Athabasca University Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

OPIKINAWASOWIN: THE LIFE LONG PROCESS OF GROWING CREE AND METIS CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This research project explores Cree and Metis Elders teachings about traditional child rearing and investigates how storytelling is used to facilitate the transfer of this culturally based knowledge. This project examines the concept of Opikinawasowin which contains the Cree philosophical framework for growing children. Opikinawasowin, translates into English as the 'child rearing way' and is a highly valued aspect of traditional Cree life. For generations Cree and Metis people used storytelling to actualize the teachings of Opikinawasowin. The concept of Opikinawasowin in this study is defined and expressed through Cree and Metis Elders points of view and by the sharing of traditional teachings.

Storytelling is used by Elders to impart core values and beliefs about parenting. Through stories Elders give specific teachings relating to how individuals, families, and communities are expected to practice traditional child rearing. Additionally, Opikinawasowin knowledge is often transmitted through the cultural context of prayer and ceremony so asking Elders about the spiritual foundation of Opikinawasowin is an important aspect within this research. This study documents thirteen traditional parenting teachings and identifies fifty four recommendations for further discussion regarding the revival of traditional parenting teachings and practices in our contemporary families and communities. Some issues raised in this study include the need to restore male and female balance in our families, communities, and nation so that our children will have this balance role modeled for them because it is an original feature of traditional society.

It was expressed in this study Cree and Metis families gain a significant amount of resilience from learning and living traditional cultural teachings. It was learned we need to restore the powers of the grandmothers to oversee and monitor the implementation of childrearing. Other insights included the need to support parents in their personal healing journey through the use of traditional cultural practices such as ceremonies and by giving them extended family and community supports so they can consciously work on themselves and their parenting practices. Additionally, it is believed individual, parents, families, communities, and nations need to develop a collective vision for parenting which includes returning children to the heart center of our society.

Through this study many of the beliefs, philosophies, customs, and traditions about traditional child rearing teachings are expressed by the Elders. It is demonstrated in this study people who were raised within families who still practiced traditional childrearing ways were able to gain cultural strength and resilience which served to guide them as community role models during their Eldership years. Although colonial impacts have negatively impacted traditional childrearing ways there is resilience and resistance in our communities and many traditional teachings were able to survive either underground, through oral tradition, and within the Indigenous languages.

With the current trend to decolonize and heal intergenerational trauma more Elders are willing to share this oral knowledge so future generations of parents will receive the traditional teachings. The research project employs a methodological approach based on the oral tradition and has followed the accepted traditional protocol expected for working with Elders from Cree and Metis communities in central and northeastern Saskatchewan. The research reporting process and teachings are shared through the model of narrative inquiry and oral history because these methods are consistent with traditional First Nations and Metis approaches to teaching, learning, and sharing.

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Introduction-Beginning the Journey

All my life I have tried to make sense of what it means to be a Metis person. My mother is of English/Irish farming background and my father is a Cree speaking Metis person originally from Cumberland House so at a young age I experienced different cultural practices in childrearing. My parents had some similarities and differences in their approach to childrearing. Upon my entry into motherhood I searched out traditional Cree and Metis ways of raising children in order to incorporate these traditions into my own childrearing practices. My interest in the issue caused me to find teachers to give me this childrearing knowledge so I could raise my son in a healthy balanced way and give him a sense of Metis identity early in his life. As compared to myself who personally struggled to make sense of my personal Metis identity until my early adulthood years. On my journey for traditional childrearing knowledge there was a beautiful metaphor within the Cree language which makes the connection between growing plants and raising children. Implied within this linguistic metaphor is the expectation Cree and Metis parents participate in a synergetic growth process with their children.

In this way of thinking parenting is considered a life long commitment. The plant metaphor invokes imagery of parents, particularly the grandmothers, as the gardeners who help all children grow into full blossom. This imagery gives the understanding caregivers provide children with the foundational roots which connect them to their family and community. It is understood in traditional Cree and Metis culture the grandmothers are the keepers of all childrearing knowledge and stories. It is said the grandmothers carry the child rearing bundle for the people. The participants in this study acknowledge the role old women as the first teachers and as the overseers of issues related to the growing of children. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the purpose, functions, and duties of women and men in traditional society in relationship to parenting practices. The stories contributed to this research project reveal the insight in order to decolonize our Cree and Metis childrearing practices women and men need to have their traditional roles, responsibilities, and powers restored into the family,

community, and nation. It is evident we need restore the balance between the male and female which was an important feature of traditional society.

Four grandmothers participated in this study and contributed their knowledge of childrearing which consisted of teachings they had learned from their own grandmothers, mothers, and aunties. The three grandfathers who were interviewed for this study were raised in strong female homes and they all provide insightful male perspectives about living and learning within female centered families. The grandfathers in this study share vital information about the role of grandfather in upholding the male portion of the family circle. This study explores how the grandfathers and grandmothers once had complimentary roles within the family, community, and the nation which were originally based upon the foundation of harmony and balance.

This research project explores the oral cultural teachings regarding traditional Cree and Metis views of growing children and how these teachings are passed on to the next generation through the use of story. It examines how traditional teachings serve as a source of resilience for our people. This study makes an important contribution to the literature because the teachings about traditional child rearing are not being shared by the Elders to the degree they were a few generations ago. At present Cree and Metis traditional child rearing information remains under-represented in the literature and due to academic standards set by university institutions traditional holistic ways of teaching and learning are not adequately represented. Consequently more information is required from the Cree and Metis community to document teachings, especially those of female Elders about growing children, and more inquiry is needed to examine the role of storytelling in transmitting this culturally based knowledge. The changing traditional roles of females and the males initiated by church and government policy have significantly disrupted parenting. Due to historical oppression of women's wisdom much of the information available about traditional child rearing practices has left women's contributions to the published knowledge base lacking and this study serves to fill that gap.

In the literature information related to traditional childrearing practices has often been misinterpreted by writers grounded in western patriarchal thought and this information has been subjected to negative racial assumptions and stereotypes held by non-Aboriginal society (Hirschfelder, 1982; Brokenleg et. al 2001; Glover, 2001). This research project is important because many modern Cree and Metis parents struggle with the dominant society's stereotypes of their childrearing practices and my goal is to contribute to some cross cultural understanding on this topic. Many modern Cree and Metis parents want to bring back their original traditional parenting practices into their homes and are searching for information about traditional parenting teachings so they can bring them into their modern parenting approaches. This project makes a small contribution to the written literature for those people especially parents who want to begin the process of engaging in critical discussion and thought about growing children.

This research project serves to fill this gap since few studies specifically interview Elders particularly females about traditional child rearing teachings and practices. At present there is an urgent need to interview Elders about this topic since they are an aging population and due to the effects of colonialism, systemic racism, the residential school system, and the child welfare system many Elders have not shared their traditional child rearing teachings as meticulously as the generations past (Bopp, 1985; Ing, 1990; Lavell-Harvard et al, 1996; Aboriginal Parent Program, 1995, & Morriseau, 1998). This study reveals Cree and Metis families need to seriously engage in a process to deconstruct or decolonize current parenting practices. An outcome of the conversations with Elders in this study resulted in fifty four recommendations for further discussion which contains ideas to help our parents, families, and communities decolonize our parenting practices.

The Elders who were interviewed for this project are recognized knowledge keepers in their communities and were willing and able to share this important aspect of their culture so that the younger parents like my self may re-learn or learn for the first time traditional parenting skills and teachings. The goals and objectives of this study were to interview Elders about traditional child rearing knowledge; to explore Elders interpretations and understanding of Opikinawasowin; to identify the storytelling techniques, principles, and methods used by traditional Cree and Metis parents to teach

culturally based information about child rearing; to gather Cree and Metis concepts about the use of story in facilitating learning, supporting child-development, and teaching values; to explore traditional Cree and Metis parenting philosophies that contribute to cultural resiliency, development of cultural identity, and parenting skills.

The thesis for this research project is people who were raised with core Opikinawasowin teachings during their formative years were able to develop cultural strength and resilience which served to help them as they faced challenges trying to live in mainstream society and these teachings gave them a vital knowledge base as they entered into their Eldership as knowledge keepers. Story as a form of intergenerational communication is a key aspect within the traditional learning system. Through stories knowledge keepers give specific teachings about how everyone including individuals, families, and communities are expected to carry out their responsibilities for child rearing. Elders were and continue to be one of the primary vessels for the transmission of traditional child rearing knowledge. Making time to engage in these conversations with these people has deepened my awareness of what it means to be a Cree and Metis parent and my related responsibilities as a caregiver and storyteller.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study is an exploratory qualitative study based on face-to-face interviews with four Cree and three Metis knowledge keepers from central and northern Saskatchewan [See Appendix A-Elders Biographies]. 'Knowledge Keepers' is a preferred culturally appropriate term for Elder (Kruger & Wheeler, 2002). Using traditional protocol they were requested to share their stories, experiences, and own understanding about traditional child rearing, as well as their perspectives about the place of story in raising children. The participants were selected based on their knowledge and experience in the subject area and their willingness to be interviewed. There is a time span of twenty one years between the participants in this study 1926-1947. All the participating Elders family genealogies demonstrated a deep historical kinship connection between the Metis and Cree people in Northeastern and Central Saskatchewan so it was impossible to separate some of these teachings into just Cree or Metis teachings. In many

cases there is a high degree of cultural influence of Saulteaux (Plains Ojibway) teachings because of the historical intermarriages and alliances with this nation.

The research was conducted in the format of the oral tradition and using the acceptable traditional protocol, the Elders were offered tobacco and a culturally appropriate gift. It is vital these traditional protocols be incorporated into every level of how we conduct and share culturally sensitive research. Cree scholar Shawn Wilson claims, "Research is ceremony," as such we need to weave our cultural approaches into our research design and reporting considerations (Wilson, 2008:11). The Elders agreed to be recorded on digital audio tape and requested the transcripts and audio files be deposited into an Aboriginal controlled archive so that future generations of Aboriginal people will be able to have access to the original research materials. The Elders emphasized I have an ethical responsibility to share this knowledge with the Cree and Metis community in as many forms as possible so people can benefit from the basic teachings. It is stressed the information shared in this report is basic and the Elders only shared what I am entitled to earn at this stage in my learning journey.

The methodology consisted of two rounds of interviews: formally recorded interviews based on a structured interview questionnaire process and unrecorded conversations to follow up with issues raised in the interviews. Oral historian Julie Cruikshank stresses the importance of establishing a conversational "dialogue" with Elders since, "some of these conversations take unexpected turns (Cruikshank, 1998: 26)." Cree academics Willie Ermine (1995) and Neal McLeod (2007) both encourage the use of visiting and conversation as important components in the transmission of knowledge and strengthening of community. In conversation with Isabelle Impey it was suggested to be mindful about the terminology used in this report because, "The words that we choose carry with them many loaded assumptions." Even though I do not speak any Aboriginal languages the Elders encouraged me to use as much as possible the Aboriginal languages to describe traditional teaching concepts in order to show respect to the original source of these teachings.

The chart below overviews information about the seven Elders who participated in this study:

Name of Elder Participant	**Childhood Community/Region**	**Family Cultural Affiliation**	**Birth Year**
Florence Allen (Saultier)	Sturgeon Landing in Northeastern Saskatchewan	Cree-Saulteaux	1947
James Burns	James Smith Cree Nation in Central Saskatchewan	Plains Cree	1945
Rose Fleury (Gariepy)	Duck Lake in Central Saskatchewan	Metis-Michif	1926
Isabelle Impey (Dorion)	Cumberland House in Northeastern Saskatchewan	Swampy Cree-Metis	1944
Solomon Sanderson	Chakastaypasin Cree Nation in Central Saskatchewan	Plains Cree-Metis	1941
Elsie Sanderson (Dorion)	Cumberland House in Northeastern Saskatchewan	Swampy Cree-Metis	1941
Robert McAuley	Cumberland House in Northeastern Saskatchewan	Swampy Cree-Metis	1944

Chart A-Overview of Research Participants

This collaborative study identified thirteen traditional childrearing teachings shared by the Elders and these teachings connect to fifty four recommendations for further discussion about traditional parenting. The teachings are symbolically organized into thirteen major themes, this is done because there are thirteen moons in a lunar year, and thirteen is considered a sacred number representing the female connection to the moon cycles. James Burns recommended the thirteen teachings be reported in the form of a wheel because of our circular worldview and as a result of his suggestion the teachings are shared in a wheel format around the thirteen interrelated Opikinawasowin topics [See Chart -The Opikinawasowin Teachings Wheel]. It is a recognized cultural practice to organize our thinking and share our knowledge in way that is embedded within traditional cultural knowledge and symbolism.

The first limitation of this study is it uses a small data sample. However, the benefits included more time to work extensively with the Elders and the ability to conduct greater levels of follow-up activity. Since I am not fluent in the Cree or Michif languages spoken by the Elders, I required more guidance and support to work through some of the linguistic challenges. Another limitation of this study is my own knowledge base in this subject area is at an infancy stage and it takes years to gain this knowledge related to traditional parenting so this study is greatly limited by my own level of experience in the subject area.

Working with traditional knowledge keepers can require years of mentorship, trust building, and relationship development before significant information is learned or imparted to the learner (Wheeler, 2005; Campbell, 1995; & Cruikshank, 1998). A benefit of this study is that I had already maintained relationships with the Elders who were approached for this study. Many of the people interviewed in this project were from my extended family system which gave me a significant amount of prior knowledge and experience about their specialized teachings before the interview process. Working with my related family members was an asset because I already knew the protocol and process for relationship building with these Elders which is an essential aspect of conducting

orally based research. By making the choice to interview family members I have made a deep personal commitment to my family and community to work honorably with their teachings.

The academy has traditionally considered in depth work between relatives as a "conflict of interest," because of the inherent lack of objectivity. My first reaction to this perspective is there really any objective research? Cree academic Winona Wheeler views a deeply personal connection to the research as not necessarily negative thing she says, "When historians have no relationship with the storyteller, or lack the lived experience, or have no personal investment in the histories they study, or do not understand the nature, quality, and role of Indigenous oral histories, it is no surprise that our oral histories become de-spiritualized, sanitized, amputated (Wheeler, 2005: 196)." It is traditional protocol to learn from the Elders within your family system it is disrespectful not to accept their hand in learning. Aboriginal societies have protocols and processes required for the sharing of knowledge between other clans and other peoples.

It is considered stealing if one tries to represent other people's cultures without undertaking steps to practice traditional protocol. Cree Elder Ruth Seeseequasis recalls when anthropologists would visit them they would, "not disclose everything, we were the protectors of this knowledge, but we could give out as much as we could, but not everything (Beardy's & Okemasis, 2004: 77)." According to the teachings "Everything is earned" and this applies to the process of doing research with Aboriginal communities. There are several levels of knowledge which will reveal itself when the learner is ready and once they have earned it. This is particularly true when discussing sacred knowledge Elders have committed their entire lives to obtain they will only share what they can.

The research material gathered from the interviews in this study is reported using a combination of academic contextualization, oral history, and sharing through storytelling. "Narrative is an important component of oral history, along with description, explanation, and reflection (Yow, 2005: 15)." The academic reporting style is like other Indigenous studies scholars such as; Shawn Wilson, (2008), Winona Wheeler (2005), Jo-ann Archibald, (2008), Kim Anderson (2000), Neal McLeod (2007), and Hertha Dawn Wong, (1992). The other style of reporting through storytelling draws

upon the models created by Indigenous researchers such as; Louise Legare (1996), Mary Bighead (1996), Angelina Baydala et al (2006), and Michael Relland (1998). It was extremely important the Elders own words and teachings form the core of the final research report.

This research project required me to participate in a deeply introspective process about how to make meaning out of the culturally based parenting teachings. Reporting through storytelling draws from the theory and practice from narrative inquiry. "Narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling. The researcher then writes a narrative of the experience (Constable et al, 2005: 1)." The narrative inquiry approach employed in this study is consistent with traditional First Nations and Metis approaches to teaching, learning, and sharing (Relland, 1998; Archibald, 2008; & Baydala et al, 2006). In regards to reporting the information for this research project the participants validated each others knowledge, therefore, not much time was spent verifying their teachings with information presented from disciplines such as history, ethnology, and anthropology.

My role in this research study is focused around knowledge transfer. As the interpreter of the research my goal is to transfer this knowledge into a format that will somehow make a bridge between the academic and traditional worlds. Any failings to bring these two forms of knowledge systems together is mine alone. Every aspect of this project has been filtered through my own perspectives beginning right with the formulation of the research questions, through to the interpretation of the interview data, and in the final reporting format choices utilized. The participants in this study have placed a great deal of trust in me to carry out this research process in a respectful manner and I hope the inherent biases and interpretations within my writing have not lost the original intentions behind their stories.

This research project draws upon theoretical frameworks commonly used within Indigenous studies such as post-colonialism theory. "The ultimate goal of post-colonialism is combating the residual effects of colonialism on cultures (Wikipedia, 2010: 1)." Post-colonialist theory sits well with this study on traditional childrearing because it is, "Not simply concerned with salvaging past worlds, but learning how the

world can move beyond this period together, towards a place of mutual respect (Wikipedia, 2010: 2)." There is some debate as to the notion that we are in a post-colonial situation and many would argue the colonial experience continues in our current reality (3).

The findings in this research demonstrate possible solutions about how our families and communities can begin the decolonization process from the negative colonial effects that have made their way contemporary Cree and Metis childrearing practices. Post-colonialist thought is useful in this study because it exposes historical inequities and seeks change by, "exposing and deconstructing the racist, imperialist nature of colonial assumptions and they will begin to lose their power of persuasion and coercion over the colonized (3)." Due to our colonial history Cree writer Sylvia McAdam states, "Decolonization should become a standard part of First Nations' vocabulary especially among the young (McAdam, 2009: 5)."

Analyzing colonial effects is very important to do within our current Cree and Metis childrearing practices because dysfunctional behaviors, beliefs, and values have made their way into our modern parenting. Historical colonial policies used by the state and church were focused on breaking down the Cree and Metis family unit in order to facilitate quicker assimilation and integration of the family into mainstream society. Cree writer Michael Anthony Hart emphasizes, "The colonizers introduce their worldviews to oppress Aboriginal peoples' cultures and act to destroy Aboriginal social institutions," such as the family unit (Hart, 2002: 25). The family was and will continue to be one of the targets of colonialism if we do not begin the process of deconstruction followed by the subsequent reconstruction of our families and our communities otherwise we will continue to perpetuate the legacy of colonial oppression.

A key goal of post-colonial theorists is, "clearing space for multiple voices" especially those that have been historically silenced such as women and children (Wikipedia, 2010: 2)." This is particularly important in relationship to a topic such as traditional cultural parenting. The patriarchal nature of historical research has neglected to search out the perspectives of women and children which are contrary to the nature of

the traditional Indigenous family leaders system which values the expression of the voices of women and children. Where possible this study uses anti-colonial writing through the use of cultural metaphor, symbolism, and Aboriginal languages.

The theoretical framework for this project is influenced by the theories and perspectives emerging from the newest generation of Aboriginal scholars (Anderson, 2000; McLeod; 2007; Bedard; 2006; Makokis, 2008). An Aboriginal theoretical perspective applied extensively in my research is looking at the application of the concept of harmony and balance and how it is represented in these stories about traditional childrearing practices. An effort was made in this study to take a balanced approach by searching out both male and female perspectives about traditional parenting teachings and how they contribute to individual and community resilience. In this study it is observed people who were raised during their formative years in families that still practiced a high degree of traditional cultural parenting were able to develop important foundational skills, beliefs, and values which served as a source of strength and resilience which helped them throughout their life and has contributed to their journey into Eldership. It is learned intergenerational storytelling is a key aspect for passing on the worldviews, traditional teachings, and resilient cultural behaviors.

As a research project focused on the documentation of Aboriginal ways of knowing creative ways were used to respectfully honor the spiritual nature of these knowledge systems. Cree academic Neal McLeod says, "Encounters with the spiritual realm are components of the Indigenous way of seeing the world (McLeod, 2007: 29)." This is certainly true in this study of traditional parenting narrative where the interviews made it clear that the non-human and spiritual world make up a significant part of the knowledge keepers storytelling and life experiences. Non-Aboriginal writers of the past often ignored or misinterpreted how these spiritual aspects of our knowledge systems formed a basis for the nature of our teachings (Radin, 1972; Friesen, 2000). So many of our spiritually based oral stories were diminished or discounted in historical writings as "just fairy tales" or as "make believe" by colonial writers and were quickly disregarded before the wisdom and metaphor contained within them could be understood, thankfully

with more Aboriginal people in the academy grounded in their language and culture these stories are becoming properly represented in academic discourse in a more meaningful and acceptable manner.

The use of oral history is an important aspect of doing Aboriginal based research since orally transmitted knowledge is the primary method used by our people. Metis scholar Kim Anderson explains, "One of the primary characteristics of oral history is to delineate the worldview of the people it serves (30)." A benefit of oral history is, "The in-depth interview offers the benefit of seeing in its full complexity the world of another Yow, 2005; 23)." In this study many of the teachings in this research were centered on the restoration of traditional Cree and Metis worldviews. This study explored Elders stories regarding past cultural childrearing practices and analyzes what has been carried forward, what has not been carried to the next generation, and why this has occurred because, "Stories of the past will reflect needs of the present (Anderson, 2010: 34)." The oral teachings were shared so future generations can create cultural balance and develop resilience in their parenting practices. Saulteaux writer Alexander Wolfe acknowledges it is a difficult task to document oral traditions and to, "bring the written tradition and oral tradition together (Wolfe, 1988: xxii)." He concludes it is possible if writer's, "Stay within the boundaries of the principles and rules that govern oral tradition when transmitting the stories in written form (xxii)." From my experience bringing the two knowledge systems is not an easy task because there are inherent oppositions between written and orally based knowledge systems.

Mohawk scholar Patricia Monture-Angus gives the insight, "It is probably fortunate for Aboriginal people today that so many of our histories are oral histories. Information that was kept in peoples' heads was not available to Europeans, could not be changed and molded (Monture-Angus, 1995:11)." Although this approach was true in the past we are entering a time where some of our traditional Aboriginal oral knowledge is now safe to share with others and our traditional knowledge is no longer subjected to the same level of colonial stereotyping because of the hard work of our own Aboriginal writers, researchers, the activism of our Elders, and the refusal of our leaders to be

silenced. Our Aboriginal communities are working hard to educate, share, and inform others about our ways so we can facilitate the decolonization process of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). As Aboriginal scholars we have a responsibility we do not perpetuate colonial stereotypes in our research. Additionally, we need to find creative ways to root our research within the foundations of our cultures which is not always an easy task when one is working within historic colonial institutions such as universities.

While engaging in this academic research project it became apparent rules held in the university academy regarding maintaining the anonymity of oral informants goes contrary to nature of the rules and customs of the oral tradition. A great deal of effort is made in traditional Aboriginal storytelling to develop an oral story telling chain. This is the ethical responsibility to acknowledge who gave you knowledge and stories. By openly acknowledging oral informants it creates accountability for them and tells others where the teachings originated. Many knowledge keepers consider it unacceptable for researchers to not identify them because it breaks the storytelling chain which works to guide the people in our communities to specialized knowledge holders. At present Aboriginal researchers are working with university ethics boards to address this inherent conflict between traditional Aboriginal protocol and current university ethics regulations (Janovicek, 2006: 163).

A Literature Review of Colonial Impacts on Child Rearing

In the 1960s and 1970s a growing body of scholarship and discourse emerged which began to name and speak about the racial violence, oppression, and injustices related to the historic process of colonization on Aboriginal peoples across the world (Memmi, 1965; Cesaire, 1972; & Freire, 1968). In the literature colonization is understood as the process of an outside group imposing their laws, customs, religion, social, educational, economic, and political institutions on a group of people who are culturally different usually for economic gain (Frideres & Gadacz; 2005; Taiaike 2009; Memmi, 1965; Cesaire, 1972). Colonizers sought "Gold, God, and Glory" through the

acquisition of land, trade, laborers, and natural and manufactured resources (FSIN, 1980:23).

Colonizers sought to change the ideology of their non-European subjects and considered European culture as the "vanguard of all peoples" because of their progress and technological advancements (23). Eurocentrism is a term coined to refer to the practice of viewing the world from a European perspective, with an implied belief, either consciously or subconsciously, in the preeminence of European culture (Wikipedia, 2010:1). This attitude of European superiority resulted in the perspective that Aboriginal parenting ways needed to be assimilated or changed to western ways of childrearing. Cree scholar Michael Anthony Hart says, "Families are directly attacked by the colonizers and are forced to fit the colonizers' expectations and belief systems" which results in feelings of cultural inferiority and shame (Hart, 2002: 26).

One model used to explain the process of colonialism is the seven part model (Kennedy, 1945; Blauner, 1969, Frideres & Gadacz, 2005). The first aspect of this model is a colonizing group encroaches into a geographic area through forced or voluntary entry (Frideres & Gadacz, 2005: 2). The second attribute of colonization is the destructive effect on the social and cultural structures of the Indigenous group by eroding the original political, economic, kinship, and spiritual systems of the people (2). The third and fourth aspects of colonization are external political control and Aboriginal economic dependence whereby a two level system develops where the colonizers own, direct, and profit from industries that depend upon exploitation of colonized peoples, who provide an unskilled, seasonal workforce (3). The fifth aspect of colonization in this model is the provision of low quality social services for the colonized in areas such as health and education and there are increasing social problems and welfare dependency (5).

The sixth and seventh aspects of colonization model relate to interactions between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with a social divide created due to the perpetuation of racism which is founded on the belief of the colonizers as culturally superior and the colonized as inferior (5). In a similar manner Cree scholar Winona Wheeler and Maria Campbell have developed the five stages of the colonial encounter

model to explain how the colonization process operated to assimilate, subjugate, and oppress Aboriginal peoples. The negative effects of colonization on Aboriginal people in Canada is vast and Metis political activist Howard Adams states, "White supremacy, which had been propagated since the beginning of European imperialism, became woven into Canadian institutions such as the church, the schools, and the courts, and it has remained the working ideology of these institutions (Adams, 1989: 14)."

In the literature there is recognition of the destructive nature of colonial institutions, laws, and policies on every aspect of the life for Aboriginal people in Canada (Dickason, 1997; FSIN, 1980; Alfred, 2009; Cardinal, 1999). Cree leader Harold Cardinal recognizes, "We must rebuild our structures of social and political leadership demoralized and undermined for a hundred years by the Department of Indian Affairs (Cardinal, 1999: 22)." The dehumanizing effects of colonization have greatly impacted the Aboriginal family due to assimilation policies which targeted destruction of the family unit by missionaries and the colonial governments (Dickason, 1984). The church and the state worked hand in hand to Christianize, assimilate and integrate Aboriginal people into mainstream society (FSIN, 1980; Pettipas, 1994; Adams, 1989).

The Federation of Saskatchewan Indians in a report on Indian governance recognizes the long term negative effect of assimilation policies to "civilize the Indian" by making him over in the image of the white man (FSIN, 180: 25). Scholar Katherine Pettipas states, "The federal government supported various means to religious control because administrators and missionaries understood the connections between religious ideology and practices and the persistence of indigenous social, economic, and political systems (Pettipas, 1994:18)." The churches were primarily responsible for the construction and operation of day, industrial, boarding and residential schools for Indian students until the move towards integration began in the 1950s and 1960s (Dickason, 1997; Fontaine, 2006).

The residential school system was, "The policy of choice to reshape the identity and consciousness of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children (Castellano, Archibald, & DeGagne, 2008: 2)." The federal government operated nearly every school in partnership

with various religious organizations until April 1, 1969, when it assumed full responsibility for the school system (Fontaine, 2006: 1). The last federally run residential school in Saskatchewan closed in 1983. Most residential schools ceased to operate by the mid-1970s, with only seven remaining open through the 1980s (1). The Residential School system implemented by the state and church played havoc with traditional teachings about bonding and nurturing in Aboriginal families and many survivors could not demonstrate love, nurturing, and caring with their own children once they left the schools (Dieter, 1999; Fournier & Gray, 1997; Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun, 1997; Ing, 2006). Fred Kelly says, "We were deprived of the care, love, and guidance of our parents during our most critical years of childhood. Many fathers to this day are unable to express their love to their children, especially their daughters (Kelly, 2008:25)." Furthermore, "Parents lost parenting skills and the children forgot how to live in a family (Boyer, 2009:74)."

Since the land and nature are a fundamental part of traditional Cree and Metis parenting process when colonial policies began to remove people from their lands onto reserves and began to put kids into residential schools for unnatural periods of time this served to erode the transmission of land and nature based cultural teachings to the next generation (Mussell, 2008:329). The children were, "Suddenly separated not only from loved family members but also from the Earth, another close relative (Duran & Duran, 1995:31)." The traditional experiential family learning model and traditional mentorship system was destroyed by residential schools therefore disrupting the transmission of traditional teachings between the generations (Kelly, 2008; Mussell, 2008; Bondin-Perrin, 2009).

Children in these schools were stripped of their cultural identity parents were discouraged from visiting their children to prevent their children from, "lapsing into traditional behavior" and to discourage homesickness (Pettipas, 1994: 80). The assimilation and isolation policies of the schools resulted in traditional parenting processes such as traditional rites of passage from birth, puberty, adulthood, and death being replaced with the Christian holy sacraments of baptism, first communion, and

confirmation (80). Aboriginal children in residential schools learned parenting models based on punishment, abuse, coercion, and control (Quinn, 2001:73).

"Oral transmissions of traditional child rearing practices and values were also lost, as a result of suppressed language (73)." The once valued role of Elders in childrearing was undermined by the residential school system and they were viewed by the Department of Indian Affairs and the schools as, "unprogressive," and their power and authority were constantly challenged and at times ridiculed by the Department's employees, mission teachers, and even the more acculturated graduates from the Indian schools who were taught to reject their own cultural values and ways (Pettipas, 1994:73).

Colonial oppression through these residential schools has resulted in a great deal of unexpressed historical trauma in our people resulting in different degrees of dysfunction in current parenting practices (Duran & Duran, 1995; Duran, 2006; Mussell, 2008; Hodgson, 2008; Krimayer et al, 2004; Haskell & Randell, 2009; Wesley-Equimaux & Smolewski, 2004). Residential school survivors have a higher prevalence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder which affects their parenting (Quinn, 2001:73). The sexual, emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual abuse at the schools has created large scale historic and intergenerational trauma which is defined as the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences (Duran, 2006; Hodgson, 2008; Duran, Firehammer, & Gonzalez, 2008). Eduardo Duran claims, "When trauma is not dealt with in previous generations it becomes more severe each time it is passed on to a subsequent generation (Duran, 2006: 16)"

Since the 1990s the phrase "Residential School Syndrome" is used to indentify these intergenerational effects (Fournier, 1997:61). The residential school system disrupted intergenerational connections between family members in many of these schools, even siblings of close age, were denied access to each other, and of course children were entirely denied the experience of being around grandparents (Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun, 1997; Fournier & Grey, 1997; Dieter, 1999; Blondin-Perrin, 2009). The combined effects of unexpressed historic trauma and the resulting emotional,

psychological, and physical abuses have led to collective symptoms of repressed emotions, numbness, and depression in survivors and their descendants (Wesley-Equimaux, 2009:20).

According to Beverly Jacobs and Anita Williams, "Near the end of the residential school era, families were subjected to another set of discriminatory practices and policies known as the "Sixties Scoop (Jacobs & Williams, 2008:127)." Large numbers of children were removed from their families and taken into care by child welfare agencies and there are numerous connections between this system and the residential school system (Logan, 2008:80). "It is estimated that up to three times more Aboriginal children and youth are currently in state care than during the height of the residential school experience in the 1940s (Cull, 2006:144)."

Research by the Manitoba Metis Federation acknowledges the historical repression of Metis custom and tradition, social structures and support systems, denial of Metis participation in the creation and administration of law as key factors for the victimization of Metis people in the child welfare system (Barkwell & Corrigan, 1991:93). In the 1980s there was a shift to transfer control over child welfare through the creation of "tripartite agreements" with First Nations and Metis governments which were a result of the activism of leaders who wanted to reclaim their children who were being lost to the child welfare system in alarming numbers (Zlotkin, 1994: 186).

Like the child welfare system First Nation scholar Maggie Hodgson says, "The years of alcohol and violence experienced within families and communities from about the 1950s to the 1970s has not been addressed in the same public way as the residential school experience (Hodgson, 2008:366)." Massive cultural loss due to social, economic, educational, and spiritual colonial oppression has created resulted in several responses from Aboriginal people such as resistance, withdrawal, or compliance (Morriseau, 1998). William Julius Mussell identifies six profound losses experienced by First Nations from generation to generation which have affected personal and cultural identity and quality of family and community life. These losses include: loss of territory, land, resources and sacred places; loss of life, loss of co-reliance and self-sufficiency as extended family

units and entrenchment of dependency through institutionalization; loss of language and traditional learning strategies such as storytelling and being mentored by a caregiver during the course of everyday life; loss of tools and opportunities to become self-determining and co-reliant by using traditional lifecycle teachings; loss of interpersonal connectedness between caregiver and child, caregiver and caregiver, and family and family due largely to the absence of rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations that contribute to the building of trusting relationships with self and others (Mussell, 2008:330).

As part of the colonial legacy modern society has perpetuated many negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people grounded in racist attitudes of western superiority and has served as a rationale for the inhumane treatment and exploitation of the colonized (Adams, 1989: 15). The myth of the 'dirty Indian' or the image of the 'lazy Indian' fails to recognize colonial stereotypes and, "It has bred distrust, suspicion, bitterness and even hatred between contemporary whites and Indians (LaRoque, 1975: 34)." In the literature the term internalized oppression is used to describe the feelings of shame and inferiority an individual develops in response to colonial oppression (Sacred Circle, 2010: 1). The Sacred Circle program for native women states:

> External oppression is the unjust exercise of authority and power by one group over another. It includes imposing one group's belief system, values and life ways over another group. External oppression becomes internalized oppression when we come to believe and act as if the oppressor's beliefs system, values, and life way is reality. "Self-hate" and "internalized racism" are other ways of saying internalized oppression. The result of internalized oppression is shame and the disowning of our individual and cultural reality. Without internalized oppression, we would not now have previously unseen levels of violence, especially against women and children. Internalized oppression means the oppressor doesn't have to exert any more pressure, because we now do it to ourselves and each other.

Howard Adams speaks out about internalized oppression he says, "As native children grow up, these white-supremacist images become more alive, but natives are powerless to do anything about them. Consequently, the children internalize inferior images as a part of their true selves, often with strong feelings of shame (Adams, 1989: 15)." The literature points to the negative effects of stereotypes and racism on the formation of a child's cultural identity which has caused many parents and children to deny their Aboriginal identity. Published autobiographies such as Maria Campbell's (1970) *Halfbreed* and Yvonne Johnson's (1998) *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman* both share passionate testimonials about the colonial impacts of family breakdown and the related significant psychological impacts of racism in Canadian society.

In recent years the literature is abundant with scholarship about the process of decolonization which refers to the undoing of the impacts of colonialism (Alfred, 2009; RCAP, 1996; Frideres & Gadacz, 2005). Indigenous scholar Hayden Burgess has identified five phases for decolonization they are; rediscover and recovery; mourning; dreaming; commitment; and action (Burgess, 2000: 155) Burgess stresses true decolonization is more than simply placing Indigenous or previously colonized people into the position held by colonizers (155). For true decolonization to occur, "Decolonization includes the reevaluation of the political, social, economic, and judicial structures themselves and the development, if appropriate, of new structures that can hold and house the values and aspirations of the colonized people (155)." Likewise, Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred claims, "The long process of colonization has had an impact on our way of thinking. People have been turned into the tools of their own oppression. We need to recognize and acknowledge the co-optation and to locate our own roles within the system (Alfred, 2009: 101)." There is recognition in the literature in order to decolonize our collective pain we need to collectively feel it, let it go, and learn from it (Castellano, 2008:385). Anishinabe writer Calvin Morriseau says, "Tribal societies have a strong sense of community. When the community is going through difficult and often traumatic times, the effect on its members is devastating (Morriseau, 2005: 56)." It is recognized individual, family, and community healing needs to occur concurrently in a holistic approach.

Literature in the areas of justice, social work, education, and health research contain information about the colonial impacts on traditional childrearing. The Manitoba Justice Inquiry (1991) and the Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Justice Review (1992) both recognized intergenerational effects of the breakdown of the family which has led to higher incarceration rates of Aboriginal youth then non-Aboriginal youth. The Saskatchewan study suggested the following: Elders work with youth in conflict with the law, traditional teachings should be transmitted to youth, and all programming such as parenting, family violence, substance abuse programs be reviewed to ensure it is culturally sensitive.

Rupert Ross shares his experiences and perspectives about colonial impacts on Aboriginal families during his sentencing of Aboriginal youth in isolated northern Ontario communities he says, "Children hear of their duty to respect parents and Elders, but too frequently see nothing they consider worthy of respect. Parents feel they are inadequate to the parenting tasks facing them, either because traditional practices no longer seem to secure their children from harm or because growing up in residential schools left them with no family model to follow (Ross, 1992:124)." In 1995 the federal government responded to the alarming high risk factors for Aboriginal children and invested in the Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) programs as a form of prevention for young children and to support families. A significant focus of the AHS programs is to create parental involvement in early childhood training and develop culturally based community models of care for young children.

In 1996 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) published landmark findings on the family in their report. Two themes emerged from the RCAP study firstly an overwhelming concern for the well-being of children and the secondly the belief that families are at the crux of personal and community healing (Minister of Supply and Services, 1996: 10). Cree leader Ovide Mercredi made the statement, "To heal a child is to heal a family, and to heal a family is to heal our nation (RCAP, 2003: 53)." The RCAP study recognized the following issues: the intergenerational effects of colonialism have a great impact on the family, family violence is occurring in epidemic

proportions, existing child welfare policy is based on a non-Aboriginal value system and worldview, and the present child welfare system is not meeting the needs of Aboriginal children (75). The RCAP study found, "At present, women are the most vocal about the need to break the silence. Very few leaders are speaking out on these issues (75)."

Healing the individual, family, and community through healing centers and transferring control of child welfare issues back to the community are significant recommendations made by the commission in order to regain balance (RCAP, 1996). In 1998 the federal government released *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* the federal policy which followed up on the recommendations made by RCAP and as a result both the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) and the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) were created to conduct research and implement healing regarding the impacts of residential schools and to address the chronic health issues of Aboriginal peoples. Literature from both these organizations recognizes the restoration of traditional parenting skills and traditional teachings as an essential method for improving the health and wellness of Aboriginal families (NAHO, 2006; Mussel 2005; Martin-Hill; 2009).

Literature in the field of Aboriginal child and family services and mental health recognizes the negative effects of colonialism and the positive effects of traditional parenting and the return of traditional teachings as an important aspect of healing families (Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003; Anderson, 2002). A study by psychologist Suzanne Stewart found cultural identity gives Native peoples the strength and wherewithal to consider healing possibilities through personal self-growth, connections with family, community, and Indigenous cultures (Stewart, 2008: 15). Another research project with Adolescent Aboriginal mothers discovered, "Young women in the program were hungry for knowledge of their culture, for their own personal development and in order to teach their children about it (Bent, Josephson & Kelly, 2004: 98)." Strengthening cultural identity, community integration, and political empowerment contributes to improvement of mental health in Aboriginal populations including youth and at risk women (Martin-Hill, 2009).

The current trend in Aboriginal healing research is to examine resilience responses to the colonial experience. Resilience is generally defined as a, "Person's ability to overcome stress and adversity (Krimayer, Sehdev, Whitley & Issac, 2009: 1)." A study on Aboriginal community resilience identifies nine factors for community resilience. These factors include: social capital; networks and support; revitalization of language; enhancing cultural identity and spirituality; supporting families and parents to ensure healthy child development; enhancing local control and collective efficacy; building infrastructure; economic diversification; and respecting human diversity (1). Cree scholar Madeline Dion-Stout explains, "Healing is the mid-section of a continuum with colonization marking one end and resilience the other (Dion-Stout, 2008: 180)."

Due to the effects of colonization it is expressed in the literature in order to begin healing Aboriginal parenting needs to once again be implemented in the heart or center of our communities in order for it to be effective (Aboriginal Healing Foundation,2008; Aboriginal Parent Program, 1995; Goforth, 2003). Since the process of colonization removed Aboriginal children from the centre of our families and communities everywhere in the literature there is a call for a return to a restoration of the child centered model where children are once again at the center of our community (Goforth, 2003; Anderson 2000; Dufault, 2003; Brokenleg et al, 2001; & Northwest Indian Child Welfare Institute, 1986). Perhaps one of the most definitive studies about colonial effects on parenting and how to transform current parenting ways by returning to traditional teachings is the work by Dr. Martin Brokenleg and his colleagues (2001) in *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*. He has travelled extensively across Canada and the United States to raise awareness about our current state of parenting.

The historical repression of traditional spirituality, ceremonial life, and destruction of traditional world views has hindered how traditional families functioned, "Plains Cree society depended upon the ability of the elders to function as protectors, "keepers," and promulgators of this knowledge. Ceremonies offered occasions through which elders transmitted it (Pettipas, 1994:61)." Cree and Metis people had to practice many of their spiritual and ceremonial traditions cautiously, in secrecy, or go

underground when ceremonies became outlawed on the prairies in 1895 (Pettipas, 1994). First Nation scholar Maggie Hodgson claims, "The destruction of ceremonies was the core of the Canadian government's genocidal policies. It served as a knife cutting into the heart of our culture. When ceremony was outlawed, they removed the very resource needed to heal from the abuse experienced by some of the people who attended residential schools (Hodgson, 2008:364)." Cree scholar Janice Makokis stresses our ceremonies carry forward our unique way of viewing the world to the next generation she says:

> One can read all the books she wants about "what an Indigenous philosophy is" but only when one truly immerses and embraces his/herself within Indigenous ceremony do they find the true meaning of an Indigenous way of thinking and experiencing the world through a true anti-colonial framework. It is through the experiential knowledge acquired by participating in various ceremonies that you appreciate the importance of a philosophy based on ceremonial teachings found in the spiritual realm of an Indigenous existence (Makokis, 2008:41).

Makokis advocates fasting as a way to, "release ourselves from the colonial shackles that keep our minds, hearts, and bodies bound to living lives that are completely disconnected from our Indigenous value systems, teachings, and principles (Makokis, 2008: 47)." Both Vincent Steinhauer (2004) and Makokis believe the fasting ceremony is an effective way for individuals to engage in a decolonization process rooted in our ancient cultural forms of self-care. "By practicing our ceremonies we are engaging in a form of resistance to colonialism (Makokis, 2008: 39)." Western misconceptions of traditional ways resulted in negative attitudes that still linger in our communities about our traditional childrearing practices. It is essential we begin to dispel these myths by approaching Elders to get the proper philosophical teachings about the true purpose of our cultural and spiritual ceremonies (Aboriginal Parent Program, 1995).

William Julius Mussell stresses decolonization is a two way process he says, "Reconciliation will be attained only by decolonizing the thinking of First Nations and all

Canadians (Mussell, 2008:332)." Research by the National Aboriginal Health organization stresses the restoration of culture, ceremonies, and a return to traditional medicines as significant factors to develop resilience and healing in Aboriginal people (Martin-Hill, 2009). Colonialism has removed Elders as leaders from the heart of how Aboriginal families and communities function (McNally, 2009). McNally uses the term Eldership to explain the traditional authority of Elder leadership. The Elder role has been impacted by colonization and the subsequent family breakdown (Couture, 1996). The Aboriginal birthrate is higher as compared to the rest of Canada and there are more youth then Elders so there is a gap forming between the generations that was not as evident in the recent past. Our communities need to brainstorm ways to address how to close this gap because many of our youth need guidance, direction, support and access to healthy Elders (Stats Canada, 2006; Norris, 1996; Bopp, 1985; Minore et al, 1991).

In order to decolonize ourselves as Aboriginal people we need to reexamine our beliefs and values we hold. Cree scholar Michael Anthony Hart explains, "We have to recapture our peoples' language, history and understanding of the world, take and live those teachings which will support us in this attempt to overcome oppression and reach mino-pimatisiwin-the good life (Hart, 2002: 32)." Cree Elder, James Carpenter uses a tepee metaphor to describe the process of returning to our culture and values he says, "We have to take the tepee down and rebuild a new tepee. It is starting to show that we are helping each other rebuild that teepee. If we don't listen to the teachings, it will take longer to rebuild (Kulchyski, 1999: 231)." Carpenter's metaphor stresses we need to decolonize our homes, our tepees, and Cree and Metis women need to reclaim power and authority to determine how we are going to rebuild our homes. Aboriginal writer Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux agrees, "We must decolonize our homes,' which can begin by "talking to our children, our partners, and our families, and connecting with them; telling them about historic and personal lies about the beauty of our cultural and social truth (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009: 30)."

Cree academic Neal McLeod says, "Part of decolonizing Cree consciousness is for collective narrative memory to be awakened (McLeod, 2007: 9)" and this can only be

done by "sitting with the Old People." Reclaiming our stories and expressing our collective voices are important sources of strength and healing for Aboriginal people and strengthening future generations of children (Anderson, 2000). Shelley Goforth says, "A lot of our culture, especially in the area of traditional childrearing, has not been written down. Our culture was not written because we were oral people. All our history, our legends our ways of believing, everything was passed on to the next generation orally (Goforth, 2003:17)."

Blackfoot educator Iris HeavyRunner states, "Our children's cultural strength or resilience can also be fostered by the oral traditional of storytelling (HeavyRunner, 2007:10)." She stresses, "Children learn to listen with patience and respect. Our stories can be told over and over; they are developmental. At every step we learn something new. In essence we grow up with our stories. They are protective factors that convey culturally specific high expectations, caring, support, and opportunities for participation (10)." Cree academic Janice Makokis stresses, "We have to return to our teachings found in the languages we speak, the songs we sing in ceremony, the teachings found in the ceremonial structures that have been passed on to us from our ancestors, and the philosophical bundles of knowledge found in the ways of our ancestors (Makokis, 2008: 41)." As Cree academic Neal McLeod writes, "Cree people have struggled to maintain their identities in the face of massive change," as such we need to work harder then ever with our children to teach them our culture so they develop a sense of what it means to be Cree or Metis (McLeod, 2002: 47). The restoration of traditional childrearing teachings is not going to be an easy task because some uncomfortable issues need to be addressed regarding the current state of parenting in Aboriginal families due to the effects of colonization such as addictions, family violence, sexual abuse, suicide, and other symptoms of colonization (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Minore et al, 1991).

Due to colonial impacts Aboriginal voices have been silenced especially those of women and children and families need to work hard to break the silence. Indigenous languages contribute to a greater sense of identity as an Aboriginal person, speaking the

language sets an individual apart from the colonizer, and provides a solid foundation for an individual to begin the decolonization process (Daniels-Fiss, 2008). Cree scholar Sylvia McAdam points out, "The recovery of our languages is one of the most powerful forms of self-determination and is necessary to reverse the effects of colonization (McAdam, 2009:5)." The negative effects of language loss due to the impacts of colonization are widespread and within our families language loss has created gaps in the transmission of Aboriginal worldviews to the next generation. Our people are calling for restoration of our languages as form of resistance to colonial oppression because, "The language is a way back to the spirit world (Daniels-Fiss, 2008: 12)."

This loss of language is a large concern since so much of Cree and Metis worldview and teaching concepts are embedded within the etymology of the languages. "Language is a repository of the values of our Aboriginal culture (Aboriginal Parent Program, 1995: 67)." Therefore, "A person who does not speak their First Nations tongue should not be ridiculed, shamed, shunned or belittled. Language is very important to our cultural survival. Such people should be given the means and encouraged to learn (68)." Oppressive colonial and assimilation policies used by the state and church and increasing modernization in the north were the catalysts for language and identity loss in Metis and Cree children. It is recognized we need to teach our children our languages and tell them about the historical oppression of our languages so they can understand why many of our Elders were unable to pass on their languages and we do not continue to shame and blame the victim (Blondin-Perrin, 2009).

In the literature there is a call to restore and reclaim original Indigenous forms of governance and "Much of the anger and despair now felt by Aboriginal people can be replaced by optimism and energy if they gain a measure of genuine control over the decisions that most closely affect them (RCAP, 1993:3)." However, many of our modern Aboriginal leaders have been colonized by mainstream political processes and customs (Adams, 1989; Alfred 2009). Due to the influence of the church doctrine and *Indian Act* systems of governance many leaders who want to access the advice of medicine people or restore old hereditary leadership will most likely face barriers and resistance from their

community. Restoration of traditional leadership requires a real shift away from how our present community leadership functions under colonial frameworks (Alfred, 2009). Since assimilation efforts greatly limited the expression of traditional teachings within the family, community, and nation our modern Aboriginal parents and community members have to rethink and reexamine the basic philosophies of life and contemplate the current social, political, and educational structures which impact Aboriginal children.

There is a growing body of scholarship about Aboriginal motherhood which advocates for the decolonization of motherhood by returning to the original teachings (Bedard 2006; Simpson, 2006; Sunseri, 2008; Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell; 2006). Many shame based beliefs about femininity entered into our community through patriarchal and racist views of Aboriginal women (Anderson, 2000; Bedard, 2006; St. Pierre & Longsoldier, 1995). Anita Olsen Harper recognizes, "Because of the patriarchy of Canadian society, Aboriginal women are subject to even more inequality then Aboriginal men (Harper, 2009: 336)." With the over sexualization of young girls and women in western culture the literature expresses more than ever we need the grandmothers teachings about womanhood in order to restore the balance between the male and female (Schaefer, 2006; Valaskakis, Stout & Guimon, 2009). Kim Anderson's, *A Recognition of Being*, (2000) is a definitive study which explores issues around colonial impacts on native womanhood and its effects on the individual, family, and nation. The literature is calling for the restoration of the traditional roles, powers, and responsibilities of women in order to make families stronger (Silman, 1987; Bedard, 2009; Voyageur, 1996; Meadows, Thurston & Lagendyk, 2009; Monture, 2009).

In the literature there is an urgent call to restore the place of women ceremonial leaders to their original roles in our families and communities (Martin-Hill, 2003:118). "Women are guardians of indigenous traditions, practices and beliefs-and agents of change for their families and nations (Valaskakis, Dion-Stout & Guimond, 2009: 2)." Cree Elder Rose Auger says, "Waking up means replacing women to their rightful place in society (Meili, 1991: 25). Rose further exclaims, "There's no power or medicine that has all force unless it's balanced. The woman must be there also, but she has been left

out! When we still had our culture, we had the balance (25)." The literature calls for a return of male and female balance in all aspects of social, economic, political, and spiritual life so children will be able to role model balance when they become parents (Mussell, 2005; Martin-Hill, 2003).

With restoration of female balance in our communities and the subsequent decolonization of our people our women will no longer have to practice our cultural traditions in isolation, shame, and secrecy (Anderson, 2000; Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere, 2006). There is too much woman abuse and negative perceptions about the female that have found their way into modern parenting belief systems (Aboriginal Women's Council of Saskatchewan, 2009:305). In order to turn this imbalance around it is suggest our grandmothers be given the role and power to once again teach our little boys or little men how to respect women, girls, mothers, and how to honor their own female side that is present within all males (Anderson, 2008; Bedard, 2008). It was recommended by RCAP, "The full and equal participation of women be ensured in decision-making bodies responsible for ensuring people's physical and emotional security, including justice committees and boards of directors of healing centers and lodges (RCAP, 1996:80)."

Since Cree and Metis people historically had many different practices, customs, and traditions about how to transition youth into adulthood these traditional practices regarding puberty were subject to colonial assimilation efforts because they were viewed as source of strength for our people which could severely limit the assimilation process (Anderson, 2010). Due to historical oppression of female knowledge in colonial systems expression of Cree cultural practices related to a girls spiritual and ceremonial life was severely limited and has resulted in many of female Elders not going through these traditional puberty ceremonies (Anderson, 2000: 384). Female Elders who have participated in these puberty rites recall how important they are in giving cultural teachings and developing themselves as young women (Martell, 2004; Anderson 2000). In order to decolonize our families and communities it is suggested we bring these puberty ceremonies back into the lives of our girls (Anderson, 2010; Anderson 2000).

Reestablishing intergenerational connections between girls, women, and grandmothers will once again contribute to the rebalancing of the male and female imbalances that are presently harming our people (Bedard, 2008; O'Conner-Anderson, Monture & O'Conner, 2009). Metis researcher, Kim Anderson (2000) believes young mothers today can learn much from our female Elders past experiences in order to help with their own daughters entrance into puberty in a world that still fears women's ceremonies and power. Presently most of the information about traditional Cree and Metis child stages of development is filtered through the western psychological paradigm and is not delivered from its inherent place within the framework of the Aboriginal community (Mehl-Madrona, 2005; Brokenleg et al, 2001). Through the use of storytelling, intergenerational communication, and cultural reclamation we can restore the value that these important rites of passage originally had in our communities from an entirely Cree and Metis perspective.

Acts of self care based on our holistic traditions are a significant source of resistance and resilience for our people. These acts of self care help us reclaim our personal powers we were denied due to the historical oppression of our people and we can take back our power over ourselves using our cultural forms of healing (Morriseau, 1998; Anderson, 2000; Martin-Hill, 2009). Many Aboriginal kids today have no sense of purpose of personal vision for themselves which makes them vulnerable to gangs, peer pressure, and other unhealthy forms of behavior including promiscuity (Brokenleg, 2001). Anishinabe writer Calvin Morriseau writes about these issues he says, "We are in the midst of overcoming six generations of oppression which have left our families in shambles, our young men without vision, our old men without wisdom, our women without power, and our children without a future (Morriseau, 1998:79)." Colonization has created much disharmony in our communities as we currently move into a modern culture that is politically, socially, economically constructed around the rights of the individual and highly focused on the accumulation of individual personal wealth. It is hard if not impossible to nurture togetherness and group harmony when there is competitiveness. The restoration of traditional consensus decision-making models would

help combat the disharmony currently experienced by our families and communities (Alfred, 2009).

The important place of dreaming, prophecies, and visions in traditional parenting has been suppressed and misinterpreted by the dominant culture especially due to interference of the church and state in Cree and Metis spirituality (Duran & Duran, 1995; Duran, 2006). Western patriarchal systems do not hold the same kind of respect for these aspects of human development and they are not as highly developed in western culture as in traditional Aboriginal cultures. Dakota researcher Vine Deloria Jr.'s (2006) work to date is the most comprehensive about how the western and non-western minds have different approaches toward the meaning and interpretation of dreaming. In western culture dreamtime guidance is often considered to be "magical thinking" which is different from our high cultural regard for dreaming (Duran, 1995; Mehl-Madrona, 2007).

Due to the nature of colonialism it is hard for young parents today to access gifted people in our communities because these gifted people have historical been removed from the outside of the family and community circle due to colonial oppression of their gifts (Duran, 2006). There has also been so much secrecy about having the gift to dream because professionals from the western medical tradition might admit these people into psychiatric centers. Cherokee Psychiatrist Dr. Lewis Mehl-Madrona speaks to failure of western medicine to come to terms with our spiritual teachings. He writes:

> The spirits are everywhere, conversing with us, helping us. We need their help. In ceremony, we respectfully honor them and ask for help. Through our requests and our willingness to honor our commitments, help comes. Again, this is seen as potentially psychotic thinking by DSM and conventional psychiatry. We believe this works, and we feel oppressed when told that we are psychotic, stupid, primitive, or childish to think so (Madrona-Mehl, 2007:47).

Negative psychological effects from colonialism has caused harm to the collective bodies, minds, emotions, and spirits of Aboriginal people resulting in many Aboriginal communities becoming lost in their understanding of the role dreaming and spirituality in traditional life.

The arrival of the western patriarchal systems upset the balance between our men and women. Cree scholar Janice Makokis says, "By reclaiming our sacred roles as nehiyaw iskwewak it is possible to decolonize and revive a governance structure that reflects a respectful gender balance (Makokis, 2008: 49)." The literature demonstrates children need to see men and women working in partnership economically, socially, politically, and spiritually in order to raise children to restore the balance in our family system (Mussell, 2005). The Aboriginal Healing Foundation says, "The closeness of fathers to their children, and of grandfathers to all family members, has been lost, and the whole family and community are feeling this loss. Too many men are no longer important role models or teachers of traditions and values for their sons, daughters, and sisters (54)." The western patriarchal system discouraged men from openly expressing their emotions with their children and others (Kelly, 2008:25). Men and boys have become removed from our original circle and we need to bring them home since they are fundamental to the balance in our families (Godfrey, White, & Moccasin, 2006; Manahan & Ball, 2007).

Due to colonization our communities have developed lowered expectations of our fathers and created higher expectations of our mothers. A study by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation discovered, "While both young men and young women of First Nations were oppressed, people interviewed agreed that males seem to have been more broken than their sisters. Many of them appeared less able to fulfill roles and responsibilities of the responsible adult male compared with the ability of the female to fulfill her roles and responsibilities (Mussell, 2005:50)." Sue Howard says, "Aboriginal men, were no longer responsible for the physical emotional safety of the family. They were not permitted to hunt for the essential food for the family. As their traditional roles were denied them, a major source of their sense of identity was eliminated (Howard,

2003: 15).” The literature emphasizes we need to raise our expectations of our Aboriginal fathers, consider new forms of the traditional warrior society, and work with them in a family centered approach to healing (White, Godfrey & Moccasin, 2006: 49).

Due to the colonization process the issue of traditional Aboriginal disciplinary techniques has been severely misinterpreted and disrupted by mainstream society. Glover claims, “The dominant culture often shows concern about the relative freedom given to a Native American child and the apparent lack of parental concern about the child’s behavior (Glover, 2001: 218).” The stereotype Aboriginal parents never discipline their children fails to examine the strict codes of conduct in traditional parenting that were used to discipline children (McShane & Blue, 1985: 119). There are significant differences between western and Indigenous child rearing philosophies and many of these have been misunderstood by outsiders or unfairly judged by western cultural standards of parenting (McShane & Blue, 1985, Glover, 2001). There were many different traditional approaches used to manage a child’s behavior which are distinct from western parenting techniques such as the nuclear family being largely responsible for the discipline of children (Brokenleg et al, 2001; McShane & Blue 1985). Overall the literature demonstrates Aboriginal families need to decolonize by rebuilding culture, reclaiming spirituality and ceremonial life, engaging in holistic healing, begin to contemplate the effects of colonialism on existing parenting practices in order to restore original practices, and revive balance and harmony between female and male caregivers.

Reflections on Colonialism and Resilience Represented in this Study

Various colonial impacts on individuals, families and communities were shared through the stories in this study. The participants in this study recognized historical trauma and other related symptoms of colonialism such as alcoholism, addictive behaviour, suicide, family violence, identity confusion, poverty, and massive cultural loss as impacting their families. The people in this study witnessed major transitions in Cree and Metis family life especially when children were removed from the family and community by the child welfare system beginning in the 1950s and 1960s. This time period is often called, “The time of the black car” or the “sixties scoop.” The people in

this study have lived through a time period whereby the long term residual impacts of colonial trauma was really beginning to take a dramatic effect in their families and communities. The Elders participating in this study all witnessed a transitioning in child rearing from the old ways to the newer ways. In the families of the people born from 1941-1947 there is often a distinct cultural and linguistic rift between the older and younger siblings. The younger siblings born in the 1950s and early 1960s were subjected to massive change in the northern communities because of the arrival of the child welfare system and modernization.

In this study many people discussed how they left their cultural path for a time trying to live in mainstream society but now as grandparents they get a "second chance" with their grandchildren to do things differently. There appears to be an intergenerational linguistic and cultural gap formed between the participants in this study and their own children because of effects of racism, pressures to assimilate into mainstream society, removal from the land, and the shift to the nuclear family system which interfered with intergenerational cultural transmission. Therefore, many people were unable to pass languages on to their own children. Despite this situation the good cultural foundation and teachings these people received in their childhood was an important source of resilience for them and gave them a foundation to transform their negative life experiences. These early cultural experiences and teachings guided them back home as they became cultural leaders and teachers in their Eldership years. These people are presently role models of strength and hope for our people and have become the 'helpers' of our people as they bring back our culture and teachings to the next generation. Despite geographical distance between the communities represented in this study there were many core cultural similarities in the traditional teachings and similar responses to colonial impacts on individuals, families, and communities.

The imposed welfare state has not been good on the traditional family system in the north (Dobbin, 1981; Barron, 1997). People in this study witnessed how social assistance, assimilation policies, loss of land and language has devastated the pride and work ethic of Cree and Metis families in the northern communities during the last forty

years. Robert McAuley says the, "Removal of the Metis from the land and the loss of a viable lifestyle on the land has created a terrible dependency of young people on welfare and that is a hard cycle to break." Historically the state has demonstrated a lack of collaboration with the Metis on social child welfare issues. According to the Elders a solution to these problems is to restore the original cultural parenting teachings and traditional child and family structures so everyone can contribute to our family and community life in a more meaningful way.

It was acknowledged due to historical social and economic oppression many Cree and Metis people faced barriers towards achieving self-sufficiency. The Elders advocated for taking back control over all aspects of our lives as Aboriginal people such as: education, health, social services, politics, spirituality, economy, culture, land, and language issues. Grandma Rose says, "Do things for yourself don't wait for others to do it for you." Solomon Sanderson believes a large part of restoring the independence of our people is to, "break the colonial bondage of dependency and work to heal ourselves so that we can begin the process of bringing back our children who have entered into the child welfare system." A holistic approach to healing is suggested to help support individuals, families, and communities.

It was recognized the historical curtailing and regulation of Cree and Metis hunting rights has severely limited the traditional diet as a result it is vital to decolonize from our modern food dependency because food knowledge is a powerful thing to pass on to our children because it is a source of self-sufficiency and independence. Our children today are missing out on land based teachings since we have all become so disconnected from the land and the natural world due to modernization and assimilation. The loss of traditional land and territories had a detrimental impact on parenting ways and the people in this study witnessed the shocking transition from the bush into modernized life. The massive changes during the 1940s and 1950s in the north created a total intrusion effect on the people. Total intrusion effect is the shock of major cultural change when individuals and communities enter into a wage labor and modern socio-economic system (Waldram, 1988).

There is the sentiment troubles children face today are because they don't have the bush skills and land based knowledge to provide for them self. For the Metis in particular the land issue has been historically problematic because the Metis were dispossessed of a land tenure system therefore this made parenting practices relating to the bush, on the land, in the camp, and on the trap line very difficult to pass forward. Due to cultural loss, modernization, and family breakdown many youth today are unable to identify the medicinal plants or explain how to gather and prepare these foundational medicines. Additionally there is concern Cree and Metis children are next not experiencing the same kinds of structure, routine, and rules in family life as in generations past because of effects of intergenerational trauma in the family unit. For the Metis people in this study provincially launched imposition of trapping territories limited access to traditional lands and historical places of teaching. The creation of the dependency on the Hudson's Bay Company and other modern food stores has had a detrimental impact of the health of youth today. It is believed traditional foods are healthier for both Cree and Metis people because they have been used for generations and the dietary changes that we see today are a relatively recent occurrence in the history of our people.

This study identified the colonial impacts on traditional community support systems meaning they are not able function to the same degree as they did one or two generations ago. The jealousy and competiveness rampant today in our communities, due to colonialism, was not as present a generation ago and the reciprocity once strong in the communities prior to the 1950s is not as strong in the present generation. Despite this James Burns is optimistic of our communities ability to begin the healing process he says, "the first seven generations of the white man is done, now we learn from the next seven generations, to put everything back together, for ourselves, and that's what we are doing today, and we probably have three or four generations to go, but we're gonna get there." The Elders would like to see a revival of some of the good community childrearing practices they were raised with in their childhood.

In this study there were a wide variety of responses to the oppression of traditional spiritual and cultural practices. In this study some people were able to find ways to take some aspects of the churches ritual and integrate them effectively into their traditional prayer life. These people were able to find a middle ground in between all the philosophical paradoxes evident in their communities and families especially the religious ones. Other people were not as comfortable with religious practices imposed on traditional culture. Elsie Sanderson and James Burns were raised with church prayer forms but once they had their choice they preferred to pray in their original languages in their traditional way. James Burns was taught by his traditional teacher to, "Never be ashamed to take your pipe and share it, never be ashamed to take your prayers and share them." Many people in this study are returning to their original cultural ceremonies as acts of healing and these ceremonies are significant forms of identity and cultural reclamation.

In this study it was understood there were two disciplinary systems present in many Cree and Metis communities because of the impact of the residential school system which severely disrupted the traditional parenting process. Florence Allen refers to the residential school system form of discipline as the "residential school methodology," which was in her opinion "easier to implement" as compared to the traditional form of discipline which was more rigorous since it required making the time to really examine a child's behavior, and explore with them why they made the choices they did, instead of hitting them and walking away. James Burns recalls both his mother and father went to residential school and when they came home to James Smith Reserve they, "had to relearn the traditional parenting values." Isabelle Impey makes the same point that there were two opposed disciplinary systems within the community of Cumberland House and that it was rather confusing for the children. Isabelle share her thoughts on why she believes the community allowed the Nuns to carry out their form of corporal discipline with the children. She says:

> The Nuns really believed in corporal punishment, you know the big strap, and they used to pull hair, or turn kids ears so severe that they would

> bleed, I'm not sure why, but parents never challenged them, I think in part it wasn't because they didn't care, but I think in part they recognized that once you grew up you're gonna see those kind of people.

It was a common understanding in traditional parenting methods that parents did not shelter children from the realities of life. Isabelle believes the parents did not want to hide the kids from the realities of racism expressed in the larger world. Solomon Sanderson agrees these two systems and the mixed messages it sent out was often very "confusing" for children and the community. Solomon stresses these tensions and paradoxes in the community severely, "disrupted traditional parenting methods because of the colonial influence."

In relationship to issues around child discipline there were stories shared about the presence of the willow stick form of discipline in Cree and Metis homes. James Burns points out that the willow stick was introduced into traditional parenting through schools, missionaries, churches and became incorporated into how some families disciplined their children but it was not an original aspect of traditional Cree parenting which was focused on gentleness. Despite overwhelming colonial impacts in Cree and Metis family life humor is used as an effective form of resistance and renewal from colonial oppression and is a significant part of traditional discipline. It was discovered strong bonds between women and sisters were important sources of strength and resilience for Cree and Metis families in this study.

People in this study understood or spoke several languages such as French, Michif, Cree, Saulteaux, and English and have expressed concern that young people and families are not speaking their Indigenous languages at the same level as a generation ago. Many people in this study were able to retain much of their original languages because of growing up in isolated or northern communities but unfortunately they were unable to pass these languages on to their children for various reasons such as mixed marriages, racism, shifts to more nuclear family dynamics, modernization, urbanization, and dispossession from the land.

People in this study experienced direct racism and oppression when trying to speak their original languages. Robert McAuley recalls," We had to learn English when we started school and we weren't allowed to speak our Indian language, no kidding, we got disciplined by strapping if we were caught speaking our own native tongue by the Nuns." James Burns had a similar experience as he never spoke English until he was eight years old and he remembered getting in trouble for speaking his language at residential school. Despite this painful colonial past, James Burns is optimistic that we can bring our languages back into a healthy state. He encourages more Elders to always use the language with younger people since it is a "sacred language" given to the people by the Creator and our youth are hungry for knowledge held within the language. James says:

> Cree is a sacred language there are no swear words in Cree, but now there's made up ones. When I was a child there was no such thing, it was a pure language related to the land, the spiritual part of you, and it was a nurturing language. You were valued by learning your language, speaking your language, understanding and being able to figure out things when using the Cree language, because it's so definitive in the way it's spoken.

Solomon Sanderson whose own family lost the languages originally spoken by his ancestors points out that the destruction of the family unit through colonial policies has limited the transfer of language and identity to the next generation.

In this study the traditional intergeneration storytelling chain was broken and is just beginning to come back. Due to colonization the original Cree creation stories were not spoken about as openly in Cumberland House and many of these Elders became exposed to them later in their life journey as they began to apprentice under traditional people and learn more about traditional ceremonies. The colonial suppression of traditional medicines and ceremonies was expressed in this study. Elsie Sanderson recalls when her brother Robert was sick and dying "The medicine women had to sneak around late at night and come over to their home in secrecy in order to administer traditional medicine and conduct the ceremony which did save his life." So many people

in this study felt a sense of freedom living on the trap line, it was there they were free from colonial forces, "the watchful eyes of the authorities," such as the Hudson's Bay Company, Department of Natural Resources, the Church, R.C.M.P, Nurses, and the School Officials.

Most people in this study shared many positive memories about practicing their culture and traditions in the bush. I refer to these stories as, "trap line memories." Many of these memories expressed the sentiment, "as a kid I just loved the trap line, I was so happy." Upon the return from the bush life back into to the communities many of the people recalled feeling a degree of tension and frustration especially when attending school, which functioned on an entirely opposed philosophical system as compared to their prior experience in the "bush learning" model. Children had to learn to carefully walk in two worlds and cope with racism when back in the communities.

Solomon Sanderson mentioned how, "conflicting and confusing" the colonial regime was and children had to find ways to carefully navigate their way within this racist environment. Children were taught to "hide" a part of who they were and this lead to identity struggles for many community members. Solomon Sanderson recalls the James Smith Reserve became deeply divided between "traditionalists" and "religionists" at times this divide resulted in violent outbursts in the community and families. Thankfully, traditional parenting and spiritual practices did survive to different degrees and all the Elders in this study are currently playing key roles to bring back traditional spiritual practices and celebrations because they know how effective they are in raising balanced Cree and Metis children. Overall there was recognition of the important role of grandmothers as the knowledge keepers of traditional parenting teachings and a call for greater male and female balance in child rearing.

In this study there is an overwhelming message to return to our natural laws and original teachings around the different stages of life since they are our inheritance for ways to live in balance and facilitate the development of character and resilience in our people. In this research there were memories of boys going through traditional forms of rites of passage whereas no women in this study shared information about going through

female traditional rites of passage. It is observed traditional spiritual naming is a way people can resist colonization and reclaim their identity and develop a sense of belonging to their people.

A return to the land, traditional foods, traditional medicines, and rites of passage are viewed as sources of healing for our families. Elsie and Solomon Sanderson both advocate every Cree and Metis family be taught to have a basic traditional medicine chest in their household to do the basic traditional first aid care. It is shared that we have to turn back to our traditional medicinal knowledge, our traditional foods, and traditional health practices in our families and communities. A significant insight of these interviews is we need to begin to think critically and reflect on our current parenting reality. It is time to apply traditional thinking and learning models such as stop, look, and listen as we enter into the decolonization processes.

The Organizational Opikinawasowin Framework

In Cree knowledge systems the philosophical framework for child rearing is embodied within the concept of Opikinawasowin, which translates as the 'child rearing way' this principle is a highly valued aspect of traditional Cree life. This research demonstrated it is not often we take the time in our modern world to sit down with the Elders and have heartfelt discussions about Opikinawasowin. After sitting with seven wonderful Elders it was challenging to create an organizational framework to share with others about what was taught in a way that would be both respectful and understandable. As a result thirteen traditional teachings emerged from the original interview data. The terminology "teachings" is used because it is the preferred language used to identify the process of traditional Aboriginal instruction. The term "gifts" is used because it most adequately reflects traditional psychology which views teachings as "gifts." Saweyihtakosiwin is the Cree term used to, "Describe gifts deriving from the peoples' special relationship with the Creator (Cardinal & Hildebrant, 2000: 10)."

This study explored Elders understanding of the Cree concept of childrearing and the Swampy Cree term for childrearing, Opikinawasowin, is used throughout the document since many of the people in this study have historical and family connections

to the Cumberland House people, where Swampy Cree is spoken. However, Plains Cree and Michif phrases are also used in this study where possible because many people speak those languages. Very little research to date has really investigated the meaning of the Cree and Metis philosophical teachings associated with Opikinawasowin. The thirteen teachings shared by the Elders in this study are all Opikinawasowin teachings and together they form a base of knowledge that we can place into our parenting bundle. The metaphor of a parenting bundle is used because a nayohcikan (bundle) is a sacred object where we place items of special significance related to a specific purpose it is symbolically carried forward on our backs (Wolfart & Ahenakew, 1998:111).

In Cree worldview children are viewed as a sacred bundle a gift from the spiritual realm. The thirteen Opikinawasowin teachings shared in this study are given with the intention to fill the parenting bundles of the next generation. What follows in this section of the research report are stories and teachings the Elders want parents, community leaders, and their grandchildren to think about in the future. The Elders participating in this study all shared different aspects of these worldview and lifecycle teachings for the development of our parenting bundle. The people in this study shared many types of tipacimowina stories, which are "accounts of personal experiences, events, and reminiscences," such as hunting stories, land stories, family history stories, food stories, and beading stories (Ellias, 1995: xxii). The Elders in this study made a clear distinction between tipacimowina and the ones that are considered to be ahtayohkanak the sacred oral stories of the Cree people. These ahtayohkanak stories have specific protocols, rules, and methods for telling them.

Before the specific teachings of Opikinawasowin are explored it is important to share some of the basic teachings about this foundational cultural concept of growing children. Firstly, the term holds so much deeper meaning from a Cree language perspective. Isabelle Impey explains the term Opikinawasowin is not easily translated into the English language as it means so much more then just child rearing. She says:

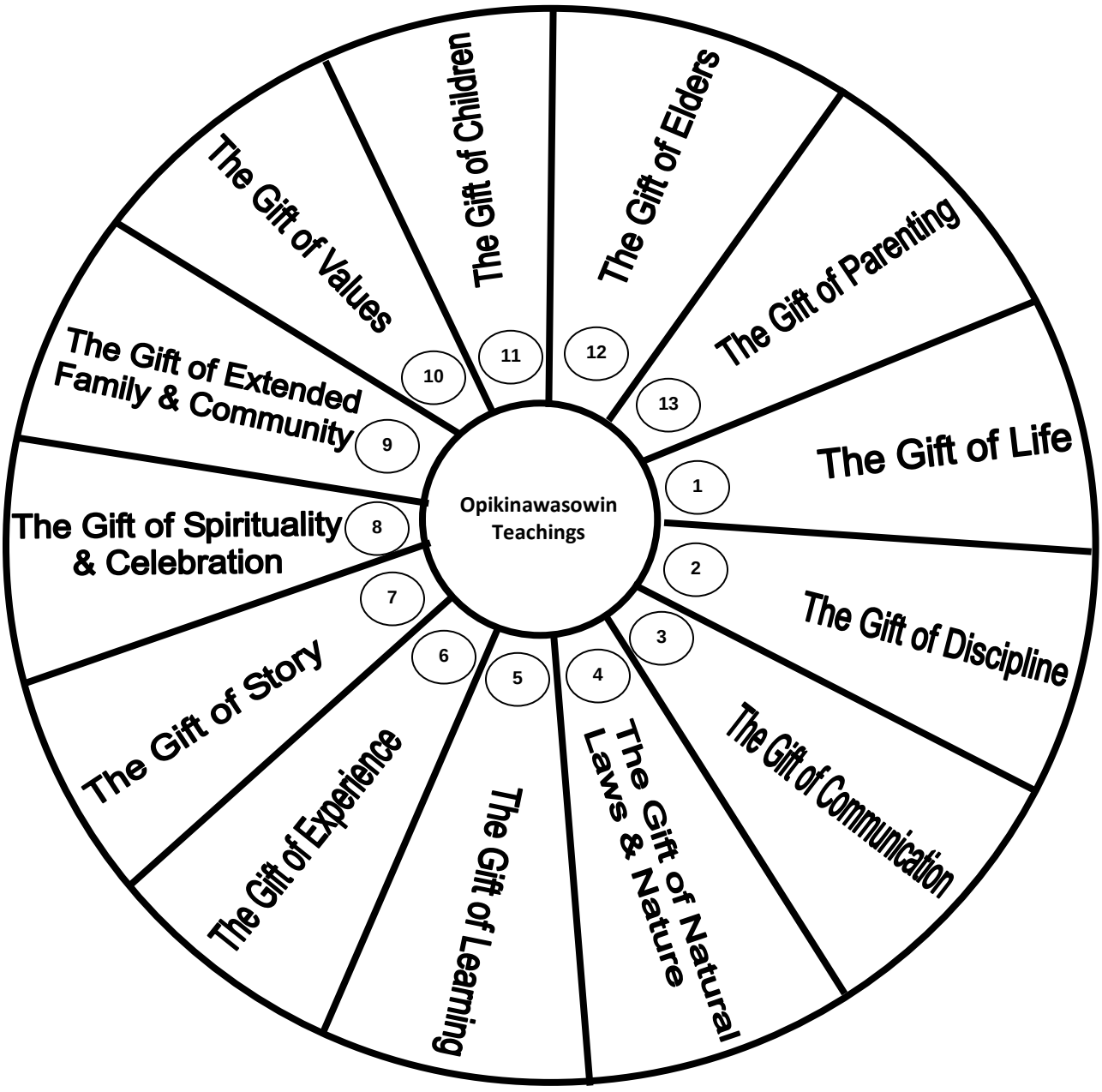
> I know that our Cree speakers, who use Opikinawasowin as prayer, you quite often will hear them say, "I growed my children," so they use that

> term as if you're growing a plant or a flower, that you're growing your children, and it's because they're interpreting Opikinawasowin as a process, that growth process. In the growing of our children in Opikinawasowin, it includes everyone who touches the life of that child, so it's not necessarily just the parent's duty, it's not the extended family only, but it becomes the community; it becomes everybody's responsibility to grow children.

Isabelle Impey teaches Opikinawasowin is interpreted as a life long process of growing children and that process begins right from pre-conception, through all the stages of life, until death. As Cree and Metis people we have inherited detailed traditional teachings for growing children at every stage of life and these teachings created balance within families and communities and are an important source of wisdom as we begin the decolonization process. The willow metaphor is used by Elders to explain to parents why we must not wait to teach children about their culture because, "If we take a willow that is older, we will find that it is harder to bend and that is why our Elders tell us to start teaching our children at an early age. If we wait too long, then it is going to be harder to teach them (Aboriginal Parent Program, 1995: 29)."

We must begin our teachings at a young age which means working with young parents even before they have children. As part of the decolonization process the Elders suggest we need to get back to the Opikinawasowin teachings about our life long responsibilities to grow all children. Many of the Elders in this study identify the traditional teachings around grand parenting, rebalancing the male and female roles, identifying parental responsibilities, healing individual relationships, and reviving traditional roles of the extended family system as some of the most important teachings to bring forth into the lives of modern Aboriginal families, in order to help them become stronger, and begin to heal from our colonial traumas. My hope is this research study contributes to the healing of our people and gives them Opikinawasowin knowledge and insight about what they want to place into their parenting bundles for the next seven generations.

OPIKINAWASOWIN TEACHINGS WHEEL



THE THIRTEEN OPIKINAWASOWIN TEACHINGS

Opening Prayer

It is traditional protocol to begin traditional teachings with prayer. In the spirit of Opikinawasowin tobacco and offerings were made to Elsie Sanderson for an opening prayer to bless the sharing of these teachings and to honor the spiritual nature of this knowledge. Here is her prayer:

> For the Grandmother knowledge keepers who have prayed for the preservation of Opikinawasowin so future generations of indigenous children might one day learn to see creation through the eyes of the Ancient ones, connected as one in the Great Spirit; that little children once again receive the honor that is their sacred birthright learning through their cultural teachings to reach their fullest potential in their earth walk, I humbly pray to all Grandmother Spirits to bless this writing of traditional Cree Opikinawasowin teachings and guide its journey towards all the parents who seek knowledge to raise their children in respect, truth and love.

A grandmother was selected to do the opening prayer for the Opikinawasowin teachings section of this report because in traditional Cree teachings woman is the first teacher and the keeper of the parenting bundle.

The Gift of all Life Teachings

In the teachings it is important to teach children about the place of the Kitche Manitou in bringing forth all life and to help them see life as a "Gift from Creator." Kitche Manitou, meaning the Great Spirit, the Creator, Supreme Being, or the source of all life. Florence Allen stresses her Elders, "Always taught us that connection to Creator." The teachings say we are a Creator centered people and our Creator is the source of many mysteries. Elsie Sanderson points out the Cree interpretation of "Creator" is that of a, "very kind and loving being." She says, "That's why I have a hard time with the kind of God that I hear described by religions which is punishing, fearful,

and vengeful because ours is not." In traditional parenting Creator is viewed as the main parent of us all and children have the closet connection to Creator. The Cree term Mamawohtawimaw meaning "our father of all" is often used in reference to Creator (Aboriginal parent program, 1995: 67)." In Cree thought, "We are all children of the Creator" even as parents we are still children in a larger sense of being. Otawasismisa is the Cree term used to identify ourselves as "Children of Creator" (Cardinal & Hildebrant, 2000: 3).

A significant duty of parents is to help children form their own special relationship with a loving and kind Creator. In traditional parenting there is freedom for everyone to develop a personal connection to Kitche Manitou, the great mystery. In Opikinawasowin it is taught our spirit has made this earthly journey many times before in order to learn something for our higher development as spiritual beings. James Burns says:

> They used to say, Atahkatasko, he's moving from this world to the other world. So, nothing was ever terminated, it just moved from here to there… and that's what my teachings were, so you never looked at the end of one's life… it's just a change, a transformation of life.

Elsie Sanderson remembers the old people referred to all new born children as "little travelers," she says, "they would say, tahkgotew, which means he or she has arrived." Elsie and James teach that life is viewed as a natural process and death is a new beginning of the next journey since our spirit never dies. In Opikinawasowin parenting children were taught to embrace the cycle of death and dying which creates a greater appreciation as life as an ever changing cycle.

In Cree and Metis culture there is recognition of the "sacredness of the child." It is understood all new born children are spiritually pure. Parents were taught to treat all new born children in a loving and gentle manner because this child just experienced the powerful journey from the spiritual realm into this physical world. Isabelle Impey shares the traditional saying, "this child has been loaned to us from Creator." Caregivers are

taught to create a gentle and loving environment for children to live and grow. Isabelle emphasizes children, "are our greatest teachers" and female and male children are both equally valued. Isabelle teaches, "This gift of child is only with us for a pre-determined period of time so they must be appreciated everyday." In Opikinawasowin "all life is sacred" which means we as parents have a monumental task to nurture the spiritual essence of every child that is brought into our lives and we have a responsibility to balance their spiritual needs with the nurturing of our own spirit. James Burns says, "If we are going to raise our children in the traditional way, we have to accept that spirituality is the foundation for our people." The Elders teach in Opikinawasowin parenting it is a priority to teach children how to make connections with the spiritual realm which is a very real and accessible source of wisdom which can be accessed through prayer, meditation, dreamtime, and traditional ceremonies.

All Life has Purpose

The Elders in this study shared many important teachings about the traditional way of viewing and relating to the world. Elsie Sanderson teaches the concept that "all life has purpose" is a traditional way to teach children about how to relate to the world. It is believed every child comes to Earth with a higher purpose to full fill and a gift to share. Elsie reminds us one of our jobs as parents is to help our children discover and fulfill their life purpose and as parents we must do this through careful observation of our children and by praying for understanding to be revealed to us from Creator. She explains everything on Earth has a sacred purpose to fulfill and we as humans must be careful not to interfere with the life path of all beings, both human and non-human. The concept of Pastahowin is used to describe a "breach of the natural order (Wolfart & Ahenakew, 1998: 149)." This Cree law means an individual does not have the right to interfere in the sacred path of another by using manipulation or coercion. One is not to interfere with the sacred covenant between the Creator and another being or there will be negative consequences. Pastahowin is the topic of numerous teaching stories and trickster stories which warn about the consequences of breaking this sacred law (Bear, n.d; Ellias, 1995; Brightman, 1989; Bloomfield, 1993). Stories of Pastahowin teach young people all their actions have larger spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical consequences. A

Pastahowin is often compared to the effect of breaking an egg which is impossible to put back together, hard to contain, and difficult to clean up. When a person commits a Pastahowin they are strongly encouraged to disclose it whereby, releasing the transgression and allowing the correct method of healing to happen.

In Opikinawasowin parenting methods children are taught to value all life forms from the smallest bug to the largest tree, and wanton destruction of nature is seen as a violation of Creator's natural laws. At a young age children were taught not to taunt or disrespect animals because each being enters their earth journey to fulfill a "higher purpose." It is believed Indigenous peoples are entrusted with the role as stewards of the Earth and it is expected we maintain harmony with all of its beings. Even to this day, Florence Allen offers tobacco to ant hills as a sign of respect. Elsie Sanderson remembers being taught by the old people, "not to disturb the wildlife." Parents must respect their own spirit, the spirit of their children, and to honor the spirit of all other life forms because in Cree thought everything possesses a spirit or form of consciousness.

Wahkotowin

This study documents the Cree concept of Wahkotowin which contains the original laws and principles that guides how families function it narrowly translates as family relations or kinship system. Wahkotowin teaches about our family relationship with all of Creation. Roan & Waugh say, "Wahkohtowin expresses the notion of an overarching law of respect and belonging. One belonged, first and foremost, to the sacred order of things laid down first Creator. One also belonged as a member of the family of the first ancestor, so the word could equally be used to describe "descendant" (Roan & Waugh, 2004:1)." Elsie Sanderson teaches the Cree language reinforces the Wahkotowin teaching we are related to all life forms within Creation. In her teachings we are not only related to human beings, we are related to everything in Creation, therefore, in the Cree language, plants, animals, rocks, and other beings are customarily referred to as our "grandmothers" and "grandfathers."

Elsie recalls the old people of her day acknowledging the north wind as "Kimooshumanaw keewatin," which means, "Our grandfather north wind." Elsie

remembers, "especially in the winter time, when it was cold, we were taught to really respect the north wind and to act and dress accordingly." The old people explained to her that everyone was to dress warmly and appropriately for cold weather or they would be demonstrating disrespect to grandfather north wind, almost like taunting him. Her family would say, "Don't challenge kimooshoom, you are going to lose." Children were taught to extend the same respect we give to our human family to our non-human family.

In traditional Cree society the oral tradition is the mechanism for passing on the teachings of Wahkotowin especially through the legendary characters in our sacred stories. Wesakechak, the Cree trickster teaches children about the proper protocol for humanities interaction with other life forms and the spiritual beings. In the sacred stories Wesakechak identifies all animals and other beings as sister and as brother which gives children the message of kinship with all life and teaches animals have some human qualities and humans have animal qualities, the Cree world is an interrelated world.

Connected to the concept of Wahkotowin is the teaching that everything in life is connected, everything in Creation is interconnected and affects each other. "There is love in kinship as there is love between brothers and sisters; therefore, there is love and kinship with all things, as all things are inter-related (Aboriginal Parent Program, 1995:62)." These teachings are sometimes referred to as the web of life or circle of life teachings. A phrase heard in Cree prayer language is, "Kahkiyaw Niwakomakanak translated into "All my relations" and means we are related and speaks to the kinship of all things in Creation (62)." Elsie says traditional people will often use the term, "all my relations," to begin and end their prayers.

In Cree society social protocols helped keep harmony and balance between family members such as the "mother in law taboo," where a man could not talk directly to his mother-in-law, nor could a woman talk directly to her father-in-law (Aboriginal Parent Program, 1995:62). The teachings of Wahkotowin identify ways to use loving and nurturing language between family members. Elsie says, "It was a Wahkotowin tradition to acknowledge all old people as your grandmother and grandfather as a symbol of respect." She says they would say nohkom (my grandmother) or nimoshom (my

grandfather) and it was important to use the word "my" because it drew them into your personal circle in a loving manner. Likewise, parents extend this same respect to their children by acknowledging them as nitanis (my girl) or nikosis (my boy) instead of using their names. "Our ancestors believed a person's name was sacred. Therefore, they did not call each other by name, but instead by relationship (Aboriginal Parent Program, 1995:61)."

It is the duty of the grandmothers to ensure children are taught about the family history and genealogy. This kinship system teaching is represented very strongly in the Metis culture. Elsie recalled being taught by her mother and aunties who was related to who. Cree Elder Stan Cuthand shares the Cree proverb, "Know your relatives and you will know who you are (McAdam, 2009: 33)." Knowledge of your family genealogy is viewed as important because it is understood that the ancestors that lived in the past have the power to help us in the present and through ceremony we call to them for guidance and assistance (Roan, 2004: 2). This is connected to the concept of "genetic memory" which is knowledge held in our physical bodies which we inherit from the physical experiences of our ancestors who lived before us. This teaching serves to give children as greater sense of ancestral continuity between the past and the present. Florence Allen refers to it as, "blood memory" and she says we all have access to this source of knowledge if we choose to develop it. In Opikinawasowin teachings there is saying, "All the answers are within us." Florence emphasizes we need to teach children to go inward to find their own answers, this accepted cultural practice is what Cree academic Willie Ermine (1995) refers to as the practice of "inwardness" which is both represented in the Cree language and supported through ceremonies.

Dreams, Prophecies, and Visions

In traditional parenting there is respect for dreams and visions as a significant aspect of human or self-development. Ritual was a vital aspect of nurturing dream development in children. From earliest life, children are exposed to a whole set of beliefs and responses to all sorts of dreams. Parents are taught to encourage children to share and analyze their dreamtime experiences. Florence Allen refers to it as the, "dreamtime,"

and this dreamtime was something that adults were encouraged to explore and develop with their children. According to Florence within the Cree worldview there are many different types of dreams that people experience and she reminds us that there were techniques, protocols, and ceremonies, and other ways to help children to foster their communication link between waking time and the dreamtime. It is understood dreamtime is an accessible source of power and wisdom that can be very helpful for children. Elsie Sanderson recalls how accepting her family was of guidance and information that was transmitted through her dreams. She was never discouraged from talking about her dreamtime, she says:

> I would get up in the morning and tell them my dreams, and they would be very respectful of it… I would tell them, so and so came to visit last night to say goodbye, and they would go and check it out, sure enough somebody was gone, so I had those dreams, and in my home I was the one that was the dreamer, and they would just accept it quite literally actually.

In Cree and Metis culture gifted ones play an important role in helping young people understand their dreams and visions. Isabelle Impey recalls William Greenleaf was the gifted one in Cumberland House who specialized in dream interpretation for the community. In traditional society the role of Dreamer in the community had an important status and played a key role in maintaining the well being of the community members. In Cree culture much is learned by our people through spirit. Cree Elder Sarah Whitecalf teaches the porcupine spirit taught Cree women the gift of porcupine quilling through dreams. The dream origins of porcupine quilling serves to remind Cree women that dreams are a natural doorway to sacred knowledge for survival and good living (Whitecalf, 1993: 35).

The Dreamer was instrumental in helping people sort out their dream symbols. The Dreamers role was to help seekers untangle the enfolded metaphors in their dream messages. Cree Elder Louis Bird says the Cree people often slept in nests high up in a tree to encourage dreaming. However, if they, "made a nest over fast water they would have a special type of dream," because of the power of water in facilitating dreaming

(Bird, 2007:96). Dreamtime and visionary experiences are considered a reliable and accurate source of knowledge for our people. Grandma Rose recently published the vision that her grandson received in their, *Fleury Family History* (2009). In this vision, her grandson was visited by their ancestor Patrice Fleury, who was active during the resistance at Batoche in 1885, and he shared teachings with his grandson, regarding family history and other personal information about his life experiences in 1885. Rose is proud her grandson approached her about his visionary experience and she respectfully publishes this historical information with the same validity as any other academic references cited in her family history research.

From a Cree perspective dreams are vital to obtaining knowledge essential for survival (Bird, 2007). Cree people used dreaming to learn from animals, get permission to hunt from the animal spirits, and obtain guidance about where to find animals (Bird, 2007). Cree academic Neal McLeod explains, "A dream helper, pawakan, links a person to the rest of creation. A pawakan could be any being, from a mosquito to a bear, and it imparts to its human counterpart various powers and abilities (McLeod, 2007: 29)." In traditional parenting the pawakan held an important place in the spiritual development of children. McLeod says, "In return for these gifts, the person treats the animal with respect and honours it. If the person has a bear for a dream helper, for instance, there may be dietary restrictions placed on eating bear meat (29)." Additionally he points out, "There may be songs that a person sings to his pawakan that honor this being (29)."

James Burns shared a powerful story which credits the spiritual guidance he received as saving his life. He explained, "Four old white haired Elders" visited him in a dream and they instructed him to get doctored traditionally. He says, "They told me exactly what to do, I even had to go buy a belt to put on to keep me together." James emphasizes, "There was no fear of any kind, knowing that these old guys were beside me all the time." James shares his visionary experience with others so young people realize how helpful and knowledgeable and real the spiritual realm is.

In Opikinawasowin parenting teachings we are never alone and the spiritual world is just waiting to help us and they can reach us more effectively through our dreamtime.

Florence Allen says, "That's how much the spirits and our ancestors love us," they want to help us in our dreams. An important job for parents and Elders is to help children make sense of their dream and visions. Solomon Sanderson acknowledges prophecies play an important role in developing the minds of young children. Elsie and Solomon Sanderson speak about the seven generation prophecy they learned through the Anishinabe people. Florence Allen recalls a Hopi prophecy that really impacted her thinking. Solomon reminds us our traditional prophecies inspire the youth, give them strength to survive, help them make sense of the past, give them direction for the future direction and transfer our cultural worldview.

Traditional Prayer

The participants in this study were lucky enough to have witnessed the important place of traditional prayer and cultural expressions of gratitude in their family life. Many of the people interviewed for this project witnessed their family members begin their day with prayer and end it with prayer. Prayer is viewed as a vital part in the Opikinawasowin parenting methodology. There is a great belief in the power of prayer especially the need to pray for patience with children. It is taught parents need to facilitate each child's personal relationship with Creator in order to strengthen their entire being. In Cree and Metis thought children need to be taught how to talk respectfully to the Creator from the heart with free spoken communication or non-structured prayer known in Cree as, Kakisimowin (Bear, n.d:15). Elsie Sanderson recalls among the old timers their prayer time was often very individualized, deeply personal, and it was just like having a natural conversation with Creator she says "it was just a natural way of life for the people and we never needed a church to express our personal relationship with Creator." James Burns teaches it is important to role model Kakisimowin practice to children so they can see how traditional prayer is expressed.

Parents are taught to find creative ways to bring prayer into the life of their children be it through song, offerings, or simple family prayers. From a traditional perspective parenting is one of the most challenging things that a human being engages in as such it will require Kakisimowin. Parents are taught to get into the routine to say

prayers before they make significant decisions which involve children and especially before they administer discipline to children. Isabelle Impey explains prayer is an important aspect of traditional parenting and sometimes you have to, "Ask through prayer for gifts, or for help, if you think that you're missing something in your life to be a better parent." Florence Allen agrees, "When making big decisions, go within, listen, what does it say, the spirit will always guide us to make the decision."

Turning children and our parenting over to the hands of Creator is a significant part of Opikinawasowin parenting. James Burns recalls his grandmother coming to stay with them in the summer time and, "she would sing in Cree about nurturing, and at the end of the day she would pray about it." Many Elders have fond memories of the old people singing their prayers out to the universe and Creator. Isabelle Impey recalls asking her grandfather why he didn't go to church he said to her, "I don't go there because I don't want to go to a place where people are watching me, I want to go to a place where, I can speak to him." It is taught regular prayer can help establish a sense of routine and security in children and give them a personal connection to Creator. Traditional prayer was used to provide children with quiet time which served as a way to settle children down and give them focus for the day or give them downtime before bed.

Safe Children

Since the life of a child is considered so sacred in Opikinawasowin parenting it is an expectation everyone play a role in keeping children safe at all times and children were never left unattended. Mothers were taught to never leave a child unattended in a traditional Wewepisun (baby swing) or in a Tihkanahgan (cradleboard) they always had to be within visual distance and to not let them cry. Stories were shared if you left a baby unattended their spirit might want to go back to the spirit world so women were really encouraged to always sing to their children and be present. Isabelle Impey and Elsie Sanderson teach that children feel safety and security when they can hear the singing voices of their mothers so "Sing to your babies, talk to them, or just hum." James Burns teaches, "The real nurturing songs belonged to the grandmothers." The grandmothers played a key role in monitoring and ensuring the safety of all children in the community

and they protected the innocence of children. In traditional society the grandmothers had the authority to discipline anyone, man or woman, who was not upholding the honor of Opikinawasowin parenting. In traditional Cree and Metis society the oldest grandmother was ultimately respected for this disciplinary role.

The Gift of Discipline Teachings

Discipline holds an important place in growing children and is viewed in a positive manner. The main goal of parents and the extended family system is to cultivate self-discipline within each child. James Burns expresses the belief that traditional ceremonies, fasts, sun dances, and sweat lodge are all places where young Cree and Metis children learn to develop self-discipline within the loving support of their family and community. Likewise, Solomon Sanderson says, "the most successful way of getting young people back to who they are, getting them self esteem, and self identity is through the teachings of our traditions, customs and practices."

It is taught everyone has a role to play in the discipline of children. Isabelle Impey shared the saying, "It takes a community to raise a child." In Opikinawasowin parenting there were many forms of disciplinary techniques mentioned such as the use of humor, humiliation, non-verbal communication, third person conversations, and storytelling. Lecturing and forms of excessive corporal punishment are not aspects of traditional parenting. Instead rewards and praise for good behavior were used to ensure positive behavior in children. Grandma Rose recalls parents and old people in her youth were very strict but she also says, "They were very gentle with us too." Elsie Sanderson pointed out it was essential for family survival that everyone learned to cultivate self-discipline and self-restraint. In traditional parenting our job is to help children acquire the ability to practice delayed gratification, develop self-regulation, and learn self-control.

An important aspect of Opikinawasowin discipline is instructions need to be given to children that are precise, specific, and repeated. Grandma Rose learned orderliness and cleanliness from her great grandmother Marguerite Trottier she recalled her being, "Very precise and everything had to be just so." There were several techniques

used by the old people to teach children such as the use of repetitiveness, metaphor, dramatization, story, and body gestures to make their points stronger and more memorable for children. When parents take the time to carefully explain their expectations to a child it will ensure the success of that child to meet their goal and minimize the need to discipline the child in the future.

Solomon Sanderson says, "If you did something that they disagreed with they'd talk to you about what you did, and encourage you to take ownership for it." Children feel a sense of security in knowing what is expected of them and what the boundaries are within the family and community. Grandma Rose was surrounded by many spirited and influential Metis women, such as her grandmother Elmire Lafond, who made the time to teach her how to cultivate orderliness and precision in her life through partaking in the act of sewing and knitting at an early age. Grandma Rose shares a teaching story about how she learned self-discipline by knitting her own lost mitten:

> I was eight years old when I first knit my first pair of mitts. I went to school and lost a mitt and so she gave me the knitting needles and the wool and she says, "They are the same kind as your other mitt, you count the stitches and I will put them on the thing and you gotta knit them." I thought, "Well grandma I am up to where you said I am supposed to put the tongue." So she came and helped me. She came with a safety pin. I was eight years old. I only made one mitt but I learned how.

By Rose's grandmother teaching her to make her own mitt she learned to take greater care of her stuff and through the process she gained a new skill of knitting that she still uses today. Another significant aspect of discipline is to follow through with your words and keep the promises made to children. If you tell kids the consequences of their actions and they don't listen you must follow through with the administration of the consequences.

It is taught discipline needs to be fair, consistent, and implemented from a place of loving kindness. In Opikinawasowin parenting practices there was no use of swearing

or profanity used in the discipline of children. The use of non-violence and gentleness is a key principle in traditional parenting philosophies. "Traditional Aboriginal childrearing does not involve hitting (Dufault, 2003, 47)." Cree Elder James Carpenter teaches discipline was gentle and effective he remembers, "If a child gets out of hand, he would be sent to the other tent and to see the Elder who he would listen to. The Elder will tell him how to live his life in the future. There were people such as this who counseled the children but there was no judge, only good talk, advice, and the teachings. That's how the Indian people lived as I grew up (Kulchyski, 1999: 232)."

Traditional Discipline

In traditional culture it is expected parents and all caregivers of children must role model self-discipline, gentleness, and patience if they expect their children to engage in this type behavior. Traditional discipline is based on the principles of gentleness referred to as in Cree as Yospatisiwin or Manatisiwaywin (University of Alberta, 2010). It is believed before you can discipline children properly you must find ways to get their full attention or refocus children so they can internalize what you are talking about. In traditional parenting caregivers of children need to find creative ways to slow down and refocus kids before implementing gentle forms of discipline. In the Opikinawasowin system it was accepted everyone must "take the time" to discipline children effectively. There are no short cuts in parenting and raising children otherwise it come back and negatively impact everyone in the long term.

Reinforcing Discipline with Story

A common traditional disciplinary technique, used by parents or old people, once children were paying attention, was to use storytelling as a form of discipline because it was a gentle way to teach right from wrong. It was then the old ones used Weesakejac, Nanabush or Ti-Jean stories to teach children about the consequences of their behavior. These characters in an indirect and non-intimidating manner helped children come to their own conclusions about the consequences of their choices. By listening to the mistakes made by these traditional trickster characters the children learned to think critically about the effects of their choices. Sometimes the old people would ask the

children questions about these traditional stories to check for a child's understanding such as, "What would you have done differently if you were in Weesakejac's shoes?" Many of the traditional stories taught children to ponder the long term consequences of their own behaviors.

A significant Opikinawasowin teaching present in traditional Cree and Metis storytelling is, "What goes around comes around." Both Florence Allen and Elsie Sanderson stressed parents need to teach children, "All actions have implications." By using stories parents can vividly show children the consequences of poor choices. Solomon Sanderson recalls a favorite saying of this mother was, "Whatever you do, goes around, and comes to your door." Florence learned the principle from her father, he would say, "When you go out of your way to be hurtful to somebody it is going to come back to you." In Opikinawasowin thought you will get four times back what you put out. Either you will get back four times the positive or four times the negative depending upon the intentions behind your actions. Grandma Rose recalls the effect of these teachings on her she says, "It made me think." She often catches herself thinking the words, "What would grandma say or do in this situation? Is this going to come back to me in a positive way or a negative way?" In the Opikinawasowin parenting system children are taught to stop, look, and listen and think about the consequences of their actions.

Our stories give us resilience, strength, knowledge for survival, and roots. Families told stories to children to teach them how to survive on the land or warn them about certain circumstances of living in the bush that could threaten their life. Elsie Sanderson recalled the old people teaching the children about certain places in the bush where people had drowned in rapids or had fallen through the ice. Stories were told to children about how people they knew used fast thinking or creativity to save themselves in the face of impending disaster. By telling children about these survival stories the tellers gave important information that could save the life of a child if they ever happened to be in the same life threatening situation in the future.

Kakayiwatisiwin

A key aspect of Opikinawasowin is to teach self-discipline and to develop the work ethic of children and youth. The Cree term, Kakayiwatisiwin is, "The ability to develop an inner sense of industriousness or an inner ability or desire to be hardworking (Cardinal & Hildebrant, 2000: 78)." In traditional parenting there is emphasis on teaching children Kakayiwatisiwin at an early age. Grandma Rose emphasized that Metis families placed a high value on receiving a formal education since they had historically been denied a formal education through government inaction and through their non-recognition policy of the Metis. Therefore, in this study many of the Metis children were encouraged by their parents and extended family to work hard at school since formal education was viewed as a privilege. This notion is supported by Elsie Sanderson who stressed how the entire community of Cumberland House encouraged her to acquire an education. Grandma Rose credits her own childhood experiences as helping her develop a sense of industriousness. She says, "I always told my kids that if you want something bad enough you work for it."

In Opikinawasowin parenting it is important to teach children to do high quality work to the best of their ability and to take pride in the work one accomplished. Furthermore it is believed we all have an inner desire to work and make a contribution. The Cree term Atoskewimahcihowin means an, "inner desire to work (Cardinal & Hildebrant, 2000: 78)." It is considered unnatural to not work but a healthy amount of work and play is necessary in raising healthy self-disciplined children. It is stressed meaningful work tasks give children a sense of direction, build their self-esteem, and teaches them self-respect. It was emphasized parents must teach their children not to take shortcuts when doing work or chores. Robert McAuley recalls being very young when he was given tasks to help contribute to the home, he says:

> In Cumberland, when I was growing up, there was no power, it was all candle light. We didn't have any conveniences, anything we wanted, we had to work for, like cutting wood was team work, my Mom used to do most of the cutting when my Dad wasn't there, but I helped, my job was to

> pile the wood and maybe chop some, and I had to do this type of work, and I wasn't very old. My Mom was quite an avid berry picker and she always made different jams and stuff like that so, in the summer time when I was home, I had to pick at least one quart of berries before I could go swimming… no kidding, and I was not the only one getting that treatment.

Solomon Sanderson, Elsie Sanderson, Rose Fleury, Robert McAuley, and Isabelle Impey all recalled the strong work ethic in their communities. Both Solomon and Isabelle spoke about how they were personally influenced by the diligent work ethic of the strong hardworking women in their lives. Likewise, Elsie recalls how her mother, Cecilia Dorion, and other women in the community of Cumberland House role modeled an exceptional work ethic to the younger women, girls, and boys. Elsie remembers:

> My mother used to tell me that during the Second World War there was "no men." All the men had left the community. They were all in the war and they (women) would have to take the horse and sleigh and go across the lake, on the ice and somebody would meet them coming from La Pas with the mail, to go get the mail that was coming in. It was the women that did that and by boat in the summer and so they did all the hunting, fishing, trapping, the gathering of the wood, preparing and all the gathering of berries, and also haying for horse and cows there were in the community. So the women were a hearty breed.

Elsie Sanderson and Isabelle Impey both remember there were rewards and praise for high quality workmanship and children were encouraged to take pride in their work in a humble manner. Isabelle recalls being around the age of five when she helped make bread for the family. Everyone in the household was expected to contribute to the functioning of the household in an age appropriate manner.

Routine, Structure, and Rules

The participants interviewed for this project originated from large families so they had a solid knowledge based of what was traditionally required of everyone in the family to carry out many duties and responsibilities in order to manage the daily household chores. The teaching was shared it is important to teach children their place within the regular daily work routine by giving them age appropriate tasks. Everyone of the people in this study recalled the important place of routine in maintaining the flow of the home especially within the large extended family system where everyone had to know their job, role, and what was expected of them. The use of the Waspison (moss bag), Tihkganahkgun (cradleboard), Wewepisun (Baby Swing) were used to teach children about family routine, structure, and rules. According to Isabelle Impey the children in the Tihkganahkgun were propped up and they could observe the family routine, this perspective gave a child a sense of safety and security, it taught them how the family functioned. These Opikinawasowin child rearing practices cultivated the behavior of stop, look, and listen in small children.

The Waspison encouraged the development of "visual acuity" in the babies. Isabelle points out the moss bag helped to, "develop their ability to be able to see, develop their ability to be able to determine when it's crying time, when it's quiet time, and when it is a safe time to be noisy." When the babies were untied from the Waspison they were free to move and explore their world under the guidance and support of the parents. It is believed we learn right from conception in the womb. Isabelle says, "Even though you're two years old you are learning how to behave in your family circle." James Burns remembers his grandmother teaching him why our women used the Waspison, Tihkganahkgun, and Wewepisun, he recalls:

> I remember women used to carry their Tihkganahkgun around and whenever they would pick berries they would set the child against a tree and that child was there looking around and observed everything that was going on, well one of the biggest teaching tools of a child was of course visionary to begin with, cause they couldn't talk, but they watched everything that happened by being propped up against a tree. Then of

> course the baby swing was again part of our home usually the granny would sing, and that child would be just so relaxed, again it is an environment where children were really taken care of, and those are the three tools I believe a child needs between first born to age one, since that time of nurturing was so important for a child. Today, I see a lot of that is missing with children, that sense of belonging, that sense of ownership of its own environment, and this is what granny used to tell us about why these things were done.

Isabelle Impey teaches you can tell a baby who was raised in a Waspison because they are calmer and more secure.

If children broke the rules or code of conduct in the family or community, it was an Opikinawasowin parenting technique to give children indirect feedback about their unacceptable behavior through the use of third person conversations between other adults. Elsie Sanderson recalls how this indirect form of public humiliation was very effective and non-confrontational. This type of Opikinawasowin discipline system meant all adults played a role in enforcing the rules of the home and community. Elsie recalls:

> While they were talking about what we did wrong to other adults, they would put it in the form of a story. They would be talking to this other person about how, if somebody would do that behavior, while out on the land, trying to keeping your body and soul together, how maybe really dangerous that behavior would be, or maybe unfortunate for the family if the behavior continued, as it could disrupt the ability to bring the food in. I think they were deep lessons. It usually took just the one story.

In the Opikinawasowin parenting system it was expected parents and community support each other in the discipline of children. Third person conversations between adults were also used in the family to praise children for good behavior.

In Opikinawasowin parenting it was expected everyone had a role to play in keeping children safe. It was the expectation or rule in the Cree and Metis communities represented in this study that children were not allowed to go out after dark without the supervision of an adult. Stories were used to help enforce the rule children had to be in before dark. In Cumberland House there were numerous stories told to children to keep them safe. Both Elsie Sanderson and Isabelle Impey remember how the adults told them stories about Chipskyboo to scare them home before dark. Elsie recalls, "If you encountered Chipskyboo, it wouldn't be pleasant." Chipskyboo stories effectively regulated the behavior of children in their community and the adults were willing to support each other in perpetuating the story in order to keep children safe. Additionally, Elsie remembers being told about the Pagagosuk beings which had, "Long fingers and came out at night." Robert McAuley expresses how creative and effective these stories were to get the children home before dark, he recalls:

> My dad and my mom used to give us all kinds of stories. If we were playing out late and if they wanted us in they'd tell us that once the owls starts hooting out there you gotta run home because if you don't run home, just about the time the sun sets, if you don't run home, they're gonna put you inside their ears… we were foolish enough to believe that it was true, so we'd all run home, and all the kids in the camp would run home, that was a story just given to the kids.

Florence Allen remembers, "We were not allowed out at night because that's when the negative spirits were out, and that is when the parents made sure you were in the house protected." In Opikinawasowin parenting the adults used a healthy amount of fear to keep the children safe within the community. Grandma Rose teaches in the traditional lifestyle, "They woke up with the sun and went down with the sun." In traditional parenting methods it is expected as soon as it is dark the children be kept safe in the house, and travel was forbidden at night by families. Florence Allen recalls there was a great deal of respect held by the old people for the "spirit of the night." In Opikinawasowin parenting night time was a time for talking, relaxing, and reflecting as a

family. Grandma Rose stresses night time routine was an important bonding time for everyone and the grandmothers played an important role in this process. Bedtime bonding, routines, and rituals were really important and many teachings were given to children when they were settling down for the night.

Many of the Elders have heartfelt memories about being settled down at night time and prepared for the evening routine by the telling of stories. Stories sparked the imagination of children and created a bonding experience for children. The close knit nature and small living spaces of Metis and Cree families allowed for children to be exposed to a great deal of knowledge expressed through listening to the conversations of their parents and the old people. Elsie Sanderson fondly remembers being in bed and listening to the conversations of the adults. Elsie has warm memories of the evening routine since it was a time where a significant amount of knowledge about community events, family history, and current issues was indirectly and directly transferred to children. Elsie remembers:

> I remember when we would be sitting around in the evenings, when everything was done and we would just be preparing to go to bed for the night, we would be sitting around doing beadwork, at home in the community, it was around the kitchen table, with my aunts, and there was always other women there, and we learned a lot about our history around the area, who had been there in our traditional trapping areas, how we belonged to the land for generations. They would tell us who we were related to. That is where we learned about what was supposed to be our job. I can still see it was quite healthy in the core of its teachings.

Intergenerational storytelling ensured everyone knew who they were and where they came from. As Elsie points out in the Metis community it was the responsibility of the women to teach everyone who they were related to in order to monitor the relationships of eligible young men and women.

Kipihtowewin and Wawiyatwewin

Getting children to slow down and have quiet time throughout the day is important in Opikinawasowin parenting. The Plains Cree the word for silence is Kipihtowewin (University of Alberta, 2010). It is taught there needs to be a healthy balance between the amount of stillness, silence, and action in a child's life. It is believed both silence and humor have important places in the discipline of children. It is taught parents need to structure down time for themselves where they can enter into silent prayer or thought which means the extended family support system becomes an important source when parents need downtime. It is through the use of silent time parents can contemplate and pray about their parenting practices. Isabelle Impey says, "I like the quiet, it gives you time to reflect, and in that reflection it gives you time to pray." The concept of, "sit with it," for a while was advocated by the Florence Allen. She teaches, "think before reacting or making decisions that will impact children."

On the opposite side of the circle is the use of humor with children. The Cree word for humor is Wawiyatwewin (Aboriginal Parent Program, 1995:73). Isabelle Impey explains, "I think healthy parents use humor, I think that the reason for that is they don't want to be too harsh, and so humor takes away from that harshness." Furthermore she says, "If people can't laugh at themselves it's not a good place to be." Isabelle connects humor with acceptance and bonding she emphasizes, "If people don't treat you with humor then obviously you're not accepted." It is said laughter is a "good medicine" since it creates balancing effects. When there is lots of laughter in the home children feel security, acceptance, happiness, and comfort. Many people recalled being taught by their caregivers to see the funny side of life's different encounters. Telling jokes and being able to laugh at your own mistakes or minimal foibles is seen as a good thing for children to learn in the home. It is considered an empty home if there is little laughter heard among the children and adults.

The Gift of Communication Teachings

Storytelling and listening are transformative acts since they can change how you feel, think, and act. Storytelling is a non-intimating way to share teachings. Stories contain the secrets for how we transform and they can show us how to find creative

solutions to life's problems (Mehl-Madrona, 2005: 2). In the traditional learning the old people sit with youth and share their lived experiences. Intergenerational communication is one of the most important aspects of growing children for it is in the act of communication children know who they are, and what is expected of them, and learn how to think critically and creatively about the world.

We are given four powers by the Creator in relationship to communication these include the power to think, act, speak, and listen. Teaching children to yield these four powers wisely is everyone's responsibility. In Opikinawasowin parenting the power to act through non-verbal communication is an important aspect of raising children. It is taught to be mindful of the messages you are giving children through the expression of your body language. Grandma Rose recalls her grandmothers were so good at communicating their expectations through body language all they had to do was give a child, "the look" to stop their behavior in its tracks. In the traditional parenting way non-verbal communication is viewed as being just as powerful and impacting as the spoken word. Using body language and open communication to share your expectations to children is very important in traditional parenting ways. It is believed all parents have a responsibility to communicate with children about how to engage in self-care and self responsibility.

Children are not born knowing how to take care of themselves they are taught these things from their family, community, and nation, through loving and kind communication. It is stressed children need to be taught to stand up for themselves in a good way with their voice, and they need to be encouraged to speak up about injustice. Children need to be taught how to use kind words and stay away from profanity. Elsie Sanderson and Florence Allen condemn the use of profanity especially with children or in front of children since it meant the person was modeling out of control behavior and they were not parenting from a centered place. The Cree word, Miskasowin is used to describe the teaching about being centered it means, "finding one's sense of origin and belonging or finding one's self or one's centre (Cardinal & Hildebrant, 2000: 79)."

In traditional parenting there is a teaching about sacred space which is understood as an energetic spiritual boundary that surrounds everyone and everything it forms a circle around you. Being in the presence of negative forms of communication does damage to your sacred space that is why Elsie Sanderson encourages everyone to smudge with the medicine of sage regularly if they are repeatedly exposed to negative words and negative energies. Florence Allen reminds us, "mean behavior has a huge impact on our entire being, whether we are aware of it or not." Elsie teaches young parents in her traditional parenting classes the importance of caring for their own sacred space and before she runs talking circles with the participants, she takes the time to clear the space through smudging, so that the communication in the circle will be positive, nurturing, and healthy. And, if communication is getting highly emotional during her talking circle she will relight the smudge, bless a glass of water, and give it to the person who is struggling to speak out their words. Elsie believes, "By teaching children about sacred space and mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical boundaries we can help prevent future abuses."

A method used for youth to express their own voice is through traditional talking circles. It is suggested parents use these ancient forms of communication in their parenting practices. Circles teach youth to value and listen to the opinions of others. Elsie says, "Why not do a talking circle, once or twice a week to facilitate family communication?" Many of the people in this study used talking circles as a part of their Opikinawasowin teaching methodology and they used symbolic devices such as a stick, stones, or eagle feather to help enhance the communication process. It is believed young parents should be taught all the traditional protocol for conducting talking circles, otherwise, these methods will not work as effectively.

In life conflicts do happen it is how we handle conflict and react to it that is important. Elsie says, "Today, I can stick up for myself, in a good way, without being ignorant because that is something we were not allowed to do." As a child Florence Allen recalls being taught to walk away from negative conflicts, unconstructive arguments, and abusive or out of control people. Florence remembers:

> My parents used to say, "If somebody is really being disrespectful to you, and wanting to fight with you, walk away. Sometimes you don't wanna walk away, but my parents always said, "Walk, leave, you've got two legs," you've got that opportunity to walk away, and not to fall into that trap of being negative like the other person. Because we're always accountable for our actions, we have a choice to either fight, or be the bigger person, and walk away.

Florence teaches effective problem solving can only happen between people, such as parents and children, when their emotions are more settled and they have had time to think deeper about the situation. In traditional society we are taught to always communicate respectfully, especially towards the old people. Grandma Rose recalls, "We were not to interrupt Elders when they were talking, we were taught not to walk in front of them, or in between them, if they were speaking with each other."

In Opikinawasowin parenting it is a common practice is to teach children to communicate with Creation about what they want in their life. This practice of, "manifestation through asking" is a foundational principle in Opikinawasowin parenting. Florence says, "Ask the Universe for it, voice it, your path will be cleared for you." She remarks, "Be careful for what you ask for because you will get it." Florence shares the teaching that children need to be encouraged to use their voice, "to ask for what they need." Even more so she reminds parents they need to teach their children how to voice their desires outward into the universe so they can develop the tools for self-care.

In traditional parenting the law of harmony and balance comes into play in relationship to learning about respectful communications. Elsie suggests, "We need to balance our need to be heard with the needs of others to be heard too." So, in relationship to traditional parenting it is important to give everyone a chance to voice their opinion and speak their mind. Parents are encouraged to not let anyone person dominate the conversation or discussions. Elsie teaches, "Everyone has a voice that deserves to be heard." Florence remembers being taught to, "always hear both sides." It was a highly valued skill in the traditional learning model to find out as many perspectives or points of

view on an issue or topic in order to make an "informed decision." It is encouraged to speak to children honestly, truthfully, and accurately. The Cree word Tapwewin means, "Speaking the truth with precision and accuracy (Cardinal & Hildebrant, 2000: 80)." Isabelle Impey says Cree people are often called, "precise speaking people," by other First Nations. Voice is one of the gifts that Creator gave humanity to help us live together in a good way and to be always used in a respectful way. A key job as caregivers is to role model respectful communication and teach about the spiritual power of the voice.

Many stories were shared about being taught how to carefully utilize your own voice as it contains a type of "medicine power." Elsie Sanderson remembers her own mother reminding her to always use "kind words" with her children. She recalls, "We were taught to speak so kindly with your words." They would say, "Manacimo, be careful with your words." In a similar way, Florence Allen remembers being taught to think carefully before yielding her voice since it vibrates outward into the universe and is heard by all beings, including the Creator. She teaches, "What you put out with your voice will always come full circle back to you, so be careful of what you say and how you say it." Of course a significant skill highly valued in the Opikinawasowin parenting system is the gift of listening. A distinction was made between the act of "hearing" and the act of "listening." Listening required the engagement of the individual mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Many of the storytelling skills used by the old people helped children develop their memory. Elsie remembers the vivid and descriptive nature of traditional oratory, she says:

> They were such orators. They could just paint these images in your mind when they were talking. You could all most see the image of that place in you. You could just see how they got there, you were following them. I guess for me, it was like there was so much attention to detail. I think what it taught me is, how to observe and retain what they were talking about in terms of how a place looked.

Many traditional stories had songs and even dances that accompanied the story in order to engage a person, mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Since many traditional stories were poetic, metaphorical, and full of imagery the teachings were able to stay in the mind of a child.

The Gift of Natural Laws and Nature Teachings

Our people originally followed "natural laws" at work in the universe and these laws are given by Creator. This knowledge is our children's true inheritance. Kihci Weyasowewin Kisipikaskamihk, is a phrase used in Cree to identify natures laws, it is difficult to translate but it generally means the, "ultimate sacred law all over the world" (Roan & Waugh, 2004: 2)." One of the first natural laws raised by the people in this study was the "law of circularity" meaning everything in life and the universe naturally occurs in a circular format. The traditional saying, Kapa-Kiwatotahkun or Kiway-to tahkowin, "What goes around comes around" embodies this circular worldview.

In this study the human life cycle is viewed as occurring in a circular manner. In Swampy Cree the phrase, Mino Pimatisiwin, translates as a good life journey and it is understood our good life journey is taken in a circular manner beginning in childhood, youth, adulthood, and lastly in eldership (Hart, 2002; Aboriginal Parent Program, 1995). It is said when we reach Eldership we become once again like children before we go back into the spiritual realm which completes our circle of life process on Earth. Florence Allen remembers her dad explaining to her that, "We all feed one another." Isabelle Impey recalls the same circle of life teaching when they dropped their berry baskets they were taught not to pick up any of the berries because something else wanted or needed them so they were taught to, "leave them be."

Law of Harmony and Balance

In the Cree worldview the natural world operates by a law of harmony and balance and is constantly self-monitoring to maintain a sacred balance. The law of harmony and balance is applied to everything including daily living, interactions with children, relating to extended family members, and forging relationships with community. According to the old traditional Cree protocol, "Almost all major decisions

among traditional First Nations people required a direct interaction between the spirit world and the mind of someone attuned to its truths (Roan & Waugh, 2004:2)." The protocol of seeking the guidance of the spiritual world by approaching our gifted men and women served to help create harmony and balance in our leader's decision making process.

Harmony is another important aspect of traditional Cree and Metis family and social life. "Within the band and tribe, the chief and elders attempted to keep a balance between the individual rights of the family members and the greater good of the group. Where there was a fundamental conflict between the two, the decision was always to compromise for the social good of the group (2)." According to Solomon Sanderson all Indigenous Nations had a five hundred year calendar that identified a path that had to be followed and guided the people for generations. Furthermore, he explains, "Collective rights in the forum of inherent rights have to be implemented and enforced as they strengthen the individual rights and benefits."

It is taught everything in life requires this balance or moderation. Elsie Sanderson says this law of harmony and balance applies to all relationships we have including, "relationships with Creation, the natural world, with the spirit world, with each other, between men and women, families, communities, and our own personal relationship with Creator." She further explains it is a natural desire of humanity, "to live in a balanced manner within all of Creation." In relationship to Opikinawasowin parenting everyone needs to find the healthy balance when raising children, especially in the areas of discipline, independence, and communication. It was expressed parents have a responsibility to find balance between their own needs and those of their children. A healthy amount of parental self-care is needed to counter balance the requirement of parents to make self-sacrifices for their children.

Listening to our sacred stories, ahtayoganak, teaches our people about the law of harmony and balance from a Cree way of understanding. In the ancient stories the trickster Weesakejac through his continuous destructive and recreation actions in our early world demonstrates there is a natural duality present in our world that creates

harmony and balance. Florence Allen teaches everything has duality, or two sides, positive and negative, and they both provide a balance in life, they provide a tension that holds the universe together. Scholars Roan and Waugh explain duality as:

> Among the Cree, reciprocity is a fundamental structure of the cosmos, signaled by the notion that Manitou or the great beauty and power of the universe is expressed in dialogic opposites for example kisemanitou and macimanitou, one positive the other negative, both of which are said to operate within the cosmos and human social order and hence are regarded as absolutely sacred (Roan and Waugh, 2004: 2).

Florence points out both good and bad serve a higher purpose she says, "Even anger has a positive and negative side because it can either harm or provide energy for a person to make transformative changes." On an emotional level parents can teach children to embrace their dual natures and children will be better equipped to accept that they are human and are naturally going to have experiences with all emotions such as love-hate, happiness-sadness, and fear-security. Teachings about emotional duality will help children learn to recognize when they are stuck in certain emotions and need to rebalance themselves emotionally.

James Burns, Elsie Sanderson, and Solomon Sanderson shared their knowledge of harmony and balance in relationship to the medicine wheel teachings. Accordingly, Creator gave humanity four gifts on the medicine wheel of life which include the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the self and these aspects are given to our people to help us process our earthly experiences. They teach the four dimensions of self, mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual need to be kept in balance in order for people to live a balanced and healthy life. Parents need to be taught about how to care for their own individual medicine wheels and need to be instructed they have a sacred duty to nurture all the four aspects of self within their children, in a holistic manner. In connection to this teaching is the Cree recognition of the power of four. The original term for Cree people is Nehiyaw and the root word is Neyo which is four. James Burns

says, “We are called the four directions people because we believe in the sacredness of four.” Things are believed to be very powerful when done in cycles of four.

Concept of Change and Movement

In Opikinawasowin teachings we live in an ever growing and changing world. Life is a natural growth process like a seed that begins life in the Earth and then returns back full circle to the Earth. They say we as parents need to accept that our children will always change and to attempt to control or resist the natural stages of development of a child is futile and possibly harmful. The Elders teach we need to grow and adapt with our children and a parents role is to help children adapt gently and smoothly to life changes. An important job of parents is to observe the changes in our kids and to assist our children through all of their life transitions. In our sacred stories, Ahtayoganak, the trickster Weesakejac, through his actions teaches our people in an often ridiculous manner that trying to stop natural change and hold back time, movement, and growth is impossible and leads to disastrous results.

Nature is Our Teacher

Nature is considered one of our teachers and gives much knowledge about how to raise our children in a “good way.” It is told nature will guide us if we listen and receive this wisdom. In Opikinawasowin we have a duty to help each child connect with the four sacred elements of life which are, Askiy (earth), Yotin (air/wind), Iskotew (fire), and Nipiy (water). Elsie Sanderson teaches these four elements of life are considered very ancient spiritual beings and they are among the oldest of the grandmothers and grandfathers on Earth. Elsie remembers being told water was a very kind and nurturing spirit they would say the, “water is so caring, kisewatisiw.”

An important principle of traditional parenting is the notion children need be assisted to develop a relationship with Mother Earth and nature through a deeply personal, mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical connection. Elsie Sanderson teaches the Earth is a living female being associated with all the attributes of mother such a loving, nurturing, and giving. Vincent Steinhauer explains the Cree concept of education, Kiskinohhamatowin is connected to the land, it translates as, “Education, the process by

which people get empowerment and nurturing with the help of the Great Mystery, the community, and Mother Earth (Steinhauer, 2004: 6)." Cree culture teaches, "The existence of man and all higher life forms depends on the health of Mother Earth (SICC, 1993:1)." Cree educator Dale Auger explains, "People will still refer to the Land and the people as one (Auger, 1997:336)." The Creation stories play a key role in assisting children to understand Mother Earth as a living being. Parents and grandparents play an important role in the teaching children to establish a connection to the land and the traditional stories help to support this educational process. Cree concepts of parenting are directly connected to learning from the earth and nature and this is embedded in the language and cultural belief systems.

The participants in this study grew up in places where families could still learn on the land. In Opikinawasowin parenting nature gives us help. Florence talks about the winds, "as our helpers." It is believed anyone can learn the natural laws of nature if they are patient and "willing to observe and listen." Cree Elder Albert Lightening teaches, "humans' inner natures are an exact copy of the nature of the universe, and deep knowledge of the self comes from nature (Roan & Waugh, 2004:1)." In Opikinawasowin parenting there were ceremonies, customs, and traditions to cultivate observation skills in children. Parents give their children a life affirming gift when they teach them creative and fun ways to observe and learn from nature. Florence Allen teaches everything we need to know to live a good life is given to us in nature. An important Opikinawasowin saying is "watch and learn from nature." Our Elders stress, "Western society's materialism and technology is unnatural to the point that many people are unaware of natural cycles and energies and even fear insects, animals, trees, and birds. As humans become unbalanced, so does their world (Roan & Waugh, 2004:1)."

For generations natural occurrences revealed much to our people. The Elders shared many stories about how their old people knew about impending weather changes and other natural shifting patterns by observing the way the stars aligned, or by the way the moon sat in the sky, and through the behavior of certain animals. Florence Allen recalls her father had much traditional knowledge of natural he said, "Nature always

hears you and observes you." Florence teaches, "Some animals mate for life, they pick their mates, and the mates have to go through a test before they will take them." She teaches young women to put their mate through several tests before they make their final decision to accept the mate into their lives. The traditional Opikinawasowin courting process was a four year process where couples got to know each other emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and lastly physically (sexually).

Elsie and Solomon Sanderson teach about the natural law for men to give women special distance while they are on their moon time (menstruation) and not to engage in sexual relationships while a woman is on her moon time in their teachings this can cause harm to both the female and the male. Solomon says, "men are not to interfere with the females relationship with the energy of the moon otherwise there are negative consequences." He advocates that, "Men require instruction respecting their responsibilities and why they can not interfere with the energy between the moon and the females." In traditional parenting teachings women have a sacred relationship with "nohkom tipskaw pisim," grandmother moon and for generations women participated in special full moon ceremonies in order to facilitate this sacred connection.

Gifts from the Land

In both Cree and Metis homes the kitchen was always a place of intergenerational teaching for families. People in this study expressed gratitude for the storytelling, sharing, and knowledge exchanges that occurred over daily family meals and tea breaks. The grandmothers in particular played a significant role in teaching stories to both young girls and boys about food knowledge. A child's relationship to food is a learned behavior and reinforced by family members and they need to be given the Opikinawasowin food teachings at an early age and at an age appropriate level. When children or young people harvest and prepare foods from beginning to end this teaches them to become self-sufficient and increases their self-esteem.

Watching plants and animals grow and following them in their life cycles teaches kids about nature and natural laws so they can practice non-harmful harvesting techniques of plants or animals. Children need to be able to learn about the life cycle and

origins of all their foods so that they appreciate them better. In Opikinawasowin parenting children are taught how to eat with the seasons and cycles of nature. Traditional stories helped children remember this cyclical traditional knowledge. Isabelle Impey recalls food was, "never forced on a child," if they are not hungry they were not expected to force themselves to eat just to finish their plate rather they were expected to give it away, to someone else, or feed an animal who is hungry. This was connected to teaching "take only what you need." Greediness was certainly a behavior that was viewed as "unacceptable behavior." The giving of food is major feature of traditional Metis and Cree culture. Solomon Sanderson remembers in his childhood home:

> We used to have a garden that was like a field that we put in every year, and we had a cellar in the basement, in the ground dug out under the house, and rows and rows of potatoes, and vegetables. We used to have to go and pick berries, we canned over around five hundred quarts of berries a year, but everybody that came and helped, such as community helpers that assisted, they never left without any food. Visitors never left without any food, when they came to our house… not only did they get fed, but they got food to take home with them, Indian or white it didn't matter, that was our practice.

The giving of food is considered one of the greatest acts of love a human can offer to another. In relationship to food preparation it was taught you need to be in a good place in your mind, body, emotions, and spirit when you prepare and work with food which is going to be given to others. Certain traditional foods have protocols to follow when they are being prepared. It is recommended to use loving and kind thoughts when working with food and to talk with the food and thank it for giving its life for yours, in essence, "always say a simple prayer of thanksgiving before eating." Florence Allen reminds young people to practice this prayer principle when they are harvesting traditional foods or medicines she says, "When we picked we prayed, we put a lot of prayers into those medicines."

In Cumberland House Elsie Sanderson, Robert McAuley, and Isabelle Impey remembered a time when everyone in the community gardened. The Metis really embraced the gift of gardening that they learned from their European relatives especially growing potatoes. The Elders all had fond memories of berry picking and it was an important social event and a staple food in the traditional diet. Traditional food harvesting together increased family bonds and helped develop a sense of accomplishment in young people. Isabelle remembers picking high bush cranberries in the winter she says, "We never picked high bush cranberries in the summer, it was all winter, those were our Christmas berries." As children their job was to pick extra pillow cases and give them away to the Elders so they had their supply of "Christmas berries." Many people credit the trap line foods as keeping them healthy and strong.

A traditional diet was rich in many foods such as moose, beaver, muskrat, fish, and berries and roots. In the north they did not have as much deer as the more southern parkland region. Florence Allen remembers her father picking bull rush roots, wild onion, and one that tasted like carrots. Like others in the study, Robert McAuley learned a great deal of his traditional food knowledge through his mother, Margaret McAuley. In this study so much food knowledge was kept by the Cree and Metis women. Women were hunters and trappers if they exhibited the gift to do so, and both Isabelle Impey and Elsie Sanderson proudly acknowledge their mother, Cecilia Dorion, as being one of the best trappers in Cumberland House, and the community acknowledged her as being one of the best skinners and butchers.

In Opikinawasowin parenting it is the adults who taught children about the accepted reciprocity principles that were practiced in the community. Reciprocity is the belief in retaining balance in a continuous cycle of give and take when you take anything something must be given in return. In Cree life tobacco is offered in a reciprocal manner because it is a, "Sacred plant that represents honesty carried in one's heart (Alberta Education, 2006:642)." Women were the first teachers of the laws of reciprocity to their children. Many people recalled learning their first acts of reciprocity and hunting skills from their grandmothers and mothers. Likewise, Robert McAuley recalls being taught all

his basic hunting skills such as rabbit snaring and skinning skills by his mother. As early as possible children were taught about the expectation, "take only what you need." James Burns discusses how he was taught never to pull the plants out by the root so they could bear more fruit. James says:

> When we used to go looking for mud hen eggs you always left one, so that the mud hen would lay some more, and raise it's family. They used to tell us, "Don't take them all, leave one or two." So that teaches you to value that bird that was laying that egg. You realize that it also is gonna have a family, that was so important these little teachings, and they used to tell us when we were hunting, especially muskrats, they'd look at it and say, "Okay there's five houses here," the old guy would say, "You can take ten." So, you gotta leave some, you never used to over kill, because it had to reproduce, same thing with beaver, and so all these teachings that I got, were all geared to respect, and to make sure that everybody has a family.

James Burns, Solomon Sanderson, and Robert McAuley, were all given these Opikinawasowin teachings from the family members who taught them to hunt and trap. These reciprocity principles were learned while working and living out on the land with their family. Robert McAuley remembered learning the "take only what you need," principle in his family. He says, "We never killed anything that we didn't use." Robert recalls they were taught to have a minimal impact on the natural cycles of all animals and plants. In relationship to duck eggs they were taught to leave a certain number behind so that they could reproduce and he was taught to never shoot a pregnant female moose. Solomon Sanderson recalled being taught the same reciprocity principles which Robert McAuley learned for the gathering of duck eggs from the role models in his life. According to Robert much gratitude and respect was given to all hunted animals. Robert says:

> My Dad when he shot an animal he gave thanks… and he did it in front of me, and I watched him do it, and when he took the animals privates he'd carefully handle it, if it was a cow, the udder, and if it was a bull's

> privates, he would take it, and hang it up, above the ground somewhere, and reverently thank the Maker for supplying the animal. And myself, I'm trying to instill that with my boys. I tell them never shoot anything, unless you're gonna use it.

To this day Robert has a difficult time accepting sport hunting as a practice since to him if it does not have a practical purpose for sustenance or survival it is not acceptable to kill any animal.

Metis and Cree women taught their children especially their daughters about reciprocity and the related protocols for harvesting medicines and plants. In relationship to the natural world Florence Allen was told by her teachers, "humans are on the bottom of the hierarchy, they can exist without us, but we can't exist without them." Florence teaches, "To always be respectful of other life forms" and to "Not to disturb that balance." Grandmother Rose remembers when it came time to harvest traditional medicines her grandmother taught her, "To only harvest the plants from the south side, so that its wounds would heal quicker from the power of the sun." Her grandmother taught her to, "never harvest from the north side, or it could create more harm to the plant, and lead to slower healing time for the plant." Children were encouraged by the old people to spread the seeds of medicinal plants while they were out harvesting in order to help support the propagation of these valuable plants in the future. Opikinawasowin is related to the land and Elsie Sanderson recalls, "children were taught to never over harvest an area, we always left some behind."

It is taught we must teach our children the concept of "Wahkotowin" when they are working with the land for instance the trees are often called, "The standing people." We need to share with our children the worldview all the plants and animals are our relatives, and they are living beings with spirits and feelings. Florence Allen remembers her father teaching her, "Even an animal has feelings." Her father told her animals had special types of wisdom we humans do not have and, "they know where you sit, and what your intentions are." He explained, "They can't speak the way we speak, but they see our

spirits and they know how we sit." She remembers him saying to her, "if you are sitting right they will know, so never be afraid." Florence was deeply moved by her father's wisdom about the land and how he had no fear of the bush and could walk comfortably among the wolves and bears.

Many of the Elders interviewed for this study teach younger people to make an offering of tobacco before they harvest medicine. Florence and Elsie encourage young people to speak to the plant about why they are taking it and for what purpose and to treat the medicine gently like a child. Florence claims we need to teach our children how to use traditional medicines to care for themselves and their families. Florence teaches her grandchildren, "You don't go out of your way to destroy a plant that's growing." She reminds us we need to teach them the accepted cultural protocols and laws of reciprocity related to harvesting and gathering.

The Gift of Learning Teachings

This study documents the concept of life long learning which values both traditional and non-traditional education. In Opikinawasowin it is believed all children have an unlimited capacity to learn. In many Metis communities the gift of reading was highly valued. Metis leader Jim Brady was credited with reading to the children. He would often read only a small section of a story to each household so the children would have to talk to each other to find out how the entire story played out. This served to create a natural educational dialogue between the children. Isabelle Impey remembers her love of being read to. She says:

> We thought Jim Brady was really something because when he came he had books, boxes and boxes of books, like literally thousands of books, and we thought he was so rich because he had all those books, and we all loved to read, I think that's where we learned to read… he had a bed roll and he'd roll it, if it was laid out he'd roll it and then we knew that when it was rolled, it was time to sit down and read, and we used to sit with him for hours and read with him and then he'd sort of test us and say what did you read, you know what was in there… and we used to laugh cause we'd

> find big words we didn't know how to say… Elsie and I spent a lot of time sitting with him reading and your Dad of course, we were really lucky…

Isabelle and Elsie Sanderson remember as children being encouraged to read and share these stories with each other. Isabelle recalls when the older people gathered together to have their meetings the children were so valued, "We were encouraged to sit there and listen, and we were quite often asked what we thought about it." Children's opinions and perspectives are highly respected and valued in Opikinawasowin parenting. James Burns teaches in traditional Cree educational system there were societies that carried the specialized knowledge of the people and children were recruited into these specialized societies if they demonstrated an aptitude for one of these societies. Nobody was ever forced into a society not congruent with their natural gifts or connected to their interests. It was the role of old people to watch and observe all the children so they knew where to direct this child in their educational journey.

The Gift of the Female and Male

Many Cree and Metis families appear on the surface to operate under a patriarchal system, however, upon closer observation clearly there is a definite female centered leadership system operating at the foundation of both cultures. James Burns says it many appear that men are in control because in Cree society men are the administrators of the laws and council decisions made by the women who are the law holders. James expresses that the, "grandmothers are the keepers of all the medicines, laws, and stories." One of the first questions asked by Metis Elders is, "Who are your grandmothers?" Grandmother Rose Fleury says when she does Metis family genealogy she begins with the female line of descent because Metis families are deeply female centered. Metis academic Brenda McDougall (2010) has documented how Metis communities were organized around family groups of women particularly groupings of sisters with their mothers and grandmothers. In the Metis community in particular it was sisters that worked collectively to raise each others children collaboratively. Both Elsie Sanderson and Isabelle Impey were raised within one of these sister centered homes. They were raised by four sisters, Cecilia, Helen, Anne, and Mariah whom all lived under the same

roof with their father John Gregory Dorion who acted symbolically as the token head of a female centered family system. Rose Fleury also remembered being raised within a female centered system of childrearing.

James Burns teaches a traditional Cree man will never speak for the women or attempt to pass on knowledge customarily held by women. Traditionally it is grandmothers who are in charge of all the early ceremonial care of baby. It is the role of grandmother to be at the birthing, to over see the ceremonial discarding of the placenta and afterbirth, to care for the dried umbilical cord, and to teach the mothers how to offer the babies hair and baby teeth into a sacred fire. Elsie Sanderson teaches the grandmothers used to turn a baby counter clockwise if their day and night was switched and this act helped them get the baby back into rhythm with the rest of the family. A job of women is to bring young mothers together with the grandmothers to learn these specific teachings. Isabelle Impey teaches it is natural law for the, "The mother and the child have a sacred connection which is first formed in the womb." She said this natural law is so strong between the mother and child even children adopted out will feel the spiritual thread which connects them to their mother. Cree grandmothers teach because this spiritual thread is so strong between woman and child that the Cree had traditional letting go ceremonies to help the mother make a transition when their children grew up into adulthood.

Children learn their behavior through watching how men and women interact around them and with each other. In Opikinawasowin parenting it is considered important that young males and females be give instructions about the female and male roles and responsibilities in the family and community. In the past young women and men had teaching lodges specifically designed for this purpose. Girls entered the moon lodge to learn teachings around moon time and young men had their warrior societies. Elsie Sanderson would like to see these lodges revived for women. In traditional culture men and women demonstrate a team work type of relationship between the male and the female. In traditional homes a grandmother was present to regulate the collective childrearing ways and to monitor male and female balance.

In Cree culture the tepee teaches about the symbolic representation of a woman in Cree society (Lee, 2006:1). The skin is her dress, the pegs which close the hide are her ribs, and the poles reaching up to the sky are her arms, the smoke leaving through the flaps is her breath and the fire pit inside the tepee is placed just off center like how the human heart occurs slightly off to one side. The tepee woman reinforces the grandmother law where the tepee is the property and domain of the female. Additionally, the Cree word for doorway is "Iskwahtem" and the root word is "Iskwew" meaning woman. The Cree philosophically, culturally, and linguistically recognize the female as the first doorway all life passes through (Wolfart & Ahenakew, 1998: 37). Traditional teacher Maria Campbell teaches in the Cree belief system there is always a spirit grandmother on the other side to send you into this world and she will receive you when you return to the spirit world (Anderson, 2010: 204). Grandmother laws ensured women and children who formed core of the community were protected and supported when family breakdown did occur. It was the role of grandmother to make sure all men and women upheld these tepee laws and at one time the grandmothers had the community support and authority to severely discipline anyone who disrespected these laws.

Mamamitoneyihcikan

Many people in this study received many Opikinawasowin teachings in their youth about the power of the mind. The mind is one of the gifts that Creator gave us to help us survive. The Cree term Mamamitoneyihcikan means the mind or intellect (Cardinal & Hildebrant, 2000: 79). It is the mind the sets humanity apart from many other beings in Creation. Florence Allen pointed out that the Creator gave us, "free will" which we all express through the inner workings of our mind. An important aspect of Opikinawasowin parenting is children be taught to take the time to think before acting. The old people were instrumental in modeling this approach to learning. Florence explains when you ask an old person something, "they'll sit there for a while, they'll think, they don't come out with the answer right away." She says when you wait for an old person to give you a response, "what they're doing is they're disciplining you, on how to sit still, and wait for the answer to come." By modeling the process of "thinking things through" the old people indirectly taught you, "nothing is instant," and good

decisions require the adequate use of the mind. In Opikinawasowin parenting it is encouraged that children be taught to slow down their minds in order to develop clear thinking. Florence teaches, "Go within, all the answers are there, sit with it, remember nothing is instant."

In the Opikinawasowin system young people were encouraged to seek out the wisdom of the old people to help walk them through their decision making process. Elders played a significant role in developing the critical thinking skills of youth. In the traditional way the old people were called upon to provide individuals with support through the open discussion of their problems or challenges. James Burns remembers his father seeking the council of the old ones. He says:

> When I was a child, my Dad went and seen this old man, and he said, "I come to ask you a question"… and the old man says, "Okay, what is the question?"… so my Dad told him what he wanted to know, he explained what he wanted to know, why he wanted to know it, and the old man says, "Okay you come back in four days, and I will give you the answer." And so we went back in four days, and sure enough he got his answer, so I asked my Dad, "How come he didn't give an answer right away… Taniki-awa, why?" "Oh," he says, "Old people when you ask them a question they have to have time to think about it…"

It was customary to take four days to think things through. In Opikinawasowin parenting it was accepted that everyone had a duty to develop the critical thinking skills in children. Thinking and taking the time to think was a valued practice in Cree and Metis communities. Participants in this study recalled being encouraged to develop questioning skills, develop their memory, and construct effective questioning skills, and reasoning skills. Another aspect of the development of Mamamitoneyihcikan is to help children develop the habit of considering the long and short term consequences of all their choices. In Opikinawasowin parenting children were encouraged to engage in problem solving with each other. In the Metis culture debate and critical discussion was role modeled for young children. An individual who really made an impact on the

development of young minds was Metis leader, Jim Brady. He is credited with having encouraged youth to broaden their learning about the world.

The Gift of Experience Teachings

Traditional Cree and Metis culture values learning through direct experience usually with the support of immediate and extended family members. Scholar Sherry Farrell-Racette describes this process as, "mentored learning" where older experienced women or men performed an action with the younger learner observing, copying the action and doing it independently under careful scrutiny (Farrell-Racette, 2007: 1). Metis scholar Keith Goulet describes Kiskinaumagehin as the Swampy Cree word, "used when describing a situation where someone is learning something from someone. It is similar to an apprenticeship model (Goulet, 2007:10)." Goulet uses the term Kiskiaumatowin when the teacher and learner are actually learning from each other in an interactional approach (10). Observe to learn is a key concept in traditional parenting teachings. Cree language educators have found, "Cree values focus on a keen sense of observation, of being observant about the world around us (Alberta Education, 2006:6)." The term Kiskanowapanhkewin means keen observation (6). In traditional parenting it is important to nurture these observational qualities in our children. The related concept of Kiskinwahasimowewin, "The ability to ask for, receive and accept guidance, from parents, Elders, teachers and other community members" is an important parenting teaching (6).

The traditional saying "everything happens for a reason" teaches children to observe and learn from every thing sent to them. Teachers are people, birds, animals, and even the land. Florence Allen says, "Even illness is your teacher." Florence herself has experienced many profound life changing experiences through her journey with cancer. As she has searched out ways to heal from her cancer she received incredible teachings and met remarkable people because of her illness. According to Florence sometimes something you perceive as a terrible experience might actually open the door way to new forms of wisdom in your life. Elsie Sanderson teaches without hardships in life we would never be able to savour the joys as much or learn as much.

In Cree and Metis culture the children are not segregated from the rest of the family at gatherings and events is consistent with the child centered model of social organization. An Opikinawasowin philosophy is, "Take children everywhere and involve them in everything." It is believed children should be involved in everything the family is engaged in, of course, at an age appropriate level, so that children could learn through these experiences. Children were taken to ceremonies and in the traditional education system children were always around family members of a variety of ages so they could learn from others. It is important to give children a variety of experiences so they can learn about the world in diverse ways. Repetition is a key technique of Opikinawasowin and taking the time to give very detailed instructions to children is important. These experiential teachings were reinforced through story.

Nurturing and Bonding

Our culture is traditionally so nurturing, kind, gentle, and loving with children. In Opikinawasowin parenting practices the role of the family was to give children positive bonding and nurturing experiences. Gentleness is a significant aspect of traditional parenting and both women and men nurtured children. Everyone was to assist in making children feel wanted, loved, and a sense of belonging. The female participants in this study recalled how loved and blessed they felt when they participated in crafts with their mothers, aunties and other women in the community by doing crafts, such as, beading, basket making, rug hooking, and embroidery. It was during these craft making moments that children were taught about their family histories and community values and beliefs. It is believed when you engage your hands in an activity it helps the storytelling occur in a very memorable manner. Isabelle Impey describes this learning style as "always learning with movement." According to Isabelle we don't learn by just being static, there needs to be a "natural flow." In traditional learning there needs to be some movement in order for the instruction to be considered effective teaching. There is a belief all our emotions and thoughts are stored within our physical body. It is taught by having an active body while we are listening to stories they will be better encoded into our being as such "storytelling gets right into your bones."

Physical nurturing is very important in Opikinawasowin parenting. Kissing, hugging, and cuddling with children is viewed as essential aspect for the healthy development of children. James Burns and Elsie Sanderson emphasized so much in the Cree language teaches warmth and bonding. Many Elders have fond memories of both men and women as being very affectionate and nurturing with children. Elsie Sanderson recalls her Grandpa John Gregoire Dorion treated children very gently. Except when it came to the safety of the children, he would use his voice to get their attention. Likewise, in the home of Florence Allen they always had a place for the grandfather and he was, "kind and he showed love to everybody." Florence remembers her aunties always showed their love to her through hugging, kissing, and loving physical contact she said, "they would say nice loving things to you." She recalls her father "would play with us at our level." Caregivers are encouraged to sing, dance, play games and do other fun activities with children.

Many Elders discussed the importance of bonding and learning through play. In Opikinawasowin parenting children were encouraged to mimic the adults in their lives through play. Florence remembers in the traditional learning system the children were given small toys so they could role model the behavior of adults. She recalls adults making small brooms for the little girls so that they could copy the adults when they did the sweeping. Many girls were given small dolls so they could model the baby care they witnessed in the home. Isabelle Impey follows the Opikinawasowin way and has made mini Tihkanahgunak (cradle boards) and Waspisona (moss bags) as toys for her grand daughters to play with and they have all become family heirlooms.

For boys many of them were taught how to make and use sling shots. Robert McAuley remembers being given toy bow and arrows, spears, and other items that helped them learn hunting skills through their play. Florence says, "My brother used his sling shot to hunt ducks because they were quiet and would not scare all the game away." In relationship to games and fun children were taught to not compete with each other but with themselves only. Solomon Sanderson always gives this advice to young future leaders, "do not compare yourself to others or compete with them, compete only with

yourself." He also encourages parents to not shelter their children too much since this can deny children the many learning opportunities that they need. Solomon reminds parents to be honest with themselves about when they need to, "cut the apron strings" with their children and give them opportunities to practice independence so that they can learn from their experience.

Listening to Intuition

All the Elders explained how important it is in Opikinawasowin parenting to develop intuition and listen to it. In Plains Cree the word for intuition is Moshihowin (University of Alberta, 2010). The grandmothers teach women all have a highly developed parenting instinct of which we can tap into when raising our children. In traditional parenting Moshihowin is an important skill parents need and one they need to develop within their children. In this study many people shared stories about how listening to their own intuition saved their lives or kept them from harmful circumstances. Elsie Sanderson always taught her children to listen to their gut feelings and she said to them, "If something feels wrong, or not just right, listen to it, don't second guess your first thoughts or instincts."

Grandma Rose encourages parents to encourage their children to turn to nature to help them bring out their intuition she says, "When I sit on the earth, in the sun, and listen to the birds in a quiet place, the answers to my questions always emerge." According to Rose the connection with Creator and intuition is better facilitated out on the land she says, "Teach them to sit with nature." She would like to see more healthy old people work with youth to develop their intuition by taking them out on the land because this is a traditional custom that is not being practiced as much as in the past.

The Gift of Story Teachings

Storytelling serves as a vital teaching tool for parents and caregivers of children in both Cree and Metis culture. Storytelling has many positive effects on each individual in all four aspects the emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical. Some Elders refer to stories as a form of "Medicine." Neal McLeod stresses, "People tell stories not only to remember, but also to hope (43)." It is believed when storytelling is done with loving

intention it can help to develop the healthy cultural identity and creative imagination of children. In Opikinawasowin teachings the role of parent is to teach all children how to interact with the world around them in a good way and stories teach in a non-confrontational manner. The use of acimowina (storytelling) is an important way parents give children a sense of identity or a common bond with their family and community. Stories were told to keep children safe, to teach them about the natural laws, and about how to survive in the natural world. If you are told stories about your family roots, the experiences of your ancestors, and how they were able to solve their day to day problems, and if you hear regularly about the resilience of your people, you will most likely develop a stronger sense of confidence and security in knowing where you belong in life.

Stories form the basis for identity formation within a child especially within oral cultures. James Burns remembers as a young person sitting for hours listening to the old time leadership playing cards at Cree political gatherings. At the table old man Angus Merasty turned to him and said, "You know James, a lot of these stories you hear, that we are telling you, you won't remember them, but, there will come a situation where one of these stories, you'll remember in what you are doing, they will help, they become your library of stories." To this day James refers to his stories as his "libraries." Stories are the "libraries" of our people and if we don't sit with the children they will miss out on the valuable teachings held within this oral library. In Opikinawasowin parenting methods stories are a highly valued disciplinary tool for parents to use with their children. It is believed stories can clearly and creatively share expectations to a child without lecturing them which does not work. Using story is a non-judgmental way to get your point across to the child. Cree and Metis storytelling is rich with metaphor, songs and drama so they hold well in the minds of children. By listening to storytelling the children are able to later model these oratory skills and develop their memory.

The Elders in this study teach we all have stories to share with each other about our own experiences and these stories are all unique to each individual. Story is considered a valuable gift that we offer to our children. Traditional stories are told over and over again to give children a knowledge base from which to draw understanding.

Repetition is an important aspect of transferring stories to children so the teachings have a better chance at becoming embodied. Personal resilience can be developed in children when they hear the powerful stories of how our people have overcome their personal traumas and survived for generations. Florence Allen uses traditional storytelling extensively in her counseling practice because it is very effective with our people.

When sharing story with children it is important to always tell them stories while they are engaged in activities or movement such as playing cards, whittling, or beading. Isabelle Impey says in the Opikinawasowin learning system, "children learn better when they are doing simple hands on activities as this harnesses their energy to listen more effectively." Children retain more from the different stories when there is flow happening around them and Opikinawasowin parenting embraces the active learning concept. There is a sentiment stories are a source of wealth. Stories have the ability to heal hearts, bodies, minds, and spirits so parents have a responsibility to share their stories and the stories of our peoples. In oral cultures there are many types of stories that are shared in situational settings as such it is important to involve children in everything so that they can inherit the complete library of stories to help them live a good life.

It is from the creation stories (Ahtayohkanak) children learn about the natural laws and teachings of the Cree culture in the context of a Cree worldview. There is a Cree belief all stories and songs hold a spirit manifested into existence through our expression of sacred breath. In traditional Cree worldview there is a grandmother spirit, Notogu Ahtayohgan, who carries the sacred stories of the Cree people in her storytelling bundle and she holds the Opikinawasowin parenting bundle for the people. Elsie Sanderson says her, "spiritual role is to specifically help women and children." James Burns teaches if you want to learn something, "Ask Notogu Ahtayohgan to help you receive the story that can help you find the answers to what you need." There is acknowledgement of the important place of the grandmothers both physical and spiritual in preserving the stories.

Grandma Rose recalls people would come from all over central and northern Saskatchewan to pick up her grandmother and take her to gatherings to share her stories.

She wishes she would have spent more time travelling with her to document these traditional stories. James Burns remembers the special place his grandmother had in his family as the storyteller. James loved to listen and learn from all the wisdom contained in her many teaching stories he says:

> My grandmother used to tell us about the real life and she used Weesakejac stories to teach what was important, about how we should all get along. She used animals as demonstrators of nurturing, one of them was how a coyote would take care of it's family, how a beaver would take care of it's family, living in two different worlds, one on ground one on water, how a duck takes care of it's family. Even the skunk was so important to the living world that we lived in, it had a purpose, the skunk has so much medicine that even when I drive today, if I happen to see a skunk or smell a skunk it just does something to me and so unless you know the story behind that creature, that animal, or that bird, it becomes a whole different meaning.

In this study there were numerous recollections of stories about the Memeguayiwahk, known as the "Little People." Elsie Sanderson explains, "Memeguayiwahk, are known as the "helpers" and they have a great amount of medicinal knowledge about the land and its environment." The trickster character plays an important role in the sacred narratives of both the Cree and Metis people. Most of the people in this study were raised with stories of the trickster characters: Weesakejac, Nanabush, or Ti-Jean which taught them so much about the human condition, the consequences of poor behavior, and other life lessons. According to James Burns the sacred stories Ahtayohkanak served a higher purpose not only to entertain but to teach. Some of them were quite humorous which made them so memorable.

Cree academic Willie Ermine exclaims that Wesakechak, "continues to guide our experiences into the deep reaches of the psyche (Ermine, 1995:112)." Ermine states these stories help create, "deeper exploration into and knowledge of the very self (112)." According to Ermine Cree stories and culture encourages each individual to develop a

sense of "inwardness" or "self-contemplation," which is a guiding philosophy behind traditional Cree child rearing. Cree parents have a great responsibility to help children learn about themselves and our stories are a wonderful way to facilitate this process of self-reflection and develop knowledge of self.

A major purpose of the sacred stories is to pass on to each successive generation the reason for human existence, the origin of the plants and animals and their purpose within creation. Much ecological and survival knowledge was passed on to children through the creative, exciting adventures of Wesakechak and other sacred beings. The use of dramatic humour in the Cree culture was reflected in the way many traditional stories that were told to children in a memorable and unforgettable fashion. Wesakechak and his outlandish behavior also taught youth about healthy sexuality and other sexual taboos against incest and promiscuity. The teachings imparted through our storytelling traditions gave our children resilience, strength, fortitude, and the ability to deeply contemplate their life choices. These sacred stories qualify as life giving stories and are believed to invoke a spirit when they are told and it was taboo to tell these stories in the summer or out of season (SICC, 1988:1). Of course traditional stories are intended to be implicit and interpreted by the listener depending upon their level of development.

Stories were and continue to be a great facilitator of intergenerational communication and were therefore highly valued. To not share your stories with children is considered an act of selfishness. Storytelling with children is highly valued by Metis people, Angie Crerar, a Metis Elder, explains, "There are some things I will leave behind to my children, the way you tell stories (NAHO, 2008: 59)!" Crerar reminds us we have a responsibility to pass on our stories for it is the rightful inheritance of the next generation. The Metis people have a rich and diverse storytelling tradition that is embedded within the oral tradition and shared through the lenses of many languages such as French, Cree, Saulteaux, English, and Michif.

Metis Elder and storyteller Louis Goulet recalls the effect of First Nations oral tradition on the Metis psyche he says, "I've often thought our minds were marked by superstition as well as intuition. Some people who grew up with legends and superstitions claim they weren't influenced at all by them, but you'll never convince me they haven't

retained some kind of predisposition, especially in times of stress (Charette, 1976:157)." Goulet believes that the traditional stories provided a source of resilience for Metis when they needed guidance in life. Goulet observed this effect in leader Louis Riel when he says, "Riel must have been no exception. Listening to him during a flight of eloquence, you could feel how his thought was inspired by mysticism (157)."

Due the mixed heritage of the Metis they possess many Nanabush trickster stories they inherited from their Anishinabe relatives. Another character present within the Metis oral tradition is Ti Jean who is a trickster character of French-Canadian origin (Barkwell, Dorion & Hourie, 2006). Ti-Jean is mischievous and Metis children can learn much about right from wrong behavior through his actions. In many ways Ti-Jean is similar to both Nanabush and Wesakechak. The Metis child's world was one full of possibility and wonder whereby it was taught the spiritual realm had an impact on the physical realities of this earth experience. For the Metis traditional stories demonstrated and reinforced teachings about how deeply interconnected humans are to the spiritual world. In this study people grew up hearing scary stories about the Whitigo especially while out on the trapline. Robert McAuley describes the Whitigo as made of stone and ice and they has no lips because they chewed them off. They had the power to turn people into Whitigos. These Whitigo stories taught the children about many social and cultural taboos in Cree life and were used to keep kids safe.

The Gift of Spirituality, Ceremony, and Celebration Teachings

In Opikinawasowin parenting it is important to teach children how to connect with the spiritual helpers and find out the special helpers of the child and the only place to do this is within the context of a traditional practice of spiritual life within the family. Elsie Sanderson explains there is a term used in Cree for someone that has a spiritual helper, Opawamiw, "which translates as he has a familiar." In Opikinawasowin parenting children are taught to make offerings of food and tobacco regularly to the spiritual helpers. Sometimes a special plate food or chair is set up in honour of the spiritual helpers. These acts teach children how to connect and to show respect with the spiritual realm. It is understood that teachings regarding spiritual helpers are best learned through the oral tradition and gained by direct participation in ceremonies, customs,

traditions, and by seeking guidance from our medicine people. It is taught some knowledge should not be written down and only learned through direct experience.

Welcoming New Life

The welcoming of new life was one of the most important Opikinawasowin practices in Cree and Metis communities. The grandmothers were the first support system for the new child. The midwife and her team undertook very important responsibilities to welcome the "new traveler" to the family and community. Isabelle Impey recalled how important it was for the community of Cumberland House to welcome new life into the family and community. The female Elders played a key role in the welcoming of new life. Isabelle speaks to how her grandmother Isabelle would give special medicines to the new arrival she recalls:

> They celebrated so much of what happened with kids. I remember my grandmother, when a child was born she would make a visit and go welcome that new child. She always had this really neatly folded little brown paper that you got when you went shopping at the Hudson Bay, she used to fold it and take good care of it and then she'd put medicine in there for the kids when they were teething. It would have a tiny little ribbon on it and that was given to that child and I remember the parents keeping the ribbon. If they needed to wear it or something, it became part of that kid's life. Many community people did that, the welcoming of a child was very important and the Elders used to make their visits and they'd go and see the kids, that medicine still exists today.

All women worked together to prepare for the arrival of the child. Another aspect of greeting the new life and making them feel welcome to the family was the use of Waspisona (moss bags) and Tighknahgunak (cradle boards). The moss bag is to help the child make a smooth transition from the womb into the world. James Burns lovingly remembers the way his grandmother welcomed new life, "when a child was born either the mother, or the grandmother, would sing a song inviting that child into this world of theirs, and I could hear my granny sing when a child was born." According to James

Burns it was a traditional Opikinawasowin practice to, "take that child into the sweat lodge and give the child a spiritual name, and after four sweats, a name is given to that child, an Indian name."

It was the grandmothers who took the placenta and offered it back to the earth after the delivery. These women also taught new mothers what to do with the dried umbilical cord. James Burns remembers his grandmother bundling and wrapping the dried cord and taking it to a special spot on the land. According to him this was an important duty of the grandmother in the family. The grandmothers also taught the young mothers what to do with the baby teeth once they were shed. Isabelle Impey recalls that, "the baby teeth and hair were bundled and burned into the fire" every full moon. In Cree culture there were specific ceremonies used for generations to mark the transitions in a child's development and to celebrate this developmental process. Childhood ceremonies such as baby's first steps and baby's first laugh helped bond everyone with the child. It was the role of old people in the community to watch the development of all children and give them special gifts when they entered into these "next steps."

In Cree culture the Old people would often give a boy a hunting knife, gun, or other symbolic gift related to good hunting in the future when they took their first steps. Some Elders recalled they were three or four years old when they first played "li petit couteau," the little knife game, and no one was ever hurt because older siblings and cousins played a key role to monitor the safety of the youngest children while they were learning about the games rules or codes of conduct for looking after their own guns, knives, and traps. The community members all took it upon themselves to celebrate all the children through feasting and gift giving. Everyone had a responsibility to the children.

Nehiyaw-Wihowin

"Who are you?" "Who are you related too?" These are two of the first questions asked in Cree and Metis communities to newcomers. The names we hold are often attached to stories and deeper meaning. A name is something we carry with us throughout our life journey it is like a label, or a badge that we wear, to introduce

ourselves to others. Our name can bond us with others or it can set us apart. Naming is a significant part of the development of identity in children. The people in this study shared many different stories about their experiences with Cree and Metis naming traditions such as the use nicknames, namesakes, and ceremonial names.

In Cree Nehiyaw-Wihowin, means Cree name or Indian name (University of Alberta, 2010). It is considered an Elders duty to teach children the history and the meaning of their name they carry. There were many traditional family names passed down through families which were largely French, Scottish, Irish or English which teach children about the European kinship system and teach them how they were connected to their ancestors. Parallel to western cultural naming traditions is the Opikinawasowin spiritual naming tradition given through ceremony.

In Cumberland House it was a great honour to be asked to name a child. Elsie Sanderson and Isabelle Impey remember Metis leader Jim Brady, naming numerous children in the community and he would teach them the story of their name as he knew this made children feel special and loved. Being given the honor of naming a child is an important gift in both Cree and Metis society. The Opikinawasowin process of spiritual naming is being revived. Florence Allen has made it a point to sponsor formal spiritual naming ceremonies for her children and grandchildren. She is willing to help anyone who approaches her with traditional protocol to access the traditional naming ceremonies. In her experience Florence finds many youth desire to learn deeply about themselves and to connect more completely with their spirit she says:

> Every person is sacred because within each one of us is our spirit, it's our Creator. We all need our spiritual names every one of us needs our name to be recognized in that spiritual realm because when we say our spiritual name, they'll hear us. When the day breaks you have your tobacco in your hand and when you voice your name all creation will hear you, all creation will turn around and honor you, and even a bird in flight will turn around and honor you for that split second and keep going, that's how powerful

> our ceremonies and our names are and that's why I gotta make sure all my children and grandchildren have their names.

There were many traditions shared about ways to care for your spirit name through Opikinawasowin practices such as feasting your name, making regular offerings to your spiritual name, and using your spiritual name in both private and public prayers. Treating your spiritual name with the utmost respect is advocated. Elsie Sanderson explains in her childhood in Cumberland House this practice of spiritual naming was lost and if it was practiced it was never talked about. Nevertheless, in her adulthood she went through a ceremony to retrieve her spiritual name, she explains that experience as feeling like "I retrieved a part of myself." Since that time she has sat in ceremony with many of her own children and grandchildren to be present while they were given their spiritual names. Elsie points out when a family supports and pledges to help a family member get their spiritual name, "it creates a special type of bonding between family members." In Opikinawasowin an important role of grandparents is to pledge and host the naming ceremonies of the next generation.

James Burns explains in the traditional societies when a child was recruited into these societies they, "received special names and a person could acquire many names throughout their life journey." In the Cree tradition names were allowed to grow with you and change with you, and they bonded and connected you to other people. Nicknames were important in forming the identity of community members. Sometimes these nicknames were quite literal descriptions of physical characteristics of a child's behavior, or sometimes they told a story about the person. Elsie Sanderson recalls her grandfather nicknaming her son, "disobedient ears in the Cree language," which really helped teach everyone including the child to learn about the importance of listening. Florence Allen recalls how humourous some of these nicknames were. James Burns teaches in the Cree culture there is a special recognition of people who hold the same name, "Okwemesi" means namesake. The role of the Okwemesi was to make sure others with the same name upheld the honour of the name. Nicknames and namesakes create nurturing and bonding between family and community members.

Celebration of Entry into Adulthood

In the past youth received many benefits from both the smaller and larger Opikinawasowin traditions that occurred around the age of puberty. Transitioning youth into adulthood is an important process that was celebrated and highly welcomed in traditional parenting practices such as the vision quest for boys or entry into the moon lodge for girls. The Cree term "ekehohksimoht" is the traditional Plains Cree word referring to the vision quest ceremony it translates as meaning, "freeing your spirit (McAdam, 2009:49)." Many of the Elders in this study recalled a small informal ceremony in recognition of a boy's first kill. Isabelle remembers her brothers Louis and Robert Dorion both going through these traditional male rites of passage. Isabelle fondly remembers how hard her brother Robert worked to get the goose for his ceremony she says, "he spent all morning waiting until he could get a good size goose, he was mud head to toe because he ended up wrestling that goose." She comments, "We were saying look at all the people you can invite because we needed three to four pots." Isabelle believes these traditions are so vital for building the self-esteem of the young men. She says:

> Everybody in the community would know when a young man got his first moose, and they would walk over, and they'd get a piece of that moose, you know a chunk of that moose, and praise the young man for his skills, and re-enforce to him these values.

Isabelle remembers telling her son, "Do you remember when you had your first kill?" "How you had to clean it, and how you had to offer it to visitors, because it's something you have to share, and in that sharing you learn from it." So, Wellington took the three boys rabbit snaring in some bush just west of the City of Prince Albert, afterward Wellington, the three boys, and all of the invited family members carried out a small feast in recognition of the boys snaring their first rabbits. Isabelle is delighted her son Wellington is carrying on the first kill ceremony tradition with his grandchildren even though they live in the city. Isabelle teaches these cultural traditions teach kids good things like sharing and celebrating independence and, "the community is recognizing that you've now grown up too." These Opikinawasowin processes play a significant role in

nurturing the spirit of independence and generosity in youth and give young people positive experiences as Oskapewisak (Elders helpers).

Traditional Forms of Spiritual Care

Many Elders in this study have experienced Kihikosimowin (fasting) as an Opikinawasowin form of self-care. Some of the people in this study learned traditional kihikosimowin techniques later in life through reconnecting with their ceremonial practices and others witnessed these traditions still practiced in their family and community in their childhood. Fasting is a way for an individual to connect with Creator and contemplate their own purpose for their life and is considered a way to develop self-discipline, self-control, and gain spiritual teachings. When an individual goes on a fast with the support of Elders and the family everyone benefits from the practice of self-care. It is believed young people who participate in fasting are able to experience the process of making a commitment and following through with those commitments which is a needed skill to develop as future parents.

It is believed we are entering into a period of cultural and spiritual rebirth by returning to our teachings. There is a Cree prophecy, "When difficult times are upon the human beings, the sacred items will reveal themselves and will have to be returned to the Nations keepers (McAdam, 2009: 23)." In traditional Cree spiritual life the Ospwakan or the pipe ceremony was used to teach children. The ospwakan is viewed as one of Creator's sacred gifts to our people, in the words of Cree oral historian Barry Ahenakew:

> When the first man was praying in a profound calling to the Creator, the Creator heard him, taking pity on the man; the Creator came down from the skies. The Creator touched the ground and tobacco grew from that spot. The Creator told the man, I will give you these gifts that are my children so that you will be heard in your prayers. The Creator touched the earth again and sweetgrass grew from the ground. The Creator braided this grass, telling the man this represented mind, body, and spirit of the human being. The Creator looked around and saw a tree. He broke off a branch, making a stem from it. The Creator touched the ground again and made fire to do the first

> smudge. The Creator told man, "These are gifts that I have given you so that they may speak for you (McAdam, 2009: 30)."

Historically both Cree women and men carried the ospwakan. There were specific ospwakanak used just to assist in the parenting process and many of these were held by the grandmothers. Elsie Sanderson, James Burns and his partner carry an ospwakan specific to childrearing. James Burns explains the process for earning an ospwakan is extensive, "There are no short cuts, for a lot of our people that hold the pipe they never walked that trail for two years of learning and then the next two years you practice, so it takes four years to earn the pipe way." Carrying an ospwakan requires a great deal of responsibility of the holder to live a good life and they are held to a higher standard because, "Most believe that the Sacred Pipe has Seven Pipe laws that are followed by the carrier and all who are participants or observers in the Pipe Ceremony (McAdam, 2009: 30)." These pipe laws include, "health, happiness, generosity, generations, quietness, compassion, and respect (30)."

The ospwakan is a metaphor for life and the bowl represents the female, and the pipe stem the male, and when they are joined together that represents the birth of the child. When the ospwakan is smoked there is a little water that gathers in the bowl which reminds us of the sacred water that holds that child within the womb of the mother before one is born. The ospwakan in its very nature is a metaphor for parenting and it is taught by the old people to carefully, gently, and lovingly hold it like a baby in every ceremony. Elsie is pleased young parents are showing an interest in learning about the ospwakan she always uses her pipe before she engages in any work with families or children.

In traditional Opikinawasowin education the Matotisan referred to as the sweat lodge ceremony was one of the most honoured teaching institutions used by the family and community to educate and bring good health to the people. James Burns refers to the matotisan as our, "place of teaching." For generations the matotisan was a place to hear our stories and learn about our teachings through an experiential learning method. It is taught the sweat lodge is a place to learn about your self and make meaning out of life. The matotisan ceremony in its very nature carries with it a birth metaphor whereby we go

back into the womb of our Mother for cleansing and rebirth. Likewise, the Nipakwesimowin known as the Sundance Ceremony event is one of the largest community ceremonies for the plains Cree people. James Burns explains the purpose of nipakwesimowin is to pray for your family, to honor the ancestors, and to celebrate community. He says, "It is a place to dance with all of life." This event is a major source of bonding for families and communities. Life giving parenting knowledge was transmitted at all these cultural and spiritual ceremonies.

The Gift of the Extended Family and Community Teachings

People in this study remember witnessing the togetherness and unity of Cree and Metis communities to care for their children. In this study there was a sharing of stories and memories about how traditional society had mechanisms in place that helped our communities function properly so the needs of children and all community members were met. In traditional society there was no such thing as an orphan in society because of the concept of "Wahkotowin," which emphasizes we are all related and we have a responsibility to each other. The Cree language symbolically reinforces each family member's role, duty, and responsibility to each other. James Burns explains the Cree language delineates what the different expectations are for family members. He teaches the Cree word for mother is 'Kawiy' and the term used to identify your mother's sister is 'Kawis' which translates as "little mother." Kawis denotes that a child can look to their mother's sister in the same way that they look to their mother. Isabelle Impey reflects upon her experience with this Opikinawasowin concept of many mothers:

> I always talk about, how blessed we were when we were growing up, you know I'm a woman who's had many mothers, and they were very much mother. My mother, my biological went away many times to work and she did her trap line, I don't remember ever feeling lonely for her and it doesn't mean I didn't love her, I don't remember missing her when she was gone… I think she probably had a harder time than we did as kids because we had Auntie Mariah, we had Auntie Helen, we had Auntie Anne and we had Auntie Agnes and then we had the wise Elders, we had

> Mrs. Carrier who was really close to us and then we had Mrs. McCauley who wasn't very far, and they could all see our place, and so we always felt secure, secure in the community that there was good people around us, and that there always would be a mother that would be there for us.

The same Opikinawasowin tradition applied to the role of uncle since the he was expected to take on the role of father with his brother's children. Uncle has the same roles, responsibilities, and duties to the children as the father. James Burn says the Cree term for father is Ohtawiy and the term for uncle is Ohcawis, which means "little father." These family relationships were a part of the traditional Opikinawasowin support systems that worked to keep children safe, nurtured, and loved.

Community Support Systems

People in the study experienced a time when Cree and Metis communities still functioned in a healthy Opikinawasowin manner and the community had intact support systems such as the remnants of traditional women's and men's societies that were once available to help parents who were struggling with their parenting. Isabelle Impey, Elsie Sanderson, and Robert McAuley remember the day when the people in the community of Cumberland House "all" took responsibility to ensure the safety of the children of the community. Nobody turned a blind eye towards the actions of children. The community created a community set curfew and the old men of the community were responsible for the enforcement of the curfew. Isabelle recalls how effective this Opikinawasowin system was at keeping children safe, she says:

> The curfew was a way of the parents controlling their children's activities at night. Mr. McKay would be the one to enforce that the kids went home, when it was nighttime, so you didn't hear kids running around at night, and nobody argued with him, everyone in the community knew that was his role. He took that role seriously, and that all kids knew that was his job, and so he did that for years while I was growing up, and as far as I remember even after I grew up, he was still doing that, and he knew every kid, and he'd have no problem going to tell on them if he

> had to. If he'd use a willow switch the parents would not be offended by it, the parents would accept it as needed, because those were the rules of that community, an interesting part of that is even though he would carry a willow switch I never, ever remember someone getting spanked with a willow switch, I just don't, I think the threat was there in the same way as the parents saying bad things happen at night…

Another concept raised by Isabelle Impey is the "au pair" system whereby an Elder or Elders live with a family for a time when they are experiencing difficulty. Another Opikinawasowin way of supporting families was to have grandparents, aunties, or uncles take a child for a period of time until they are able to return to their home with their parents. These cultural practices helped families function for generations and provided families in conflict or trauma with a helpful support system.

The community played a significant role in watching the children and if parents were struggling with their childrearing it was an acceptable practice for the children to be raised for a period by another family or community member until the parents could work out their difficulties. When Elders or another respected adult requested to raise other people's children and it was considered a great honour to take on this role and it is not considered a failure or judged as a negative thing to do and the family who took in children received extra help and resources. Elsie and Solomon Sanderson have coined the phrase "traditional social safety net" to refer to some of these Opikinawasowin community parenting practices that are still used today in both urban and rural families. Traditional adoption known in Cree as, Tapahkomew was another way to strengthen families (University of Alberta, 2010). The practice of Tapahkomew means being adopted into a family that is not within your immediate family circle. Once the ceremonial or custom adoption process occurs the individual is given all the supports and acceptance as a full family member which meant access to additional help, resources, knowledge, and skills.

Community Bonding

We all have the desire to be connected to a larger community. It is an Opikinawasowin teaching to welcome all strangers into the community and make them feel welcomed. Children need to know who their people are, the history of their nation, and feel connected to their people. Many people in this study belong to traditional Opikinawasowin clan systems for example James Burns is a member of the Beaver Clan and Florence Allen is connected to the Saulteaux Bear Clan. Elsie and Solomon Sanderson stress how important the clan system is in teaching people their duties and responsibilities in society.

It is an Opikinawasowin teaching that communities need to support their members. In Cumberland House they had no tax money or any kind of government support for the higher education of their children. However, this situation never stopped the community from working collectively to obtain education for their youth. Elsie Sanderson recalls how Cumberland House people raised funds to send some of the youth away to school to get an education. Elsie was one of those people sponsored to go to school, she recalls:

> They raised money to send me to school. I'd come home, and I would meet them on a road. They'd be going by in their little wagons, you know horse and wagon, and talk to me. The Elders would say, "Oh how are you doing in school this year?" So, I'd have to be telling them how I did in school and how I was doing so far. They never said to me, "Hey I raised money for you so you better do well." I had so much help, and I think I learned in our community that kind spirit of helping, giving by contributing. We learned we were part of a community and we also helped in whichever way we could.

Another important place of community was during grieving and marriages. Everyone bonded together to make sure that the families hosting these events were supported and helped such as by giving food. There were accepted cultural traditions and symbols used

in both Cree and Metis culture to express the grieving process such as hair cutting and the wearing of black ribbons throughout the grieving period.

People from Cumberland House recall the important community bonds formed at large gatherings such as the Samuel Hearne Days celebrations. Elsie Sanderson, Robert McAuley, and Isabelle Impey remembered how much pride the community felt at this event. Isabelle recalled how the old people were given special seats at the finish line so they could watch the kid's foot races and at the finish line the old people would hand out the treats, usually oranges. Elders and children were treated so well at community gatherings they were the center of the community and everything revolved around them and their needs. Robert McAuley remembers how the last hereditary chief, Thomas Settee, would put on his full Indian Affairs outfit and he would be the starter for the races. It is believed having a good time and coming together for fun is really important in maintaining a healthy family and community. There were other memories shared about box socials and community dances which helped to bond people and families together in a good way.

The Gift of Values Teachings

It is emphasized parents need to examine their value system before they begin growing children. Before young people become parents they need to take the time to know who they are, where they come from, and be clear about what they believe and value. Many of the values shared by the people in this study were similar to the tepee teachings outlined by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (McAdam, 2009: 103). The Elders in this study shared many tipacimowina stories from their lived experience that imparted wisdom and teachings about the many regarded Cree and Metis values. There were numerous teachings about values such as being respectful, non-judgmental, and showing tolerance for others. In Opikinawasowin it is taught good behaviour is always witnessed by the spiritual realm and rewarded accordingly.

Kisewatotatowin

The old people say that love is the nature of the universe. Love and happiness is what every human being desires in life if we can't find it in our family we search for it in

other places. One of the main values parents are supposed to follow when raising children is the concept of Kisewatotatowin. Elsie Sanderson describes this as, "the traditional spiritual belief that all life is sacred and must be treated with loving kindness (Sanderson, 2008: 1)." Kisewatotatowin is one of the most important teachings placed into the traditional parenting teaching bundle. Within this teaching it is understood everyone is expected to play a role in raising children with love and kindness. Elsie says, "Every child needs to be told and shown that they are loved, and these bonds are really critical to make before the age of four years old." Parents play a key role in giving children an environment that is full of love and happiness. The Elders teach we must do everything with loving kindness especially in relationship to all acts with children.

Related to these values of love and happiness is the teaching of Manatisiwaywin (gentleness) which is evident in the traditional saying, "Walk softly in your moccasins." Children are taught to walk their path "gently." According to the Elders life is harsh enough and there is no need to make it more difficult, so always be kind and gentle. It is believed the same kindness we extend to our human family needs to be extended to all life forms. From an early age children were taught through traditional stories to practice loving respect for all life forms in Creation. Cree Elder James Carpenter shares how the old people reminded him to respect all life forms, "When I was young I used to tease a frog, my father was very angry with me. 'Don't tease that frog," he said. When I was walking around along the stream, and while they were making a camp fire, they told me that the frog you tease is used by the Creator to make water clean and safe for us to drink. He is the one who helps you and makes the water clear (Kulchyski, 1999: 220)." Carpenter's story teaches about the Cree concept of Ochinewin which is, "the breaking of the Creators laws against anything other then a human being (SICC, 1993:2)." Elsie Sanderson recalls being explicitly taught not to act disrespectful to animals in any manner. Florence Allen stresses from a young age children were taught about extending kindness to animals. The law of Ochinewin guides how the human beings are to interact with the earth, the animals, and all plant life. Children were taught about the concept of Ochinewin through the stories and the actions of characters which through their behavior demonstrated the consequences of breaking this law.

Mamawi-wicihitowin

Sharing, caring, and generosity are primary Opikinawasowin values in both Cree and Metis culture. The Cree concept of Mamawi-wicihitowin, means working together or everyone helping each other and it refers to getting along well with others through sharing and good will (Sanderson, 2008:2). Sharing and generosity was modeled to the children in traditional society through daily acts of giving and through traditional protocol and customs practiced through the larger ceremonial life such as the give away ceremony, Pakitinasowin (Ahenakew & Wolfhart, 1998: 284). In traditional society the act of sharing helps to create a sense of community bonding. Helping each other is a core value in Cree and Metis culture. Florence Allen recalls how everyone worked, "collectively to get things done." Grandma Rose remembers how there was more of a sense of community togetherness in her childhood days she recalls, "The men would go build a house, then they'd build the barn, then they had a social after, and everybody would bring something for the family, that was helping each other."

It is believed we need to give children opportunities to practice sharing, caring, and generosity. There are so many Cree and Metis values passed through the storytelling tradition especially about the dire consequences of not helping each other through acts of greed or inaction. Within the teachings of mamawi-wicihitowin is the teaching to respect one's own and other peoples belongings stealing was highly forbidden and had serious consequences.

In the teachings it is expected children be taught about the value of hard work. Teaching children about good work ethic and encouraging everyone in the family to help with chores is an important responsibility of parents and grandparents. Everyone was expected to equally participate in family life. All the Elders participating in the study were raised in simple homes. The childhood homes of the participants had few material possessions outside of the very basic items that were required for daily necessities and the home to function. Elsie Sanderson says, "Children were taught to live simply." People were taught at a young age not to be greedy. Stories were told to children to deter any greedy behavior. Solomon Sanderson's father used the saying, "You can't take it with you," and he really taught the children to not get attached to the accumulation of material

things. Kids were taught at a young age to, "Give their best items away." There is high regard for the place of the give away in teaching kids the value of sharing and non-materialism. Grandma Rose recalls being taught by her grandmother to give with out holding back she said, "What you give you get back," which applied to everything you put out into the world including material goods.

Florence Allen is uncomfortable with too much accumulated stuff and she will often go through her stuff and give things away to people who need it. She finds this practice of giving away helps "unblock the energy of her home." Florence says, "You were taught how to share in the home, to hand things down, not to hoard things." Scrupulousness was highly valued in Metis homes but it was balanced with healthy generosity. Kids were taught to appreciate even the small material gifts in their lives. Florence says, "Nothing was ever wasted and everything was recycled." In the traditional lifestyle there was always the notion of recycling and non-wastefulness. Solomon Sanderson says, "You never wasted animals, you never wasted anything." To this day Grandma Rose still has her button jars like her grandmother before her. What material things you do own it is important to take good care of them. Elsie Sanderson and Isabelle Impey recalled in their home everyone had one box per person with their personal items. Personal things were respected by all the family members and cared for appropriately by each individual.

Manatisiwin

Self-discipline, patience, and respect are some of the most important values as an Opikinawasowin parent. In Cree the word Manatistiwin is used to describe the act of respect or politeness, it is used to describe acts that are considerate, gentle, and mannerly (University of Alberta, 2010). According to the Elders there are many levels of respect in the Opikinawasowin system such as respect for Creator, self, parents, grandparents, family, Elders, other human beings, and all of Creation. For example, at feasts and family meals the Elders are always served before everyone else as a symbol of respect. Grandmother Rose stresses in her day all parents did not tolerate back talk from their children. She points out that today many parents, "Allow children to swear at them, and

back talk to them," which was never allowed in traditional childrearing. Rose stresses that parents should act lovingly and respectfully to their children which means they need to stop any disrespectful behaviour demonstrated by their children. It is understood patience is connected to respect. The Cree word, Sipeyihtamowin, is used to describe patience (University of Alberta, 2010). Patience as one of the key values associated with growing children.

Kanatisiwin

People in this study shared numerous stories about how clean and orderly their homes and camps were in their childhood. In the Cree language the word Kanatisiwin is used to describe the value of cleanliness (Cardinal & Hildebrant, 2000: 78). Traditionally it is viewed that a home needs to have structure, order, and cleanliness. The Elders in this study remember living in clean and orderly homes. Women, men, and children all had roles and duties to keep the living space in a respectful manner. Children did daily chores to keep the home in order such as scrubbing and sweeping the floors, stacking wood, hauling water, and emptying the ashes from the fire, everyone participated in chores at an age appropriate level.

It is believed orderliness and cleanliness has to be done with a balanced approach. Some Metis women when bead working were taught to purposely make a mistake in the beadwork by putting a black bead or strange coloured bead in the work to remind them that only the Creator is perfect. Florence Allen says she was taught, "A cluttered home is a sign of a cluttered mind." In Cree the term Kanacihowin is used in relationship to purity and cleanliness (University of Alberta, 2010). Elders interviewed with the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre express similar teachings, "Clean thoughts come from a clean mind, and this comes from Indian Spirituality. Good health habits also reflect a clean mind (McAdam, 2009: 38)." External cleanliness of self and environment is important along with inward or internal cleanliness of self.

Nanaskomowin

The power of having faith in Creator and the greater good is an aspect of Opikinawasowin. In Cree the word for gratitude is, Nanaskomowin, it is taught to be

grateful everyday. Florence Allen says we also need faith in knowing our prayers will be answered. Faith is associated with hope and optimism. Isabelle Impey reminds parents gratitude is an, "action word" it must be shown to children and acted upon. A core teaching is parents need to practice daily gratitude for their ability to have children in their life. If an individual is in a state of gratitude there is no room for self-pity, self-depreciation, and wallowing. Traditional thinking is full of hope, optimism, and faith. Florence says, "Creator gave us all that we need to make a good life on earth." She teaches, "Everything that you need in this life to heal, is here." In the traditional worldview the Creator has given us everything that we need to live, we just have to learn to listen, and receive.

It is believed Elders play a special role in helping the next generation of children learn about Nanaskomowin. Cree academic Dale Auger says, "The role of Elders is like that of the roots of a tree. They hold the tree stable; when the wind blows, it is the roots that hold the tree in tact. Roots are the foundation (Auger, 1997:332)." It is the role of Elders to model faith and gratitude to children. It is through stories and the languages these teachings about Creator, faith, and gratitude are conveyed to children and they can develop an appreciation for the mysteries of life. Cree scholar Willie Ermine stresses, "Our Aboriginal languages and culture contain the accumulated knowledge of our ancestors, and it is critical that we examine the inherent concepts in our lexicons to develop understandings of the self in relation to existence (Ermine, 1995: 3)." The sacred stories Ahtayohkgun support a child's understanding of the vast mystery of Creator and give children a sense of association with a patient and loving higher power. In Opikinawasowin parenting we need to teach children to be grateful for and appreciate the large and small gifts they are given from Creator and life experience.

It is stressed parents must model daily prayer and gratitude to Creator for the gift of life. Cree Elders refer to this modeling process as walking the Red Road, Mikoh Meskanaw (Steinhauer, 2004:10). It is said traditional people say thank-you upon rising in the morning and before bed in the evening to complete the cycle of each day in a good way. One of the key principles in traditional child rearing is the great value of prayer and ceremony in raising children. Florence Allen reminds us to teach young people,

"Nobody's perfect, only the Creator is perfect, so we must accept our own human flaws and those of others in a gracious manner."

The Gift of Children Teachings

In Cree and Metis worldview it is recognized a child is one of the most sacred gifts given by the Creator. Metis writer Kim Anderson explains, "Aboriginal children are precious to us because they represent the future. They are not considered possessions of the biological parents; rather, they are understood to be gifts on loan from the Creator. Because of this, everyone in the community has a connection to the children, and everyone has an obligation to work for their well-being. Each one of us has a responsibility to them (Anderson, 2000:159)." Cree Elder Sally Milne explains, "The place of children in traditional society was the one of great honor, equal to but different to the kind of honor reserved for Elders (Milne, 1995:17)." The Elders in this study advocate for the restoration of the child centered model of social organization. Elders represent the past and children the future. In Opikinawasowin all family and community decisions should consider the needs of children and Elders since they represent the inner core of our communities.

In Opikinawasowin beliefs children are viewed as being spiritually pure, totally sin free, and completely innocent. It is understood the human spirit can never be tainted by anything because it is the representation of the Creator within us. James teaches, "We are all uniquely different," and we each have a purpose so we must never compare children to each other because we all have a unique path to walk in life. Children are considered to be our greatest teachers on our Earth walk and in traditional parenting teachings it is encouraged to take time out regularly to place oneself in the child's shoes and try to see things from a child's point of view in order to learn a new perspective. James explains for our people to thrive we need four things we need people, leaders, land, and spirituality. As part of his teachings James says we need leaders who consider the needs of children first and foremost since they are the future of our people good leadership will always acknowledge the children and the ones yet unborn.

The Gift of Elders Teachings

Old people sit in a place of great esteem within Cree and Metis culture and are valued as a gift. In the Cree culture there is a special recognition of four generations as such great grandparents and great grandchildren who call each other "chapan." It is taught the chapan are spiritually closest to Creator and to each other in the circle of life. There is deep cultural respect for Elders and their role in passing on traditional childrearing ways. In traditional culture female Elders are accorded a higher status as a female when they enter into Eldership which results in many Cree women looking forward to their entry into old age. People in this study exhibited the utmost respect for Elders and were raised to take care of old people and treat them well, especially old women. Solomon Sanderson says there are many respectful protocols for talking with the grandmothers and grandfathers and a role of parents is to teach young people how to approach an Elder for guidance.

In traditional society there were always people designated as, Oskapeyosak, "Elders Helpers," it was a key part of the traditional learning system. In traditional society youth were given jobs as an Oskapeyos (Helper) at ceremonies and cultural events. It is believed children need to always be in the presence of Elders for their healthy human development. Academic Joseph Couture explains, "One learns about Elders by learning from them over a long period of time (Couture, 1996:47)." Elders played a key role in the parenting of children because in traditional society parents were busy with day to day chores so children were always kept under the watchful eyes of Elders.

There are many different kinds of Elders, such as counseling Elders, ceremonial Elders, healing Elders, and teaching Elders. In the Michif language the word for Elder is Li Viyeu which translates into English as, "the old people (NAHO, 2008:21)." There is a great deal of respect for the lived experiences of Metis Elders within the Metis community. According to Francis Dumas to be an Elder, "a person has to have experienced a lot in his lifetime to be able to share his experiences over the years (22)." Isabelle Impey explains there are two Cree words for the term Elder one is, Keteyak which means old person, and the other word is Kiseyak who were the wise ones those,

"who gave the guidance for the community." Elsie Sanderson points out the root word for Kiseyak is the word "Kindness" and these people are known in Cumberland House as the, "The Kind Ones." Isabelle explained the Kiseyak had a different role to play, "the wise ones would be the ones that would know the medicines, they would know what to do in case there was a dilemma, they're the ones that would circle the family if there was trouble."

Isabelle identifies a French term called "au pair," which closely represents one of the jobs of the Kiseyak in her community. If a family was having difficulty the trouble maker would be kicked out and the Kiseyak would come and live within the family until it was able to find its balance and teach them the skills that they needed to get back on their feet. Isabelle comments on the workings of this Opikinawasowin system:

> I think au pair is, is one of the most important piece we are missing right now, we always pull kids out of families, and we do lots of harm. They feel like they're the guilty ones cause they're the ones that are being pulled out of the family, where as when your are pulling out the trouble maker then everybody knows who the trouble maker was, and then the family can resume, they still have their beds, and they still have their toys and they still have a grandma next door. I think au pair would go a long way in dealing with the issues that we have with child welfare in Saskatchewan. Au pairs were always the wise ones it wasn't the old ones, it was the wise ones.

Keeping the family intact and bringing a support system right into the home was a very effective way of helping families. The grandmothers played an important role in the implementation of the au pair system. James Burns agrees this Opikinawasowin system was very effective and we need to bring it back so that children and families can remain intact and work through their challenges collaboratively.

There were many cultural practices in place to show respect to the old people. Isabelle Impey says that in her day, "all the old people are known as the grandmothers

and grandfathers, you never used their first name, you used that title, and that title brings them into your family, into your Wahkotowin." It was convention that no one ever interrupted Elders. Everyone in the community made sure Elders had enough food and other staples. Robert McAuley, Isabelle Impey and Elsie Sanderson recalled as children distributing food and other needed items to the local Elders. Florence Allen explains some of the traditional customs for looking after Elders she says:

> You always saw them honoring the Elders by giving them the best parts, the older people got the best and tender parts because you knew that their teeth weren't as good as they used to be and that most tender parts were gentle to their stomachs and to their whole body.

Another traditional Opikinawasowin practice is for grandparents to take the oldest grandchild to raise which ensured their knowledge would be passed on to successive generations. Metis teacher Maria Campell explains, "Notokwe Opikiheet, Old Lady Raised," is the Cree term used to identify children raised by the old women (Anderson, 2008: 6). Isabelle Impey concurs and says you can always tell these "Kohkom Kids" apart from others because of their respectful behavior and abundant cultural knowledge.

The Gift of Parenting Teachings

As Cree and Metis people we have our own cultural methods, teachings, and ways to raise children, these are good ways and have worked for our people for generations. It is said being a parent is the greatest opportunity to learn more about life and become a better person. One of the highest compliments for Cree and Metis Onikihikomawak (parents) is being identified as raising your children well. The Elders remind us we have been given the most precious gift from the Creator and we need to honour this sacred gift that we have been given. The Elders teach knowledge of the 'self' is a key component for traditional parenting and this is achieved through the sharing of stories, listening to stories, and by participating in cultural life. To many Elders stories are like looking into mirrors since they give you a reflection of who you are. It is taught parents must really know about themselves and understand what they believe to be true so that they can pass

on their wisdom to their children. It is impossible to practice good parenting when you have no personal vision or insight. Therefore, developing a parenting vision is essential when growing children.

Closing Prayer

To close the teachings tobacco and offerings were given to Grandfather James Burns to share a closing prayer so the knowledge, teachings, and wisdom in this research project will be shared in a good way with the people who desire this information. Here is his closing prayer for this project:

> As we awake to the morning sun this day with our children, we give thanks to our Creator. The Spirit of the Sun gives us another day to live and learn and to share with our children the happiness we have just for today. The Spirit of the Eagle will watch over our children. We give thanks for the Spirits of our Grandmothers for the teachings of love, care, and beliefs of our children. The teachings that have been shared by the Elders are of those of our Story Keepers, "Our Grandmothers." We give thanks to the Wind, Thunder, Rain, and Rock that gives us life this day. We give thanks to the Spirits of our Grandfathers and Four Legged animals that we share with on Mother Earth. Great Spirit we give thanks to the Elders, that have shared their stories of childhood and the children they have helped grow in the child's growing years. We thank the Creator, Great Spirit, and the Spirits we learn from and share this time on Mother Earth. May the guiding lights of the Spirits be with you today and for ever in your walk of life. Nunaskomun. Thanks.

This prayer by Grandfather James Burns completes our journey through Opikinawasowin knowledge and gives female and male spiritual balance in this research. The use of opening and closing prayer is a traditional custom. Therefore, prayer has an appropriate place when reporting and conducting research of this nature.

Conclusion-Returning Home

Although this is an exploratory study a great deal of basic Opikinawasowin knowledge was acquired which gives a foundation for future inquiry. As contemporary Onikihikomawak (parents) learn their traditional values are valid they can begin to feel pride in their heritage and history and start to feel good about themselves and their Indigenous identity and pass this pride on to their children. By returning to our original teachings our families can begin the process of cultural rebirth and restoration. As we decolonize and free ourselves from the shame, blame, and negative stereotypes that have been historically perpetuated through the domination of western colonial patriarchal systems over our Indigenous life ways we will heal the family circle.

As significant outcome of this research project was the message about returning home to our original childrearing ways. We have entered into a decolonization time in the story of our people and as we dismantle colonialism we need to include reflection about our original and future vision for our children as part of the process. As we return home we need to bring back our men, brothers, fathers, and grandfathers back into our family circle. As we return home we need to rebuild our tepees and bring back our sacred bundles and ceremonies to our people. As we return home we need to sit with our knowledge keepers and once again listen to the voices of women and children.

It is suggested we get back to these Opikinawasowin practices for the betterment of our children, families, and communities. It is believed an investment in traditional parenting teachings and programs will give individuals back the power to transform their parenting ways. We can't rely on just programs alone to bring back our cultural parenting skills it needs to be done concurrently in the home, family, community, and nation. Traditional parenting as a whole needs to be elevated to its original place of honour. It is the responsibility of everyone especially our leaders to ensure a vision regarding childrearing for without one we become lost and confused. The renewed interest in the restoration of traditional parenting is believed to be an aspect of the original prophecies being manifested whereby Aboriginal people will regain their original resilience and strength.

We need to do everything to make our parenting stronger, we need parenting lodges, parenting circles, parenting conferences, parenting ceremonies, and the restoration of traditional women's and men's societies. We need to heal and decolonize as Onikihikomawak (parents) and we must nurture our own fire and tend to those of our children. Due to colonial impacts we all need to re-parent ourselves and sometimes that isn't easy if we have never been parented. In traditional First Nations life there were ceremonies, customs, and traditions used to create balance between the individual, family, and community and we need to access these again as parents. The restoration of traditional parenting teachings will contribute to the rebalancing of the traditional social system. The healing of each individual parent will bring balance into the family, community, and nation. Anishinabe writer, Calvin Morriseau (1998) recognizes the important place of sharing story and the power of communicating traditional teachings in order to begin the individual healing process.

Kim Anderson (2000) in her interviews with female Elders identifies when we reclaim our power by expressing our stories, and begin to share our voices, healing begins. The goal of existing traditional parenting programs is to help parents break the intergenerational cycle of neglect, loss of power/control, repression and self-pity experienced by many individuals due to colonization (Aboriginal Parent Program, 1995; Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, 1998). "When First Nations people first become aware of the abuses of colonization they may feel anger, rage, hostility and revenge. They may feel nothing but hatred for the colonizers and members of the dominant society. This is a normal and healthy stage of growth, but, if people stay stuck in this mind frame, it can be damaging to their emotional and spiritual health (Aboriginal Parent Program, 1995:102)." As Florence Allen points out at the end of every struggle, "There is a gift waiting for you at the other end." As parents begin to heal they are giving a beautiful gift to their children and future generations.

Due to the impacts of colonization the modern Aboriginal family has changed and there has been a high level of family breakdown which has resulted in a lack parenting skills and teachings being shared about the practice of respectful and healthy

communication between the generations. As a result of this intergenerational breakdown stories are not being transmitted like they used to from Elders to youth. Yet, in the past stories were used to help close the generation gap between Elders and youth. Traditional teaching stories can be used to help youth reframe or reconstruct their own lived experience. There is a storytelling chain in orally based cultures which occurs between the generations. Historically colonial processes worked to break sections of this storytelling chain but our Elders are working hard to repair this chain to its original strength. Isabelle Impey compares our stories to the threads that bring our parenting philosophies and practices forward through the generations.

Intergenerational trauma resulting from assimilation policies, residential schools, and the child welfare system has caused so much spiritual disconnection within the modern Aboriginal family so that many traditional teachings related to Cree and Metis worldview are not being transmitted to the next generation. The cultural reconstruction process is a kin to sewing back together a large quilt that has been violently ripped apart and we have to travel far and wide to recollect the pieces and sew them back together in a loving and gentle manner. The good thing is every Aboriginal person holds a piece of that original quilt and when we work together we can repair that quilt and lovingly give it back to our children. The decolonization quilt is not going to be easy to reconstruct but it is a necessary act we must take in order to halt the continual transfer of colonial trauma on to our children. In order to heal we need to express our collective colonial grief and we need to turn to our traditional grieving processes as this will help us do our family, community healing in a way that is grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing.

The harshness of colonialism has created a term ripple effect of numbness, denial, anger, and withdrawal in our communities which has been felt through the generations. As we enter into the time of decolonization we can begin to send a ripple effect forward of tolerance, acceptance, love, nurturing, and kindness into the future. We can do this by sitting with our grandmothers to document traditional parenting teachings since are they are the "keepers of the parenting bundle." We need to see grandmother and grandfather work collaboratively to ensure the cultural teachings return to our people. As our

prophecies say it is a good time to take back cultural control over our self, family, and community. Reclaiming our traditions and ceremonies give us the opportunity to sit in a space grounded in our systems of knowledge and ways of being. The sweat lodge and the sun dance ceremonies both serve as places where parents and children can engage in anti-colonial space. We need to give our children opportunity to experience these traditional teaching institutions of cultural learning since they are our original universities and knowledge transfer centers. In this study people who were raised in communities that still had a functioning level of traditional cultural, values, and beliefs in their families and communities were able to transform themselves from the colonial impacts resulting from historical oppression and are presently playing vital roles as knowledge keepers for the next generation.

Decolonizing our families and the institutional systems which impact them are important aspects towards healing because residential schools have been replaced by the modern child welfare system so we must work to stop this continued oppression of our children. Knowledge about traditional child rearing is still present in our communities and families and we often need not look far to find it. There is still so much work to do in making oral teachings available and many Elders are passing on with their Opikinawasowin knowledge, experience, and stories. Our Elders are in great demand so we have to step forward and help them by carrying out our duties and responsibilities as helpers. Our Elders are getting tired and overworked so we need to sit down and find creative ways to support them so they can continue to fulfill their important role in our communities.

The thirteen teachings in this study serve as an excellent foundation for those people interested in searching out the basic Opikinawasowin knowledge acquired from the oral tradition. In summary this study was inspired by a plant metaphor which symbolically guided the entire project. In this teaching we are spirits in physical form and when we arrive we are a spiritual seed planted into the earth which sustains us. We begin our life journey through the female and woman is our first teacher on our life journey she is the first doorway for our learning about this physical world. In the

darkness of the womb and the earth we spring forth into our human life and our caregivers play a key role in helping us to express our spirit especially the grandmothers. The caregivers in our life are like the sun helping us grow by giving us guidance and unconditional love everyday. Our caregivers play a key role in fertilizing us into our blossoming stage. With the help, guidance, love, and acceptance of others we discover our destiny, purpose, gift, and learn true insight which teaches us to give something back to others in our community and family. As we complete our growth cycle of life we return to Mother Earth and then once again go back home to the spiritual realm.

As a result of the Opikinawasowin teachings in this study there are several major outcomes resulting from these conversations. The first outcome of this research is we must begin the process of decolonizing our families and our child rearing practices which is not going to be an easy process if it is done in a truthful manner. The process of decolonization needs to occur by reaching back to customary child rearing practices in order to find creative ways to heal our modern families. As Isabelle Impey says, "We must reach back in order to move forward." The second finding is we need to restore the female balance and power of the grandmothers so they can effectively carry out their duties, roles, and responsibilities once again. The third finding is we must facilitate intergenerational storytelling and communication between Elders and youth through the restoration of traditional mentorship practices.

The fourth finding is the nuclear family system does not meet the needs of the Cree and Metis family system. We need to restore, revive, and heal the extended family system so it can function to the same degree it did in the past for the betterment of our children. The fifth finding is we need to find creative and culturally sensitive ways to document traditional parenting teachings so they can be passed forward to modern parents. The sixth finding is we must acknowledge western patriarchy has many conflicting philosophies with traditional parenting philosophies and we must begin the process of analyzing the effects of patriarchal thinking on our current parenting practices. This means teaching our cultural and spiritual traditions right in our homes instead of relying on outside institutions such as prisons or schools to teach our kids about culture.

It is time to bring back traditional childrearing teachings back into the heart of our families and communities through making shifts in our thinking. The seventh finding is it is essential we return to a child centered model of childrearing whereby the child is once again elevated to a place of honour within our families and community. Additionally, there are fifty four recommendations for further discussion about how to restore traditional childrearing into our modern society (See Appendix B).

A special thank-you to all the Elders in this study who willingly, lovingly, and patiently shared their time and their teachings for this research project. I have enormous gratitude and respect for these people because they are gifted researchers in their own right and I appreciate they were so willing to support me as I struggled to find ways to represent this oral knowledge about traditional childrearing. I acknowledge the grandmothers both spiritual and physical who work so diligently and lovingly to carry the important childrearing bundle of our peoples.

My hope is future generations of parents will benefit from the knowledge shared by these Elders and I pray that this preliminary research opens the doorway for more critical discussion within our families and communities about how we are currently growing our children. Most importantly it is time for the restoration of the power of the grandmothers whereby they can exercise their traditional roles and responsibilities in our families and communities. Now more than ever we need to see the grandmothers and grandfathers work together in harmony and balance in our families, communities, and nations.

We are entering a time whereby the grandmothers will be once again be publicly recognized and acknowledged for their child rearing knowledge and when this happens our children will benefit enormously. All of us will see great changes socially, economically, culturally, spiritually, and politically when our female and male balance is returned and when the grandmothers are given back their power to over see the functioning, regulation, and restoration of the Opikinawasowin system. I would like to close this project with the inspiring and insightful Cherokee proverb, "A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground," which adequately reflects the

warrior spirit demonstrated by the grandmothers who participated in this study. Through research projects such as this we will begin to weave together the threads of a beautiful, strong, vibrant sash that we will one day pass on to our grandchildren.

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APPENDIX A-The Elders Biographies

Allen, Florence

Florence was born on December 7, 1947 at the Cree community of Sturgeon Landing in North East Saskatchewan. Her father was Peter Saultier (Saulteaux) and her mother was Melanie Chaboyer originally from Cumberland House. She was married to Doug Allen in 1970 and they had four children. Florence specialized in the field of social work for many years and is currently an Elder for the Pine Grove prison for provincially sentenced women located in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. She is a grandmother of nine grandchildren. Florence has been practicing traditional medicines, especially in the area of traditional plant knowledge, and is currently a member of the respected *Midewin Medicine Society Lodge*.

Burns, James

James Burns was born on February 8, 1945 at the James Smith Cree Nation. His mother was Margaret Sanderson and his father was George Burns. James is the father of four and raised two step children. James and his partner Wilma have lovingly raised over eighty five foster children over the past twenty five years. He is a Cree leader and was Chief of James Smith Cree Nation for two years and was an acting Chief for six years. James shares many traditional teachings in both Cree and English and conducts numerous healing workshops on topics such as residential schools, families, and inner child work. He currently practices his traditional ways and ceremonies with his partner Wilma, who is trained in the field of social work. They currently make their home at the James Smith Cree Nation.

Fleury, Rose

Rose Fleury was born Rose Gariepy in the MacDowall area of Saskatchewan on November 26, 1926. She married Ernest Fleury in 1946. Together they had six children. Rose has been a Metis Elder for many organizations such as the Batoche National Historic Park and the Metis National Council of Women. She is a family historian, writer, poet, and Metis activist. She speaks numerous languages including French and Michif and spent the majority of her life living in the Metis community of Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. Rose has received numerous awards and recognitions from the Metis community during her lifetime.

Impey, Isabelle

Isabelle was born in February 13, 1944 and raised in the Northern Metis community of Cumberland House as such she in fluent in her Cree language. Her mother was Cecilia Dorion who was a respected trapper in the area**.** In 1968 she married Ernest Impey and together they raised six children. Isabelle has worked as a family and child activist her entire lifetime. She has held important advisory positions such as a Royal Northwest Mounted Police Commissioner, the Canadian Human Rights Council Commissioner, the Correctional Service of Canada Commissioner, and served on the Canadian Centre for Police and Race Relations advisory council. Isabelle is also an Elder

for Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. She is currently an Elder for the Opikinawasowin Elders' Council which is an Elders circle that works with Aboriginal families in trauma and advises the court on family justice situations. Isabelle currently makes her home in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

Sanderson, Elsie

Elsie Sanderson was born on November 2, 1941 the historic Metis community of Cumberland House, Saskatchewan. She was raised in the traditional Cree-Metis extended family system and continues to speak her original language. Elsie is herself a gifted leader, grandmother's pipe carrier, and traditional teacher. Her traditional name is "Chief White Thunderbird Woman (Ogema Wabaski Banaice Quay)." Elsie has spent the last ten years working in the development of women's traditional teachings and traditional parenting. Elsie has taught academic courses such as Indigenous Peoples philosophy, world view, treaty making process, and the treaty relationship. She continues to share these teachings through First Nations Forum a consulting company that she founded with her long time life partner, Chief Solomon Sanderson. Elsie currently lives in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan with her husband, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Sanderson, Solomon

Solomon Sanderson was born on October 18, 1941 at James Smith Cree Nation. His mother was Murtle McKay a Metis from Glen Mary, Saskatchewan and his father was Gilbert Sanderson a descendent from Chakstaypasin First Nation. At the age of fifteen he was mentored by Elders to become a Cree leader. He was first elected to the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations in 1973, and became Chief in 1979. Solomon was instrumental in building the structures, policies, programs and institutions of the federation. He is an internationally recognized authority on Indian Education and Indian Government. His commitment to traditional family values and the Cree kinship system has been a foundation for his political work. He currently lives in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan with his long time partner Elsie Sanderson and large extended family system.

McAuley, Robert

Robert McAuley was born on May 15, 1944 in the Metis community of Cumberland House, Saskatchewan. His mother was Margaret McKenzie and father was Joseph McAuley. In 1973 he married Doris Dorion and they had 5 children. For all his life he has been an avid hunter, trapper, and fisherman. He was one of the first northern Metis people to become a Royal Canadian Mounted Police Office and he was stationed at Cumberland House for his entire twenty year career. He is a fluent Cree speaker and has used his gift to act as a Cree interpreter in court. At present he spends a great deal of his time with his grandchildren and is an Elder for the Opikinawasowin Elders' Council which is an Elders circle that works with Aboriginal families in trauma and advises the court on family justice situations. He currently lives in the community of Cumberland House.

APPENDIX B-The Recommendations for Further Discussion

Recommendations for Further Discussion about Traditional Parenting

1. Modern Cree and Metis parents need to begin the process of deconstructing our childrearing practices by returning to the ancient worldview teachings of our peoples and through the restoration of our traditional women's and men's societies.

2. We need to search out the Elders who carry the old teachings in the oral tradition such as the medicine wheel teachings. Books and programs should not become a replacement of the time honored tradition of sitting with the Elders in order to gain traditional knowledge.

3. There is a need for the Grandmothers and Grandfathers to sit with youth in order to engage them in the personal visionary process and help them establish personal goals for their life that are in harmony with their mind, body, emotions, and spirit.

4. We must turn back to our original laws and principles that guide how families function such as the laws of Wahkotowin which is a core principle that grounds the dynamics of respectful relationships in Cree families as we put our families back together.

5. We need to restore our dreamtime teachings which help given children direct connection to a larger spiritual universe and we need to let our gifted people once again carry out their roles and responsibilities as our spiritual leaders.

6. We need to once again sit together as communities and nations and listen to the oral telling and teachings contained within our original prophecies and sacred stories.

7. Our people need to decolonize our thinking about how we approach, dreamtime, visions, and prophecies in order to restore these ancient knowledge systems back into our families, communities, and nations.

8. Keeping children safe was the Grandmothers original responsibility. We need to once again form Grandmothers councils about issues of child safety. Men need to work with the Grandmothers to carry out and implement their decisions around child safety.

9. Our cultural ceremonies help young people develop a greater sense of purpose, help them develop their greater vision, and give them a strong sense of cultural belonging and develop resilience. It is highly suggested we need to bring these traditions back into the lives of our youth and children to develop self-discipline.

10. Modern Cree and Metis parents need to deconstruct their attitudes, beliefs, and practices regarding how to discipline their children. It is suggested we seek Elders

guidance and teachings about traditional forms of discipline so discipline is done is a loving, gentle, and sacred manner.

11. We need to bring the Opikinawasowin teaching, stop, look, listen, back to our youth, so they take the time to ponder their choices, in a society that often encourages rushing of the decision making process.

12. We have an Opikinawasowin responsibility to tell our own personal, family, and community stories about human resilience and strength since it gives children pride and encouragement knowing their ancestors were remarkably adept people.

13. Our leaders need to find creative ways to ensure that everyone participates and contributes equally to family and community life. This requires rebuilding and strengthening our family units, extended family, our community, and our societies. The revitalization of traditional societies can provide for support for families and instruct about the female and male roles.

14. We need to work collectively to overcome our colonial dependency by taking back control over our land, health, education, society, language, culture, and spiritual lives to give our children a healthy future.

15. We need to develop holistic community approaches and strategies to collectively care for all children. This means holding forums on issues of child discipline.

16. We need to develop more community based strategies based on Opikinawasowin values in order to create safe communities for our children and revive our original lodges for ceremonies and teachings.

17. Opikinawasowin curfews and the role that respected Elders play in enforcing the curfews would be a good thing to bring back into our communities.

18. We need to give our Grandmothers back the respect and power to carry out their traditional disciplinary roles that has been severely undermined by the western patriarchal family system where "headmen" carried out the discipline

19. Elders need to work with young parents to reintroduce the use of traditional parenting tools such as the Waspison, Tihganahkgun, and Wewepisun for baby care.

20. Our leaders within families and communities need to work together to find ways to support young Aboriginal parents so that they can acquire our traditional communication teachings and learn how to share these teachings with their children.

21. Parents need to develop traditional oratory skills in their children through exposing them to the stories, languages, and teachings of our people.

22. Our communities need to develop language revival strategies that begin within the home and family. Family based approaches for language revival need to be

focused around reconnecting the relationship between grandparents who still speak the language and their grand children. Everyone can play a role to preserve, promote, and restore our original languages but we need to work together collectively to do so.

23. A return to traditional parenting practices in connection with the land is an effective way to heal our communities. We must restore traditional food knowledge to our children and do this teaching process out on the land.

24. We must revive traditional medicines in modern family systems. Our leaders need to establish more community forums and develop strategies to reintroduce our medicine chest teachings into our households.

25. The nuclear family system has eroded effective support systems that were present in the traditional extended family system so we must work to restore the original function of the traditional extended family system.

26. Grandmother Medicine Keepers need to be sought by our leadership in order to advise about the proper approach for bringing the medicines back to our people.

27. Apprenticing and mentorship are an important aspect of traditional Opikinawasowin education and we need to revive these traditional learning systems in our families and communities in order to decolonize our current learning systems.

28. Our children would benefit from the revival of the sister centered children rearing since the western patriarchal system and the modern nuclear family system has deeply eroded the female system of childrearing by isolating women from each other.

29. A key aspect of decolonization in our communities is to bring back the traditional female governance systems for the benefit of the children. We need to reestablish the Councils of Grandmothers and respectfully listen to their guidance as we did in the past and restore the Grandmothers laws.

30. Our leaders have to cultivate critical thinking in our people by creating forums of open discussion in our communities with our youth. It is time to bring them back into the council circle and listening to their thoughts about childrearing.

31. Our Elders advocate traditional parenting teachings because of the effect they have in strengthening the extended family networks, in promoting healing across generations, and in enabling parents and families to support and nurture their own children based on cultural teachings.

32. We need to decolonize ourselves and our childrearing practices so that we can get back the gentleness so valued within our culture. We need to discuss how to create a safe environment for our children to grow up in.

33. An important aspect of raising healthy children is through the sharing of our pre-colonial Ahtayohkanak stories since they help to form the foundation of a child's identity and give children a sense of Cree cultural expectations, worldview, values, and beliefs that are grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing.

34. We need to return to our spiritual and ceremonial traditions of our original people as this will greatly facilitate the decolonization process of our people and foster resistance to historic colonial oppression.

35. We need to apply seven generations thinking in our choices and decisions about children. In seven generations thinking parents are taught that their parenting choices will have an impact on seven generations so there is a great emphasis placed on making mindful parenting choices today for future generations.

36. We must restore the child to the heart centre of our communities and make sure their needs are met on every level, socially, economically, politically, spiritually, and culturally.

37. To combat modern stereotypes it is important to bring back traditional teachings about keeping children safe and to inform mainstream society about our original cultural ways that were entirely focused on keeping children safe

38. We need to bring back or adapt some of our different stages of life cultural practices such as the formal puberty ceremonies like the vision quest so that youth today are supported in their transition into adulthood. A key support role for this process is the revival of women's and men's societies.

39. We need to restore the traditional mentorship systems that were in place where Aboriginal youth are matched up with Grandparents as their Elders helpers.

40. Parents need to role model self-initiative, independence, and self-sufficiency so that their children will learn the value of doing things for themselves instead of waiting for others to live their life for them.

41. Young parents need to be given women traditional women's and men's teachings before they enter into relationships and parenthood.

42. Women need to be given an equal place in holding and participating in traditional ceremonies because colonialism caused women's spiritual ceremonies to be hidden and deeply oppressed. Modern spiritual life needs to be rebalanced by recognition and restoration of the Grandmothers role in family and community spiritual life.

43. We need to bring our kids back home and work collectively to stop the current oppression of our people through the modern child welfare system which continues to cause the same harm as the former residential school system.

44. Our leaders must revive traditional community governance and strengthen families through the restoration of the clan systems versus using the *Indian Act* form of community governance.

45. We need to ask ourselves the question; what kinds of communities are we creating for our children? In order to decolonize our communities our children need to have a voice and we need to ask them what they want and listening with open minds about what they have to say.

46. We need to reorganize our political, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual systems to better reflect the original place of Elders in our families and communities. This means allowing Elders to advise and monitor the actions of our current leadership.

47. Many of our Elders need healing too, and we must support them in their healing process, and give them access to healthy Elders and supports. We need to call on the Grandmothers Council to monitor Eldership in our communities to ensure they are upholding the code of ethics of Eldership.

48. We need to restructure our Cree and Metis educational systems to include the role of healed Elders in the education of our children.

49. More information about traditional concepts of family relationships needs to be made available to young parents.

50. Men and women need to work in partnership to raise their children and create a healthy family fire once again. Traditional teachings about companionship are needed to rebalance female and male relationships.

51. We need to get busy working with our Elders to reconstruct our traditional knowledge systems before more is lost.

52. Women need to take back their place as the family and community storytellers because the patriarchal system has really limited the expression of Aboriginal women's voices.

53. The elevation of the child or the status of child is what is missing in today's Aboriginal society because of the infringement of western thinking in our approaches to child rearing. We need to restore this teaching back into our modern parenting practices so our children are once again placed in high esteem.

54. Young people are not as rigorously taught about how they are related to other family members within their extended family system resulting in marriages which are closer than in days past. Grandmothers once played a key role in monitoring the eligibility of young people's marriage partners and with the breakdown of the Aboriginal family system and subsequent suppression of the Grandmothers role as the keepers of family stories today we need to work harder to ensure our children know their ancestry and identity.