. And then I left home in 1975. So, I was 18 when I left home. At that time, it was still lots of children, grandchildren, Mom and Dad had four grandchildren that kind of stayed there most of the time, my oldest sister's children. So, the house was always full. But I left at 18 and I think one of the reasons why I left so early from home – as comfortable as it was – was because it was too crowded. And so, I met my partner when I was 18 and we moved in together and bought a trailer, our first home. And then I had my freedom, I guess, to breathe easy and to be able to do what I wanted, when I wanted. But growing up, growing up from the early days, there was lots of comfort. It was wood heat in the house at 101. And everybody went to school. At the age of five, everyone had to go to school. For education, it was very important to Mom and Dad that we all go to school when we're old enough. And we moved to Far Reserve and again, Mom's concern about all the kids having to go to school – unless you're very sick, you couldn't go, of course.

When I turned 15, I started working for the Band. I started October eighth, 1972. So, I was 15 then. And I was actually in school in grade ten and the Chief and Council came to school to ask if I could help start the Band administration operation. So, I didn't want to go. I said no, I want to go to school, and they said, "Well your mom and dad said it was okay, just come help us out for a while." I said no, I love money, I won't return. So anyway, that's what happened. I ended up being with the Band at the beginning and this year October eighth, it'll be 50 years.

I wasn't always at the Band Office for the time I was having children, I left for those times. And then I was part of the council in '92, '93. Then I had a couple year break to be a



mother. And then my kids were old enough to go to school, so then I was called back to come back to work. So, I did take a two-year pause. And growing up with my parents was the best they could do, I guess. My father was a miner at the time I remember things. He always worked at the mine and then he always had other jobs. So, we were hoping that we could have a trapline like every other kid, but it didn't happen that way. We never had one. But we did have a good upbringing. Healthy, all the kids were healthy. And I was just thinking that I'm 65 now and I don't remember ever having a broken bone and same as my siblings, they never had broken bones. And I always say it was all the porridge my mom fed us. Every morning, porridge, porridge, porridge. [Laughs]. And then she always had the skim milk, and it was gross, but it's something you grow to like, I guess.

I guess for what they learned at the residential school, both my parents learned how to be domestic. You know, do domestic chores and that's what we had to do as soon as we were big enough. I remember, we started washing dishes when we were five, six; sweeping and washing the floor, doing laundry by hand on the scrubbing board and all that stuff. Probably from eight years old, looking after the kids, helping Mom look after the kids. Mom was a good mom, she never left us, but she expected us to help because she had such a large – there was so many of us children. They had 12 of us, so it was a lot of work for her. So that's how she raised us. I remember Mom doing the small – the little time she had, she did pick her Medicine, her berries and stuff but it was very little, and it wasn't even important to me at the time. It was meaningless to me, you know, all about Rat Root and all the other Medicines, local Medicines. They weren't important to me at the time because I didn't really need them. I didn't have a use for them. So, she did try to teach us that. And for survival, for food, she did try. She did have her rabbit snares and stuff, but you know, I don't remember as kids – we all loved fish, but for wild food, we didn't really have enough to say we got a liking to it. We didn't see that much. Dad was too busy working at the mine to be able to trap and bring that type of food in. So, I guess we didn't have enough to like. I always – my friends now, some of my friends, they'll say, "Oh, I wish I had beaver, or I wish I had muskrat, or rabbit." I don't crave that because I never learned to – I never had it enough to learn to like it, so I don't miss it, of course. But fish, we always had that. And I still do. My partner when I was 18, we did right from the beginning, we spent a lot of time with the Elders, and we learned the Medicines. The Elders taught us to pick Chagga and time and again, when you're 18, you're well and healthy. Chagga didn't mean anything to you. Medicine

only means something to you when you have the aches and pains, I think. We learned to pick that, we learned to pick the local Medicines. And that was always important to us, to help our family and our friends and you know, feeling good with what's available here. We're not into – we raised our children, our three children not to run to the hospital. They don't have medical files. The only time they were there was when I had them.

I didn't have a choice – we didn't have a choice. My partner wanted to have a midwife and at that time, I didn't want to risk it because of course, it's really painful having a child. And we had agreed we won't take anything, nothing at all to ease the pain or anything and there was no way I was going to go with a midwife because I probably would have died because I had like a 48-hour labor. So, it was hard. And I had big children too. The oldest was nine pounds, ten ounces, so that's really large. And to have them natural, we did all three natural.

But right from the time, we partnered up [my husband and I], we learned Medicine. And we picked – we taught our kids how to pick. And a lot of times, in their spare time, that's what they do. They picked as they were growing up, you know, the right times to pick the Medicine is what they did. And like my son said, "The worst part about being a child with you Mom, was always walking, always picking." [Laughs]. But he said, "I guess now that I'm an adult, I understand it was important and I will teach my children that." My daughter taught her kids how to pick the Medicines at the right time. And for us, it's natural. As long as you carry your Tobacco, and you understand to Thank the Creator for what we get. My son hunts now, but he does all the Tobacco Offerings before he goes for a hunt and everything. I remember our grandfather, Charles. He used to talk about the Stories about that even back 50 years ago, 60 years ago about his placing the Offering for his trapping. I remember him, he used to talk about that. And again, back then, that was meaningless to me, it didn't mean anything. But now as I get older, I understood for everything we take, we have to give an Offering.

Yeah, so with COVID, most recently with COVID, I'm the only one that's doubled vaxxed in my family. I wasn't gonna go through with it, but one member of the family had to because we need to go to the store, we need to go – you know, sometimes there's places that require it. Some of the stores required it, so I had to be the one – I chose to be the one to do it for my family cause none of them are vaxxed, my grandkids or my children or my partner. So, it's something they didn't believe in. My kids never even got their shots when they were small babies. You know, as they're getting into school and all the fluoride, you know, all the dental

visits they had, their father didn't permit that. And then you talk to the doctors now, "Wow. Wow. What a good decision you guys made." But that's just the way we were. It scares my children, my three children now. We didn't have our shots, so they haven't allowed their kids to have them also. My daughter's oldest, she decided to get vaccinated cause she's right on campus there. And she's going into Medicine, so she has to be vaxxed. She has to be vaxxed because you know, not knowing how long this is going to take. And her classes were through online last year, but now she's right in the classroom. So that's where we're at. We still pick and the kids, it's just natural for my kids and my grandkids to be picking the Medicines whenever, at the right time of year. And that's what I raised my kids and then it rubbed off on my sisters. Then of course my brother, he's super intelligent, he is so smart. When he turned 50, it came to him like a Gift. He just woke up one day and he had all this knowledge. I love going to him. And I have to go to him occasionally because I'm side by side with him in our – you know, I'm just a couple years older than him. So, we're close. He can feel when I'm in pain or whatever is bothering me. He just calls me, says, "Come, sister. I gotta work on you." So, he knows, he can sense it.

He's a Medicine Man, since he was 50. He's very – you know, I never believed in that stuff, I never did. He did it, he was doing it and I was part of that world. I shouldn't say I didn't believe in it; I just never needed it, I think. The one day he asked me to go, Mom was still alive. We had a really good visit. He said, "Sis, lay down!" So, I laid down on the thing without thinking cause we were talking so deep and all of a sudden I'm finding myself, I'm on his Healing bed and he's working on me and it felt really good. Like whew, what is this? So that's how I got into it. I just felt so good. And my daughter – I help him out. I have to help him out when he works on some Elders. And my sister is really good at it too, but my oldest daughter worked with him, and she also went and took a bunch of old hippie doctors, retired hippie doctors – that's what I call them – had this same thing, hands on Healing but it's more western, you know? And she went and took five levels of classes. So, she blended in with what she learned from her uncles. So, it's kind of a both worlds thing? So, she's got her own clientele. And then once in a while, she'll work with my brother and then they'll exchange treatments. And it's good, I like seeing that. And then of course her son, her son is 18. He'll be 19 in July. And he's very – he's got a lot of energy. He's very good with hands on as well. And of course, her daughter's going into Medicine, so they want to kind of go both worlds, I guess.

I know my oldest daughter ordered her DNA. I don't know what they're worth, 180 or something. But that's what her dad gave her for her birthday present and she's still waiting for it. She finally got an email saying that it'll be available March 19<sup>th</sup>. So, we'll see where we come from, I guess. [Laughs]. Well, my brother's son, had his done back last fall. And it showed he was 43 percent Native.

Residential schools affected my home and family in terms of I think the importance of education too, and domestics. Oh yeah and the lickings. Dad learned that. They always had a strap when they didn't listen. And yeah, I remember. I was six, seven, Dad would line us up and he'd strap us. If somebody did wrong, we all had to pay. So that, he learned from the residence. I didn't realize it as a kid, of course. But as I got older and read, yeah, something he learned there, and he just carried it on.

The other thing was, growing up, the other thing that – and I don't know if it's good or bad, but growing up, both sides grandparents were Christians. And it was very important to them to Pray and read the Bible every day, go to church every Sunday. At 101, that's what we found because they lived so close that they kind of – you know, it was everything for them. Christianity was very important to them and that's how I grew up. And I didn't – as I got older too, I never – I'd go to church with Mom and Dad occasionally. Not Dad, Mom, all the time she went. But I didn't go all the time because it just didn't make sense. And then the one time, Mom asked me, “Why don't you come to church? Why don't you make time to come to church?” And by then I was with my partner, I said, ‘Well I don't see the importance, Mom. Why should I go if – if people live right, if people think they live right, you know, do all the right things according to what's right, why should you go to church?’ I'm grateful, I give my Thanks and that, isn't that good enough? And she kind of said, “No, you should send it to the church.” But never did my mom ever say, “We want you to get married.” Mom and Dad never told [my partner] and I that. They never did! But his parents did. But that's about it. The other thing, growing up was with religion not directly from my parents, but the grandparents tried to make sure that we went to church every chance we got. I remember growing up, they used to have church Sunday morning, two o'clock, and then in the evenings. It was way too much! But to me, it was singing hymns and reading the Bible. Of course, that's where Mom and Dad – they went to the Anglican residential, that was a daily thing for them there.

I think a house would be a roof over your head, just a place to live. A home is probably more of where you bond with your Loved ones. To me, that would be it. Practical INAC houses is what we have, other than the time we lived in town. Yeah, well they were the same. They were all kind of the same. If you bought your own house in the town or in Air Ronge, three bedrooms. When my husband and I were – this is like 30 years ago, probably in the 90's, when we lived off reserve. Cause from the time we were together till almost 2000, we lived off reserve and it was my choice. My choice to get a CMHA house on the reserve, which we own. We have a 99-year lease – well, probably now 70 – from Band Council for the piece of land where our house is. My husband never wanted to live on the reserve because he always heard all the bad stories about you getting booted out if you're White and that. Times have changed. He's okay there now. But still, we have a property in La Ronge which we hang onto just in case things change and we have to build a home in La Ronge. But we own it, so it's sitting idle. I know we've been asked to sell it off. People have tried to buy it but we're still hanging onto it. And of course, we have a farm also, which we just lease out to people that are renting it. You know, that's really what he has for the three children, you know, should we go. When we're no longer around, that's theirs to do whatever they want. And he wasn't feeling good this winter and he asked me, "Can you consolidate everything? Can you try and consolidate everything? Then also let me, I'll give the cash now before there's a feud. You know, there will be a feud," you know, that happens. Children fighting over property, whatever, after their parents go. In the White side with our friends, I see that lots. It's broken families. It's sad, eh? It's very sad. But yeah, and with that, I think that's why he said, "Consolidate everything. Sell it and then give the kids their share and then we don't have to worry about it when we're no longer around." I guess that's the plan for the summer.

I create my home as a place of health and well-being, well, it's a place where my children, their partners, and my grandchildren want to come all the time. I never have trouble expecting my kids to come on holidays, and or my grandkids. During the summer, they want to come and stay at our house, which is okay as long as we're well. So, I don't have that problem of, oh I wish my grandkids were here, I wish my kids were here. My oldest daughter lives next door, she chose that when she married her partner cause he's a *Moniyaw* (White man) too. It's been 20 years now since they bought a home, and they live beside us. Well at least she does, they're separated. So now the kids are all grown up and they have their own lives and they're

doing what they want. Yeah. They've been separated for six years and yeah, my daughter hasn't even dated yet! She has her B.Ed. Yeah, well before they were divorced, probably 10 years now she's had it. And she's taught adult training and she's taught – she never really wanted to go fulltime into teaching. She found that sporadic, because she had her husband who made a good income. "I want to stay home for a couple of days a week, so I'm just going to do the subbing." So, they called her, and she found out that she enjoyed that. Now, she's working for the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology as a career counsellor here in La Ronge at the career center and she's been there for two, three years and she Loves it. So, my mom and dad's influence in seeing the importance of education has flowed through the generations too.

And now that the kids are gone, my partner, he makes me feel really – he pampers me. The only thing I ever have to do is make my bed. Seriously. He has supper made; he washes my clothes. Oh! And I have to fold my clothes, he just lays them on the bed for me. He'll go out and start the vehicle in the morning, brush it off. All the stuff I'm going to miss if he goes before me. But yeah, today, he's gone out. He's got three nets and he's going to go fish for the kids. Normally, they would go with him, set the nets and then check it every day. But it's kind of scary out there, there's a foot of snow. Underneath that – this is on the ice. A foot of snow and then soft snow and then underneath is like a foot of slush. I know, so I'm just waiting. When I get home, I'm gonna see if he's home, then I'm gonna call my son to go check on his dad if his dad's not home.

We still carry on the Traditional life. In the fall, we can like eight cases of trout and it tastes just like salmon. The kids and I are planning a trip to go to Vancouver, Vancouver Island, just roam around there for a week. We're driving down and back, my son and his wife, his woman, my oldest daughter and her son, and myself. Two or three vehicles, we're not quite sure yet. Cause we want to camp along the way and every second night, get a hotel room to shower and stuff. We're doing our first planning meeting Saturday night, Google some maps and routes. See who we can find over there, all the long-lost relatives.

#### **4.14 Chapter Summary**

This chapter depicted the words verbatim of the 13 Storytellers. Only the responses to the interview questions were captured here in the Participant stories so that the voices of the Storytellers are heard. The individual stories are the heart of this dissertation and illustrate topics

of utmost importance to the Participants regarding house, home and health. Relationships, according to the Tipi Teachings, is the cord that binds all the other Values together. Every Story was told within the context of Relationships among the generations and spoke of Love as a binding force of health and well-being. Houses of the past were large communal spaces and to some extent, carried onto modern houses that had an adjoining living room and kitchen. However, the separation of bedrooms and fences impacted some of the Storytellers in terms of feeling crowded. Socially, inhabitants are no longer spending time together as they once had before the separation of space and the advent of technology. Participants spoke of the warmth they felt in their homes not only by fire, but of Love. Chapter five will delineate these 13 stories according to the frameworks of the Tipi Teachings and the LLRIB Medicine Wheel.

## CHAPTER FIVE – THEMATIC FINDINGS

### 5.1 Tipi Teachings Framework Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of my analysis of the Stories detailed in chapter four as reflected through the Tipi Teaching framework. In presenting these findings I begin with a brief description of each Teaching followed by exemplars of associated experiences of house, home, and health described by Participants. Tipi Teachings are presented in the order in which the poles representing each are placed in the construction of the Tipi. The four most significant Values for the LLRIB revealed through this analysis are Love, Sharing, Faith and Kinship.

Although this chapter paints a picture of a thriving Woodland Cree community, the chapter concludes with a section that highlights findings on the impacts of colonization on Woodland Cree society, specifically disruptions to Tipi Values in house and home identified by Participants in their Stories. The clear dissonances between the two types of accounts that emerged from the Stories are picked up in the final discussion chapter where I locate the significance of these findings for the LLRIB. Note that dialects and spelling of the Woodland Cree (Th), if different, are followed after the Plains ‘Y’ words.

#### 5.1.1 *Nanahitamowin – Obedience*

Unlike conforming or submitting to authoritarian rules and regulations, the forms of Obedience demanded in residential schools, the Tipi Teachings frame Obedience as a thoughtful respectful interaction with all our relations: ‘Obedience means accepting guidance and wisdom from outside of ourselves, using our ears before our mouth. We learn by listening to traditional stories, by listening to our parents or guardians, our fellow students and our teachers. We learn by their behaviors and reminders, so that we know what is right and what is wrong’ (Elder’s Council, 1988, in Sanderson, 1991, p.33). Many Participant Stories referenced practices of Obedience



within and around homes. James Eninew shared how his grandfather gathered his grandchildren in the evenings to convey traditional Wesakecahk stories:

I had a grandfather who we had as an Elder who was a Storyteller. So, every night, he would be our television. A lot of us kids would sit in a little audience, and he would recite stories of Wesakecahk, and he was our television.

He further spoke of how as a small child he was expected to Obey his family and serve the Elders:

And our Values and our systems back then were simple, basically to survive, help one another. I started as a young child of five years old, helping Elders with their water and their wood. And then I'd get up at five in the morning and then I'd go help them and then get ready for school, get back and then I'd be at home doing chores.

Kathy Bell spoke of the Obedience children had towards their Elders as they helped out with the daily chores:

But anyways, my grandparents raised us because our moms would go out and work and they'd be gone. And our grandparents would look after us and we'd have to help with the chores and hauling water and sawing wood and chopping wood cause we had wood heat. And it was always lots of work and then you'd get to go play after you did your work, helping with the dishes and sweeping and whatever. But it was very crowded.

The Stories carried moral codes of behavior and children were expected to listen quietly while the Stories were related to them. The Value of Obedience was also protective as described by Storyteller Alvina Halkett when she was forewarned by her mother not to go near the priest in her community:

... You know, my mom used to say not to go with the priest. That's what I said to the priest, "Never go in the priest's house." And he said, "No, no... I'll be outside because I'm throwing the logs in, and you guys put them in a shelf there." So, after he said that, and I said okay. And then after that, I went home, I had a chocolate bar and my mom said, "Where did you get that?" And I said, I went to help the priest bring wood. Right away she said, "Nope. Put that chocolate down. I told you not ever to go in there!"

Later in life, Alvina Halkett related how she became an Elder and the children gravitated to the Elders for guidance or just to have someone to talk to when they were having a bad day:

As an Elder, like school today, they have Elders now, hey? Before they didn't have anybody. Probably, guidance counselors that they came, they took the guidance counselor out and then they put a social worker in our school, and then the Elders. I find that Elders, for me, like kids, they talk to you. The only thing we can do is, sometimes there's things coming up and then the social worker steps in. It has more things to do with that child. But like that everyday thing, they come there just when they have a bad day and then they talk to us and they feel better after that.

### ***5.1.2 Kihceyhtowin - Respect***

Elder Bill Ermine (personal communication, 1995) once taught how everything has power and that when we do not understand the power of not only people, but also ideas, and objects, negative consequences can follow. He spoke of how even money had power, and that we needed to Respect its power. This teaching subscribes to the paradigm that all manner of existence is animate. However, Respect is usually concerned with our human interactions: 'Respect means giving honor to our Elders and fellow students, to the strangers that come to visit our community, and to all of life. We must honor the basic rights of all others' (Elders' Council, 1988, in Sanderson, 1991). When we converse among ourselves in both private and public spheres, we take turns listening to each other. A Sharing Circle format naturally evolves, and individuals who choose not to speak simply reflect and listen intently while Respectfully acknowledging others. The Knowledge that people impart holds Spirit, and to interrupt a speaker is especially disrespectful.

Participant Miles Charles explained that Respect was not only accorded to parents, but to older siblings:

We had a lot of Respect for our parents. There's nothing like it as far as now. Everybody respected the Elders. Not only the parents, but even you had to – the older brothers, the older sisters, you had to Respect, the young ones.

John Halkett recalled the Respect that was the main teaching in his community:

My grandparents were pretty well the ones that were the go-to Elders at that time. And my great- great- grandmother – what was her name? She was one of the oldest members of the Band. So that's where people went to for advice and things like

that. The Elders and the Teachings we got at that time was Respect, mainly Respect, and to look after the Elders. We used to go over there and help out a little bit with what they had to do, and they would make us go into the cabin and feed us. [Laughs]. And they would lecture us a little bit. So that's basically how we got our Teachings was from the Elders, guiding us on certain things. And to this day, I still remember those Teachings. [Laughs]. But they were not too much on a Traditional side. They were strong Anglicans, eh?

Respect was also accorded to dog relatives as elaborated by Alvina Halkett:

He had a dog team. And even the dogs, we weren't allowed to go in where he has his dogs cause those are working dogs, you can't go and play with them. So, he was taking care of his dogs. So, we weren't allowed to go play with them, things like that. He kept everything – to stay away from dogs. And it was – it was good.

Kathy Bell stated that accepting food while visiting was a sign of Respect:

Like I said, we used to go visiting with our grandma on Sundays or Saturdays and she'd take us to go visit her friends and if you walked in the door, they would set a place for you right away for you to eat. And if you didn't eat, you had to eat what was put in front of you. It was a sign of Respect; you never refuse it. But that would be it, they would set a place for you right away.

### **5.1.3 *Tapahteyimowin – Humility***

Elder Mary Lee exemplified Humility as she taught us how to build the Tipi in September, 2019. As we built the Tipi, I felt a connection with the words of our Elders who stated that 'We are not above or below others in the circle of life. We feel humbled when we understand our relationship with Creation. We are so small compared to the majestic expanse of Creation, just a "strand in the web of life, and we respect and value life." (Elder's Council, 1988, in Sanderson, p.34). In building the Tipi, Elder Mary Lee related how she offered Tobacco before construction. I think of the reverence we held in the past for our homes and wonder if anyone performs a Ceremony anymore before building modern houses. After all, there are trees whose lives were sacrificed for contemporary shelter. Miles Charles described how his parents humbled themselves before Creator and nature:

[*Kokum*] taught us how to take Medicines and all that. Before she took the Medicines, she had to prepare a Thank You to the Creator. And same with my dad,

when he'd go out on the trapline, he had to put out an Offering. He'd make Offerings. And if you didn't have the Tobacco, [he would be], just Praying and that to the Creator. But *Kokum* was the one who taught us all the Medicines in the summertime, and she always taught us not to over harvest, just to take what was needed. And then in the fall, we would do the same thing. Just take the things that you can to get through the winter, but you don't take a whole bunch, just the Medicine that you would need if a person gets sick. Cause they made an ointment out of herbs and that mixture of animal grease and stuff like that. And she brewed herbs, too, for drinking to cleanse the whole system of your body. That's how Mom taught us, and she continued to be a Medicine Woman right through till she died.

James Eninew explained that although his house was small, it was very meaningful to him as a home:

I have a house in Sucker River, right now as we speak. But it's just a house. The house I'm living in is a ten by 14, but it's my home. It's my home because if I didn't call it a home, it would be just a shack. You see, a house is just a building, a home is where your heart is. And to be honest, I've only lived in a house once where there was an actual fence. [Laughs]. Fences are not an Indigenous concept. It blocks other community members from yourself and so you pretty well isolate yourself by building a fence. That is one thing our Indigenous People never had is fences, walls. It's a whole new concept cause we've always been open to one another.

Elizabeth Charles also showed humility in wanting simplicity in her life:

I live in a small apartment. As long as I have a nice bed and a place to put my clothes. And a stove to cook something if I'm hungry. That's about it. Otherwise, I don't crave any fancy things like some people do. I'm happy with a bed and a place to cook my food, a stove, I mean.

#### ***5.1.4 Miyowatomowin – Happiness***

Once the three foundational poles of Obedience, Respect and Humility are fastened, Elder Mary Lee explained that the rising of the fourth pole representing Happiness creates the entrance to the home. This portal of Happiness assures the inhabitants 'a sense of peace within,' (Attimoyoo cited in Sanderson, 1991, p.34). The Old Man Attimoyoo tied the relationships among Happiness, Peace and Contentment with Respect, Love, Sharing and Wisdom;

This contentment comes from living well and being able to respect oneself. We can find happiness from nature, love of family, doing a good job and helping others. When you create a sense of happiness in your life, you listen with an open mind and heart. (Attimoyoo in Sanderson, 1991, p.34)

Dr. Leona Makokis (2009), a Cree Elder of Blue Quills College at St. Paul, Alberta, elaborates that ‘Happiness means we must show enthusiasm to encourage others. Our good actions will make our ancestors happy in the next world. This is how we share happiness.’ The teaching reminds me of my grandparent’s doorway being a portal to Happiness, and their humble lodge was a celebration of family laughter and Love. This feeling translates to public spaces such as Band Offices, Health Clinics or Schools, where despite the seriousness of the service to community, laughter and tea are in abundance.

Annie Sanderson remembered her childhood to be the Happiest time of her life despite being poor:

It used to be so nice to go visit *Kokum* there cause they had a tripod outside where we used to hang out meat and stuff like that, our fish. Hang your fish... We had our little own path, just from my house to their house. Anyway, we were close... But if I were to go back to the way we used to live, I would. I’d go back and live like that. Oh, them days were good, long time ago. Way, way good. Were the Happy times. When you were poor, that’s when you were Happy. But now you’re always worrying, living the White man way.

Elizabeth Charles remembered her Happy childhood and how her mother was a generous woman:

I had a Happy childhood. *Mooshum* and *Kokum* never fought. They would argue over little things like when *Kokum* was using that flour and lard. She was always giving it to other people instead of using it at home. *Kokum* was generous. She really liked to Share... My home was Happy, yeah, I would say that ‘til people started drinking and they used to fight or argue. Otherwise, it was perfect.

James Eninew articulated his Happiness in his work and service to community:

I’m Happy being where I am. I am helping Elders get subsidy for their living allowance for their rent and power. I’m Happy doing that and I’m Happy where I ended at a good point in my life... I create my home as a place of health and well-being by just going along with the Teachings. Most of my Teachings, I follow from my mom, but she got them also from the community. I just do my best to help people, to help people that are grieving, to help people within the community, do as much as I can to help people. Then I come home, and I’m satisfied. I Pray to the Creator and I Thank the Creator for the opportunities that

I've been given, Thankful for all the Blessings I've been given. And I've been given lots, and I don't take them for granted.

### **5.1.5 Sakihitowin -Love**

Love is a Spirit that beats in concert with our mother's heart during our first human experience in her womb, and upon birth we come to know the kindness of Love at her breast. The home, Tipi and Sweat Lodge are tangible metaphors of this first sanctuary. We are expected to extend this Love to others by being 'good and kind to one another, and to our self' (Elder's council, 1988, in Sanderson, 1991, p.35.). Sanderson (1991) extols the harmonious relationships wrought of Love;

If we are to live in harmony we must accept one another as we are, and accept others who are not in our circle. The ability to love in a balanced way grows as we incorporate the other values of respect and humility. We are able to love with great strength when we believe we are no higher or lower than others' (p. 35).

My deceased son, Martin Nelson told me that his name was *Maskwa Sakihitowin* not long before he transformed to a Spirit Boy. I understood the first part of his name to mean 'Bear', but he translated to English, the Cree word *Sakihitowin*, a word that I had forgotten. I was amazed that he knew some Cree words, but he said that the most important reason we came to Earth was to learn about all the different kinds of Love that exist. In Cree cosmology, the Bear is known to be the most intelligent of all Beings and is also the Healer. Martin said that like his name, Bear Love, that was to be his work when he became a Grandfather (Ancestral Spirit) to teach about Love and Healing, and that he would be helping me. Indigenous research methodologies reason that both corporal and Spiritual entities must be considered. I have Teachers in both worlds guiding this work. I believe that communities embrace relationships with societies outside Indigenous circles only if the Values of Respect and Humility are expressed authentically. I am also certain that research designed to extend human life and well-being is an expression of human Love. When asked how Participants made their homes places of health and well-being,

Love was often identified as the force that kept their homes Happy. Even beyond death, people maintained their households with the Love of the deceased as in the case of Annie Sanderson:

When I talk about my home as a place of health and well-being, it's all about the Love of family. Yeah. We all got along. We Shared everything. Yeah. So, we had a Happy life. Good neighbors... I don't mind my house. Now I'm used to it. Now, I told the old man I'd never leave it if he ever – if he, when he dies, I'd never leave the house. So, I would never. Cause a long time ago, people didn't leave their houses when their spouses died, eh? They stayed there till they died too.

Love is exemplified in an adoption story told by Elsie Ermine:

My late brother got adopted by my aunt and uncle. All of us, there was eight of us, and he was the only brother we had at that time... And my brother was always sick, and my auntie worked at the hospital. So, she said she'd take him home when he got out. And they ended up taking him as their own cause they never had any kids. They waited till he was nine years old to ask him if he knew anything about adoption or why he lived with them and he didn't live with Mom... We didn't need a lawyer or anything. People just adopted how they wanted.

Frances Charles elaborated on the Love she felt while growing up on the trap line:

Well, a home is where there's a mom and dad, there's Love there and Prayer and there's lots of hugging. And I had so many different names when I was just starting to remember and they called me so many different little names, my mom and dad and I felt just being so Loved. That's what I call a home, where there's lots of Love and a mom and dad. I never felt poor when I was growing up.

### **5.1.6 Tapowakeyihamowin – Faith**

Faith, in relation to human development, requires the acknowledgement of divergent expressions of Spiritual traditions. Even if a person is an atheist, the Faith that person has that no Higher Power exists, is that person's human right and must be Respected. Regardless of the standpoint, we must learn to believe and trust others. However as Indigenous Peoples, it is generally accepted that an individual's relationship exists among our Great Mystery, our Ancestral Guides and ourselves;

We believe in a power greater than ourselves, whom we worship, and who gives us strength to be a worthy member of the human race. To sustain our spirituality, we need to live it every day. It is a way of life. (Makokis, 2009)

Life was and is a Prayer in Tipi spaces known to be as sentient as any animate being. I can imagine how the Sweat Lodge Miles Charles speaks of here took on a life of its own:

But out in the trap line, I remember *Mooshum* always making Offerings and things like that, but I didn't see a Drum or a Rattle or anything like that. But I saw *Mooshum* making a small Sweat Lodge where he'd go in and I'd hear him hum – doing chanting in there and I asked Mom one time, Dad would do this on our way to the trapline, where we camped. And I asked Mom once 'Why does he do that?' And Mom told me, "He's talking to his Higher Power," she said. Cause *Mooshum* was a Medicine Man.

Frances Charles added how her and Mile's father was not only a Medicine Man, but a Lay Reader for the Anglican Church, '*Mooshum* was a Lay Reader at the church; he didn't go to school, but he taught himself syllabics and he'd read the Bible at the Church and sometimes he'd go to PA to a meeting at the Diocese.' She further related how she followed both Western and Indigenous Faiths upon her entrance into the Sweat Lodge:

Our teacher asked if I wanted to go in and I said 'I'll try but I want to sit close to the door in case I have to come out, so they sat me by the door and I managed to sit through the first whole round and somebody kept touching me on my side because something here was hurting so there was a Medicine Woman there and I went to see her and she had an assistant and she said 'I can't, I can't do it 'Try it again', that assistant said and so they tried again and they sucked out a quarter sized gray stuff and said that's what's making you sick so she said 'You can come here and your Colours are White and Blue' and I can't remember the third one. And she gave me my Spirit name which is *Mahican* – The Wolf that Looks Around and I'm from the Eagle Clan so the second year we went and I went in again and I was good.

Faith in one's capacity to be a Healer or Medicine Person came from members of the community as in the case of Annie Sanderson:

I saw an old lady over there and she shook my hand. "Give me your hand," she said. I shook hands with her. "Oh my," she said, "Your hands are warmer than mine. You've got Power in your hands," she said. "What you're doing is good for you." She said to make some kind of a salve and when somebody wants a rub or something, to rub them with my hands when they're hot and they always come out pretty good. One of my sons, he had a growth on his back, so, he said, "Look at this, I have a lump here." So, I Prayed, and my hands started getting hot, so I took it out with my hands. Kind of just a little wee hard, just like a marble, I don't know how it got there. When I finished taking it off, but then I put my hands on it, and it didn't take long to Heal. That's how I knew that I had some kind of Gift for rubbing people. Sometimes when some people need help or want some information or need help or something bothering them, they come to me and I talk to



them, and they always felt better after. I don't charge them anything, all I ask for is a package of cigarettes; Tobacco comes first before you Heal somebody. You know, when you're picking Medicine, you put your Tobacco there, then you can pick.

### **5.1.7 *Wahkohtowin –Kinship***

Although Kinship is known to be ‘a powerful connecting force’ among Cree societies, the interruption of residential schools has Elders concerned that Kinship needs to be strengthened. According to the Elders’ Council (1988), Elders traditionally conveyed Kinship Protocols which were ‘...reinforced through everyday interactions’ (Sanderson, 1991, p.35). Makokis (2009) and Lee (2006) both affirmed the importance of family and how its members are rooted to Mother Earth’s lifeblood and Love for each other. The extended family also nurtures a communal bond. I noticed that community members often address their relatives, not by name, but by kin, as in ‘my boy’, ‘my cousin’ or ‘my brother’ to reinforce the Loving Kinship connections to each other. I still call my son Matthew, my boy, and in turn he calls his son Logan, my boy. I think that an underscoring principle in Indigenous communities is to look after each other, and reciprocally, they look after you when in need. The dynamics of Kinship are evident in Annie Sanderson’s words as she recalled from her childhood:

A long time ago, you just go and visit each other. At their house, visit each other. Go out on the lake together. Go picking berries. And we used to be about four families going together to go picking the blueberries towards where your *Mooshum* had his cabin. They lived in a tent or a cabin. But we used to stay about five days in the bush and pick berries. One time me and my cousin stole some blueberries from the old ladies. [Laughs]. They were picking berries, so me and my cousin snuck home. We didn’t want to pick berries, so we stole their berries. Oh, did we ever get into trouble!

Miles Ratt’s perception of Kinship reveals the cohesiveness of families and community groups:

As First Nation's people, that's something that's probably everywhere, we have about three generations living in one house. We stick together a lot. We don't leave the house and take off to England or Russia like others do. We don't do that; we stick together. That's been like that from the beginning, I guess, for First Nations, small communities living together, growing up together.

Kathy Bell explained the fluidity in house sharing as her extended family moved alongside each other in various dwellings:

And there was my uncle and my grandmother and my two uncles and my aunt with her two kids, and my mom and me, we lived in the two shack tents. And we lived in it all summer long and in the winter, we moved into my other grandfather's house. It was across the street. While they went to the trap line, we stayed in their house, and it was just a one big room house or whatever. I think one bedroom, I can't remember. And then we lived in my uncle's house. It was a three-room house. Two bedrooms with a big open area and of course there was no water and no electricity.

### ***5.1.8 Kanateyimowin - Pikisowin – Cleanliness***

Cleanliness holds various cultural interpretations in time and place, and while physical cleanliness is practiced, the emphasis is on the purity of the Soul.

Today, when we talk about cleanliness most people think hygiene. While that is very important, years ago, when old people talked about cleanliness, they meant spiritual cleanliness. Clean thoughts come from a clean mind, and this comes from our spirituality. With a clean mind and a sense of peace within, we learn not to inflict ills on others. Good health habits also reflect a clean mind (Makokis, 2009).

Other Elders concur with Makokis' thoughts as they say, 'It is important to be clean both spiritually and physically' (Sand in Sanderson, 1991, p.36)) and 'we must also put effort into emotional and mental cleanliness' (Attimoyoo in Sanderson, 1991, p.36). Sanderson (1991) added her interpretation and explained some of the processes by which one achieves Cleanliness.

...we should aspire to think clearly...to analyze and understand things with as much clarity and analysis as possible. We are also expected to examine and experience our true emotions to be clear and honest about our feelings. Sweetgrass and sage are used as a ceremonial smudge on a daily basis to purify and clean the body, mind and spirit. These spiritual moments of focused concentration create deep commitments to respecting our body, mind and spirit, pure and clean into our daily relationships. (p. 36)

Therefore, it is imperative that any research endeavors include Ceremony throughout the process.

Annie Sanderson recalled how Balsam not only had antiseptic qualities but Spiritual qualities as well:

They used Balsam for the flooring. We used to haul those. We used to make them – cause that Balsam has Medicine in there, eh? It's Medicine. So that's what we had for the flooring, was Balsam. So, you could smell that Medicine and that was what we used. Of course we smelled like Balsam. But we enjoyed it.

Frances Charles also indicated that Balsam was used in her home:

When you're in the cabin in the trapline, you can't really keep it clean cause of the flooring, there's no floor, it's just the Earth, but we used lots of Balsam branches to clean the floor and sometimes *Kokum* would put Balsam branches on the floor just like a rug, so it kept everything clean and smelled good.

In terms of the construction of the domes, Roderick Sanderson similarly spoke of the use of Balsam in his dwellings:

I think the only responsibility the women had was the flooring of the dome. The women went out and got that flat Balsam, that's what was used for the floor, first it was layered with straw then it was that Balsam Pine that was layered on top for insulation to keep it from getting cold from the ground.

Elizabeth Charles stated that in addition to the Balsam her mother used rabbit fur to cover the floor:

The cabin was very, very warm. One thing I hated though, there was no flooring, just gravel. And we had to put thick rabbit bed rolls on the floor, and I hated that cause I was falling asleep one time and a darn mouse ran over my face and I just screamed! So, I wouldn't sleep on the floor. So, I had to sleep with *Mooshum* and *Kokum*. There was no lumber on the floor, so they actually used Balsam branches for flooring.

### ***5.1.9 Nanaskomowin –Thankfulness***

Gratitude is a state of mind as our conversations are sprinkled throughout or often end in '*teniki*' which means thank you. According to Makokis (2009), 'We learn to give thanks: to always be thankful for the Creator's bounty, which we are privileged to share with others, and for all the kind things others do for us.' Sid Fiddler, the former head of the Indian Social Work Program at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (now First Nations' University of Canada) further elaborated on the notion of Gratitude:

Looking closely at your world and seeing what you have to be thankful for is practised traditionally. Materialism is not the focus of this acknowledgement, but the pleasures of having children, the laughter amongst friends, the sound of rain, the ability to see and hear, and on and on, these are the treasures of life. This does not mean that individuals, families or communities should not strive for strong economic development, a political voice and items that make life easier. (Fiddler, in Sanderson, 1991, p.36)

Sanderson also stated that we must express our gratitude to Creator and our communities for our talents by helping others achieve their success, 'We must be thankful for our unique gifts such as intelligence, oratory skills, the ability to heal, or the strength to pull people together' (Sanderson, 1991, p.36). Miles Charles expressed Pride in his mother's Gift in midwifery for which the local women were Thankful:

When people were to get sick, my mother was a Medicine Woman of all sorts, like if you were going to have a baby, my mom would be the one that would be called. Most of the time, after people knew she was staying in town for the winter, there was a lot of ladies that were left behind that didn't want to have babies on the trap line. When it was time for them to have a baby, they would call my mom for it wasn't too far for her to walk.

Elsie Ermine expressed her contentment for the Thankfulness she enjoyed with her family:

And another value is Thankfulness, Oh, that family togetherness thing? Being a Happy family... well, I brought up my kids that way. I guess I didn't want to let them go. And then they had their kids of their own and they slowly moved out of my house... That's what I like about my kids. I'm friends with my kids. Yes, I'm very Thankful that we talk to each other in a – how do you say that, equally? Yeah, in a good way.

### ***5.1.10 Wicihitowin –Sharing***

Sharing and giving are intersecting forces that reinforce the cohesiveness of community life, 'When you have one hundred horses, and you give one to somebody that is a handout. When you have two horses and you give the best horse to a person, you understand sharing' (La Chance, in Sanderson 1991, p.36). Sanderson (1991) advises that 'We must give freely for others know when we begrudged the sharing and they will accept the gesture with shame,' (p.37). We learn to be part of a family and community by helping with the provisions of food and other

basic needs. The Value of Sharing means that ‘We learn to be a productive part of our family by helping and sharing’ (36). The notion of homelessness is not as visible in an Indigenous community as it is in an urban centre because ‘couch surfacing’ or ‘camping’ is a strategy to address housing shortages and is an opportunity to carry out generosity. Miles Charles related how Sharing was of utmost importance to the survival of a community:

...my dad had a large family which was camped at Kitsaki. He had two sisters that were married to the Métis side and these sisters stayed in town while their men went trapping. They pretty well had everything all ready, when my dad got back, they all had gardens, and those two sisters had my dad’s garden prepared so my dad could plant potatoes for his family and other vegetables like turnips and carrots and other stuff. I remember all the families helped each other, if you ran short of anything, they would help you out. Also, if you got sick, they would help you, and if you ran short of food, or if you needed help building a cabin the men would help each other hauling logs and peeling logs and erecting the cabin. Throughout the summer, pretty well every man had a fish net in the bay, they had one place, after they checked their nets, they all put their catch in one place and everybody helped themselves to the fish, to as many fish as they wanted, and everybody got their fish.

Matthew Charles told of the Respect they had of animals-not to kill more than was needed and to Share on behalf of the community:

But anyway, me and this other guy, after we were done hauling logs, we came to La Ronge. And after we were coming out from Portage, Egg Lake, that would be the west end of Egg Lake, there was a caribou herd standing there and I had a sleigh that was empty. He said, “How many do you want?” I said, ‘let’s just take one.’ He said, “Oh, we got some people to feed in Big Stone.” ‘Alright, it’s up to you’, I said. He shot two. He shot two of those and then we gutted them, and we quartered them and we put everything in the sleigh, and that wasn’t a wasted trip. We had a lot of meat for everybody, cause in those days, when somebody killed something on the reserve, everybody got something. You know, back in those days, you walk into somebody’s house, you always had tea, bannock, soup, anything. They’d tell you, “Help yourself,” or they’d serve you. It doesn’t matter where you went. If they had something to Share, they would. Nowadays, I don’t see that. I still have that. I still keep that. Whenever somebody comes to my house, if I have something ready, I’ll feed them. So that’s how I keep my home as a place of health and well-being, I follow those old Traditions of Sharing food. And I fed a *lot* of kids. Cause my daughter’s friends and my son’s friends that used to come over here and eat, I’d make sure when I cooked there was lots. Cause I do a lot of cooking. I like my wife’s cooking too, but I like cooking.

Kathy Bell exclaimed how there was no such thing as homelessness as people cared enough to Share their living quarters with those in need:

...no one ever, ever did get turned away from your door if it was cold. Like I said, there was no homeless people sleeping outside anywhere cause someone always let them in to stay warm, always made a bed for whoever was there.

Elsie Ermine also declared how women Shared their resources to help each other out:

The women took care of the sick. I'll use my grandmother as an example. Long time ago, people used to go and help. They used to visit each other every day and help each other out. We'd have these ladies from the reserve come to visit and if something needs to be done, they'd just be there.

Alvina Halkett also talked about how the whole family Shared in the daily chores:

So, there's a stove at the center. That's the heat we had for our house. There was no electricity or running water. So, I remember when I was a small girl, I used to haul water, haul water from the lake. And then also, the wood. My brothers will cut the wood, would bring the wood in. That's how, we helped each other in our household there. Everybody can do something, help out...My parents both Shared the responsibilities of the house. Right after my mom passed away, so my dad was the boss.

James Eninew recalled how Sharing was extended to whole family units who had no place to stay:

I was brought up in Sucker River. We lived in a small home, small cabin. When we first started out as a family, we didn't have a cabin of our own. So, we used to go from family to family, stay at their homes. And at one point, we actually lived in an underground storage building. And from there, my father and my uncle built a cabin. So, it wasn't a very big cabin.

### ***5.1.11 Sohkisowin – Sokatisowin – Strength***

Spiritual Strength is often a power born of adversity. Rarely is Strength used in reference to one's physique, rather, Strength is known in the context of other Values such as patience, endurance, and empathy when times of hardship visit people. My grandmother outlived my grandfather when he passed in 1977 and they both Shared the loss of six children. She served her community as a midwife and prepared bodies for burial. Relatives often remarked on her

Strength after suffering so much loss, but I think she was taught, like other Cree people, not to complain and to 'accept difficulties and tragedies so that we may give others strength to accept their own difficulties and tragedies, (Makokis, 2009). When my grandmother was passing, I looked into her eyes, and she appeared to be gazing in the distance as though she was watching my future in my eyes. Elder Sand stated that 'One must have inner strength to help his/her people (Sanderson, 1991, p.37)). Times of adversity result in gifts of Spiritual Strength that we in turn must Share to Heal others in despair. I was once told that I would become wise from Martin's passing, and I cried, wanting his human presence instead. I was told by my son Matthew that things didn't work that way. Now, I must be Strong for myself and others.

Elsie Ermine's story shows how people drew Strength from each other during times of death:

We lost our sister around one o'clock that night. When we lost our sister, we had to walk; it was in the wintertime. We weren't that big, our grandmother dressed us warm, and we told her that my sister had passed away. We walked through a trail in the bush; it was a short cut instead of going around the road. So, they came there, and I don't know how people knew but my aunt came over that morning and she found out that my sister had passed on and shortly after that people were coming in and out of our house. I guess they look after their families at home and try to make them feel better.

Strength was a result of growing up in adverse living conditions in Matthew Charles anecdote:

I keep my house healthy because we don't drink in my house. Yep. Because I grew up in an alcoholic family and to me, to bring up my kids in an environment like that, I can't see it. You know, I resented my father for the longest time for the way he brought us up. But now, I think back, you know, if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be where I am today. Actually, what he did was he made us Stronger. Yeah. To think before we do. Well, he raised me a wise man.

Kathy Bell recalled how her grandmother depended on the Strength of her grandson to dive for clay to make her summer kitchen:

I remember my grandma cleaning fish in the shade in the heat. Be cleaning the fish and we couldn't cook inside, so she had a – my cousin, he would go diving down at the lake for clay. And he'd haul it up for my grandma and she'd shape a

cooking stove outside there by the rocks and that's where she would cook in the summertime. Cause it was just way too hot to cook inside.

### **5.1.12 *Miyo opikinawasowin – Opikiyasowin - Good child raising***

Indelible Love describes the power that flows when a newborn child is lent to us from Creator. In reciprocity for this ultimate gift, all we must do is return the 'love, sharing and belonging [we] were taught' (Poochay, cited in Sanderson, 1991, p.38). When we raise our children with these Values, they in turn will nurture us during the 'continuity of our circle of life' (p.37). We are also responsible for teaching children 'to respect and obey Elders and parents and to share in household responsibilities' (p.37). Additionally, children were taught 'about spirituality and nature and the oneness of all things' in order that they become stewards of Mother Earth and all that she provides for their families and communities. Good child raising includes teaching children home stewardship which was likened to respecting the Tipi as one's mother.

John Halkett grew up watching the daily activities from his *tikinakan* (cradle board):

One of the things I remember was I think I was just a baby. I was hanging on a tree, and I seen my mom running. She told me a story one time. Yeah, I guess it was that time I was in a *tikanakan*, so she hung me in a tree while she was picking berries. But she's deathly scared of frogs, and she seen a frog, so she started running towards my dad, shouting. I guess it was that time he saved her. [Laughs]. So, I guess my dad just gave her heck and telling her not to leave me like that.

John also remarked how the whole community was involved in raising children:

I think at that time, back in the old days, men and woman had their role. Part of survival, I guess, by instinct. So, they were – they'd take care of the children, make sure everybody was looked after. Not even their children, their relatives' children, everybody was looked after. And then we were sent to bed early. You could hear the woman calling their children when it was getting dark. So, we knew whose mother was who.

Having grandchildren and Good Child Raising is a measure of wealth in the eyes of Annie Sanderson:



I'm a fourth generation *Chapan* so, I'm rich. Oh, *Chapans*, I never count them. One Elder told me, don't ever count your *Chapans*. But I can't help it. On Christmas, when I give them something, I have to put their names now, but it doesn't bother me after. I never count all of my children, my great grandchildren. Great, great, great, great — I've got one great, great, great, great, and he lives in La Ronge with his mom. The Big Stone area, that's where they live. Oh, I'm rich, I feel rich.

Good Child Raising included teaching childhood responsibilities and Elsie Ermine showed how that played out in her home community:

In the summertime when the fisherman would be fishing, we would all move from one place to another cause the fish moved. When the fish plane came, the older ones, the bigger kids used to help pack the tubs and the men loaded up the fish. Back then, everybody was equal we were treated; my grandfather wanted us to do the same work as my uncles did.

Good Child Raising was a responsibility of the whole community and in a modern context, takes place at school. Miles Ratt describes how the advent of Culture Camps takes on this role:

We opened up a Culture Camp down there and it's very healthy. They call it Base Camp, Land-based learning. There's a sign there that says, "*Kewetan* ", it sounds like *kiwetin*, but it's not, 'cause *kiwetin* means north and "*Kewetan* " means let's go back. That's what it means. We're teaching kids, let's not forget what was behind us, let's go back to some of the Traditions that have been given to us by Elders from the past; let's not forget that, let's use them.

### **5.1.13 *Kici etataytamowin – Iyitateethitamowin –Hope***

The last word I heard my son Martin softly say was 'Hope'. I was reading to him the poem by Emily Dickenson (1890, cited in Charters & Charters, 2013, p.846), 'Hope is the thing with feathers/ That perches in the soul,/ And sings the tune without the words,/ And never stops at all'. I understand now that he was letting me know that he had heard me, and that I needed to hold onto Hope for our future. But living and Praying in a state of Hope during Martin's illness helped me survive, because, as Sanderson (1991) explained, 'Hopelessness is a painful and overwhelming way to exist. We must work to regain hope if it is lost to us or others. Hope helps us to move further around the circle' (p. 38). The Cree teaching on Hope reminds us to 'maintain

hope for ourselves, our family and our community, both materially and spiritually' (p.38). It is my Hope that with other women, we can rekindle our home fires with the Ancestral wisdom of the Tipi and *Migawap* teachings.

Roderick Sanderson identified the Hope he held for Cree language transmission:

What I Hope and wish that my grandchildren would want to learn their Native language, which is Cree. I pursue and push that they want to learn it cause the ones in their 30's now are willing to learn... There is a lot of humor within our language and it's very descriptive too, which brings out the humor in learning the language.

Frances Charles held Hope for a drug and alcohol-free future with the building of a new wellness center in her community:

For my family and my community, oh, I Hope that they're drug free and alcohol free. There's just so much alcohol and drugs in this community. But with the wellness center opening soon, I guess I Hope that makes a difference.

#### ***5.1.14 Kicikisewin – Kanawethimikwisowin - Ultimate protection***

Just as a mother protects her children, the Tipi, a feminine representation of her, essentially represents Ultimate Protection. While both parents share duties in Protection, the masculine responsibility lies in the public sphere as Protector of the community and the feminine responsibility rests in the private sphere. Our sources of Ultimate Protection; Creator, Spirit Guides and Ancestors provide us guidance through moments of Inspiration, Dreams, and Ceremonies. Frances Charles recalled when her father Protected the family from fear of the Whitigo as in the following story:

My dad had a dog team, and it was in the springtime we were living in a tent and it was getting late and the dogs started growling. My dad was just going to start saying his Prayers and we heard a terrible scream by the swamp and the dogs just growled like they were really scared. My dad said 'Don't be afraid, nobody, nothing will hurt us', so we started Praying and three times we heard that terrible scream like a woman screaming and there was nobody living near us. It was just us. It was a Whitigo or something like that.

Miles Ratt talked about the Protection of Treaties:

You know, I often hear, “We didn’t give up the land, we didn’t sell the land.” When they signed Treaties, you’ll find what the conditions were. They didn’t really like what they had to sign into. They had to compromise, I guess. They didn’t like what the deal was, but they could live with it. And there’s a story, you probably heard it a lot. In those Treaties, when they signed it, they said, “As long as the trees grow, the sun shines, the river flows, and the grass grows.” That becomes law, the document they signed. And that’s forever. And those laws that they signed, it’s forever and they’ve been broken time and time again... So, it’s good to teach Treaties in our school cause people have to know about that, what does it mean.

### ***5.1.15 Cisekwahikanisa - Relationships***

The fifteenth teaching on the value of Relationships is found in the two poles that support the control flaps. The flaps control the breath of the Tipi and regulate the air quality. Just as the flaps control the air, a necessity of life, the flaps also control the harmonious relationships necessary for healthy families and communities. According to Elder Mary Lee, ‘When we don’t know how to use the flaps, it gets all smoky inside the tipi, and you can’t see, which is like life – because if we can’t live in balance, we can’t see clearly where we’re going’ (tipi poles, para. 15). The flaps indicate the dependence we hold for all relationships and that ‘having respect for and understanding this connection creates and controls harmony and balance in the circle of life’ (para. 15). Frances Charles depicted the connection of Prayer and harmonious reverence for Nature:

I remember my Dad used to sing hymns and I’d lay beside him and listen to his hymns and every morning and every night he would kneel by the bed and say his Prayers for us and sometimes there were lots of owls outside by the cabin, and my Dad said ‘come on, let’s go out’ and we went out and there were owls right around the trees there and they were white owls and he said ‘oh, somebody came to visit us, somebody is visiting us ‘ and the owls were hooting and after a while they flew away.

Relationships with the Four Cardinal Directions and how they figured in everyday life were pointed out by Participant Roderick Sanderson. He showed the Relationship between the Traditional Dome and his house in a modern context:

They looked something like a Sweat Lodge that's what I was thinking, but this Dome you could build a fire in there and it had a door that faced the south. It was like that with all doors on the Domes, they were always facing south. *Sawunohk*, that's where the sun walks or the direction of the sun where the sun comes from, they were always facing south, and it was usually close to a tree line guard for the wintertime... The door was facing the south where all good things came from the south at least in our Teachings...

And then I have the tree line in my back yard cause my house faces south, that's why I chose this house. It reflects the days of living in the Dome, I kind of thought that when I was asked by the Band. So, I looked for a house on this street where the front door faced the south.

### **5.1.16 Summary**

The analysis of Participant Stories reveals that the recollections and Values associated with home, family, and community of the Woodland Cree of northern Saskatchewan find resonance with the Plains and Parkland Cree Tipi Teachings. The Domes and *Migawaps* of the Woodland Cree carried within their shelters the Values which sustained the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities. These interconnected Values have protected the cultural identity of Woodland Cree in the face of colonization.

## **5.2 Colonization**

### **5.2.1 Residential School**

Despite the strength of the Woodland Cree culture, colonization by the Anglican Church and the policies of the Indian Act impacted the lives of the Participants. In Timber Bay, two Storytellers attended the Mission School. Some had attended the All Saints Anglican Residential School until it had burned down in 1947, others went to Prince Albert to continue school, while still others attended the Gateway School in La Ronge. No matter which school they attended, corporal punishment followed:

They went to residential school, but I went to Gateway School and it was a day school. I was in grade five and a few of us girls ran away and where that main highway was by Big Rocks, we ran over there cause there was no road there then. We were hiding in the muskeg, and we could hear the truant officer yelling 'I can

see you girls, I can see your heads little girls, come on out of there', but we weren't that little. We came out and he took us back to the school and we got straps with a leather strap and my wrists were bleeding and I didn't wipe them or anything I went home like that with that dried blood on my wrists and my mom said let's see your wrists what happened?' and I said 'we ran away and I got a strap' so she took me back to the school to see the principal and she just argued with him and told him 'my daughter will never come back here. (Frances Charles)

The form of active resistance that transpired ranged from running away from school, quitting school to ultimately burning down the school.

My mom went to residential school, and I think most of her siblings. My aunt went and my aunt would never talk about it. Mom would tell me a few things and then my uncles all went, except for my one uncle. I think he was too old already; I don't remember. But of all my grandma's family – this uncle, he drank a lot. My two aunties didn't drink. But then my uncles, they all drank. And my one aunt and my mom drank, and I think it was because of the residential school. I don't know what it was called. All Saints, I think, it was a residential school in La Ronge. But I've heard some horror stories from some people that survived it, but Mom didn't say that much about it, just that she went. And she said that some boys burnt it down. She only made it to grade four. I heard it was two guys from Sucker River cause they were beaten every day. And then another guy from Big Stone. My friend, she's passed away now, and she said her dad was one of the ones that burnt it down cause – two other guys, I can't remember their names. But she said they were beaten every day. Cause there wasn't much food going around, I guess a lot of work. (Kathy Bell)

### **5.2.2 Alcohol**

Some of the Storytellers related how alcohol impacted their lives as they were growing up. None of the Elders or Knowledge Keepers who participated in this study consumed alcoholic beverages when they entered Elderhood:

... a lot of times, we would run in the middle of the night cause my uncle would come home drunk and he'd be mad. He never hit anybody and his was because of – his trauma was because of the war. But he would get drunk, and he'd yell and bang his fist on the table and my grandma didn't like drinking or alcohol or anything, so she would take us kids and we would go sleep- in the middle of the night, we'd just go to one of the neighbors' houses and spend the night there. Like I said, nobody ever turned you down when you were at their door. They would let you in and make you a place to stay. (Kathy Bell)

The Value of Kinship served as a protective factor during difficult times. Alcohol, as a by-product of colonization, has affected several generations and Elders Participants express Hope that a new Treatment Centre would help their community once again become a place of well-being.

### ***5.2.3 Welfare***

Welfare as a form of colonization came up in some of the interviews. Miles Ratt, like the other Participants who spoke about welfare, was Proud of his self-sufficiency and independence from welfare. However, he felt that welfare should be accepted without stigma as the land that was taken more than paid for the welfare and housing:

Housing should be free. These people that come to our land, they're paying for what they give us. It's like when you go into a place, even a hotel, you pay, right? That's the same thing. They come here, they come to visit, they're like visitors. They're refugees almost, like refugees. They come to visit, and they have to pay to stay in this land. That's what it is. People should know that, understand that, young people. But that welfare word is just to make us look bad. So much stuff out there to make us look bad and really, this is our land. They're the ones that should be looking bad, not us, it's just to put us down. Yes, it's a misunderstanding for a lot of people. And it passes on from generation to generation. It makes us look bad, but really, it's not us.

### ***5.2.4 Housing***

Colonized housing wrought substantial changes on the lives of the Participants. They described their Traditional shelters as places of warmth and comfort even though there was no flooring. Instead, the ground was covered with Balsam fir, straw or rabbit fur. Natural resources such as spruce trees, moss and clay adequately served to house the inhabitants in structures which were usually one room dwellings. In contrast, the government houses were built with foreign materials and divided into small two bedroom or more dwellings with poor heat circulation.

Back in the day, they'd be two by four walls and the wind would have blew right through the walls. It was horrible conditions. I lived in one of those houses.

Actually, the heating system was one stove in the living room. And the bedrooms were poorly, poorly heated. There's no heating system in there. The living room would be just hot, the bedrooms would be cold, cold in the winter. (Participant James Eninew)

In addition to being draughty, the separate rooms had an impact on the inhabitant's sense of space whereby the communal space was reduced to individual space producing discomfort to some of the Participants.

And then when we moved in here, they [the boys] were separated. And I find it was just like we were moving away from each other but we're still in the same house but it's like we're moving away from each other. It is how I felt when I moved here. My grandson, when he comes over, he wants to close my bedroom door, and I said no. No, leave it open, can't sleep when the door's shut. I leave my door always open. I don't know, I just feel like smothered if I close my bedroom door. (Participant Alvina Halkett)

### ***5.2.5 Theft of Land***

Miles Ratt saw that despite the signing of the Treaties, the theft of land through colonization continued to present day:

I go to a lot of meetings and trapping was the first industry ever to be introduced to Canada, and fishing. And you know, logging came later on, but trapping was the first one. And that's what made Canada. They got so much money from the Indians that it's not even funny. It makes me sick when I read what so much land has been taken out for hardly anything. When I read the books, like buffalo. They wiped out buffalo. It's very – it makes me – why this happened, I don't know. Just greed, I guess. They just took over. Greedy people. And it's still going on today. Our land is being stolen today as I speak. When you go out there, they're logging, mining companies. All that stuff, peat moss, all the stuff that's been taken out of our land and we don't get nothing out of it. Maybe a little bit, but not much. And we live off that land.

### ***5.2.6 Anglican Church***

The impact of the Anglican Church on the Participants ranged from largely embracement to rejection. While some expressed their dedication to the Anglican Church through weekly attendance, others preferred Traditional Cree Spirituality. Roderick Sanderson followed his grandfather's Teachings over his grandmother's Anglican influence. His grandfather had not

attended residential school so managed to retain his Traditional Woodland Cree upbringing. John Halkett, while in search of his Indigenous identity through the American Indian Movement, questioned the doctrine of the Anglican Church. Despite having a difficult time in the residential school system, others like Elizabeth Charles remained true to the Anglican Church.

### ***5.2.7 Status Indians***

All the Storytellers were Status Indians although some did not obtain Status until Bill C-31, an amendment to the Indian Act of 1985, included them. Elizabeth Charles who had grown up on the reserve lost her status to the discriminatory section of 12 (1) (b) of the Indian Act of 1876 when she married a Métis man. Others like Alvina Halkett and Anna Sanderson grew up in adjacent land to the reserve as their Métis fathers had chosen to live nearby their Woodland Cree relatives. Roderick Sanderson spoke of his transition from being a Non-Status Indian to a registered Indian under the Indian Act:

I went to Timber Bay cause at the time I was a non-status Indian. Cause I never got my status until 1985, cause my mom was a Treaty and she lost her status marrying my dad, cause my dad's family gave up their Treaty status to purchase alcohol. So that's where I ended up being Non-Status and back then Social Services would only allow you to have four kids, any other kids you had were apprehended and put in a residential school for Non-Status Indians, and I went to Timber Bay. Yeah, I was nine years old when I got apprehended.

### ***5.2.8 Rich People***

Although the oppression of colonization affected the lives of the Woodland Cree financially and economically with the decline of the fur trade, the Participants often spoke of how rich they were in other ways. The Woodland Cree Medicine Wheel is a testament to how wealth is measured in Woodland Cree society. They are rich in their Culture, Values, Skills and Pride and the 13 stories shared in this dissertation offer ample evidence of that wealth. Miles Ratt alluded that colonization put the people in their present economic position but wanted to make it clear that we are rich.



I want to say thanks for the interview and it's always a pleasure to try and help out a little bit in a small way for others to try and understand where we stand because we're not poor, we're rich, but yet we are poor. But people, when they're put down like that, it makes them feel bad, so they don't want to do anything because of what they're perceived to be, but there are not – they should understand that they are rich people. They're not lazy, they're just put in the position to be who they are now, hey? So, it's not their fault. It's not us that's the problem.

### **5.3 Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the Tipi Teachings with examples from the Storytellers' experiences. Although the Domes and *Migawaps* of the Woodland Cree were constructed differently from the Plains and Parkland Cree of southern Saskatchewan, the Values identified in the Cree Tipi Teachings permeated the lifestyles of the Woodland Cree. These Values can be found in the Stories of the 13 Participants of this study. Despite the onslaught of colonization, these Values have served as a protective force against the impacts of colonization. Chapter six will also locate findings within the LLRIB Cree Medicine Wheel. While the LLRIB Cree Medicine Wheel addresses the virtues by which people live as in the Cree Tipi Teachings; it also offers the Culture, Skills and Pride important to community health.

## CHAPTER SIX - DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Introduction

When I set out on this study, the intent was to find out how the dwelling places of the Woodland Cree People of Northern Saskatchewan were built to reflect the Values of our Ancestors and teach these Values to the next generations. I chose the Plains Cree Tipi Teachings, grounded in a matriarchal orientation, as the framework for my investigation because this resonated for me as a Woodland Cree woman. I found that the Tipi Values were certainly reflected in the Stories of Participants; however, the matriarchal ideals of Tipi life did not align with what were revealed to be more egalitarian notions of house and home in Woodland Cree society. The trapline life of the Boreal landscape, and the dwelling places associated with it, dominated the interviews, but more importantly, the Love of family and Kinship ties permeated the Stories. In this last chapter I will elaborate the significance of this research, its theoretical, substantive, and methodological contributions, respectively. In the final pages I discuss my plans for dissemination, advance some ideas for ongoing research, and consider practical implications for the housing and education portfolios of my community. I conclude with more personal reflections on this research journey, closing the Storytelling circle that opened this thesis.

### 6.2 Theoretical Contributions

The Cree Tipi Teachings are the foundational Values to self-governing systems of family and community in Cree society. While the Woodland Cree structures which were built pre-colonization were shaped as Domes and tipi-like *Migawaps* (Lee,2006) rather than in the style of Plains Cree tipis, the values represented by each of the Tipi poles (Obedience, Respect, Humility, Happiness, Love, Faith, Kinship, Cleanliness, Thankfulness, Sharing, Strength, Good Child Rearing, Hope, Protection, and Relationships) are consistent. Aside from growing up with these

Values myself, I first came upon these as Teachings in Joan Sanderson's study, *A Cree Way of Life: Plains and Parklands Perspectives* (1991), while I was working at the First Nations University of Canada. The meaning of each pole was described by Elders whom Sanderson had interviewed for her thesis project and their words of wisdom resonated with me. I found the Elders' explanations of the Values reflected in the Tipi poles to be rich in Spirituality and Cree philosophy.

A decade later, while working as a researcher on a health research collaboration with Beardy's & Okemasis Willow Cree First Nation near Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, I again came upon the Tipi Teachings, this time displayed on the ceiling in their high school. This First Nation is in the Parklands boundary between the Plains to the south and my Woodlands home to the north. I had been facilitating a series of focus groups on community well-being, and as I listened to the responses, I heard the Cree Tipi Teachings emerge in the conversations. I recognized the same Strengths in my own family and community as the Willow Cree Participants spoke of their experiences. I was reminded of the aspects of the Cree Tipi Teachings that the Elders were talking about in Sanderson's (1991) work. I was intrigued by the femininity of the Tipi structure (resembling a woman's skirt). As I read other descriptions by Woodland Cree scholars Elder Mary Lee (2006) and Dr. Herman Michel (2012) of Tipi-like structures called *Migawaps* and their experiences of *Migawap* life, I was heartened to see that they referred to the same Values of the Tipi Teachings with which I had wholly identified from the Plains Cree context. Based on this history, I was inspired to learn more about my home community and celebrate the vivacity of life in the houses and structures I remembered of my childhood as a Woodland Cree person of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. I presumed that Woodland Cree followed the same Cree Tipi

Teachings as the Plains and Parkland Cree, including the matriarchal grounding, and I planned this study based on these assumptions.

However, in my study, the stories of the 13 Woodland Cree members of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band revealed a more egalitarian rather than matriarchal orientation through which the Cree Tipi Values were expressed. Further, the mostly pre-1970s dwellings participants described, typically one-room cabins, were not centered in the way I had expected. The Stories I heard focus on the Love and rich life ways that took place not only in around these four walls, but also across the communities and lands of my People. Thus, the interviews took a different direction than originally proposed. Instead of exploring the notion of housing as an extension of femininity in relation to the Tipi structure, the Interviewees steered the conversation to talk in a relational way about their lives growing up in and around their trapline and rural community homes.

Nonetheless, the original objective of the study, which was to explore healthy personal/family and housing strategies that ensure (d) the Wholistic well-being of Woodland Cree Peoples living in the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, were still met. Questions about the ‘house’ or ‘houses’ were the entry point to our conversations, but the focus quickly turned to the idea of ‘home’, maintained through strong Kinship relationships as the foundation to Wholistic well-being. Importantly, however, these were not centered on, or representative of, any one gender, nor did the notion of over-crowding surface as a topic in the way space was used in the smaller one-room cabins. The Spirit of Loving Kinship once Shared in the single room circular Tipi or Dome- like structures followed the families into the square or rectangular shaped cabins. Here, the living quarters such as a one-room kitchen /living room, were transformed in the evenings to sleeping space, with bedding brought out at night and put away again in the morning. Three

generations of a family would share this space reflecting the values of a communal Kinship system. Newer, contemporary housing follows a Eurowestern nuclear family ethos with distinct rooms set aside specifically for sleeping with doors to close them from other spaces. A few of the Storytellers described these arrangements as isolating and disconnecting, with family members dispersing behind these doors rather than engaging in communal space. Ultimately, these contemporary structures are not as accommodating of potential for spaces to be transformed to accommodate ebbs and flows of Kinship living arrangements that are today captured in western literature as a problem of crowding with associated negative impacts on the health of inhabitants (Carrière, et al., 2017; Pahwa, et al., 2015; Perreault et al., 2020; Waldram et al., 2012).

Overall, the stories captured how Woodland Cree families create (d) reflections of themselves in their children through the interplays of home life. While they made mention of colonization practices that interrupted this interplay in contemporary housing rather than elaborating these impacts, Participants moved on to speak a language of current and future possibility for the co-re-creation of healthy families and communities within and between houses. The Stories are critical to understanding how resilient the Tellers were in finding joy as well as individual and community well-being no matter what the circumstances. Wholistic Health is a foremost Value outlined in the Medicine Wheel of the LLRIB (Figure 2) and is conveyed in the motto of their Education Unit as *kiskinwahamātotān*, which means ‘Teaching Each Other’.

Thus, while this study points to the importance of the Tipi Teachings Values for Woodland Cree, these now need to be placed in the context of the LLRIB Medicine Wheel, with its own set of Values, within which I would argue the Tipi Teachings are nested. The LLRIB

Medicine Wheel Values include Traditions not reflected in the Plains Tipi Teachings framework because they are grounded in the Boreal Forest land of the Woodland Cree:

**Values:** Respect for the Creator and all his/her creations, self-respect, independence, respect for others, beliefs, morals, customs, knowledge, language, wisdom, identity, honesty, trust, endurance, patience, sharing, self-discipline, learning, respect for the environment: wildlife, fish, land, water, air, plant life; medicine wheel: emotions, mental, physical, and spiritual (lrib.com).

These Woodland Cree Values are enacted across the four directions of Culture, Values, Skills, and Pride, which vitalize our identity, especially in the wake of colonization. What this looks like in practice can be drawn from the Stories of the 13 Grandparents in this study.

The Participants' Spiritual practices were largely grounded in the Anglican religion, although some respondents were revitalizing their Cree Spiritual Traditions. Thus syncretism, the blending of at least two Spiritual Traditions, was the choice of some who complemented the Cree Spirituality with the Anglican belief system. However, some lamented that Church attendance had fallen sharply over the years and yearned for the days that people attended Church every regularly each Sunday, instead of occasionally for funerals, weddings, and baptisms. Some of the Stories were of a Cree Spiritual nature with elements such as *Wesahkechak* and animal motifs embedded in them. Love for the Spirit of the land often came up as a topic of discussion.

The Emotional aspect of Wholistic Health was expressed in Love for the Creator, Love for the Land and its life-giving forces and Love for each other. In fact, Love permeated all anecdotes pertaining to Kinship, and Happiness was felt in the Stories told about family life. The Emotion of yearning for trapline life was drawn upon in recollections of a time when seasonal cycles determined the lifestyle of the people. When people talked about their homes they spoke of the Love and warmth they felt in these largely single room abodes compared to the draughty compartmentalized living quarters of modern-day housing. Some spoke of the loneliness they felt as bedroom doors shut out the family connections they enjoyed in communal spaces. Thus,

the colonized houses not only physically dislocated the Storytellers from Traditional houses made from the bounty of the land, but culturally dislocated them from their use of space.

Regardless of the type of housing people lived in, Love and Happiness was foundational to their tightly knit family systems.

In the Physical domain of Wholistic Health, the Storytellers invariably spoke of the Physical demands of living in Traditional housing. They spoke of hauling water and collecting firewood as childhood chores, as well as doing laundry by scrub boards and tubs. Erecting the cabins and shack tents also demanded Physical work and the men generally were responsible for building these. One Storyteller related how there was cultural significance in where the front door was placed in the Traditional Domes of the past and how he carried on that Tradition to Physically locate the doorway to the South in his present home. Clay was harvested both for chinking the log cabins and making outdoor ovens. In some capacity, every family member was charged with Physically contributing to the upkeep of the home. Thus, by extension, the home contributed to the Wholistic Health of the people.

In the Mental domain of Wholistic Health, all Beings were Gifted with the intelligence of Knowing who they are. The Floral and Faunal Beings were spoken with such reverence in the Stories as people related the Gifts of the land, lakes, and rivers in terms of water, food, clothing, and shelter. Traditional Knowledge of the terrain and waters was fundamental to the survival of the people. Medicinal Knowledge surfaced in most of the interviews. Roles of men and women were transferred to a modern economy as women in their care-giving capacities became human services workers, while men became attuned to industries such as logging and mining. All the Elders and Knowledge Keepers were cognizant of Traditional Knowledge and carried out the

customs and Values of the people in a modern context. Thus, to walk in the Ancestral footsteps of our Woodland Cree grandparents is to walk the path of Wholistic Health.

The Wholistic Health of the Woodland Cree encompasses not only the Spiritual, Emotional, Physical and Mental domains of Wholism, but can be understood in the strength-based activities and traditions that are taking place in Woodland Cree homes according to Culture, Values, Skills and Pride, a rich Medicine which connects the community. The cultural activities include language, seasonal gatherings, fishing, hunting, trapping, Oral Traditional Stories, Spirituality, and art. Values such Love, Sharing, Faith and Kinship as per the Cree Tipi Teachings shape the daily activities of the Storytellers. Historical and contemporary Skills are discussed within the context of Pride. Pride permeates all the interviews as the Storytellers chose topics that were of utmost interest to them.

Thus, it is the combined richness of Values represented in these two frameworks - the Tipi Teachings *and* the LLRIB Medicine Wheel – that encapsulate the dimensions of significance for a full understanding of how houses, and the homes into which they are transformed through Woodland Cree community and family life, connect where and how the People live with Wholistic Wellbeing.

### **6.3 Substantive Contributions**

This portrait of Wholism that is reflected in the combined dimensions and Values identified in the Tipi Teachings and LLRIB Medicine Wheel is not evident in most of the scholarly literature. This literature, summarized in chapter 2, elaborates research on the lifestyles of Indigenous Peoples in terms of home, house, and health, and is a largely Western body of research that has focused on the quantification of health disparities, framed through a view of houses as structures for sheltering its inhabitants. The findings are important, revealing



contemporary (colonized) housing for Indigenous Peoples as characterized by substandard building materials that lead to poor health outcomes (Adelson, 2005; Kovesi, 2012; Larcombe et al., 2012; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health [NCCA], 2010; NCCA, 2017; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples [SSCAP], 2015; Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC], 2013; Stats Canada, 2010). Rightly so, structural dimensions of housing remain a forefront issue in Indigenous communities (Jonathan, 2017, para.4), with research linking substandard and overcrowded structures to respiratory and other health diseases. A Western structural orientation, while important, provides limited perspective, especially for Indigenous peoples. We cannot be defined by these statistics alone. A gap exists in our understanding of the experience of houses as homes. Indigenous paradigms, grounded in wellness, emphasize harmonies between Physical and Spiritual dimensions of Being.

In undertaking this study, I was therefore motivated to show others that despite what the statistics show about the economic, social, political and health disparities of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, that we are a strong, resilient, successful, and happy group of People. I wanted to share fond recollections of my childhood and, as in the words of Danny Musqua, ‘dig up the Medicines’ or Teachings (Anderson, 2011, p.3) of our Knowledge Keepers and Elders. Although some of the Participants voiced their concerns about the impacts of colonization on our houses and homes, as well as the sovereignty and health of our people, they held Hope that through Cultural Teachings and a Wellness Centre Healing would return to those in need. Further, this research underscores for me personally that although members of my own extended family have endured poverty and substandard housing, these colonial housing systems do not prevent them from experiencing a positive, strong Woodland Cree identity. An examination of our home life through the lenses of the 13 Storytellers illustrates that in contrast to an impoverished and sickly

group of people; we are rich in Culture, Values, Skills and Pride, and despite the very real and important structural issues with our houses, enjoy Wholistic Health in our Love imbued homes.

The Values of the Cree Tipi Teachings and the LLRIB Medicine Wheel overlapped each other, but those of the LLRIB locate them in the Culture and Pride of the People. Together with Culture and Pride, LLRIB Values of Respect for Creator, regardless of Spiritual Tradition, Respect for the Land, and Respect for others, dominated the stories. Examples are reflected in descriptions of personal and family activities, Virtues, Customs, and Traditions by which the Storytellers live in their Boreal Forest Ancestral homelands. These are briefly elaborated in the following paragraphs.

The survival skills of Woodland Cree peoples required an intimate Knowledge of the terrain and waters. So intertwined were the resident's lives with the lakes and rivers that they organized their activities around six seasons. It was not safe to travel especially during the seasons of freeze-up and break-up. They would follow the water routes of the beaver and muskrats. Thus, the demands of the land and waters shaped the Culture of the people.

### ***6.3.1 Fishing***

Fishing was a key cultural component as Elders related how the economy shaped their lives. At an early age, children Obediently went about their daily chores and were taught how to care for siblings while their parents attended to tasks around the fish camp. As children grew older, they would engage in more complex tasks, such as cooking for the fish camp or 'making fish' (gutting and filleting the fish). Eventually, as young adults, children grew into the tasks of casting fishnets and loading the planes with fish. Fishing was not only a mainstay of their diet but became a source of income with the advent of commercial fishing.

### ***6.3.2 Hunting***

Hunting was another key activity central to Woodland Cree identity. Elders recalled learning as toddlers through observation as their parents and older siblings went about harvesting the fur bearing animals. In time, the young ones would learn to set traps for smaller game such as rabbits and prairie chickens. Some would learn to make Tobacco Offerings before they went on the hunt. As adults, they would follow strict Protocols about hunting only what they needed and being sure to Share the game with other community members.

### ***6.3.3 Trapping***

Trapping was usually a communal activity with small Kinship groups banding together in the bush to trap during the late fall and winter months. They mainly trapped beaver, muskrats and rarer pelts like mink and lynx. The pedestrian societies would canoe along the water's edge and make their way to La Ronge and the surrounding reserves such as Morin's Hill, Far Reserve and Kitsaki Reserve. The families would return by dog team or snowshoes to the village for Christmas and Easter Church services. Sometimes the women would stay behind the village if they were pregnant so that they would have easy access to the local midwife. All the 13 participants' lives were intertwined with trapline life in some way. Included in the harvesting of wildlife would be the tanning of the hides undertaken by the women.

### ***6.3.4 Sewing***

Women Participants recalled how sewing was an essential skill which has served them well into the present economy. Women oversaw making clothes and footwear out of hides and furs not only for their families, but for sale at the Hudson's Bay Company and Robertson's Trading Post. Today, their sewing skills include making business cards, Ribbon Skirts and Star Blankets. The art that Woodland Cree created was functional in nature, and everything from clothing to

household items such as birch bark baskets was adorned in art. Even equipment for the dog teams was sometimes decorated.

### **6.3.5 Culture**

Respect for the environment, as actualized through the seasonal activities described above, is the hallmark of Woodland Cree culture. Although there are numerous definitions of culture, the one by Barnouw (1985) succinctly captures how we find ourselves walking in the Ancestral footsteps of our Woodland Cree Grandparents: ‘a culture is the way of life of a group of people, the complex of shared concepts and patterns of learned behavior that are handed down from one generation to the next through the means of language and imitation’ (p.5). According to the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, the definition of culture encompasses the ‘Language, seasonal gatherings, fishing, hunting, trapping, tanning, survival skills, entertainment, music, dance, sports, oral traditional stories, community role modeling, legends, spirituality, art, history, cooking and transportation’(llribedu.com) of the Woodland Cree. These components of culture are community chosen, strength-based, activities and traditions which give rise to a strong Woodland Cree cultural identity.

### **6.3.6 Language**

Language, central to conveying the concepts of Culture, was spoken mostly in English during the Storytelling sessions. I forgot my Woodland Cree language upon leaving La Ronge at the age of five. All the Storytellers were fluent Cree speakers and were proud of their Mother Tongue. They used Cree to convey some concepts that were difficult to translate into English. Loss of language was often cited as a concern as Elders Hoped that future generations of children would continue to speak the Woodland Cree language. So important is the development of a Woodland Cree identity that the Education Portfolio has its own Cree Language and Culture Unit. Some of the Elders interviewed for this study were employees of the Cree Resource Unit. They mentioned

that Culture Camps were held and the six seasons of the land (break-up, spring, summer, fall, freeze-up and winter) guided the activities of the Culture Camps. The Cree language was used as much as possible and Valued in daily life. There was Hope that the younger generations would come to enjoy speaking Cree in the same way the Elders took delight in their Mother Tongue.

### **6.3.7 Summary**

Despite the negative influences of colonization, Storytellers chose not to dwell on these, directing our gaze towards the strength-based activities of Woodland Cree culture. The influence of residential schools, alcohol, welfare, substandard housing, theft of land, the Anglican Church and loss of Indian Status were discussed in passing, but for the most part Participants shared aspects of Woodland Cree life that they enjoyed the most. Relationships were of primary importance, whether they were relationships with their Higher Power, relationships with the bounty of the lands and lakes, or Kinship relationships. Thus, relationships constituted the Soul of the people and marked the kind of home they lived in, regardless of the materials used to build the dwelling. While colonization impacted the lifestyle of Woodland Cree people, their strong and powerful sense of cultural identity was such that the 13 Storytellers consistently portrayed the Culture, Values, Skills and Pride of their Nation as the Medicines which bound their personal, family, and community lives together.

Participants recollected the vibrant Kinship communities in which they were raised and yearned to go back to a Traditional lifestyle, as in *Kewatan* or 'let's go back', which is the name of one of the Culture Camps of the LLRIB. Many of the Knowledge Keepers and Elders are leaders at the land-based Culture Camps where students learn the Emotional, Physical, Mental and Spiritual Traditions of the Boreal forests, lakes and rivers. The trapline way of existence is conveyed to younger generations as mandated through the LLRIB Education Unit's Vision statement:

The education of our children is based on the culture, values, skills, and pride of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. Educational activities reflecting Woodland Cree culture and Cree language are to be integrated into the provincial curricula to provide the educational foundation from which the individual student can learn to live successfully and happily in any society. By providing educational experiences that interconnect the child's community, Cree language, history, and culture, the provincial curricula, and the world at large, our children will acquire the skills, knowledge, and strength to enable them to assume productive roles as adults. (llrib.com,2024)

It is my Hope that this dissertation, in its humble way, helps to realize the Vision described above. In analyzing the Stories of the 13 Participants, the Culture, Values, Skills and Pride of the LLRIB shine through their Teachings. According to the findings of this dissertation, these Elders and Knowledge Keepers lived successfully and Happily in their Woodland Cree societies, and in turn are culturally transmitting their Ways of Knowing in both home and school settings. Just as their Ancestors did, contemporary Elders and Knowledge Keepers maintain and actualize the strength based personal/family and housing activities and Traditions that ensured the Wholistic well-being of the Woodland Cree People living in the communities of Lac La Ronge, Stanley Mission, Grandmother's Bay, Sucker River, Hall Lake and Little Red River.

#### **6.4 Methodological Contributions**

The Storytelling approach was chosen as a method through which to understand how the Woodland Cree understood the Values inherent in the Indigenous health promotion of home life and housing. The literature on housing and health has been largely deficient in connecting positive health outcomes with housing, and in applying frameworks and methodologies not designed to capture these important dimensions of dwelling places. Wilson (2008) explains:

Many studies in psychology, human services and other social sciences conducted on Indigenous people- as opposed to those conducted *by* or *with* Indigenous people – focus on negative aspects of life as identified by outside researchers. In many of their conclusions, the studies identify 'problems' that are in need of further study (Dion, Gotowiec and Beiser, 1998; Novins et al., 1997). The research agenda is set from outside the community As Reynolds-Turton (1997)

concludes, the focus of these studies is on illness rather than health. One consequence of such studies, even though their intentions may have been good, has been the proliferation of negative stereotypes about Indigenous communities. (Wilson, 2008, pp. 16 -17)

Instead of focusing on the negative aspects of housing and health as in the previous research, I chose a Wholistic approach to delve into the question, ‘Would you please share with me, where you grew up and what it was like growing up in your house(s) and the values and customs your family followed in your homes?’ This Wholistic approach meant that I needed to look at the question by engaging in Ceremony as part of the research process. Anderson (2011), Archibald (2019), Kovach (2010), Makokis (2009), Sanderson (1991), Settee (2013) and Wilson (2008), all refer to connections they have with their Higher Power while engaging in their research as Knowledge Seekers. I also have been in a state of Ceremony since the onset of this research journey. Over the years, I have Prayed for guidance at Sweet Grass and Sage Ceremonies, Sweat Lodge Ceremonies, at a Sun Dance and four Medicine Camps. According to Wilson (2008) ‘Research by and for Indigenous peoples is a ceremony that brings relationships together’ (p.8). The relationships include Creator, Grandmother and Grandfather Ancestral Spirits, our Spirit Guides and Loved Ones departed. The relationships include the Land on which I gathered Medicines for Ceremony and the waters on which I floated in meditation on hot summer days. The relationships extend to the trees surrounding my house just as the trees surrounded the Domes, *Migawaps*, and cabins of my Kinfolk. Relationship in this Ceremonial research embraces the Kinships of not only my extended family, but the families of Participants not related to me except through LLRIB membership. I introduced myself to them as an LLRIB member, identifying my close family ties, thus opening the door to Storytelling research with people I had not known before the study took place. Kovach (2010) explains the importance of establishing relationships in Indigenous research:

Story and Indigenous inquiry are grounded within a relationship –based approach to research...In asking others to share stories, it is necessary to share our own, starting with self-location...For many active in Indigenous research, this comes naturally, as a part of community protocol. The researcher's self-location provides an opportunity for the research participant to situate and assess the researcher's motivations for the research, thus beginning the relationship that is elemental to story-based methodology. (p.98)

I began this research quest, and this thesis document, by writing a Story about being a little girl of four years old under the Loving care of my Grandparents, Lydia and Mathew Charles. I Shared the Story with my Uncle Miles Charles (Deceased) and my Aunt Frances Charles. I explained that I wanted to tell Stories about life growing up in Lac La Ronge and that I wanted to do research for a doctorate degree at the same time. They were both pleased with my Story about their parents and volunteered for the proposed study. As I wrote the research proposal and accompanying documents, I shared the information sheet, individual Storytelling consent form, Storytelling questions, transcript release form and audio/visual recording release form with my aunt and uncle to see if they easily understood the forms, as they were both fluent Cree speakers. I offered them gifts as proper Protocol and was quite fortunate to initiate my plans with them before the COVID pandemic arrived. At this time, before the COVID pandemic beginning in 2020, Frances had agreed to be my assistant in conducting Sharing Circles as an opportunity for Participants to review the transcripts and provide more Stories if they so chose. However, as the pandemic crept in, I had to alter plans and conduct a second round of Stories instead.

Initial and secondary interviews were conducted by telephone and recorded on my computer. Ideally, and according to my research proposal, I was to conduct the Storytelling interviews face to face and follow the community Protocols of Offering gifts of Tobacco and food in honour of the Storyteller's contribution to this research. These actions would have been consistent with Indigenous research methodology embedded in relationality. With the advent of



the pandemic and related public health measures, just as I was entering into data collection, I feared the study could not move forward as planned. I was, however, able to adapt the methods of data collection to a virtual rather than the face-to-face orientation which underpins Indigenous data collection methods. The key, I learned, is relationship.

A fortunate relationship had been formed with the LLRIB Cree Language and Culture Unit as a liaison between me and the Knowledge Keepers and Elders of the Band. This facilitated virtual connection to the Participants previously unknown to me. The Coordinator of the Cree Language and Culture Unit introduced the study to potential Participants on my behalf, providing information sheets and organizing a Microsoft Teams meeting where she introduced me to the Elders of the six communities of the LLRIB. With this trust and relationship bridged, the Elders were comfortable to ask me a few questions about the research and some expressed interest in participating in the study. Through this I was able to recruit seven Participants not related to me, and with whom I have no previous relationship. The other six, including my mother, are my relations.

In my approach to the Storytelling interviews I did not name the Values of the Cree Tipi Teachings framework that informed this study but followed the lead of the Participants in answering interview questions according to their interest and preference. The connections to the Tipi Teachings framework emerged in analysis. Not all the questions I had prepared to elicit Stories were always answered, as some Participants concentrated their Stories on trapline life rather than housing. This did not take away from the significance of the research, which was to celebrate Elders' recollections of the Values and survival strategies, which sustained them during a time of technological and social change, some of which was reflected in a transition to colonizer housing design during the mid-twentieth century. Their Stories highlighted strength-

based practices of home stewardship and positively expanded my perceptions of Woodland Cree identity. I came upon the Woodland Cree Medicine Wheel, which expanded my analysis of Woodland Cree life beyond the 15 virtues of the Plains Cree Tipi Teachings.

Four digital audio recording copies of each Storytelling interview were made. I kept one set for analysis. A second set was archived to secure Cloud storage where it will be kept for five years after the study is complete. A third set is housed at the Cree Language and Culture Unit of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band office to be owned and used by the Band. I mailed transcriptions of the Stories to the Storytellers and invited them to let me know if they accurately reflected our conversation. At Christmas time of 2023, I sent each Participant a Christmas card with a digital audio recording of the Storytelling interview. These practices of reciprocity with the LLRIB as a whole and with each individual participant are fundamental to relational Indigenous methodology and research as ceremony (Wilson 2008).

The methodology is emically centered through me as an individual Woodland Cree woman and through LLRIB, ensuring the meanings elicited have personal and collective resonance. This methodology addresses gaps identified in the literature. An emic grounding is also consistent with the practice of Storytelling as an Indigenous methodology. Storytelling is a Wholistic approach to research that incorporates Prayer, Emotion, Mental and Physical capacities to produce an experience which is meaningful to both the Storyteller and the Listener. This Indigenous methodology Honours the custom of the Oral societies who have been conducting research since time immemorial by opening our hearts and minds to the guidance of our Creator. Significantly, Indigenous methodology is also inclusive, respecting relationships with Western paradigms of Knowing and the meaningful and touching relationships I had with University Faculty and staff. Thus, I am also able to navigate important moments of etic insight

in relocating the significance of this study in a multi-paradigmatic context. While my study is deeply Indigenous in its theoretical, methodological, and substantive location, these are not exclusive but are transferable. Other peoples and places similarly grappling with issues of housing and home may find resonance in my conceptual and methodological journey to answer their own questions and uncover relevant insights for knowledge and intervention.

## **6.5 Dissemination, Practice, and Research Implications**

Walking in the footsteps of our Woodland Cree Grandparents alongside the Elders and Knowledge Keepers has been a profoundly enriching journey into a trapline way of life which bears influence on the LLRIB today. The Cree Tipi Teachings proved to be a useful framework by which to analyze the Storyteller's experiences as the Values of the Plains Cree are congruent to the Values of the Woodland Cree. Finding the Woodland Cree Medicine Wheel while writing this dissertation has been an affirmation of the Values that support a Wholistic society. The word *Kewetan* affirms that we find great strength in walking in the footsteps of our Woodland Cree Grandparents:

*Kewetan* means let's go back. That's what it means. We're teaching kids, let's not forget what was behind us, let's go back to some of the traditions that have been given to us by Elders from the past; let's not forget that, let's use them. (Miles D. Ratt)

In being a Knowledge Seeker of Woodland Cree ways of Knowing, I have practiced *Kewetan* and delved into the past experiences of 13 Storytellers and Knowledge Keepers who lived through a time of social and political change in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. I am using this Knowledge to illustrate how the Values of both Plains and Woodland Cree societies build toward Wholistic experiences of Being as individuals and communities. The Cree Values, foundational to Cree *Migawap* /Tipi teachings described in chapter two that underpin my research support the goals of the LLRIB:

To provide educational programs that will develop pride in our students, to provide educational programs that promote and uphold the traditional values of the members of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, and to restore and maintain Cree language and culture (llrib.com, 2024)

In developing this study, I anticipated that the dissemination of Knowledge and experience of those Teachings that support the Vision of the LLRIB will first be shared with community and potentially inform curriculum for the education of our children. As the Storytellers made clear through informal and formal means our Values are transmitted between the generations in all our dwelling places, which are distributed across our Woodland Cree lands in schools, houses, Culture Camps, and trap lines. I anticipate presenting findings at LLRIB Education and Health conferences, or at Elders' Gatherings and Culture Camps. This dissertation and findings are intended to inform a curriculum resource kit for kindergarten to Grade Twelve. In building a resource kit with community stakeholders, this study speaks to a recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), '10. iv. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities' (p.2). This dissertation, along with the Culture Camps and curricular activities of the LLRIB, are realizing this Call to Action. Alongside this community-based dissemination, plans are to publish findings in journal articles and/or a book, which may be useful for University Indigenous Studies courses.

## **6.6 Recommendations**

The findings of this study revealed that there is more to the life of First Nations Peoples than statistics indicate and literature portrays as marginalized populations. The findings illustrated that the 13 Participants of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band enjoy Wholistic Health as captured in their Woodland Cree Medicine Wheel. The following recommendations are aimed at suggestions for further study;

1. That the same study be carried out to include the communities of Hall Lake, Grandmother's Bay and Little Red River Reserve that had not participated possibly to COVID 19 Restrictions.
2. That a study be carried out that looks at how the Woodland Cree Medicine Wheel is developed in each of the six communities of the LLRIB.
3. That a study explores the perceptions of cultural identity among the Woodland Cree of the LLRIB.
4. That a study identifies matriarchies in Cree society and if the Woodland Cree carry any such characteristics.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

Much of the literature on housing focuses on the impact of substandard housing on the poor health outcomes of the inhabitants. Most research on dwellings is primarily concerned with the relationship between housing and physical health (WHO, 2018). Research does not ask inhabitants to speak from the heart on what they enjoy about homes; rather it separates the person from the house and rates all the negative characteristics of the built environment. However, there have been some publications that extend beyond the structural concerns of houses and integrate the social mores and cultural appropriateness of the inhabitants into the design (Boutilier, 2013, Chagni, 1998, Homeward Trust, 2015, Northern and Aboriginal Health Research Group, 2016). Just as the Lac La Ronge Indian Band Participants expressed their desire for more communal space in their living quarters, other Indigenous groups such as the Torres Strait Islander First Nations of Australia and the Māori of New Zealand were noted in the literature for the importance of Kinship consideration in their space (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024, Reweti & Severinsen, 2022). In Canada, the Dene of northern

Manitoba (Larcombe, et.al., 2020) and the Inuit of Baker Lake ( Baron, et.al., 2020) similarly prefer living space which is conducive to their land-based environments.

This dissertation goes beyond the discussion of the impact of substandard housing on the Woodland Cree of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band and instead develops the ideals by which Band members chose to discuss about life within and around their homes. The over-arching question I asked participants in this study, ‘Would you please share with me, where you grew up and what it was like growing up in your house(s) and the values and customs your family followed in your homes?’ revisits Wholistic strategies that ensured the survival of Indigenous Peoples in Saskatchewan for millennia. Their answers are the Medicine by which the community thrives. The Values imparted by the Storytellers were framed within the context of the Plains Cree Tipi Teachings as well as those Values identified in the Woodland Cree Medicine Wheel. They were Proud of the Skills that they had developed in response to trapline life and a modern economy. They related how colonization impacted their ways of life, yet they held dear to them their languages, Customs, and Traditions. Balancing the Spiritual, Emotional, Physical and Mental domains of self leads to Wholistic well-being, reflected in the healthy decisions and practices that Indigenous peoples carry out in their homes.

The Medicine Wheel of the LLRIB is a path which our Ancestors followed. In exploring the path through this research, we are walking in the Ancestral footsteps of our Woodland Cree Grandparents. The Woodland Cree language figured predominantly in the discourse of the Storytellers for it carries with it the philosophical underpinnings of the Culture. Culture was shaped by the six seasonal gatherings which determined activities such as fishing, hunting, trapping, and tanning. The six seasons determined the survival skills especially around the lakes

and rivers. The influence of these six seasons on the lives of my maternal family began this research story.

I now Offer this research Story to my son Matthew, daughter-in-law Andrea Still, and my grandson, Logan Martin Nelson. I want you to know the Happy childhood I experienced while under the care of Kokum Lydia and Mooshum Mathew Charles. I want you to feel the Love that flowed in and among our relatives like the hues of the northern lights. I want to affirm that Respect and affinity you have with Nature is a Spiritual experience. I want you to know the Sharing and Generosity that our People practice is an act of Love and means of survival. This research Story was inspired by Pride I hold for our People and the rich Culture of the Woodland Cree. I Hope this research Story enhances your sense of Pride in a rich Indigenous cultural identity. It is one of my ways of *kiskinwahamātotān* which means ‘Teaching Each Other’. Thank you for joining me in this Ceremony.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1. Information Sheet

Appendix 2. Individual Story Telling Consent Form

Appendix 3. Story Telling Questions

Appendix 4. Transcript Release Form

Appendix 5. Audio/visual Recording Release Form

Appendix 6. Letter from Chief and Council

Appendix 7. Ethics Approval

## APPENDIX 1- INFORMATION SHEET

**Title of Study: Standing in the Matriarchal Footsteps of our Cree Ancestral Grandmothers**  
**INFORMATION SHEET**

**Graduate Student Researcher:**

Kathleen McMullin, University of Saskatchewan [\[e-mail address\]](#) xxx-xxx-xxxx

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Sylvia Abonyi, University of Saskatchewan [Sylvia.abonyi@usask.ca](mailto:Sylvia.abonyi@usask.ca) 306-966-2194

**Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?**

You are invited to participate in this research study because you are an Elder or Knowledge Keeper of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band.

The study is collecting local stories that will help us to better understand how Woodland Cree people of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band experienced living in traditional home built houses or cabins and the traditional culture, values, pride and skills that Elders and Knowledge Keepers would like to see passed on.

Before you make a decision about participating, I will go over this form with you. You are encouraged to ask questions if you feel anything needs to be made clearer. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

**What is the reason for doing the study?**

Much of the information written about Indigenous peoples in the past has been negative. There are stereotypes of people relying completely on the government for basic needs of food, clothing and shelter and that women did not share equal social status with men.

The purpose of this study is to highlight strength based practices of building and taking care of homes, share stories of independence, and celebrate women's places of honour alongside men in Cree society. If we can walk in the footsteps of our Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and hear their stories of the path ways that they followed, we are gifting generations not yet born with the culture, values, pride and survival skills necessary to living well.

As a member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, I am conducting this study as part of a Doctor in Philosophy degree in Health Sciences, College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan.

**The main objective of this study is to :**

- 1) Explore healthy personal/ family and housing strategies that ensure(d) the holistic well-being of Woodland Cree Peoples living in the Lac La Ronge Indian Band and its other five communities of Stanley Mission, Grandmother's Bay, Sucker River, Hall Lake, and Little Red River, Saskatchewan.
- 2) Understand the interconnection between women and their Migawaps or Tipis and homes.

**Chief and Council**

At a meeting of Chief and Council on February 21, 2010, Motion 212 was moved by Councilor John P. Roberts and seconded by Councilor Kenny Ratt to approve the request from Kathleen McMullin to perform Elder interviews on LLRIB reserves for her thesis. All ten people who were present voted in favour and the motion was carried.

**What will you be asked to do?**

1. Individual story sharing visit: conducted with each of the 24 participants at a time and place most comfortable to each person

2. Sharing Circle at the LLRIB Community Hall: to review findings, you are also invited to share more of your stories if you like, and share ideas for curriculum resource development. (I will provide transportation which allows for physical distancing, masks and sanitary gel).

The Sharing Circle is not anonymous or confidential as it will be audio recorded and the recordings will be stored at the Cree Language and Culture Unit.

### **Guiding Questions:**

You will be asked the questions on the attached question sheet.

Before the Sharing Circle at a later date, you will be provided with a transcript of your story sharing visit so that you may check them for accuracy, edits, deletions, or additions and return them to me two weeks after receiving the transcripts. If the deadline is missed, I may assume that you are fine with me using your transcript. The person transcribing the transcript will sign a confidentiality agreement.

At Sharing Circle, you will be given a list of themes that emerged from your sharing circle transcript. The attached questions will be reviewed with Circle members in case there are more stories that anyone would like to add. I may have more questions to probe with you after reading your stories. I will create a PowerPoint presentation and a summary of themes to reflect with the group.

As you can see this will take two visits of about one to two hours each. Please feel free to ask questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study and your role.

### **What are the risks and discomforts?**

Some memories may seem difficult and can make you feel uncomfortable, and we will have supports in place. Either the Research Assistant who is a local Elder or myself are available for one-on-one consultation and a list of local clinics will be provided at request. The two visits may be longer than one hour each and may make you tired or uncomfortable.

### **What are the benefits to me?**

You may not get any personal benefit from being in this research study.

By participating in this study, you may learn more about your family and community history.

This research will conclude with audio visuals, articles and a curriculum resource kit designed to maintain or rekindle the fire of cultural values that warm our homes, the pride and skills with which homes were/ are built.

### **Do I have to take part in the study?**

Being in this study is your choice. If you decide to be in the study, you can change your mind and stop being in the study before recording of your story and the Sharing Circle.

### **Can my participation in the study end early?**

On the scheduled day, you may withdraw from this study before your storytelling interview is recorded and at the transcript review stage which happens at the Sharing Circle. You do not need to provide a reason for withdrawing.

However, once your story is included in the thematic analysis, your information cannot be removed.

You may also withdraw from the Sharing Circle; but what you already contributed will remain a part of the study as it has been audio recorded for the Cree Language and Culture Unit.

If you do not want to take part in the group Sharing Circle, I can do an individual Sharing Circle with you.

### **Will my name be kept confidential?**

Because some story tellers may want to be credited for their contributions to the project, their names will be honoured. However, at the individual storytelling interviews, the confidentiality of participants who do not want their names disclosed will have their data protected by a pseudonym (false name) to indicate the participant. Any names or communities identified by the anonymous participant will be identified by alias. Upon request, transcripts and analysis will be provided to the non-identified participant before any reports or publications are disseminated

### **Where will my information be stored?**

The recordings will be transported in a locked briefcase and the recordings will be stored in a locked safe at my locked home office. Electronic data will be stored on my password protected computer during analysis, but moved to a USask system (One Drive) for five years. Names cannot be kept anonymous or confidential at the Sharing Circles as they are being video-recorded with other participants and the audio recordings will be kept at the Cree Language and Culture Unit.

### **What will happen to my data?**

For your individual storytelling interviews, the main purpose is for this research, but I will also be asking you if you wish to have your data as part of the Cree Language and Culture Unit that will be accessible to the community. For the Sharing Circles, those will be video recorded and also put in the Cree Language and Culture Unit.

### **Who will have access to the consent form, transcripts, audio files or video files?**

Dr. Sylvia Abonyi, the Cree Language and Culture Unit, and I will have access to the consent forms, transcripts, audio files or video files.

### **Do I have to be audio/visually recorded?**

For the individual story telling session, it is your choice to have the camera shut off or your image and voice blocked. Instead, written notes without your name will be taken. For the Sharing Circle, it is necessary to be recorded due to the relational nature of circle talks; therefore consent needs to be granted beforehand. Should you choose to have an individual Sharing Circle with me, it is your choice to have the camera shut off or your image and voice blocked. Instead, written notes without your name will be taken.

### **What will it cost me to participate?**

Your participation in this research project will not involve any additional costs to you. Compensation is not dependent on completion of the project.

### **Will I be compensated to be in the research?**

An honorarium of \$60 and ceremonial gift will be provided at each of the two visits; the storytelling interview and the Sharing Circle.

### **What if I have questions?**

If you have any questions about the research now or later, please contact Kathleen McMullin at telephone number (306) 960-3238.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan at 306-966-2084.



## COVID 19 PROTOCOLS

**Before meeting** with me and my assistant on the day of our individual storytelling visit or sharing circle, you will be phoned and asked the following questions:

Have you experienced any of the following in the past 14 days?

- Fever of 38 Celsius or greater on prior to visit
- New or worsening respiratory symptoms **not attributable** to seasonal or environmental allergies such as cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, sore throat, runny nose?
- New onset of symptoms including chills, aches and pains, headache, loss of sense of smell or taste, diarrhea, nausea/vomiting, loss of appetite, fatigue or weakness, acute functional decline (including falls), acute confusion?

In the last 14 days have you:

- Traveled outside of Canada?
- Been identified by Public Health as a close contact?
- Had close (within 2 meters or six feet) or prolonged contact with a confirmed /probable case of COVID-19 without proper Personal Protection Equipment?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, I will contact you in 14 days to reschedule another visit.

**On the way to the** individual storytelling visit or sharing circle, if you choose to have me transport you, you can expect the following protocols:

- You will be provided with a mask and hand sanitizer
- You will sit in the back of the car on the passenger (right) side of the vehicle

**At the** individual storytelling visit or sharing circle, the following protocols will be followed:

- All attendees will be wearing masks and have sanitized their hands
- Chairs will be in a circle at least two meters apart
- Table surfaces and chairs will be sanitized
- Nutrition snacks will be individually wrapped and prepackaged. Beverages will be served in disposable containers.

**APPENDIX 2 - INDIVIDUAL STORY TELLING CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Study: Standing in the Matriarchal Footsteps of our Cree Ancestral Grandmothers**

**CONSENT FORM ONE – INDIVIDUAL STORY TELLING SESSION**

**Graduate Student Researcher:**

Kathleen McMullin, University of Saskatchewan [Kathleen.mcmullin@sask.ca](mailto:Kathleen.mcmullin@sask.ca) 306-960-3238

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Sylvia Abonyi, University of Saskatchewan [Sylvia.abonyi@usask.ca](mailto:Sylvia.abonyi@usask.ca) 306-966-2194

Assistant

	Yes	No
Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you understand that you are free to leave the study before or during the recording, without having to give a reason?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you want your name kept confidential?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you want to be audio recorded?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you want to be visually recorded?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you understand who will have access to your transcripts?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you know what will happen to your audio and video files?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you want a copy of your transcript?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you want to review your transcript?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Who explained this study to you?		
<hr/>		
I agree to take part in this study:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like my transcripts returned to me at the address below	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Signature of Research Participant		
<hr/>		
(PrintedName) _____		
Date: _____		
Signature of Witness		
Your address for return of transcripts (email or post office box)		


## **APPENDIX 3 - STORY TELLING QUESTIONS**

**Title of Study: Standing in the Matriarchal Footsteps of our Cree Ancestral Grandmothers**

**QUESTIONS**

**Graduate Student Researcher:**

Kathleen McMullin, University of Saskatchewan [Kathleen.mcmullin@sask.ca](mailto:Kathleen.mcmullin@sask.ca) 306-960-3238

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Sylvia Abonyi, University of Saskatchewan [Sylvia.abonyi@usask.ca](mailto:Sylvia.abonyi@usask.ca) 306-966-2194

Assistant

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Past:

1. Would you please share with me, where you grew up and what it was like growing up in your house(s) and the values and customs your family followed in your homes?
2. Was there a difference in female /male influences in the design of your home?
3. Was there a change in your family life when you moved from one room cabins or smaller dwellings to houses with more rooms? (Probe female/male power structure, e.g. tipi is a female structure to 'a man's home is his castle)
4. How did people take care of each other in times of sicknesses such as tuberculosis? (Probe female /male experiences, who took care of the sick)
5. How did residential schools impact your home and family life?

Present:

6. What does house and home mean to you? Is there a difference?
7. What do you like about your house?
8. Would you please share with me, how you create your home as a place of health and well-being?

Future:

9. What would you change about your house?
10. What is your vision of an ideal house and how would it reflect your values?

**APPENDIX 4 - TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM**

**Title of Study: Standing in the Matriarchal Footsteps of our Cree Ancestral Grandmothers**

**TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM**

**Graduate Student Researcher:**

Kathleen McMullin, University of Saskatchewan [Kathleen.mcmullin@sask.ca](mailto:Kathleen.mcmullin@sask.ca) 306-960-3238

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Sylvia Abonyi, University of Saskatchewan [Sylvia.abonyi@usask.ca](mailto:Sylvia.abonyi@usask.ca) 306-966-2194

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal story in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal story with Kathleen McMullin. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Kathleen McMullin to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of  
researcher \_\_\_\_\_



**APPENDIX 5 - AUDIO/VISUAL RECORDING RELEASE FORM**

**Title of Study: Standing in the Matriarchal Footsteps of our Cree Ancestral Grandmothers**

**AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING RELEASE FORM for STORYTELLING INTERVIEW**

**Graduate Student Researcher:**

Kathleen McMullin, University of Saskatchewan [Kathleen.mcmullin@sask.ca](mailto:Kathleen.mcmullin@sask.ca) 306-960-3238

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Sylvia Abonyi, University of Saskatchewan [Sylvia.abonyi@usask.ca](mailto:Sylvia.abonyi@usask.ca) 306-966-2194

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby grant permission to Kathleen McMullin, the rights of my image, in video or still, and of the likeness and sound of my voice as recorded on audio video tape without payment or any other consideration. I understand that my image may be edited, copied, exhibited, published or distributed. I consent to the following:

Photographic, audio or video recordings may be used for the following uses which include:

1. Only to help me with my analysis and research purposes Yes  No
2. To be used in the following circumstances Yes  No 
  - Presentations;
  - Courses;
  - Online/Internet Videos;
  - Media;
  - News (Press);
3. For inclusion in the Cree Language and Culture Unit for public use Yes  No

By signing this release, I understand this permission signifies that photographic or video recordings of me may be electronically displayed via the Internet or in the public educational setting.

I will be consulted about the use of the photographs or video recording for any purpose other than those I have consented above.

There is no time limit on the validity of this release nor is there any geographic limitation on where these materials may be distributed.

This release applies to photographic, audio or video recordings collected as part of the sessions listed on this document only.

By signing this release, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to be bound thereby. I hereby release any and all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material for educational purposes.

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address/P.O. Box \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Province \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX 6 - LETTER FROM CHIEF AND COUNCIL**

Sanderson <asanderson@llrib.ca>  
Fri 2020-03-06 3:13 PM

- McMullin, Kathleen;
- Gladys Christiansen <gchristiansen@llrib.ca>

□

**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the University of Saskatchewan. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe. If in doubt, please forward suspicious emails to [phishing@usask.ca](mailto:phishing@usask.ca)

Hi Kathleen:

For your information and records.

3) Kathleen McMullen to interview elders on reserve.

**MOTION: 21/02/2020 – 212**

**MOVED BY: COUNCILLOR JOHN P. ROBERTS**

**SECONDED BY: COUNCILLOR KENNY RATT**

**To approve request from Kathleen McMullen to perform elder interviews on LLRIB reserves for her thesis.**

**10 in Favor**

**0 Abstention**

**0 Opposed**

**Motion Carried**

If you have any questions or concerns please call this office.

*Anna Sanderson*

**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

**EMAIL: [asanderson@llrib.ca](mailto:asanderson@llrib.ca)**

**TEL: 306-425-1168**

**FAX: 306-425-3578**

**CELL: 306-420-8187**

**APPENDIX 7 - ETHICS APPROVAL**



Beh ID 2496  
Certificate of Approv

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) 02-Jun-2021

## ***Certificate of Approval***

Application ID: 2496

Principal Investigator: Sylvia Abonyi Department: Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit

Locations Where Research

Activities are Conducted: Stanley Mission, Lac La Ronge, Grandmothers Bay, Sucker River, Hall Lake, Little Red River

Student(s): Kathleen McMullin

Funder(s):

Sponsor: University of Saskatchewan

Title: Standing in the Matriarchal Footsteps of our Cree Ancestral Grandmothers

Approved On: 02-Jun-2021

Expiry Date: 02-Jun-2022

Approval Of: Behavioural Research Ethics Application

Project Information Sheets (individual interviews, sharing circles)

Consent Forms (individual interviews, sharing circles)

Interview Questions

Transcript Release Form

Audio/Video Recording Release Form

Confidentiality Agreement

Recruitment Script

Recruitment Poster

Acknowledgment Of: Motion of Approval for project by LLRIB

TCPS2 Core Tutorial Certificate (McMullin)

Review Type: Delegated Review