

**THE SEVEN FIRES:  
THE LIFELONG PROCESS OF GROWTH AND LEARNING  
AS EXPLAINED BY SAULTEAUX ELDER  
DANNY MUSQUA**

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents a general overview of human development from the perspective of an Aboriginal worldview through the teachings of Elder Danny Musqua. This paper is an attempt to provide a summary guideline of these teachings - and not a comprehensive explanation - surveying seven primary stages of human development that constitute the totality of this knowledge base. The knowledge and practice of human development from this perspective is so vast and complex that it would require years of exhaustive study and research to adequately represent this body of knowledge in a comprehensive way. After all, Aboriginal people have acquired this knowledge from childhood through the lifelong process of experiential learning and the oral tradition. Articulating this knowledge in written form is a new and challenging approach.

This understanding of human development stems from pre-contact knowledge systems which existed in North America that are as complex and vast as any other traditions of learning in the world. Sharing in this way is timely as enormous and vast amounts of knowledge have been lost in other areas under the impact of modern technology.

The oral tradition is the research methodology employed for the purpose of this project. The oral tradition is an age-old process for transmitting and preserving the knowledge of a people and, in the Aboriginal world, is still considered an important guide to learning.

There are a variety of reasons that have made this project seem purposeful, such as the endorsement of Aboriginal knowledge and the methods and principles for sharing that knowledge in the education process; the validation of a subjugated, experiential based knowledge; an Elder as a primary source in the acknowledgement of the oral tradition as research methodology; the development of a resource that can be used for education and research purposes; and the development of a forum in which the Elder's vital role as teacher and guide can be shared in a contemporary way.

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### **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to Elder Danny Musqua, his wife Thelma, their children and grandchildren, and to the memory of Healing Bear and Morning Light Hunter.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

For a significant part of my life, I grew up with a lack of understanding, and therefore, appreciation for Aboriginal culture and traditions. Schooling in my youth did little to expand my knowledge in that regard. In the town that I grew up, there were no residents of Aboriginal ancestry although we were aware of the existence of the neighboring reservation and the difference in lifestyle that accompanied membership there. As fate would have it, my life's journey brought me into full contact with Aboriginal society through membership by marriage. Committed to raising my children with appreciation of their cultural heritage from both parental backgrounds, our family welcomed opportunities to learn about the traditions of our people. We attended most of the usual gatherings that families attend, as well as some, such as pow wows and rain dances, that were very specific to the culture. A significant milestone in this path of learning occurred when we met various Elders, Danny Musqua being one of them. I do not remember the date when I first met him, but do remember how I was immediately impressed with the oratorical skill that he possessed along with the great knowledge that he had acquired. It was he who shared information through stories and first introduced us to the experiential learning through participation in ceremonies that he conducted. Through this experience, in ceremony, he adopted my family and me in the traditional way of the Bear Clan.

This aspect of learning has made a great contribution to my life in that I have been able to complement my teachings in graduate study in Western society with the teachings attained through the Saulteaux learning traditions. I feel very fortunate in the direction my life has taken, the people I have come to know and respect, and the positive influence on my own personal development that membership in the Bear Clan has given me.

### **Background**

This paper presents a general overview of human development from the perspective of an Aboriginal worldview through the teachings of Elder Danny Musqua. This paper is an attempt to present a summary guideline of these teachings - and not a comprehensive explanation - surveying seven primary stages of human development that constitute the totality of this knowledge base. The knowledge and practice of human development from this perspective is so vast and complex that it would require years of exhaustive study and research to adequately represent this body of knowledge in a comprehensive way. After all, Aboriginal people have acquired this knowledge from childhood through the lifelong process of experiential learning and the oral tradition. This process of education is seen as a lifelong quest which requires patience, introspection, mistakes, sacrifices, and spirituality (Musqua, 1995). Historically and through tradition, the Elders facilitated this educational role and function as spiritual guides, mentors, and role models to their particular tribes (Wolfe, 1989).

Articulating this knowledge in written form is a new and challenging approach, as learning through human experience has always been the preferred way to obtain knowledge in Aboriginal cultures. This is so because the learning process is a personal journey, and requires not only the use of the mind, but also the use of the heart, body, and spirit of the individual. The individual's behavior and perception of the world is learned by observing the behavior of others and all aspects of nature, and doing what is necessary to become a better human being and a productive member of society.

It is timely to present this knowledge in this way as enormous and complex areas of knowledge could be lost forever under the impact of modern technology. This has occurred in other regions in a matter of one generation.

### **Brief Historical Context of the Education of Aboriginal People in Western Knowledge Systems**

The modern definition of education stands in sharp contrast to the traditional Aboriginal view, which centered on education as a natural process occurring during everyday activities. Within the traditional Western school, knowledge is treated not as a process but as what could be called an object or noun; that is, something without any particular activity or spirit of its own. Knowledge is generally treated as what is written in books, as an accumulation of facts and figures, events and dates (La France, 1988). The goal of Western education is to go through the curriculum, to have accumulated a certain body of knowledge, to have developed skills in memory, writing, mathematics, and to be able to arrange one's

thoughts in logical argument (La France, 1988). To the Aboriginal people of North America, the process of learning is an activity and an energy in its own right.

Knowledge about nature, about the meaning of our relationships with all living things, about a history that goes back for thousands of years, about the intuitive knowledge of one's environment, about the alliances and responsibilities to plants and animals, about ceremonies and stories, will also enter the whole being and cause a person to think and act in a profoundly different fashion. Knowledge is to have developed those skills necessary for survival of the group and oneself. Today, this responsibility to the group includes the ability to engage within the Western world and to develop, as lawyers, politicians, doctors, nurses, biologists, ecologists and scientists the skills necessary to protect the group and the environment.

Historically and through tradition, the Elders facilitated this educational role and function as spiritual guides, mentors, and role models to their particular tribes (Wolfe, 1989). Learning and teaching in the traditional view ensured cultural continuity and survival of the mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of the cultural unit and of its environment, the individual, the family, the community and the people as a whole. Quality education based on Aboriginal education methods ensured survival of Aboriginal peoples (Armstrong, 1987).

There is a prevailing view, however, among scholars and educators that Aboriginal principles are somehow inferior to modern principles. They have also been conditioned to assume that Aboriginal methods for preserving knowledge are unreliable or non-existent, which has rendered much of their knowledge of history

and cosmology invalid and, for the most part, useless for academic use (Knight, 1989). Further, Foucault (1980) states that some discourses, ways of thinking and producing meaning, have shaped and created meaning systems that have gained status and currency of truth, and dominate how we define both ourselves and our social world, while other alternative discourses are marginalized and subjugated. Through voicing and valuing these subjugated knowledges, critiques of societal institutions and practices can occur (Foucault, 1980; Cathro, 1993).

### **Impact of History**

The history of Aboriginal education is filled with examples of governmental attempts to eradicate Aboriginal languages and culture through education and to assimilate Aboriginal people. Written discourse about Aboriginal people, formal education, and schooling in Canada is all directed at definition and implementation of Aboriginal education in a societal context that has changed drastically over the last one hundred years. As part of the larger struggle for self-determination, the education system has come under examination.

For the majority of Aboriginal students, now as in the past one hundred years, Aboriginal education means the education of Aboriginals by non-Aboriginals using non-Aboriginal methods (National Education Association, 1983). While Aboriginal people are rapidly gaining institutional control of education, the need to conform to provincial and federal guidelines regarding curricula, test scores, and other trappings of modern education has prevented fundamental change

in the substance of education (Cajete, 1994). Teaching methodology, curricular content, and educational legislation are based on a worldview that prepares students with skills for competition in Western society. While many of these skills are necessary for success in today's society, the American society that they reflect is wrought with contradictions, prejudice, hypocrisy, narcissism, and unethical predispositions at all levels, including the schools (Cajete, 1994). There continue to be educational conflicts, frustrations, and varying levels of alienation experienced by many Aboriginal people because of their encounters with mainstream education. From the point of view of Aboriginal people, the issue is mainly political and cultural in that the schools have not been shaped or controlled by people of Aboriginal ancestry. Therefore, Aboriginal children have experienced dissonance between the culture of their family and upbringing and that of the schools. In addition, acts of racism and discrimination against Aboriginal people have damaged the ability of children to feel good about themselves and about participating in the schools (Indian and Metis Education, Background Paper, 1992). Courtney (1986) agrees that the main cause for educational failure of Aboriginal people is that they face educational programs and forms of instruction devised by the dominant society. Cummins (1989) is even more critical of the school opportunities provided for students from minority groups, particularly the lack of community participation in education. While most people are content to accept that the process of cultural assimilation of Aboriginal peoples is a recognized colonial historical fact, they are not equally disposed to accept the fact that this process has

not been arrested in contemporary schools (Battiste, 1993). The challenge for the present generation of educators and administrators is to address change in the areas of teaching methodology and curricular content that will embrace an Aboriginal knowledge base and process for sharing that knowledge.

Translating foundational traditional education principles into a contemporary framework of thought and description is not an easy task. This translation attempts to develop a contemporary, culturally based, educational process founded upon traditional tribal values, orientations, and principles, while simultaneously using the most appropriate concepts, technologies, and content of modern education (Cajete, 1994). Band-aid measures such as cultural content and language classes do not acknowledge and help students connect the cognitive and knowledge bases when their first language is not used as a medium of instruction, when culture is objectified not as a way of knowing and interacting, but as a noun to be understood, and when education is transmitting and not transforming (Battiste, 1993). Traditional education presents an anomaly for the prevailing objectivist theory and methodology of Western education. The mindset of objectivism, when applied to the field of Aboriginal education, excludes serious consideration of the relational reality of Aboriginal people, the variation in Tribal and social contexts, and the processes of perception and understanding that characterize its form and expression (Peroff, 1989).

Through education and healing, the effects of colonization are diminishing and First Nations communities are experiencing positive developments in many

areas. Aboriginal students are taking a keen interest in learning about their histories and traditions. There is growing interest in the information about Aboriginal culture and history and recognition of a unique and distinct Aboriginal worldview is emerging. Aboriginal worldview denotes a distinctive version of reality which not only interprets and orders the places and events in the experiences of people, but lends form, direction, and continuity of life (Beck & Walters, 1977). Worldview assists people to understand their relationship with their world, comprehend their function, recognize the communal purpose of their group, formulate an identity, feel connected to tradition, and to be part of a specific belief system with principles and values that are practices through culture (Beck & Walters, 1977).

### **Purpose**

There are a variety of reasons that have made this project seem purposeful, such as the endorsement of Aboriginal knowledge, and the methods and principles for sharing that knowledge, in the education process; the validation of a subjugated, or experiential based knowledge; the use of an Elder as a primary source in acknowledgement of the oral tradition; the development of a resource that can be used for education and research purposes; and the development of a forum in which the Elder's vital role as teacher and guide can be shared in a contemporary way. Elders such as Danny Musqua and Alex Wolfe, have endorsed the development of materials that will encourage students to learn more about their traditions. They



recognize that for many Aboriginal people, the old ways of passing knowledge on have deteriorated given the times that we live in today. They have supported the creation of this resource, not as a replacement of the traditional path, but as a way of raising awareness of the potential for traditional practices and beliefs to impact positively on individuals, communities, and societies and in order to preserve knowledge.

Many Elders are cognizant of the fact that information must be recorded in written form now as the oral tradition is no longer the primary form of learning for many young people. Today many things distract the listener and disrupt the storytelling. Radio, television, video, and printed material take precedence in the everyday lives of many children and adults in our present society (Wolfe, 1988). The Elders realize that preserving the oral stories in written form is a necessary step in order to preserve the knowledge base that has been passed on verbally. Alex Wolfe (1998) has affirmed that we must turn to a written tradition in order to support, not destroy, the oral tradition. Preservation of stories that contain history must be committed to a written form. "It is hoped that it will encourage Aboriginal educators and scholars to turn their attention to this traditional source of knowledge, and begin the long and arduous task of using it to develop a knowledge base of authentic Aboriginal history and philosophy that will be an original product of their academic institutions". (Knight, 1988). "Elders have endorsed the development of materials in order to encourage students to learn more about their ways. Raised awareness of the potential for traditional practices and beliefs to

impact positively on individuals, communities, and societies will entice students to take on the experiential learning that cannot be shared through a written form".

(Musqua, 1996).

The study will examine seven stages of human development, or "fires" as described by Elder Danny Musqua. The "fires" of human development encompass the lifelong journey of learning as described in Saulteaux oral traditions. The stages, or fires, include: conception and life in the womb; birth to walking; walking to seven years of age; little men and little women; young adult; adult development; and old age and death. In the Saulteaux tradition, human development is viewed in the context of an individual and personal lifelong learning process. This process of learning involves attainment of knowledge through experiential and oral teachings. The process includes four great dimensions of learning that constitute the path of human development: the mind, heart, body, and spirit that develop congruently in all phases of life. The teachings that Elder Danny Musqua shares view development as a lifelong learning process that is dependent on the attainment and incorporation of knowledge through the oral tradition and the seven disciplines of learning. This project will be based on the teachings Elder Musqua has shared through the oral tradition and participation in the ceremonies he has conducted. He has allowed his lectures on Saulteaux Human Development, that he teaches for the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College to be recorded for the purpose of the project.

## **The Oral Tradition as Methodology**

In this research project I seek to document Elder Musqua's knowledge of Saulteaux human development. This understanding of human development stems from pre-contact knowledge systems, which existed in North America that are as complex and vast as any other traditions of learning in the world. This knowledge is only one small but important aspect of that tradition. In examining this knowledge, not only its content will be observed but also the methods by which it is transmitted and the principles that were established by that knowledge system. The practice of the oral tradition is an age-old established learning system that has validity; is a discipline with standards; upholds guiding principles; has established methods; and includes memory development and language skill development.

The oral tradition is the methodology employed for the purposes of this project. The oral tradition is an age-old process for transmitting and preserving the knowledge of a people and, in the Aboriginal world, is still considered an important guide to experiential learning. Prior to proceeding with this project, and in keeping with the oral tradition, Elder Musqua's verbal permission to proceed with the project was obtained. The oral tradition is not to be confused with the Western concept of oral history, a method of gathering information and preserving historical information through recorded interviews with participants regarding past events and ways of life. Oral history methodology involves the selection of a research topic, and completing background research on the topic in order to familiarize oneself with the subject, development of an interview guide, selection of

appropriate subjects to interview, interviewing, and questioning for detail, clarification, or further information (Sitton et al, 1983). The oral tradition of Aboriginal peoples, in contrast, is a system of teaching and learning that identifies both a body of material retained from the past and a process by which information is transmitted from one generation to the next. It is regarded as a valid and authoritative aspect of Aboriginal learning traditions. The oral tradition embraces many areas of knowledge such as history, medicine, philosophy, and science, but in a traditional society, knowledge is holistic and enfolded and there is no concept of a topic such as "science" or "history" that is independent of other topics (La France, 1988). Western learning theory implies that the only way to gain true knowledge and understanding is to have objective intellectual awareness in which the observer does not allow his feelings or spirit to interfere with his observations. The oral tradition, however, embraces the physical and spiritual dimensions of life.

In oral tradition, the Elders are regarded as the keepers of knowledge and the teachers. They are generally recognized as having the authority to pass on knowledge and theirs is a prominent, vital, and respected role. They share wise counsel, advice, and guidance on community matters as well as spiritual issues. They participate in matters of economics, justice, politics, and social matters, and their voices carry great weight (Sun Bear & Wabun, 1986). Their genius was displayed in narration of past events. They [amassed] significant stories in their minds, unchanging, kept intact, entrusted to them through the years from one generation to the next. With the need for the past to be remembered, with the role

of the Old Men institutionalized and respected, they were respected repositories for the annals of the people (Goody & Watt, 1963). As Elder Ahenakew has stated, "It was the Old Men who were qualified to speak, for they had passed through most of the experiences of life. They would speak as fathers of the race, having tasted all that was of Indian life, its bitter and its good; they would speak with authority, for they knew all that they needed to know; and they use this privilege wisely, knowing their responsibility and the need that they filled in Indian life." Elder Alex Wolfe has also stated that, "Information and instruction were transmitted orally, in story form, by our old people. The use of the mind and memory were important in order listen attentively and to absorb that being relayed. The stories were told over and over again and the environment of the time held nothing to distract the listener and the story teller." Elder Musqua has also indicated that stories relate to certain times and occurrences and are related as part of experience-based information. That is the substance of the oral tradition, keeping the stories alive in the purest form possible. The important work of researching traditional Aboriginal approaches to growth, healing, balance, and the profound lessons of life requires the leadership, direction, and support of the Elders.

Stories are powerful tools in transmitting knowledge, particularly for Aboriginal people who traditionally rely on the power of the story and the oral tradition to pass cultural knowledge from generation to generation. There are many genres or types of stories including histories, creation stories, humorous stories, and ceremonial stories (Johnston, 1982). While some people believe that story is a

simplistic matter of cultural transmission, it is quite the contrary. Stories, unlike the explicit writings of Western academia, can be interpreted on a number of literal and symbolic levels and are, therefore, found to be simple, yet complex. Literal interpretation takes words in their usual or basic meaning. In symbolic interpretation the words stand for or represent an idea, quality, condition, or other abstraction. Therefore, the listener is responsible for making his or her own meaning which is often determined by the position of the learner's own developmental growth. As a result, the oral tradition contains many levels of knowledge whose deeper meanings can only be understood when the proper time for the learner has arrived (Relland, 1998). For this reason stories are repeated many times and the listener is expected to be respectful and listen each time the story is offered. Listeners are encouraged to draw their own inferences from stories in order to foster individuality and self-growth.

Principles and methods observed in the attainment of knowledge through the oral tradition include the establishment of a close, personal relationship between the Elder and his or her student. Permission from the Elder is granted to proceed with the learning. Tobacco is offered to the Elder, as both a sacrificial and respectful gesture, to acknowledge the spirit and to express a sincere desire to learn. The foundation of research through the oral tradition is respect. To the degree the researcher respects the people or community with whom one is doing research, they can truly begin to understand the experienced reality, the actual life, of that person or community (Katz, 1986). Listening, patience, memory, trust, purpose,

flexibility, and respect are principles observed by the student. Recognizing the need to learn is essential as acting like one already knows the answer cuts communication. Elders do not force their will on listeners nor do they confront them with concepts they are not yet prepared to understand. For this reason, interpretation lies in the hands of the listener whose responsibility is to derive meaning, leaving the story open to interpretation. To listen to an Elder one must first learn to create an active stillness and silence in which the Elder's words may enter. Elders share a moral ethic of telling only what they know and speaking from the heart. They are also careful in sharing information with people from whom they feel genuine interest and respect. For this reason, patient and careful listening to what is being said is important because that is all the Elder is prepared to share. To say any more would violate his/her standards. Questioning by Western standards to draw out further information or in order to confirm a preconceived idea is inappropriate in researching through the oral tradition. That is not to say that questions are inappropriate. When the researcher asks something they really need to know and accept the limited response the other may wish to maintain, that inquiry can be respectful (Katz, 1986).

This project will focus on the teachings that Elder Danny Musqua has attained and shared through the oral tradition. He teaches a class on Saulteaux Human Development (Social Work 421) for the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. With his permission, the lectures from this class have been tape recorded for the purpose of this project. Twelve tape recordings, one for each class, have

been transcribed. Initially, help was recruited to transcribe three of the tape recordings. I found, however, that it was beneficial to transcribe them personally as this provided an opportunity to listen to the lectures. I was familiar with a significant portion of the content already, based on having heard Elder Musqua speak of these topics while visiting in my home or in the learning lodge, where days were spent together in order to learn. I have asked Danny to speak personally, in parts where he has been distracted by questions from his class and has not returned to the original concept he was presenting, in order to complement the tape-recorded material.

There are several styles of transcribing tape-recorded information and decisions on types of transcripts to prepare are based on the needs of the user. The ideal transcript is an accurate verbatim reflection of the content, preserving as much of the quality of the interview and the uniqueness of the speaker as possible. It should also be easy to read and understand (Davis et al, 1977). In transcribing Elder Musqua's words, I have attempted to apply the rules of grammar and punctuation that apply to written language while retaining the essential and desirable qualities of spoken language. In this way, I have tried to maintain Elder Musqua's voice. Steps in the process of transcribing have included: typing an accurate verbatim transcript of the lectures and stories (stories told during lectures to emphasize content); reflecting the conversational quality of Elder Musqua's spoken language and individuality; rearrangement of words in order to improve the transcript's clarity and readability; correcting false starts and repetitions; deletion of



false starts and repetitions; omission of pauses such as stammering and habitually used words like "but", "you know", "anyway", etc.; and punctuation for clarity of meaning. In the final edited copy presented in this paper, I have attempted to present a transcript that clearly conveys the speaker's meanings and reads smoothly enough that the reader can understand it without having to stop and reread. At the same time, it is my hope that the casual spoken quality of Elder Musqua's language and individual speech patterns have been maintained.

The Aboriginal copyright system is a generally accepted, unwritten law in Aboriginal societies that always and publicly acknowledges the source of knowledge including songs and stories that belong to individuals, families, and nations. In keeping with this tradition, and as a part of doing research through the oral tradition, I acknowledge that the following text contain Elder Musqua's teachings and are the transcribed version of his words. It is not my intention to include my own interpretation and, therefore, I have not added to nor elaborated on any of the text.

## **Chapter 2: An Introduction To Elder Musqua's Teachings**

### **Elder Musqua's Teachings**

**From this point the transcriptions of Elder Danny Musqua's stories are presented. This section of the paper is broken into the seven "fires" of development which were described earlier, as well as introductory components which describe the Saulteaux world view from which human developmental knowledge stems.**

### **Introduction of Elder Danny Musqua**

Elder Danny Musqua, a Saulteaux Indian from the Keeseekoose First Nation in Saskatchewan, is a recognized and respected Elder throughout the province. He has been a farmer for most of his life, combined with periods of work in the process of developing First Nations governmental structures. His extensive knowledge of Aboriginal history and culture has been recognized by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities alike. This recognition has resulted in attainment of an Honorary Doctorate of Laws degree from the University of Saskatchewan and many requests for consultation and teaching at both local and international forums. Presently, Elder Musqua is employed by the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan where he lectures and provides counsel to both students and faculty. The word for Elder Musqua's

people is Naconiniwak which means “the middle of the road.” The name was given to the Saulteaux people by the Cree as a result of the strong alliance between them that developed through intermarriage. Although a combination of Cree and Ojibway heritage, the Saulteaux people maintain a distinct cultural identity of their own, from which Elder Musqua's knowledge stems. As a member of the Bear Clan, which is the policing or warrior clan, he carries the responsibility of maintaining the history of the people through the oral tradition. I have known Elder Musqua for many years and through this relationship became an adopted daughter in the Saulteaux way. I have been able to learn about the Bear Clan teachings and other aspects of Saulteaux history and culture through informal discussions, storytelling, and participation in the Learning Lodge and Sweatlodge ceremonies. This project will be based on the teachings Elder Musqua has given to me through the oral tradition and participation in the ceremonies that he has conducted. He has also allowed his lectures from the Saulteaux Human Development class that he teaches for the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College to be recorded for the purpose of the project.

### **Elder Musqua's Primary Sources**

Elder Danny Musqua comes from a family of eighteen children, twelve sisters and five brothers. His mother was a strong Christian Catholic and his father a traditional Indian. Both parents had an acceptance of differing spiritual orientations that allowed them to raise their children in a manner that

acknowledged both. At five years of age, however, Danny was plagued with epileptic seizures and consumption. His health deteriorated to the point where he was at risk of losing his life. His mother could not provide the individual care required given the number of children and, as a last resort, his parents sent him to live with his grandparents who were knowledgeable in the ways of healing. Over a period of time, under the loving care and treatment of his grandmother (a Woodland Cree from the Shell River area) and grandfather, he was able to overcome his illnesses. In his childhood, living with his grandparents, Danny spent a significant amount of time with other old people who came to visit and learned from the stories and participation in their ceremonies. His grandfather, Kageegaymuqua or Healing Bear, a great influence in Danny's life, received his teachings from his father, Morning Light Hunter, who was the last warrior from the Bear Clan in his family. Those from the Bear Clan are usually the ones who are generals, the organizers and leaders of the army, as well as the teachers, telling the Bear Clan stories through the oral tradition.

Elder Musqua, in speaking of his grandfather, said "My grandfather's philosophy of life was simple. You come here on a journey. Your spirit, which was made in the instant that all creation was formed, came here to understand the physical universe, the physical nature of the Creation that is in all that we see around us. The Creator is perfect, never makes mistakes, but allows things to seem complex and difficult at times. He is the one that does things the way that they are but nothing ever ends in total destruction. Everything always ends up with the

Creator. Life is a circle, we come from the Creator and go back to the Creator. That is why we are never at peace on this earth, given the inner urgency for something greater than ourselves. We need to have an understanding of something that is within us. We want to have a relationship with the Creator as that is where we came from. Until you meet that inner need, you shall not be at peace. That is what he said. You eventually have to go inward because that is how you find out who you are."

### **The Teachings**

The Bear Clan is the biggest clan of all. Many people became part of the Bear Clan because we were the policing clan, the warriors, or the army. Just about everybody from time to time came into the Bear Clan to serve. Our family stayed in the clan and we must be the last people to have kept the stories about the clan. At first, my participation in the Bear Clan was as the *wascabious*, or young man being taught to work in the ceremonies, and I did this until I was about forty-five years old. My father passed away when I was forty-seven and until then I participated in ceremonies but did not conduct them. I looked after the pipes, the feathers, fire, and foods. I would go to the grandmothers and mothers, with tobacco, and request soups that were required for the ceremonies. I went to the head of the women's groups to learn about different groups of foods that were required for different ceremonies. The grandmothers knew exactly how much soup to make given the number of people. I had to know how to set the flags and the

ribbons, the seating arrangement for the singers, and the order for the prayers. I've now become a ceremonial Elder and conduct my own ceremonies. When my father passed away in 1981, this responsibility became mine. In 1985, I began my public journey to teach, as a member of the Bear Clan. From 1981 to 1997 will be sixteen years, at which time I will be finished that public journey and can go back to my community. That is how it is supposed to be. I will be finished my four year trip. Four years is like sixteen years in the spiritual realm. When I finish my public journey, the Elders say I can go home and become what they call a ceremonial Elder.

As a people we call ourselves the Anishnabe and our purpose is to teach people how to live in this world, as we are a people of the earth. The term "Anishnabe" refers to the process of becoming a better human being, a process that has its origins in Saulteaux philosophy and is a life philosophy, or a path of learning which is open to all people. The Nacowayiniwak, or Saulteaux people, are of Anishnabek origin, their name being "people who came down from the heavens." Their knowledge of the universe and world as we know it, is deeply embedded in the philosophy of the Nacowayiniwak people. The knowledge of the Saulteaux people is based on principles and practices of their ancestors. From generation to generation, knowledge has been passed on for the benefit of the culture and the future.

## **Creation Story**

We are children of the Creator who has two identities though he is one. He is both mother and father, his identity is in both man and woman. The old people tell us that the Creator created humanity from perfection and he blessed us with the gift of life so that through love, honor, and respect we could experience companionship. The Creator's companions were the grandfather spirits, the sources of life itself. The Creator gave us the gift of being unique, as nothing he creates is ever the same, yet our commonalties lie in our disciplines, virtues, laws, and teachings.

There are a number of Creation stories found amongst the Nacowayiniwak people, but out of respect I will tell the story according to my understanding. Our Creator is both mother and father, our body is a replica of our mother and our spirit is that of our father. This is noted in all aspects of the philosophy, mother brings life to reality, father represents the spiritual side of respect and love. The beginning of human kind on this earth came from the Creator's vision or dream. Life began somewhere in the vast universe where a woman of a physical entity became lonely. In her loneliness, the Creator made man of a spiritual nature to comfort her and provide companionship. In their union she was blessed with a child. She was lead to the earth, the center of the world assumed to be somewhere near the equator, where the weather is consistently warm and the environment a suitable place where her child could begin life. The spirit of our mother then exploded with love and the universe, earth, and life were created - all in an instant, nothing after that.

The word "fire" in Saulteaux is defined as "woman's heart". They say that the love of a woman is so great, so powerful that it caused creation to take place. And because her love is so powerful, when she withdraws it, destruction can occur. That is how powerful a woman is. When a woman takes her love away, you are actually nothing. That is what my grandfather said. The rejection of a woman is like fire. A woman's fire is powerful and pure. That is the foundation of the heart of a woman. The foundation of our people is the heart of a woman. When they are strong, we are strong. We survive because our women are strong. The day we begin to recognize this is the day we will become great again.

The spiritual world came before that of the physical world. The four directions, the grandfathers, and the spirit of women were already in place. The degree to which Aboriginal people live within a pantheistic - Creator within the world, the world within the Creator, the Creator within the universe - and supernatural view of the universe cannot be over-estimated and this orientation supersedes all other aspects of development. Anyone familiar with Aboriginal people will have his or her own stories of events, which point not only to continued belief in both good and bad medicine, for example, but also in the spiritual plane that makes them possible. The spiritual plane clearly continues to play an important role in Aboriginal life, despite the fact that many traditional ceremonies were banned by law and were deemed heathen practices. When considering the role of the spiritual plane, we are not dealing with some quaint custom, nor are we dealing with religion as defined in the western world. To Aboriginal people, the



spiritual plane is not simply a belief, which is separate from everyday life; instead, all aspects of life are viewed as having a spiritual dimension.

In terms of a natural order, we are mere humans are at the bottom of the chain and therefore need to respect our life sources, the plants and animals, in order to survive. The Creator is at the top of the chain as he is all spiritual, then Mother Earth, plant life, the animal kingdom, and, last of all, man. Thus in order to understand the Creator and spirituality we must first understand Mother Earth. Plant and animals have spirits with stories to share through the gift of tobacco offerings and prayer. Human beings are the only species that have individual spirits whereas one spirit looks after each species of plant and animal. For example, there are millions of spruce trees but only one spirit takes care of them all. That's how powerful that spirit is. That spirit is given to help the species procreate and all of the laws given by that spirit are created by the Creator to take care of that species. The old people used to tell us that there are spirits in the universe that came from the Creator in the beginning of time to take care of this universe and they remain here taking care of life as it is. Creation and humanity are kept alive through mother earth.

From the philosophy we were taught that there were four great laws handed down to us: to respect and love the Creator; to respect and love the spiritual beings; to respect and love mother earth and all physical beings; and to respect and love our fellow man. The most powerful principle of learning, respect, requires taking the time to use the disciplines of attentiveness and learning for the care of our

surroundings and all of life within it. Respect involves being aware, taking the time to analyze and evaluate before taking the next step, before saying the next word, or before taking the next action. You have to be aware that everybody has a specific way of doing things because we are all different. We have to recognize our differences and accept them. We have to learn about other people and the way to learn is to respect them first so that you will be open-minded enough to accept differences. The practice of respect goes beyond respect for human beings only. To practice respect is to take the time to use the disciplines of learning - observation, attentiveness, listening, memory development, and imitation - for the care of our environment and all the living things in it. Take into account that everything that exists has a right to be there and, as human beings, we must fit into the scheme of things in order to perpetuate all of existence. The natural system of the universe is not to be interfered with. You need to take the time to pay attention to the creatures, and then you can pay attention to your family in the same way. Spirit beings and their laws are to be observed. People used to get up with the sun because there is a law, a power that takes care of daylight. Spirits also look after darkness and the seasons. Everything has order and we have to live in balance and listen to the natural knowledge of the universe. The other principles of learning are patience, carefulness, commitment, non-interference, humility, and preparation. All of these are needed to be able to learn in the traditional way.

We were further blessed with four sacred gifts: cedar, sage, sweetgrass, and tobacco to be used for ceremonial purposes and as offerings in acknowledgement of

the spiritual realm. All of creation was blessed with the division of four to symbolize the quarterly divisions existing in time, space, life events, order, thought, and dream. There are four seasons in the year and four points of the earth. There are four orders of existence (earth, wind, fire, and water) and four species in the animal world and four races in man's world. Our old people tell us that there are four bright stars in the sky that represent creation: four directions, four great grandfathers, four seasons, four types of animals, with the animals and plants further broken down by groups of four. Four levels of belonging include belonging to the Creator first, then to a family, a community, and then the world at large.

The Anishnabak people were blessed with seven clans, the Eagle, Loon, Crane, Hoof, Weasel, Turtle, and Bear clans, each representing a point on the seven-cornered star. Within the seven-cornered star (Big Dipper), we also find the seven disciplines, seven grandfathers, seven virtues, seven levels, and the seven stages or "fires" of life. All of our teachings and disciplines, virtues, and principles of life come from the teaching of seven.

### **Purpose For Existence**

The purpose for our existence is to learn. The Creator put us on this earth to learn about physical limitations and laws, so the challenges of living in the physical universe, including the suffering and pain, are all part of learning. All of our spirits were created at the moment of creation, long before the actual birth date. (The old people have a difficult time understanding the structure of western religious beliefs

because creation begins a long time before the boundaries of structured religion). For this reason our spirit is said to be an internalized vehicle which we use to acquire knowledge around us through our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits, in a balanced way. Spiritual development is paramount in the developmental process of Aboriginal peoples. Spiritual development includes understanding and relating with the world around us and is a force that sustains life. This aspect of development was nurtured early in life through participation in ceremonies that began before birth. It was a way of living in which one was instructed as part of the process of childhood development. Development of the mind is essential to understanding and acting in the physical world. Mental preparation, which includes memory development, is necessary to approach other areas of learning. Physical development is essential to survival and well being and includes development of the five senses. Development of the heart is equally important to development of the mind, body, and spirit and is greater than understanding feelings or emotions. When you follow your heart you are following a deeper truth which draws on knowledge from the spirit that is not intellectually accessible and, therefore, relies on the spirit's abilities to recognize the true path in life. In this sense, the heart may be considered a mediator between the mind and spirit.

The spirit, which comes from the Creator, comes here on a journey to acquire all of the knowledge of the physical universe and then goes back to the Creator. We are never at peace on this earth given the inner urgency and need for understanding something within us that is greater than ourselves. Until you meet

that inner need to understand your purpose you shall not be at peace. You eventually have to look inside to find out who you are because the spirit came with that knowledge but the memory is lost in the physical existence. It cannot remember because in the other realm it was in perfect surroundings and the physical universe is out of that realm. With the shock of being placed in the physical realm, the spirit enters a dormant state. Therefore we have to awaken and develop an understanding of the spirit within us. That is the philosophy from which human growth and development stems. There are two components to our consciousness, the physical and the spiritual. The physical mind has components that include desires, wills, and beliefs but the spiritual mind has only one will, one mind, one thought, one desire, and that is to complete this journey and go back to where it came from. That is the great mystery.

The Creator gave us ceremonies, rituals, and prayers in order to help us connect to, or understand, the spirit world. Ceremonies are significant and sacred to all of mankind and, therefore, deserving of respect. Ceremonies allow for mediation with the spiritual world through physical reality and are an important element in our tradition. Ceremonies are about the celebration of life and the marking of milestones. Ceremonies are also held for thanksgiving, for recognition, to cure pain and suffering, and to enlist spiritual help in other matters. It is a time when the people come together and there is a strong sense of community. Types of ceremonies include the Roundance, the Sweatlodge, the Raindance, and the Sundance. We have to respect, care, share, and worship the Creator, the spiritual

beings, the physical universe, and the earth. This is done through ceremony.

Ceremonies are conducted by Medicine Men and Elders who have spent a significant number of years learning about the purpose and procedures. The Elders say that a ceremony has to be performed in the way that it has been given without modification. Ceremonies are conducted in a particular way because that is the intention of the Creator. To minimize the importance of ritual and procedure is disrespectful. Over the past one hundred years ceremonial practices have been affected due to banishment of the practice. Most of the ceremonies that were performed traditionally are no longer a part of the lives of Aboriginal people. The key to learning about ceremonies is through the Elders and the gift of tobacco.

The Creator has a plan for everyone, a matter in which we have no choice. Our lives are needed in order to affect or help somebody in this world. You continue searching, studying, praying, and being a good human being who practices the teachings of the old people through participation in ceremonies and through helping. In the end, however, you will return to the Creator, as you have no choice.

The Creator is in all life. The Creator's mystical power and knowledge will bring a tree back to life in the spring from its suspended state of animation. In the same way, our spirit comes alive into this existence living in a state of suspended animation until it finds the means by which to get back to the Creator, and the knowledge is within itself, within your mind's eye. Within that mind there is

another mind, that of the spirit. It is our subconscious mind with which all of us speak to one another. It is the mind of the Creator that is in all things.

### **Gifts From The Creator**

The Creator blessed us with the gift of life, the greatest gift of all. We were created from perfection and placed on this earth in order to learn about ourselves and our environment in order to become good human beings. The old people say 'in this day you live all your life.' You don't know what is ahead because you haven't arrived there yet. You have this day to live to its fullest. You acknowledge the Creator at dawn and plan your day. Upon fulfillment of the day, thank the Creator, including appreciation for letting you live that day. Then prepare for the night and hope that you will have other days to enjoy. Having a relationship with the Creator is an everyday thing. That is the philosophy of the old people. We do not take anything for granted, especially the gift of life, and always give thanks for that first.

We do not have a religion but a way of living that includes prayer, worship, and a close relationship with the Creator throughout all aspects of our lives, as the Creator is the center of all things. We come from the Creator and go back to the Creator. We have been given the disciplines and tools to help us to become good human beings and to practice *the way*, as referred to in the Bear Clan philosophy. The Indian way is not a religion but a way of understanding the spiritual world and developing a deeper understanding with the Creator. You can practice its disciplines and still be a good Christian because it does not discriminate,

membership is open to anyone who is interested in learning in this way. In fact, you will become a better Christian. There is no conflict in the principles. Fasting and sweat lodges are tools we use to help us gain in understanding ourselves and to understand Creation. The learning lodge is a good place to learn about fasting and the journey of life. Systematic use of these tools will help you to open up to your inner self and to gain knowledge. The process takes time but is rewarding in the positive sense of well being it creates. The teacher is not anybody else but the spirit and it comes and shows you through your thoughts and through the actions of others around you. The spirit is in union with us through the actions of our mother, father, brother, sister and we begin to identify the Creator, not because someone has told us, but because we observe that. Examples of this are that you begin to see good things taking place and you begin to be able to speak of things you could not speak of before due to the pain. Sometimes the doors are closed and we don't want to remember. The Creator reveals that. The changes begin to occur when you begin to act on the things that you have learned, thus your own actions change. Recognition begins when you let the Creator in and begin to look at yourself and your relationships with others and all of Creation. You recognize that you are not happy with your behaviors and actions and that you want to change, to find inner peace. The old people exemplify this with the order and control that they demonstrate in their lives. Something inside has given them the discipline to accept things as they are. When with them, you feel happy and at peace. That is how you become a good human being in the spiritual way. The teachings are all



about learning, self-analysis, and self-development. We fast to know who we are and we go to sweat lodges in order to pray. It is a discipline, or a way of living, to help you learn who you are and to better yourself. We refer to this process as a journey rather than as a religion or faith. There are no "musts" and everyone proceeds at their individual pace and comfort level.

Fasting will help you learn about your purpose and how to heal pain and anger that may be inside. Acceptance and understanding of the pain and dislodging it come from a long process of forgiveness. The teacher is the spirit who shows you through thoughts and actions around you. Changes begin to occur when you begin to live the changes that come from recognition. You begin to look at yourself and your relationships with others and with the earth. You have to begin to live life as an example of the goodness of the Creator in the physical way. The old people recommend fasting four times a year, for personal development. For cleansing purposes, two days a month is recommended. Doctors know the benefits of such cleansing of chemical wastes. Old people would prepare for fasting by avoiding solid foods, eating mainly soup and berries. When you fast for personal reasons, you inspect your inner spirit. When you heal your body, your spirit, and your mind, you can heal the relationships with people around you. A concept in fasting is that the spirit needs reawakening and it is necessary to suffer in order to accomplish this. Fasting, a personal and private thing, brings an awareness that leads to personal development through the application of self-knowledge. Many seek help through spiritual healing in order to assist in the process of change in

order to live a better life. The learning lodge is a good place to learn about fasting and the journey of spiritual development. An important principle associated with fasting is that the Creator knows your limits and will not present you with more than you can handle. Through meditation and fasting you may have visions that help you in understanding your journey.

Another gift that the Creator blessed us with is free will. From this gift we have freedom of choice. We have freedom to choose in all aspects of our lives and are, therefore, responsible. The Creator gave us free will and expects the following - don't judge, don't convert other people, and nurture your own human self. The Creator's institution is within yourself and you must wake up this being inside of you. It will never force itself upon you because you are given free will. The Creator will speak to you through prayer, meditation, and fasting. These are the tools of learning. Systematic use of these tools will help you to open up your inner self and to explore your purpose for existence. To feel good, you must have the desire and take the time to go inward. The Creator will wake up the spirit and be the teacher. As you learn about yourself, there are disciplines for learning. That is being a good human being and never judging anyone in their actions, not trying to change someone when things are not going well. That is how you become a loving, spiritual being.

Two other equally important gifts that we are blessed with are tradition and culture. Our tradition includes our ceremonies and language. You have to study your language because it contains all of your history. Every word specifies a

location, an experience, a specific happening. Knowledge is enshrined in your language. The language tells you where you came from and how we understand things in life, things related to our character and philosophy. Traditions are what made people strong. They remain steady and should never change as they are gifts from the Creator. Our culture is one that is adaptable to changing times. Culture is the way in which we dress, our modes of thought, our innermost psychological being. Knowing your culture can help you to heal, to forgive, and to love.

We have been given the gift of knowledge in order to rise above animal instincts and to give impetus to the natural spirit which has characteristics of the Creator. Embarking on a journey of self-knowledge requires commitment and preparation, two very important principles in our tradition. You begin that journey when you begin to look at yourself and at ideals such as honesty, humility, respect, love, and purity.

People who understand the natural knowledge of the universe are humbled by it. They are revered by the work of the Creator. They know there are prescribed laws to be observed. Preparation and commitment are important in that actions cannot be rash, but objective and planned. People used to get up with the sun because there is a law, a power that takes care of daylight. There are powers that look after darkness and the seasons, as well. Learning to live life in order with all existence, under the guidance of an Elder is important. In the old days punishments were harsh for hurting someone or falling aside of the way of living. Banishment of varying degrees was practiced. If a person killed someone they were banished

and were at risk of, in turn, being harmed by someone else as they were considered worthless. A person that was banished was not even talked about because he did not deserve the honor of being spoken about. For lesser offenses, banishment under the guidance of an Elder until one learned to live in order with all life on earth again, was practiced. Because of the consequences, one seriously learned the laws, the disciplines, the skills, and the way of life as determined by the Creator.

### **Seven Disciplines**

The seven disciplines that have been established to facilitate learning are: prayer, meditation, fasting, benevolence, parenting, learning, and teaching. The discipline of prayer is to develop and nurture our link to the spirit which is our primary source of knowledge and survival. The discipline of meditation is the practice of connecting directly to the spirit, through bypassing the thought processes and becoming aware of knowledge as it exists in its purest form. Meditation helps us to understand the meaning of dreams and visions. Dreams that mean something are few. The old people say that if a dream comes three or four times then it means something. You must meditate on it to understand its meaning, seeking outside interpretation only when you have great difficulty understanding it yourself. There are Elders who are skilled in dream interpretation. The old people tell us that when you dream of someone who has gone, for example, it is because of something that may not have been finished on this earth. Therefore they come to tell us that we may have to do something for them. One day my father came to me

in a dream and he kissed me. He told me that he wanted me to develop close relationships with my children through hugging them, listening to them, and being there for them - something that he could not carry out because I was with my grandfather for a significant part of my childhood. I have made efforts to do this as directed in the dream.

In a benevolent world, two to three hundred years ago, the old people said the practice of kindness and sharing was essential because people needed one another to survive. Cooperation was important. So in their benevolence the people shared their food, their shelter, their knowledge and understanding of how to survive in the world. It was necessary, not like today where you can live in a self-contained environment and not worry about someone else.

The discipline of fasting a process in which our attention to daily affairs is redirected to forging the link to our spiritual reality. Fasting is necessary for learning, healing, and personal development. A concept in fasting is to reawaken the spirit through a process which takes one away from daily rituals and distractions which can prevent introspection. Suffering is part of the process that brings personal awareness that leads to personal development. The discipline of parenting is a great responsibility that includes teaching and becoming a role model to the future generation. Parenting skills come from the seven fires. The discipline of learning refers to the lifelong process of growth and development that includes learning in the areas of the heart, mind, body, and spirit. In order to learn you have to pay attention and gather as much information about the world around you

through relationships with the old people. To learn you must observe, evaluate, analyze, and question.

Tools for learning include the ceremonies, the rituals, and the language. Language contains the history of our origins, where we came from and where we are going. Our language has not been interfered with by other languages, unlike English which is an accumulation of many languages. You should take the time, the old people tell us, to learn the language and to learn what it will tell you. Without that it is impossible to survive as a people and as a nation. The discipline of teaching is to express, transmit, and remember knowledge of survival through understanding and respecting our relationships with all aspects of nature. You must first learn for many years by spending time with the old ones.

### **Seven Levels**

The old people say that the Creator has created seven levels of life. The first level is the spiritual one in which we only assume what is there and from which we come and to which we return. When the Creator created the physical universe, life began in the water. The first level of life is the fish kingdom which comprises all water life forms. The second level of life is the plant kingdom, with all life being dependent on plants. The next levels are the four-legged and two-legged creatures, the crawling creatures, the insect world, the bird kingdom, and, last of all, man. All levels are so intertwined that they make up life and one whole existence. The Creator is present in all things and, therefore, we are taught to

revere all living things. The old people tell us that all living things are important because they have an intricate responsibility to the balance of life all around. Imbalance within nature is the beginning of our destruction. Misunderstanding of this concept is leading to destruction of lands and depletion of certain species of life. The imbalance also affects our weather patterns, and in the long-term, our very existence. The old people tell us that when you tamper with that, the world begins to end. We all know that the ozone is depleted, it's going away, there are holes in it, and so the weather patterns are not the same any more. The seasons are not as they used to be. It is what we do with the land that is causing that. Man can block up rivers, release millions of metric tons of acid into the universe and it becomes acid rain somewhere else, killing fish and other life in lakes. The ecosystems are affected and world becomes out of balance. The elements become out of order and the world goes into a self-destructive mode.

### **Chapter 3: The Seven Fires Of Life As Described By Elder Musqua**

#### **The Seven Fires**

The seven fires refer to the seven stages of life that encompass the lifelong process of learning and growth. They are: conception to birth, birth to walking, walking to seven years, little men and little women, young adults, adult development, and old age and death. Development throughout all stages of life includes the physical aspect, the mind, the heart, and the spirit. According to Saulteaux philosophical teachings, spiritual life exists before birth, before physical ability to survive, and after death when the physical body has expired and can no longer function. During a lifetime a person would celebrate either as the principal or as a participant observer in a number of ceremonies marking an event or milestone. Ceremonies were conducted to mark significant events such as naming, puberty, marriage, death, and for thanksgiving. There were seven celebrations for the seven stages of life as every major event in life was a celebration. From this acknowledgement through ceremony developed a strong sense of belonging. Human development, as described in Saulteaux philosophy, is inter-generational. Not only physical traits, but emotional, mental, and spiritual attributions of our ancestors are encoded in our memory. These initial traits are established at conception. All the experiences of our



ancestors, whether good or bad, are registered in memory and handed down to succeeding generations. So an individual's personality traits are somewhat pre-determined by not only his parents, but all of his ancestors. Further, the traits an individual cultivates in his life will have an effect on his offspring and future generations. Therefore, striving to become a better human being is a great responsibility. Each generation has an opportunity to correct personality defects and strive to become a better human being for the betterment of future generations.

In our unconscious is the entire collection of experiences and memories of our ancestors. From time to time, for some unknown reason, certain memory cells will open up and thoughts and feelings will surface to your conscious mind. Aboriginal people do not believe in reincarnation or deja-vu which are commonly attributed to these experiences. We explain these occurrences as experiencing recollections of the experiences of our ancestors. In this sense we are driven to learn about our history, about the lives and times of our ancestors. The bulk of these memory cells never surface to our consciousness but certain individuals will develop a skill for accessing such historical information.

### **Conception and Life in the Womb - The First Fire**

The spirit enters the body at the moment of conception. The spirit decides on the mother and father that it needs in order to learn in the physical realm before going back to the Creator. The choice is determined by the Creator, as the Creator has developed everything in that being before the spirit's arrival. Within it are the orders and dictates of the Creator's purpose for that spirit. So the spirit occupies the body and acts as its protector and helps it to grow into a human form. When the body is fully developed, the spirit enters the brain as part of the subconscious state and remains that way until awakened. It is said that the spirit goes to sleep upon shock of arrival in the physical realm as it is used to being in perfect surroundings. Ceremonies acknowledge the spirit and throughout life we seek to awaken the spirit as part of our personal quest for learning.

The care of the woman is of utmost importance during this stage of a child's development as she prepares physically, mentally, and spiritually for the birth of the baby. Meditation, prayer, and ceremony assist in the maintenance of a positive emotional state and elicit help from the spiritual realm. Effects of pre-natal care were recognized a long time ago as a child in the womb is already a being that has a means of communicating with the outside world through the mother. Women were treated with special care during the period of pregnancy. Care was taken to speak quietly in their presence and not to insult them in any way, as the child is also affected by a

woman's emotional state. Women were revered for the ability to give life and, therefore, consideration was given by all members in the community in order for life in the womb to be sheltered and happy.

The unborn baby, aware of its surroundings even before birth, develops in the womb and can feel and hear the mother's heartbeat. This can be comforting because of the slow and steady rhythm, like a drum beating. The time spent in the womb is a time of peace, comfort, serenity, security, and joy. The baby existence at this time is in both the physical realm and the spiritual realm.

### **Birth To Walking - The Second Fire**

The ceremony of birth was considered very important. It was the old people who had the honor of announcing the birth of their grandchild, a time of eager anticipation and prediction. Ceremonies were conducted in which old and young could participate and assist in praying for a healthy birth without complications. Young men contributed by fasting and holding sweat lodges and council dances in which they would pray for the health of the mother and child alike.

When the announcement came, gifts would be offered in celebration of the birth of a healthy child. The birth of either gender was equally accepted because men and women were regarded as equals given they both had well-defined distinct and important roles. (That is one reason why the

language does not have gender differentiation). When a child was born there was an immediate sense of belonging. There were public announcements and ceremonies to announce an occasion that was considered of great importance. There was a lot of anticipation centered around the child. All of the old people were as excited as the parents, if not more so. They were the ones who really made a big event of this and made plans for a feast for a child coming into the world. They would usher the young women, the organizers of the community, and the young men, the hunters who would bring the food for the feast, for the big celebration of a new member to the family and community. It was a time of great joy for the whole community. Everybody knew that a child was coming and there was no child in those days whose arrival was not greatly anticipated by the community. It must have been beautiful to be awaited like that.

The occasion of the birth of a child was used as an opportunity to support community goodwill and communication. Babies were passed around for everyone to acknowledge and hold. The immediate sense of belonging was a very positive aspect for the child's emotional and social development. Also, this was the beginning of the relationship with the community, as the whole community was responsible in raising a child. The need for the child to have a relationship with their extended family was very important because many times they were taken to them for care.

An Elder was offered tobacco and asked to name the child. There were days of meditation and nights of dreaming before the name-giving ceremony. A name was not merely a term of address, it was an identity given that later emerged into character and into a manner in which the spirits could identify the child. Hence the namer's task was not a light one. Not only did he give a name, but by virtue of being the giver, had to assume certain responsibilities for the child. The name the child would bear was a gift from the spirits bestowed through ceremony. When the day arrived, everyone came and sat in a circle, food at one end and the little ones at the other end. The old grandfathers would sit on the north side, the old grandmothers would sit on the south side, the young men would sit on the west side, the young women on the east side. Everything was arranged in a certain manner for a reason, birth and life to the south, and the representation of peace and death to the north. The young women representing the dawn of life sat on the side, the young mothers in the east. Everything was done in a certain way for a reason and was explained as such. The grandfathers would hit their drums and talk about the journey of being brought into this life and the disciplines that would be required to help the child. And they would sing their songs and hit their drums. It was beautiful. There is something about these old people and their voices, so full of life and spirit. They would sing four times, honoring the directions with each song. And then they would hold their drums high in the air and

look up. If you ever saw this, you would never forget it. You would want your child to have that kind of entry into the world. After being named, a child was presented to the Elders. Each Elder embraced the child and acceptance was shown as well as an unspoken commitment from the Elders to teach the child. Several babies were named in the ceremony and whoever was born first would lead the way. The babies would be given to the grandfathers to pray for. Then there was the fire ceremony and everyone would pray to the fire. The children were passed around to everyone. The grandmothers would tell stories of how to survive in the world and become strong so that death would miss their pathway. They would pray that way so that the spirit could hear and take care of the child.

Babies are extremely aware and, inherently, have strong spiritual awareness. At this time they are not limited by physical reality. The necessary process of socialization and physical orientation to the world suppresses the spirit. As children are molded intellectually and socially they lose touch with the spirit which becomes part of the subconscious.

This is a stage of dependence on people and the development of trust. It is a stage where intelligence and reasoning are not well developed and learning takes place primarily through the use of the senses. Instinct is predominant and many lessons are learned through experiences which can cause fear and pain. Responses to cries need to be immediate as a child does not cry without reason, it is a cry for help, a cry to be heard when in

need. This is the way in which a child learned that someone would care for him and trust developed as a response to basic needs.

Because the child is totally dependent on adults, it is the age of dependence and trust. He is going to have to trust because he is immobilized, he has no language yet, just sound so he is going to have to use his voice to let us know of hunger, sickness, cold, pain, and other discomforts. Because we are entrusted by the Creator and the community to look after a child, we have to be aware of when a child is in need and the way that you will be told is through the crying. When you respond, the child learns who to trust.

The child, an instinctive being, relies on the five senses. A lot of nurturing by touch, by seeing, and by doing is required. Through this the child comes to know and rely on the use of its senses as the child requires security. You will be thankful that you spent time with your child because discipline will be easier due to the security and trust that has developed at this stage. The child will respond especially well to the person who has been there for him. Discipline begins with trust and the child's world will be violated if time is not taken to understand and care within the first two years. When a child's physical and emotional needs are met, they can learn.

### **Walking To Seven Years - The Third Fire**

During the first seven years of a child's life, the women and Elders were the caregivers and teachers. Discipline is the main focus of development for children in the age range of two to seven years. As reasoning is developed, children gather a lot of information through observing the actions of their caregivers. Children always grew up to be obedient through gentle nurturing and being taught by example. One of the virtues enforced by the old people was that to educate those around him, one must live by example. The first seven years of life are critical as children are very dependent on caregivers and intent on learning. Discipline is best accomplished at this time. The effects of the first seven years are critical in determining the outcome for the rest of one's life.

It is a well-documented fact that the residential school process has impaired parenting skills in this generation as children were taken away from their homes at a critical age for learning this from their natural parents. For this reason, it is important to learn about parenting. I felt that my father's parenting skills were affected as a result of having attended residential school. My father, however, spent time with his children in learning lodges, teaching the philosophy and beliefs of our people. He was the one who introduced us to the sun dances, council dances, pow wows, and round dances. I went to a lot of these in the summer months. In those



dances we learned about the way to relate to our grandfathers, grandmothers, and the world around us.

It is challenging to raise children in the traditional way in the times in which we live today. Children are not being given the important teachings of respect, for example, particularly for older people. Knowing children's capabilities, strength, weaknesses, interests, and limits is important in order for strengths to be supported and weaknesses nurtured. Through this practice children develop positive self-esteem, an important foundation for healthy development. Teaching by example is of utmost importance as children learn very quickly that they cannot believe you if you do not do as you say. One should not say one thing and do another in front of a child. The old people say that if you say you will do something, you must be sure to do it. Trust wanes when broken promises are made and children begin to feel that they are not important. Structure is also very important in a child's life. When there is structure in the home, children develop a sense of security that helps them to better cope with any situation outside of the home.

Children need special care through an individual relationship with the caregiver(s). Allocation of time for this is essential. Many children who exhibit behavioral problems can be helped through caring and taking time to develop a long-term individual relationship with the child that includes shared activities and talking. Children should not be pacified with

money in place of quality time with parents. Money only brings temporary happiness and soon children will demand money and not expect to earn it. Ninety percent of a child's needs and wants are for quality time that is centered on the relationship with parents and family. Acknowledgement of children on a daily basis is very important. Making time for them and being in touch with them is very important. They need your attention and you can accomplish this through inquiring about their friends and activities in a friendly way. Wrong doings can be pointed out in a gentle manner and the child can decide on the direction they should take. When a child's physical and emotional needs are met, it is easier for them to learn. Adults need to take care when around children as they do not forget what happens to them when they are young. Care must be taken not to speak of things that you do not want children to hear. When rules are established, they must be followed by everyone in the family or resentment will build. Children want to be like someone they admire, so we have to be positive role models.

Organized activities and responsibilities are important for children as they provide opportunities for teaching and esteem development. In the old days, at about the age of seven, boys left the tutelage of their mothers to learn about hunting, fishing and other practical matters aimed at survival. Young boys became resourceful in learning all aspects of providing for a family and community. Young girls spent time helping in the maintenance of the lodge. Gathering wood, gathering berries and plants, food

preparation, basket making, and hide repairs were a few of the activities that were learned. Through all of this children were given responsibility and made to feel an important part of the family.

During Kookum and Mooshum's tea breaks, which were many, I was told to come and tell everything that I saw. That way I learned to pay attention to the world around me. My grandfather told me the way that I pay attention to the things that I see is the same way to pay attention to the things that I hear. You have to sit still and make up your mind that you are going to hear what is said. Describing what I saw was important. I was asked to describe what I saw, being allowed to finish my story without interruption. I would tell what I saw, describing the behavior of animals. (The discipline of attention helps in hunting and when you go to listen to people). We were taught to maintain our attention span much longer than the ordinary child does today. We were taught attentiveness and attention to detail, all based on survival. To look and listen with both ears and eyes. We were also taught to keep focused on an object and not lose sight of it. That kind of patience and attentiveness was also required for survival, deliberately and carefully doing what you are going to do. Another great skill is listening. You have to hear for effect for it is effect that will tell you what is taking place. Sometimes if you listen to people you can use that skill to understand character. Eyes are very deceiving. You can emulate honesty or deceit but behavior does not lie. Use as many of your senses as

possible to gather information. Each sense must be trained specifically to gather information. My grandfather would tell me to look at a big tree and he would tell me stories. I could go to that tree and remember that story. Today they call it memory by association. When you have retained something in your memory bank, it is there for life.

Stories were told slowly and graphically to allow a child to kindle his imagination. As the child grew older, the stories took on deeper meaning. Not only did the stories go beyond the child's immediate world, but they assumed a moral character. To teach of positives and negatives in human conduct, grandparents as storytellers would re-create in story form the state of things in the family or community. Deliberately, the characters in the story were made to reflect the characters of persons appearing in the account. In these stories, men, women, and children were represented as animal beings. While the children would not immediately recognize themselves in the character or plot or understand the substance of the story, they would, eventually come to know themselves and the meaning of the story after repeated many times. Young people were allowed to draw their own inferences about the story and to acquire a sense of what is right or wrong. As children grew older stories assumed greater depth. Themes covered hunger, courage, generosity, fidelity, creation, death, history, and all matters that related to life. Children listened to fables, myths, legends,

and tragedies. From these stories they gained insights into life and, therefore, grew in understanding.

### **Little Men and Little Women - The Fourth Fire**

The period of adolescence as we know it today did not exist in the old days. As soon as they were physically capable, young men and women began to take on roles of adults in order to learn and to help the community as a whole. Young boys went with the men to learn about survival skills while the young girls remained with their mothers and the elders. This is the stage when a young adult is fully accepted into the adult sphere. There is deliberate care taken by adults because the young person is very much a child in many ways emotionally and psychologically. The onus was on adults to be aware of the childlike tendencies and to correct, not by shaming, but by gently talking to them to earn respect. The puberty ceremony is very important as it opens the door to the adult world. The ceremony is important to the community because it is believed that this young person is going to be entrusted with doing adult things.

I remember attending a big sweat lodge where young men were being initiated. They were thirteen or fourteen years old and were being given the first opportunity to hold the pipes, to work with feathers, and to bless the rattles and the drums. There were about sixty people there. The first thing was to greet the Elders and the children too. I remember how

beautiful that was. All the old people kissing us, telling us nice things, some giving us candies. An old man spoke of how children were to be cared for in that they are the future generation. He told us that children are to be taken care of, loved, never left alone, and never allowed to be worried about their safety or security. Children are to be taught, to be treated in such a way that they know they are important. They are to be held sacred. That was a great occasion when the old and the young would come together.

For a girl the attainment of womanhood was a major life event during this time. When her time came, around her twelfth year, the girl was removed from the village and lodged in a shelter constructed for her. For a period of four days the girl abstained from food, taking only water to sustain her and received visits from only her mother and grandmother. The gift of life-giving was considered so important that the girl was placed in solitude during this time. The girl had to prepare for receiving this gift. Her mood and spirit had to be prepared, the reason for no distraction, no food, no interference, no visitors. When the fast was over the girl returned home to her family where a feast awaited her. Girls, as today, attained maturity earlier than boys.

Grandmother's looked after the puberty ceremonies for women. Sage was used for blessing. The grandmothers would gather and take turns explaining the changes and difficulties a young woman would go through in

the transition from childhood to womanhood. She was told how to foretell when her time would come and how to care for herself both physically and emotionally. Tremendous support was offered. As the women were the organizers of community functions, this also was an important aspect of a young woman's teachings. In the ceremony that I saw, I remember the Grandmothers using a round rock and little water drums. In those times pipes and drums were used by both men and women. Women, as givers of life, could speak directly to the Creator, therefore the structure of their pipes was different, symbolizing this. In our histories we have recollection of naming ceremonies being held by women, pipe ceremonies, songs that are specifically sung by women, ceremonies and sweat lodges that are specifically conducted by women. (Yet modern day emergence of women into spiritual practices is being met with resistance). They say that there is nothing stronger than the heart of a woman. That was the Creator's vision.

When a boy killed his first animal, the entire community celebrated with ceremony. At the feast, all of the people received a small portion of the meat as acceptance of the offering of the newest hunter among them. The event marked the movement from boyhood to manhood, and confirmation of another hunter upon whom the community could rely. Until a young man had performed his first act of courage, he was considered a boy physically. It was an act of courage that admitted him into the company of warriors and gave him status of manhood.

At sixteen, a boy received a blanket from his mother, which served as a coat and blanket. The blanket was a gift, a symbol of love and an emblem of an attachment. With the gift was signified partial dependence, partial independence. It symbolized a bond, a sign of continuing motherhood.

A young woman could be assigned to take care of a particular old couple or widow so training in the care of the sick and elderly was provided. Children were also entrusted to women's care, not men. Whenever a child was entrusted to another member of a family, it was the responsibility of the leadership to assign someone within that community to help the young couple who took on the care of extra children. So there would be a lot of volunteer work for young women at this stage of development.

I have seen the ceremonies take place. I remember seeing the Kookums and the materials they used like little water drums, round rocks, and pipes. In our histories we have recollection of naming ceremonies being conducted by women, pipe ceremonies, sweat lodges, and songs that were only sung by women. We sat with the women in their lodges because the seasons were opened and closed by them in their ceremonies. The sweat lodge door would face south in the summer and in the fall it would face north. At the closing of the season ceremonies, all the young women were recognized. The women of a certain clan would do that and everyone



would join in. They would teach the other clan members. We don't do this today because we don't have the clan groups that we used to. From 1930 to 1970, given governmental oppressive legislations, there were hardly any women participating in ceremonies. It is changing now as women are participating more and performing ceremonies as they used to.

### **Young Adults (14 to 20 Years) and Adult Development (20 to 60 Years- The Fifth and Sixth Fires**

From the ages of fourteen to twenty, children were referred to as men and women. Although they are teenagers it is an error to regard them as less than men or women. In the old days, at that age you were regarded as an adult and treated as such. Nevertheless, there were still childlike tendencies. Adults were expected to be aware of this and not shame them but treat them as a fellow human who is interested in their lives and development. At this stage physical features become important as sex differences are noted. Future roles as parents begin to be reinforced. At this age, the old people were very careful in preparing children by spending time with them so that they could learn about relationships and learning control of emotions.

The old people say that we must learn the intricacies of life in the first twenty years. It is a very difficult time of life because you are totally dependent on everything around you and on the knowledge of others to

teach you that life is one in unison with everything else. So those first twenty years comprise childhood and youth development.

Adult development focused mainly on providing for family, marriage, and parenting during the period of twenty to forty years of age. As our relationship with the Creator, Mother Earth, and the spirits is very important, so is our relationship in terms of family and kinship. Our philosophy centers on describing objects both in the universe and on earth in terms of family. Creation itself is that of both a mother and father, mother being the physical aspect and father the spiritual. The universe is conceptualized as a family of stars within a galaxy. Life on earth, in the forms of plants and animals, is described in terms of families that exist within communities. For this reason, we model our family structure in the same way in order to promote harmony and well being in all of creation. The importance of relationships within all life is important in order to prevent destruction of all life forms.

The Anishnabeg word for the relationship between a man and a woman was "weedjeewaugun," meaning companion - a term which referred equally to male and female. There was no distinction in sex, no notion of inferiority or superiority. Specifically, "weedjeewaugun" meant "Companion on the Path of Life." For both men and women, a companion was someone to walk with and be with through all aspects of life and living. Such was the notion of marriage, the taking of a companion. It was the

strongest of bonds. Taking a companion in life, either a husband or wife, was a serious matter. A partner might be selected by the parents for their children or the young might choose their own companion. Even if the young were to seek marriage through love, approval and permission of the parents was still needed. A prearranged marriage was preferred, however. The marriage ceremony and feast were conducted by the Elders.

The old people tell us that marriage is sacred and that it is paramount to take great efforts to try and maintain a relationship with a partner. When two people got married in the old days it was the responsibility of both families to prepare them. A home had to be made available, usually provided by the parents of the male. The woman's parents provided all the utensils and furnishings for the home. The parent's of the male would be given a horse by the female's parents. The mothers and grandmothers would sit down with the woman to be married and teach her about the expectations of a wife, mother, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, and how to relate to her relatives. One important principle was to speak to her father-in-law through her husband only. One reason for this was so that she would not deviate from the teachings of her mother, her primary teacher. Therefore, there would not be any excuses if the marriage were to fail. On the male side, the fathers and grandfathers would speak with the man to be married about how to treat his wife and about the responsibilities of marriage.

In the early years of marriage the relationship is one of possessiveness due to the lack of trust which has not yet developed. It is new love and one does not look at identification of faults or negative qualities about their partner. There is little give and take and sometimes the marriage reaches a point of oppressive possessiveness on both parts. Realization of this comes when jealous tendencies surface. Backgrounds may differ with regard to spiritual orientation, interests, structure at home, etc. With every conflict there must be resolution which may involve seeking advice from other married couples. It is important to seek counsel as there may be children who are affected by conflict in the home. At times it is better to end a relationship if conflict cannot be resolved. For compromise to take place, both parties have to be open to change, particularly giving up detrimental behaviors and habits. You have to give and be willing to look at your partner's needs, your needs, your children's needs, as well as the needs of the relationship.

When separation was requested in the old days, it was simple because there wasn't as much dysfunction at the time. It was based on honor. If you could not accept your spouse any longer, you would simply 'shut the door' on them. This was done by placing the personal belongings of the other outside the lodge. If the action wasn't honored, there were men in the family who would offer protection. Women were protected because they were the foundation, the ones who ensured the continuity of the tribe.

The stability of the children was based on the stability of the women and that is why it was so important to protect them from physical or emotional abuse. So in cases of no other recourse, separation was acceptable.

The warrior society was the policing body in the community. Membership in warrior societies was dependent on the absence of abuse to women. Women sat in this circle as well. If there was a breakdown in the relationship they, along with Elders, would speak to the couple. Decisions were made regarding the actions to be taken and marriages were ended rather than allowing the continuation of abuse. The women and children received all of the property as restitution. As this structure began to diminish, it was the families who had to supervise in the absence of the warrior society.

When people manage to compromise and accept each other's differences, compatible relationships are possible. There were ceremonies where the old people would reinforce the young people's relationships. During these ceremonies, they would provide counsel and encourage participation in the learning lodge and rain dances as these reinforcements would contribute to the ability to live in harmony.

### **Stages of Marriage**

In Aboriginal society the structure of family is very important. The stages of marriage refer to one's process of individual development in

relation to life in a relationship with a partner. With marriage comes responsibility to one's partner, children, and the community.

There are five stages of marriage. The first seven years are the trial period in the relationship in which trust has to be built. In the old days, the marriage was consummated only after seven years. Any time before that, it would be appropriate to dissolve the relationship if necessary. Parents provided a lot of support in order to help young people stay together during the first seven difficult years and for this reason the couple lived in close proximity to parents and grandparents.

The first stage of marriage is characterized by attraction and blind love. The couple is immersed and differences in character and interests are not considered problematic. Awareness of frailties is not focused upon and weaknesses are not considered seriously. Advice is not accepted from others who observe weaknesses. It is a time of forgiveness and expression of love. Only if extreme differences are present, will the marriage dissolve during this time. If there are children involved, they will be affected by the disruption to the family.

The second stage of marriage is the stage of compromise. Role clarification is present and both realize the necessity for change and self-examination. Value differences have to be worked out and advice is accepted at this stage when necessary. It is a stage of compromise and can be successful only if both partners are willing to change. Time is spent together on activities of mutual

interest or of support for the interests of the other. Children are involved in activities and there is emphasis on relationship building as a family. Children are taught to understand animosity partners may have toward one another and the process of conflict resolution. Sacrifice and relationship building through shared mutual activities and time spent together are essential for the marriage to survive at this stage. A spouse is recognized as a true friend, others take lesser priority. Listening to one's spouse is essential to understand that person's innermost difficulties and sensitivities. This stage takes time and continual effort until each become one with their partner and are able to maintain the vision of when they first met. This stage is still considered a beginning in terms of marriage.

The third stage of marriage is the stage of compatibility. The couple has determined what works in the marriage and a process or system has been established. It is a stage of give and take that is well orchestrated. The couple enjoys being together and a pattern has been established. Enjoyment is evident and the relationship is nurtured. The couple is compatible and enjoys doing things together.

The fourth stage of marriage is the stage of oneness. The couple spend a lot of time together doing mutually enjoyable activities such as visiting friends and relatives. Children are grown, grandchildren may be present. Time is spent with old friends but care is taken not to take time away from the partner as they are much a part of each other. There is a need to be together and time is spent reminiscing. At this stage a couple can be a living example of a successful

relationship and can counsel young people in this matter. Break up at this stage would be devastating with little hope for recovery.

The fifth stage of marriage is the stage of companionship. A couple has total trust and have become intimate friends. Information about children and grandchildren is shared. There is total acceptance of differences and of life courses that their children have taken. It would be difficult to remarry at this age because of the difficulty in replicating a close relationship that has taken years to develop. At this stage a couple cares deeply for each other as they know each other very well, the fears, needs, weaknesses. There is strength in this knowledge and worry about each other's welfare is evident when apart. At this stage a person is well prepared to counsel, evaluate, advise, and assess. The other person's feelings and opinion are always considered when a decision is made as one is more aware of their companion's needs. Strength is developed through caring and happiness in being together. Difficulty leading to separation can occur at any stage when one is not willing to self-examine and make necessary changes in order to compromise.

### **Old Age and Death - The Seventh Fire**

At about the age of fifty to sixty years, the old people begin conducting ceremonies that they have learned through many years of helping and participation. By around seventy years of age, old people become regarded as Elders because of the vast knowledge that they have attained. They are regarded as advisors and teachers in many matters and their counsel is sought. There are three types of



Elders - Earth Elders, Community Elders, and Spiritual Elders - based on the specific areas of knowledge that have been attained.

Old age is the age of wisdom and experience. There is a status that comes with old age among First Nations people. In old age one is considered to have acquired wisdom by virtue of living a long life. Wisdom was considered as knowing and living out the principles of life as understood. That is why so much respect is granted to the old people, the Elders. The age of wisdom is the age of honor, fulfillment, and pride. It is the age in which the convictions of the things that you have done have become right in the minds of other people who aspire to learn from your experience. This recognition from the community qualifies a person to be known as an Elder.

Old age is the time when people have acquired knowledge, have achieved some success, and have accepted failures and limits. Old people have gained significant knowledge in terms of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development. Young people are encouraged to form a relationship with the old people in order for the knowledge to continue. To seek the knowledge of these people is to gain understanding of what they have experienced and learned through that experience. In times of difficulty the counsel of the old people is strongly encouraged.

Old age is called the age of reminiscence. This is the age in which the Elders tell you of things that happened in the past, as long-term memory is better developed at this age than short-term memory. Stories that I haven't had in my

mind for a long time are coming back. The old people love to talk about history and things that happened long ago. If you want to learn about what happened in your community, or what happened in the last one hundred years, you should go and talk to the old people. Sometimes talking about history opens old wounds. But if you ask in a nice way they will tell you. That is the way you learn your history and the traditions.

Old age is a very productive stage of life. Old people have much to contribute in that they are teachers of history, traditions, language, and philosophy. They are also keeper's of the law, nurturers, advisors, and leaders in ceremonial practices. Many of our old people are called to speak at gatherings, to travel and meet people in order to consult and provide counsel. Their important purpose keeps them strong mentally. Elders are very helpful in decision making as well. When in difficult situations, it helps to talk to an Elder who helps to sort out the facts around the problem. By the time you are finished you know what your decision is. The beauty of these gifted people as advisors is that they explain things so easily.

It is very important for the old people to have children around to talk to and tell their stories to as children add to life and happiness for old people. It is an important relationship that will keep the culture alive and maintain the stories, songs, and traditions. Bringing the old and young together not only adds to the revival of the culture but completes the circle. My grandmother at age ninety-nine, had raised five generations of children. She had many health problems but lived to

an old age because she disciplined herself in terms of diet in order to be there for her grandchildren. Children learn discipline through spending time with their grandmothers and grandfathers.

In dealing with old people it is very important not to disrupt their confidence and trust, not to question what they are doing. It is good to ask them how they feel and what it is that they need from you. They like to be asked for advice, to tell stories about life. Old people feel invigorated by these requests and will take a long time to talk. Discipline and patience is learned through this process. Elders share their knowledge through story-telling. It is up to the listener to derive meaning from the stories. The meaning of stories may not be understood for many years. When someone returns to the Elder many times, the sincerity to learn is demonstrated.

The old people are the keepers of our knowledge, laws, and ceremonies. They become leaders based on all of the knowledge that they have attained. You will see a good Elder by the way they live, the things they do. They are very careful. These are the ones you want to see, a holy person who is not afraid to tell you the truth.

### **Death and Dying**

One of the reasons that people fear death is because they have never come to an understanding of what the real purpose of life is on this earth, which has to do with the Creator's intention in our lives. Preparation for death is essential and that

preparation includes fasting, meditation, and ceremonial practices. As children we were taught not to be afraid of the dead. In the old days you could see the bodies in full view on stilts, not in graves, maybe as close as one hundred yards from your home. Superstition is what makes people fear the dead.

The purpose of death was to allow the spirit to leave the physical realm and to journey to the spiritual realm. As explained in our tradition, when death occurred the body remained for four days before burial, as this was the time required to allow the spirit to take leave of its physical frame and journey to the spiritual realm. Given the strength of the bond between the physical and spiritual, the separation was deemed reluctant and the spirit required time to make the final break. Because of the presence of the spirit during the time of the wake, prayers for restitution or blessing were common. The grieving period included mourning, reminiscence about the deceased, story-telling that included stories about the deceased and humorous stories to help ease the pain. It is said that mourning too much can detain a spirit in this realm. Ceremonies and feasts were observed that included commemoration for ancestors who had gone before. Families attending the feast did so in honour of the dead and of the family. Belongings of the deceased were distributed to the family and community. Mourning extended for a period of up to a year, marked by a ceremony at its end.

There was a place where people who did not lead a good life would go and be in a state of utter confusion and difficulty. But, according to the old people, that person whose spirit had tried so hard to emerge had not entirely lost the purpose of

its journey and would therefore stay in a void where it would be in a kind of dream state. These beings are not bound to this situation forever and require our assistance through specific ceremonies to help them move on.

The old people tell us that when dying there is a state when the suffering actually ends as the body goes into a deep state of shock. There is a state in which the mind begins to shut off the pain in a certain time of death. Before we had any kind of drugs to stop the pain the old people tell us that the mind has the ability to stop the pain. You can actually train for that. So preparation for the end of life is an acquired skill. In our society the old people had a way of dealing with their pain as they trained to live with and control pain. Part of the process included learning of particular songs to be sung before death. That is part of the preparation in learning how to die. They would sing their death song and that would take the pain away. And it wasn't loud. There is a sound when the mind and spirit come as one. It just shuts off the rest of the body. The song takes the spirit out of the body. So that kind of an ending is very important. Someone else can sing if the dying person is not capable. The old people say that this is the way to go back to the spirit world. The school of thought that promotes euthanasia is in contrast to the Indian way of death. The near death experience is the moment of restitution, of confession, when you relate to the Creator your failures and your mind reflects on that for a moment. The old people say that this is a necessary part of the preparation. Sometimes the spirit momentarily leaves the body because the body is actually surviving on its own limited energy.

Preparation for death is essential and that preparation goes back to fasting and meditation practices. It is also important to visit people who are dying, to witness death, and to attend wakes in order to gain a better understanding of this process. People who are dying want to be spoken to. When someone is dying all of the relatives come, children included. This is the last time your conscious body can see all of the family before the natural transition occurs. When my mother was dying she wanted to know if everyone was there. When the last person finally came, it wasn't long after that she finally went to sleep.

The old people said that a man's spirit could exist on four different levels. On the first level it gave life to a body and was conscious. On the second level, when the body was in sleep, the spirit traveled through past, present, and future, through space and time, awakening the body on its return. On the third level the spirit left the body to take up an existence in another dimension. This happened when death occurred. The fourth level was existence in the realm of spirits.

**Elder Musqua's words end at this point.**

## **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

In this research project I have documented Elder Musqua's knowledge of Saulteaux human development as attained through the oral tradition. This understanding of human development stems from pre-contact knowledge systems, which existed in North America that are as complex and vast as any other traditions of learning in the world. This knowledge is only one small but important aspect of that tradition. In examining this knowledge, not only its content has been observed but also the methods by which it is transmitted and the principles that were established by that knowledge system. The practice of the oral tradition, the research methodology utilized for the purpose of this project, is an age-old established learning system that has validity; is a discipline with standards; upholds guiding principles; has established methods; and includes memory development and language skill development.

This paper presents a general overview of human development from the perspective of an Aboriginal worldview through the teachings of Saulteaux Elder Danny Musqua. Articulating this knowledge in written form is a new and challenging approach, as learning through human experience has always been the preferred way to obtain knowledge in Aboriginal cultures.

There is a great need for this type of research in Aboriginal education as the colonization process has disrupted the educational process for Aboriginal people.

The modern definition of education stands in sharp contrast to the traditional Aboriginal view, which is centered on education as a natural process occurring during everyday activities. For the majority of Aboriginal students, now as in the past one hundred years, Indian education means the education of Indians by non-Indians using non-Indian methods (National Education Association, 1983). There is a prevailing view among scholars and educators that Aboriginal principles are somewhat inferior to modern principles. They have also been conditioned to assume that Aboriginal methods for preserving knowledge are unreliable or non-existent, which has rendered much of their knowledge of history and cosmology invalid and, for the most part, useless for academic use. (National Education Association, 1983). Aboriginal educators and scholars have turned their attention to the traditional knowledge base and have begun the long and arduous task of using it to develop curricular materials that will be original products of their academic institutions. Translating foundational traditional education principles into a contemporary framework of thought and description is not an easy task. It advocates developing a contemporary, culturally based, educational process founded upon traditional tribal values, orientations, and principles, while simultaneously using the most appropriate concepts, technologies, and content of modern education (Cajete, 1994).

There are a variety of reasons that have made this project seem purposeful. The endorsement of an Aboriginal knowledge base, and the methods and principles for sharing that knowledge, in the education process is important. The



acknowledgement of the oral tradition as research methodology, with methods and principles established by that knowledge system is also important as the preservation of knowledge in this form is endorsed by Elders as the old ways of passing knowledge have deteriorated given the times that we live in today. The validation of a subjugated, or experiential based knowledge of a group of peoples considered a minority is important. The use of an Elder as a primary source in acknowledgement of the oral tradition is also important. This project can be viewed as the development of a resource that can be used for education and research purposes. It assists in the development of a forum in which the Elder's vital role as teacher and guide can be shared in a contemporary way. Elders such as Danny Musqua and Alex Wolfe, have endorsed the development of materials that will encourage students to learn more about their traditions. They recognize that for many Indian people, the old ways of passing knowledge on have deteriorated given the times that we live in today. They have supported the creation of this resource, not as a replacement of the traditional path, but as a way of raising awareness of the potential for traditional practices and beliefs to impact positively on individuals, communities, and societies and in order to preserve knowledge.

Motivation for this project stems from the fact that time is of the essence. It will not be long before enormous and complex areas of knowledge attained in the Aboriginal culture will be lost forever under the impact of modern technology. In a matter of one generation, vast sources of information could be lost. In sharing this information it is important to note that it has to be examined in its own light and

according to its own regulations and consistencies. This work is not based on theories already established in western society or intended to be subjected to comparisons with material obtained under different philosophical rationale.

Personally, I feel honored to have been able to work with an Elder in the development of this resource, in taking the teachings from the oral tradition and putting them in a written format that can be shared with others. This valuable resource can be used as an educational tool for informing those who do not understand Aboriginal concepts. It can also be used to enhance the learning of those who do know, to gain new insights and formulate new questions that warrant researching. The material can be used as a valuable resource in teaching, both in secondary and post-secondary institutions. It can also be used for research purposes in the areas such as developmental psychology, health, counselling, and education.

A venture of this magnitude is not without limitations. I have but touched the surface in the vast body of knowledge of human growth and development that stems from Sauteaux teachings. This paper presents a summary guideline of these teachings, and not a comprehensive explanation. After all, Aboriginal peoples have acquired this knowledge from childhood through the lifelong process of experiential learning and the oral tradition. Also, as implicit in the oral tradition, Elder Danny Musqua's teachings are presented in their original context with interpretation left to the reader, each deriving meaning at a level that is appropriate to them.

A great limitation is that this paper is written in the English language, not the Saulteaux language. There is no doubt that the interpretation would be richer and more powerful if presented in the language of its origin, as language and culture are inseparable. The description of the process of human growth and development in stages is another limitation that is inherent in describing this holistic model of development in the English language.

A contemporary perspective of Aboriginal education requires the knowledge of the cultural traditions and philosophies of the people themselves as shared by Elders through the oral tradition. I believe this to be a necessary step in the process of Aboriginal educational self-determination. This paper is a contribution to that process.

*We have a beautiful tradition and a holistic view of the universe that makes us who we are. In our circle, we need the old and the young, the old to teach and the young to keep the tradition alive. Nothing really dies out in a circle, things might get old and wear away but they renew again, generation after generation. That is what the circle is about. Very few of us were in universities in my youth, now it is an everyday occurrence. These are the ones that are going to make the change. And there will be a time when the old will be allowed to speak again and I think this is the time right now.*

*Elder Danny Musqua*

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## **Appendix A**

### **Saulteaux Human Growth and Development - Course Outline**

**COURSE OUTLINE**  
**OF**  
**DAN MUSQUA**

**Human Growth and Development from a Saulteaux Perspective**

**Social Work 421**  
**Social Work Program**  
**Saskatchewan Indian Federated College**  
**Saskatoon Campus**  
**September - December 1995**

## **Course Outline**

- 1. Introduction to Human Development: An Overview**
  - 1.1 Saulteaux Philosophy and World View: Purpose for Existence  
Relationships to Life that Surrounds Us, Physical and Spiritual  
Dimensions
  - 1.2 Theoretical Framework:      The Seven Fires of Life  
   The Seven Levels of Life  
   The Seven Disciplines of Life
- 2. Knowledge and Practice of Learning**
  - 1.1 Disciplines of Learning: Attention, Listening, Memory  
Development and Imitation
  - 1.2 Principles of Learning and Practice: Respect, Carefulness  
Patience, Commitment, Non-Interference, Humbleness, Preparation
- 3. Methods of Developmental Learning**
  - 1.1 Oral Tradition
  - 1.2 Ceremonies
  - 1.3 Fasting
  - 1.4 Doorways to Knowledge:      Meditation, Dreaming,  
   Fasting/Visions
  - 1.5 Practical Applications of Knowledge: Hunting, Trapping, Dancing,  
Singing, Healing, Medicine Gathering, Food Gathering, Storytelling
- 4. Dimensions of Development**
  - 1.1 Mind, Heart, Spirit, and Body
  - 1.2 Balance and Harmony of the Four Dimensions of Learning
  - 1.3 Relational Development: Self, Family, Community, Nature
- 5. Conception and Prebirth - 1<sup>st</sup> Stage**
  - 1.1 Philosophy of the Creation of the Self and the Universe
  - 1.2 Transition from Spirit to Physical Worlds: From Out of Eternity
  - 1.3 Ceremonies: Rites of Passage
  - 1.4 Prenatal Care of Mother and Baby
- 6. Birth to Walking - 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage**
  - 1.1 Ceremony: Rite of Passage
  - 1.2 Age of Dependence
  - 1.3 Development and Use of Five Senses
  - 1.4 Security and Belonging Needs of Child: Parental and Extended  
Family Roles

- 7. Walking to 7 Years - 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage**
  - 1.1 Freedom and Responsibility
  - 1.2 Reason Development - Spiritual and Physical
  - 1.3 Knowledge of Existence
  - 1.4 Identity Formation: Understanding Origin and History of Anishnabe
  - 1.5 Relationship Between Self, Family, Nature, and Creator
  - 1.6 Language Development and Oral Tradition: Relationship to thinking, reasoning, and moral development
  - 1.7 Social Development
- 8. Little Men and Little Women (7 to 14 Years) - 4<sup>th</sup> Stage**
  - 1.1 Ceremonies: Rites of Passage
  - 1.2 Sex Roles - Recognition and Exploration of Gender Differences
  - 1.3 Preparation for Adult Life - Wascapayos
  - 1.4 Teachings: Understanding and Respect for Opposite Sex
- 9. Young Adults (14 to 20 Years) - 5<sup>th</sup> Stage**
  - 1.1 Full Membership to Adult Community
  - 1.2 Relationships to Clan, Ancestors, Opposite Sex
  - 1.3 Identity Formation: Beliefs, Geneology, History, Family/Clan Relationships, Membership to Societies, Laws
  - 1.4 Apprenticeship to Teachers and Practitioners of Medicines and Ceremonies
  - 1.5 Ceremonies: Rites of Passage, Lone Fasting
- 10. Adult Development (20 to 60 Years) - 6<sup>th</sup> Stage**
  - 1.1 Parenting Role and Skills
  - 1.2 Responsibility for Self, Family, Community
  - 1.3 Sex Roles
  - 1.4 Age of Productivity: Male and Female Roles as Providers
  - 1.5 Ceremonies and Purposes: Council Dance, Feasts, Round Dance, Rain Dance, Learning Lodge
  - 1.6 Advanced Learning through Fasting, Meditation, and Dreams
- 11. Old Age and Death - 7<sup>th</sup> Stage**
  - 1.1 Age of Wisdom: Experience and Knowledge Together
  - 1.2 Age of Reminiscence: Teacher and Keeper of History and Traditions, Philosophy and Original Language
  - 1.3 Productivity: Role as Teacher, Nurturer, and Advisor
  - 1.4 Leader and Keeper of Ceremonies
  - 1.5 Tradition of Okichitow: Recognition and Role of Holy Men and Women

- 1.6 Relationship Between Grandparents and Grandchildren
- 1.7 Relationship with Self, Family, and Community
- 1.8 Health and Wellbeing of Elders

**12. Death**

- 1.1 Death and Renewal: The Cycle of Life
- 1.2 Transition From Physical to Spirit Worlds: Back to Eternity
- 1.3 Preparing for the End of the Path on the Earth
- 1.4 Death as an Advisor
- 1.5 Ceremonies: Remembering Our Ancestors

**13. Conclusion and Review**

**Appendix B**  
**Agreement and Consent Forms**

## Agreement and Consent Form

To Elder Musqua:

As you are aware I am in the process of completing a Masters of Education degree through the College of Graduate Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. As a graduate student in the Department of Educational Foundations, I wish to focus my project on Saulteaux human developmental stages and aspects, as taught through the oral tradition as we discussed previously.

For my project, I will be producing resources based on lectures that you have delivered in classes on Saulteaux human development for the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. I am requesting your permission to share the tape recorded information from these classes as well as information from our personal discussions that describe the human developmental process from the Saulteaux perspective through the master's project that I am proposing. A copy of the audio-tapes of lectures and discussions will be safeguarded and securely stored by the supervisor at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years as per University regulations.

You will receive copies of information that I have gathered while conducting research for the project and you will have final authority on any material that is included in the final draft of the project. You will be asked to sign a Transcript Release Form in order for me to use the information in my project. However, it is also understood that you can withdraw your involvement and permission at any time, and that none of the knowledge that you have conveyed will be used without your full knowledge and written permission. You will receive a copy of the final product, which will be dedicated to you and your forefathers.

As mutually agreed, all recorded and written material that I collect will not be used for any other purpose or distributed in any manner other than for my master's degree project. The project will, however, be in the University's collection and, therefore, accessible by anyone and subject to his/her interpretation and citation.

For your consideration.

---

I agree to the terms outlined for the completion of this project and have received a copy of the Consent Form:

Elder Danny Musqua: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Diane Knight: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I can be reached at 953-7230 or 763-7276 for further information.

My supervisor, Dr. Mark Flynn, can be reached at 966-7710.



## **Appendix C**

### **Data Release Forms**

## **TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORMS**

**I have reviewed all data collected and used in this study for it's accuracy and interpretation. I have made changes I feel necessary. I am, under these conditions, in agreement for the release of this information for use in your project in the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan.**

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

**Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_**

**I have received a copy of the Consent Form for participation in this study.**

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