



Kisiyiniw Pîkiskwêwin Pîyêsiw Iskotêw Elder's Voices Carried by Thunderbird Spirit's Fire

Preface:

This web site is a collection of 16 stories from the Dene (Dene Suline) & Cree (Nêhiyawak) communities in Northwest Saskatchewan . Joseph Naytowhow (Sturgeon Lake, SK), a Cree speaker, has been gathering these stories from Dene and Cree Elders since October of 1995. Saskatchewan Elders say each of the poles of the tipi represent a moral value. Represented in this collection of stories are values borrowed from this model - reflective of both Cree and Dene worldviews. This site has four titles: Cree and Dene with English translations for each. The stories are also in both Dene and Cree with English. Welcome!

Elder's Biography:

Cecilia Mary Ann Martell (Morningchild), was born at Joseph Bighead First Nation, SK; somewhere near the church. In the past when Cree people travelled by horse and wagon. Women who went into labour would have to give birth along the way. This is how Cecilia was born at Joseph Bighead. Originally, she and her parents came from Makwa Sahgaiehcan. In the mid-1920's her family moved to Greig Lake, SK. Many wonderful memories are associated with Greig Lake and it is Cecilia's dream to some day return there to live.

Cecilia comes from a family of 11; eight girls and three boys. In her own family she has had thirteen children. Due to various tragedies or illnesses, seven have passed on to the spirit world. She and her husband Baptiste reside in Waterhen Lake First Nation.

Cecilia has been a mother for most of her life. Because of her good child rearing, attendance and participation at various ceremonies and cultural activities, she has developed the qualities looked upon by Elders as pre-requisites for becoming a spiritual leader. These qualities include: being a visionary, being a committed student to Cree sacred teachings, and having a good and caring heart.

At one point in her life, Cecilia became a Roman Catholic through the introduction of a missionary near the place of her birth. However, today her spirituality is totally focused on the practices and tradition rooted in Cree culture.

Today Cecilia conducts ceremonies and counsels young people and adult alike from Waterhen Lake and the surrounding area. She is also recognized as an Elder within the Meadow Lake First Nations.



Kanâcisowin

(Cleanliness)

Elder's Name:

Mrs. Cecilia Martell

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1. I was born at Joseph Bighead First Nation and was raised there until I was five years old. During this time, I was raised by Elders who were very caring people; they loved everybody. They would tell me many things, however, I was one of those children who did not listen as well as I should have. However, they did teach me how to respect. For instance, whenever people came to visit I was not allowed to interrupt; especially if it was an Elder who was talking. I would have to sit very still and was not allowed to go outside to play. To even walk in front of where an Elder was sitting was forbidden. Elders were feared and commanded much respect.



2. A willow switch was kept near for children who wouldn't listen. Whenever a child was seen acting inappropriately, even to talk back, then he/she would be punished. It was believed that a child who was not disciplined or didn't respond to authority, would have a difficult life ahead. The child would not be able to stop bad behaviours developed by not listening to his or her Elders.

1. ministikoskâw-sâkahikanihk, (Joseph Bighead First Nation) nikî-nihtâwîkin niya, êkwa êkota, nikî-ohpikihikawin iskohk niyânan ê-itahtopiponiyân. êkospî ôma kêhtê-ayak nikî-ohpikihikwak mitoni kî-miyohwâwak. kahkiyaw awiya kî-kisêwâtotawêwak. mihcêt kîkway nikî-wihtamâkwak, mâka namôya tâpwê kîkway nikî-natohtên kwayask, ta-kî-natohtamân âta. mâka wiya nikî-kiskinohamâkawin tânisi ta-isi-manâcisiyân. tâskôc ayisiyiniw kê-pê-kiyokêt, namôya nôhci-pakitinikawin ta-wâh-wanâhtâyân asonê ita kêhtê-ayak pîkiskwêtwâwi. piko pâyakwanohk ê-kî-apiyân êkwa namôya ahpô wayawîtimihk nôhci-mêtawân. namôya ohci pakitinikâtêw, mîna ahpô nîkân ta-pimohtêt awiyak ita kêhtê-aya ê-apiyit. kî-kostâwak kêhtê-ayak êkwa êyikohk ê-kî-manâcihihcik mîna.

2. cîki nîpîsîs kî-kanawêyihcikatêw awâsisak ohci êkâ kê-nitohtakik kîspin kê-wâpamiht ôma awâsis êkâ kwayask ê-itôhtak ahpô ê-naskwêyâsimot, êkosi kî-mâkohâw. kî-tâpwêhcikatêw awâsis êkâ nânitaw kê-isi-minwâhiht sêmâk, ahpô êkâ ê-nitohtak, mistahi ta-ayamihâw nîkân ati. namôya ta-kî-pônihtâw anima kê-mâyâtaniyik, pahkaci êkâ ê-ohci-nitohtawât kêhtê-aya.



3. Today it is different. We aren't allowed to discipline the way I was raised, with strong measures. There is confusion in the way children are to be brought up and so now children act what ever way they please without fear. However, I still follow the traditional method of discipline. My children still earn their rights and respect by acting correctly. Even though many of my children are older, it is not too difficult for me to get a willow switch to correct their wrong actions.

4. Besides respect, I was also taught the importance of cleanliness for one's own self. As my girlfriends and I were becoming adolescents, and going through our menstrual cycle, we were taken to a private place for four days and nights. We were not allowed to talk to anyone other than each other. Our mothers were the only people allowed to come into the bush where we were learning how to become women. Our mothers showed us how to prepare ourselves to have a clean and pure mind, heart and spirit. We were not to talk to, nor even allowed to look at any males. Tasks to keep our hands busy, like sewing would be given to us to do. We had to make an effort to think positively and have pure thoughts. Thoughts of goodness, for example about Mother Earth and the Creator were our focus. The reason for having pure thoughts was to ensure we'd live a good life in the future. This is true. I believe it.

I was also taught the importance of cleanliness for one's own self.

“manâcihitowinihk
ohci mîna nikî-
kiskinohamâkawin
têsi-kanâcisiyân”

3. anohc êkwa misi pîtos. namôya êkwa pakitinikâtêw ahpô ta-kitahamawâsoyâhk tânisi kâ-kî-isi-sohki-ohpikihikawêyâhk niyanân. mitoni wawânihcikâtêw êkwa tânisi ta-isi-ohpikihcik awâsisak, êyak ôhci pikwîsi awâsisak kâ-isi-waskawîcik; namôya nâkatohkêwak, mîna namôya kîkway kostamwak. mâka, kêyâpic niya nipimicisahên kayâs kitahamawâsowin. nitawâsimisak kaskihtamâsowak manâcihitowin kâ-isi-waskawîcik. kiyâm âta ê-kah-kêhtë-ayiwicik. namôya âyiman nîpîsis t-ôtinamân t-ôh-mâkohakik, ita ê-wâpamakik êkâ kwayask ê-tôtahkik.

4. manâcihitowinihk ohci mîna nikî-kiskinohamâkawin t-êsi-kanâcisiyân. nîc-ôskinîkiskwêsisak, êkwa niya ê-ati-wâ-oskinîkiskwêwiyâhk nikî-itohtahikawinân ohpimê nêwo kîsikâw mîna tipiskâw. namôya nôh-pakitinikawinân awiyak ta-pîkiskwâtâyâhk, niyanân piko tasi. nikâwînak piko kî-pakitinâwak ta-pê-itohtêcik ita k-âyâyâhk, ê-kiskinohâmâkawiyâhk t-êsi-iskwêwêyâhk. nikâwînak nikî-kiskinohamâkonânak tânisi t-êsi-wawêsihisoyâhk ta-kanâci-mâmitonêyihitamâhk nitêhinâhk mîna nitahcahkonâhk. namôya ta-pîkiskwâtâyâhkik, ahpô ta-kitâpamâyâhkik awiyak nâpêwak. kîkway nikî-miyikawinân t-ôsihtâyâhk t-ôtamihikoyâhk tâskôc mîna kaskikwâsowina. piko ta-sohki-kocihtâyâhk ta-miyo-mâmitonêyihitamâhk. ta-miyo-mâmitonêyimâyâhk okâwîmâw askiy, mîna mîmaw-ôhtâwîmâw êkoni ta-nîkânastâyâhk kîkwaya tânêhki ohci ta-miyo-mâmitonêyihitamâhk êyakw ânima t-ôh-miyo-pimâtisiyâhk ôtê nîkân isi. tâpwê êwako nitâpwêhtên.



5. This is the way it was when I was young. The earth was very clean. Very few people were around. We would see people from other communities once a year. We girls were very shy and timid. We would not look at other people, especially the young boys. The only time we would see people was during Sun Dance ceremonies in the summer. As our family approached the Sun Dance grounds, all of us girls would hide.

6. In the past, parents chose who was the right woman for their son. As a girl, it did not matter if you knew the man who was chosen for you; you had to go live with him. The people whom I knew who were part of this tradition of arranged marriages, grew to love and live with their pre-selected mate into old age. When a man chose a mate, it was for their ability to hunt, work and live in the lifestyle according to bush survival and not for their physical beauty. It is unlike today where you can decide on a marriage partner based on desire. This kind of planning does not work well since many of these kinds of marriage end up with the partners separating after only a short while of living together. My sisters who married in the traditional way still live with their husbands. They taught themselves how to love and to perform household duties for their spouses.

5. êkosi ôma kâ-kî-oskâyiwîyân, askiy mitoni kî-kanâtan. namôya ohci mihcêtiwak ayisiyiniwak. nikî-wâpamânânak mâna ayisiyiniwak ohpimê ohci pêyakwâw pêyak askiy. niyanân iskwêsisak nikî-nêpêwisinân êkwa mîna mâna ê-ki-sakotêhêyâhk. namôya ahpô awiyak nôhci-kitâpamânân ason cî nâpêsisak. tânita piko mîna mâna ê-kî-wâpamâyâhkik ayisiyiniwak ôma kâ-nipâkwêsimohk, kâ-nîpihk, ôma k-âti-takopiciyâhk, kahkiyaw mâna niyanân iskwêsisak ê-kî-kâsôyâhk.

6. kayâs pêci-nâway onîkhihikomâwak kî-nawasonêwak iskwêwa okosisiwâwa ohci. ê-oskinîkiskwêwihk namôya nânitaw kiyâm êkâ ê-nistawêyimat ana nâpêw kâ-nawasonamâkawîyan. piko ê-kî-nitaw-wîcâyâmat. tahto kâ-kiskêyimakik êkosi kâ-kî-isi-wîcêhtahihcik, kî-ati-sâkihîtowak, mîna kinwês kî-ati-wîcâyâhtowak ê-kêhtê-ayiwîcîk. nâpêw k-ôtinêskwêwêt, piko ê-kî-nihtâ-mâcît, ê-nihtâ-atoskêt, mîna ta-nihtâ-pimâcihot sakâhk, namôya wiya ê-ohci-miyonâkosit ohci. anohc namôya êkosi ispayin sôskwâc êkwa ê-mosci-otinitocik oskâyak k-êsi-akâwâtîtocîk. namôya miywâsin êkos îsi, namôya kinwês wîcâyâhtowak êkosi paskêwîhitowak. nîcisânak êkosi kâ-kî-isi-wîkihtocîk kayâs, kiyâpic wîcâyâmêwak owîcêwâkaniwâwa. kî-kiskinohamâsowak tânisi t-êsi-sâkihîcîk mîna t-êsi-pamihîcîk owîcêwâkaniwâwa.



7. Even hard work was done with love and appreciation. Many things, such as drying meat was done with the spirit of living a good life. Sometimes, when my mother was preparing the racks for drying meat, all of us little girls would mimic her. She would give us scraps from the wild meat and we would pretend to be like her; cutting and drying meat. Our natural environment was very clean. Even the preparing of fish and the tanning of hides was done with cleanliness in mind. The land was kept very clean.

7. ahpô atoskêwin kî-tôtamwak sâkihitowinihk ohci êkwa miywêyitamowinihk, ê-isi-kitimâkêyimitohk. mihcêt kîkway, tâskôc wiyâs kâ-pâsamihk, kî-miyo-pimâtisinâniwiw kî-isi-nôcihtâwak. âskaw mâna ôma nikâwiw kâ-tasihkahk akwâwân kâ-wî-akwâwît, kahkiyaw mâna niyanân iskwêsisak ê-kî-ayisinawâyâhk. ê-mâh-miyikoyâhk mâna wiyâsis kâ-pânisahk êkwa mâna ê-ayininawâyâhk, ê-mâh-manisamâhk êkwa ê-pâsamâhk anima wiyâsis. mitoni kî-kanâtan ita ôma kâ-kî-ayâyâhk. ahpô kinosêwak kâ-kî-osîhikcîk mîna kâ-kî-pahkêkinohkêhk, kî-kanâci-mâmitonêyihcikâtêw. askiy ôma mitoni kwayask kî-kanâci-kanawêyihcikâtêw.