



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:

Harry Blackbird was born at Waterhen Lake First Nation in the early 1920's. In his later years when he found out he was registered to Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation, Harry moved back there to take up residence. As a child, he lived with and was raised by his grandmother, Pipon. Having no children of his own, Harry helped his present partner Sarah raise her 4 children. At age 13 he hunted, trapped and fished with his uncles; they were his teachers. A fluent Cree speaker, Harry learned English from working with farmers around the Meadow Lake area.

Elders played a very important role in Harry's ability to survive and live inter-dependently within the two worldviews of Cree and Euro-Canadian cultures. From the Elders, Harry learned about the use of herbs, fire making, hunting, trapping and the importance of practicing sacred rituals. From the Euro-Canadian value system he learned about monetary exchange, farm work and how to communicate in the English language.

Harry was taught how to approach Elders using traditional Cree protocol. Through this procedure he was able to gain respect from Elders who, in turn, provided him with the access to sacred teachings. They told him, " you must look after yourself now or you will regret it when you get old." The giving of specific colored broad cloth cotton prints, tobacco and other gifts was Harry's way to accessing information about Cree rituals and personal power.

Each morning, Harry smudges himself with sweetgrass; the smoke as it rises skyward, are prayers for all mankind sent to a divine Creator. He makes prayers to thank the Creator for giving us another day and says other prayers asking for guidance as he prepares for whatever he may encounter each day. A thank-you and a morning song are also sung to honor the Creator.

Today, Harry travels throughout Saskatchewan and Alberta performing various ceremonies the Elders have entrusted him with. He is one of the main Elders who gives spiritual direction to Meadow Lake Tribal Council.



Nêhiyâwin

(The Cree Way)

Elder's Name:

Harry Blackbird

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1. One day while sleeping, an elderly man was awakened by his deceased wife of six years. She came in spirit form. The elderly man had mixed feelings about this visit but nevertheless managed to remain calm and sat up curious wondering why she had come to visit him.



1. pëyakwâw êsa mîna ê-nanipât awa pëyak kisîyiniw, kâ-pawâtât onôtokwêma ê-pê-kiyokâkot. nikotwâsik askîy aspin ê-kî-nakataskîyit. êkwa ôma êkwa otahcahkwa kâ-pê-kiyokêyit. mitoni pîkwêyihitam êsa awa kisiyiniw, êkwa ôma ê-kamwâcipayit, ê-simatapit. nohtê-kiskêyihitam ôma, tânhêki kâ-pê-itohtêyit.

2. She began to speak, Listen very carefully... I have been sent by the Creator to tell you about a boy who passed away recently.

2. mâci-pîkiskwêyiwa êsa ê-itikot, "ê-pê-itisahot ôma Mâmawi-ohâtâwîmâw ta-pê-wihtamâtân kîkway. ana ohci oskinikîs kâ-kî-nakataskît ôta namôya kayâs.

3. Upon entering the spirit world he was greeted by an Oskapêwis who led the young man down an easy road to follow. At a certain point the road forked going in two directions. They first traveled down the road to the right. This road was also easy to follow. After walking for some time they came to a village. A number of young people about the same age as the youth came running towards him. The group of young people stopped to observe the new boy who'd been brought to them by the Oskapêwis.

3. ispî kâ-takohtêt ôtê ahcahk-askîhk, pê-nakiskâk oskâpêwisa ê-kiskinohtahikot ê-wêhcasiniyik mêskanaw. pëyakwâyak anita, nîswâyak paski-môniyâw ôma mêskanaw nistam anima kihciniskêhk k-êsi-paskêmok mêskanaw, êyako pimitisahamwak. êyako mîna mitoni miywâsin ta-pimitisahamihk. piyisk kêtahawê k-ôtihtahkik ita ê-ayâwiht tâskôc ê-wâ-wîkihk. sêmâk ôhi wîci-oskâya pëyakwan ê-ispihcisiyit, kâ-pê-nakiskâkot, êkoni ôhi osk-âya mêtoni nanâkatohkâtik.



4. The young people then began to speak in the language of his ancestry - Nêhiyawêwin. Unfortunately the young man could not make out what they were saying even though he was of the same nation; Nêhiyaw. He even had the two long braids of hair, common trademarks for Nêhiyawak who were following the Nêhiyawin way. Confused and feeling lost, the young man was quickly whisked away by the Oskapêwis towards the other road at the fork.

4. kâ-mâci-pîkiskwâtikot ôhi oskâya ê-nêhiyawêyit. mâka namôya nisitohtawêw awa oskinîkîs tânisî ê-itwêyit âta wîsta ê-nêhiyawêt. ahpô mîna apihkêw tâskôc mîna ôki nêhiyawak mitoni kâ-pimitisahakik onêhiyâwininiwâw. pîkwêyih tam ê-wanihkêt awa oskinîkîs. âsamîna sipwêhtahik oskâpêwîsa kotak êkwa anima mêskanaw ita kâ-kî-oh tohtêcik.

5. This new road was also easy to follow. They came upon a cluster of houses and another group of young people came towards him. Only this time these youth kept their distance with disappointment written all over their faces upon viewing his Aboriginal features. Listening to their conversation as they whispered among themselves, the young man could only make out a few words. He was able to understand these youth because they spoke English, but they obviously weren't interested in this new boy by their behaviour. He felt betrayed, alone and wondered why he didn't fit in.

This new road was also easy to follow.

“êyako mîna ôma mêskanaw miywâsin êkwa wêhcasin tapimitashamihk.”

5. êyako mîna ôma mêskanaw miywâsin êkwa wêhcasin tapimitashamihk. otihtamwak wâskahikana ita câh-cîki ê-wâh-wîkihk. âsamîna êkota kotaka osk-âya pê-nakiskâk mâka êkwa ôki oskâyak namôya cîki pê-nâtik,

wâhyawês ohci osâpamik, ê-pômênâkosicik ê-kanawâpamâcik ôhi oskinîkîsa ê-nêhiyâwinâkosiyit. nanitohtawêw ê-kîmôci-pîkiskwêyit. âtiht piko kîkway kâh-kahcicihtam. êkoni êkwa nisitohtawêw oskâya osâm piko ê-âkayâsîmocik, mâka namôya tâpwê cîkêyimik k-îsi-waskawîyit. mâmisihow, ê-pa-pêyakot ê-nitaw-mâmitonêyih tahk tânhêki êkâ nânitaw kâ-kî-wîchihwêt.



6. The Oskapêwis once again whisked him away and this time left the young man at the fork of the road. His spirit is lost and wandering now because while alive he hadn't learned to find his way.

7. Now, my husband, the deceased wife's spirit added just before she vanished, it is up to you to make certain that young Indian children are told this story I have been sent here to tell you.

Oskapêwis - Helper
Nêhiyawak - Cree People
Nêhiyawêwin - Cree Language
Nêhiyawin - Cree Worldview

6. âsamîna êkota ohci sipwêhtahik
oskâpêwisa awa oskinîkîs, mâka êkwa êkotê
nakatik ita kâ-nîso-paskêmoniyiki
mêskanawa, otahcahkwa ê-wanisiniyit mîna
ê-papâmâcihoyit êkotê nâyiwâc osâm êkâ ê-
ohci-kiskinohamâsot mîna êkâ ohci-
wawîyêstahk onêhiyâwiwin mêkwâc ôta
askîhk ê-pimâtisit.”

7. “hâw, kisêyiniw”, itwêw awa
nôtokwêw, “otahcahkwa pwâmâyî-
sipwêhtêt kâwi kiya êkwa piko ta-
wihtamawacik, mîna t-âcimostawacik osk-
âyak ôma âcimowin k-ôh-pê-
itisahokawiyân ta-pê-wihtamâtân.”