



Stories from our Elders

Stories and Teachings
from an Atlantic Circle
of Knowledge Keepers



Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer:

We the APCFNC Circle of Elders have agreed to share our cultural knowledge collectively according to our memories, our traditions, and our commitment to preserving our beautiful cultures for generations yet to be born. The contents of this booklet cannot be altered or used in any manner or form without the express permission of the APCFNC Circle of Elders.



Introduction

The Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Research Program (AAEDIRP) is a unique partnership between the member communities of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat (APCFNC), the Inuit of Labrador, twelve Atlantic Canadian universities, and federal and provincial government funders. The AAEDIRP funders include Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, and the Office of Aboriginal Affairs for the Province of Nova Scotia. The main purpose of the AAEDIRP is to improve the knowledge base concerning Atlantic Aboriginal economic development in order to improve the lives of Aboriginal people in the region.



Photo by Wanda Ralph

In 2010, the AAEDIRP facilitated a Mawio'mi, a gathering of Elders from across the Atlantic Region. One of the recommendations from the Mawio'mi was to establish a regional Council of Elders. Following up on this recommendation, in 2014, the AAEDIRP again brought together a group of Atlantic Region Elders to establish a Council. The Elders themselves facilitated the process of establishing the Council. At the end of the process, the Elders who volunteered to form the Council were accepted by consensus. This booklet is produced by these Elders.

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Artwork by: Sarah Solomon

Cipenuk: East Spirituality/Culture

The Stories in this direction reflect our spirituality, our cultural worldview based on teachings gifted to us beginning at birth through our ancestral languages. As newborns, we are blessed with familial love, communal love and universal love. This direction is also symbolic of the season Spring, a time of new beginnings, new growth, illumination and gratitude for the generosity of our Earth Mother, our element teacher.

Labrador Tea

As told by Elder Jean Crane



Labrador Tea is made from a mountain laurel with white blossoms and was used by the ancients as a herbal healing tea. My mother learned this from an Innu woman and taught us how to prepare it. Labrador tea has vitamin C needed on a daily basis to replenish energy. We use it during and after flu symptoms.

2 Cups

- Bring 3 cups water to a boil
- Add a handful of leaves
- Simmer for 1 minute, let steep
- Good with honey

Partridge Berry Tonic

As told by Elder Jean Crane



Photo source: www.whitesailsinneastport.com

Partridge Berry tonic was analyzed by the Smithsonian Institute. It is said to have the most vitamin C of anything that grows in Labrador. We need to renew vitamin C daily. This tonic was used as a 'pick me up' when we had the flu or when we weren't feeling well.

- Cook up one quart of Partridge Berries with two quarts of water and 1/2 cup sugar.
- Strain juice away, add 1/2 cup honey and 1 cinnamon stick or 1 tsp. cinnamon.
- Simmer for a few minutes,
- Take a glass full twice a day for two days.
- Break away from it for a few days.

It is alright cold but is more soothing hot.

Recipes

Partridge Stew/Soup as told by Elder Loretta Perley

Two partridge skinned and cut up, 4-6 potatoes, 2-3 carrots, 1 onion quartered, and some bean pork (optional). Bring to a boil. Allow meat to simmer for 30 minutes before adding vegetables. Add sage, pepper and salt. Make a large dumpling and add it to the stew. Once soup/stew comes to a full boil, turn back down to a simmer or very low boil for at least 30 minutes to 1 hour; or you can let it simmer for 2 hours.

“Do not open pot until ready to eat.”

Note: Add only enough water to just barely cover food for stew, or a little more for soup.

Fiddleheads (Mat-Sos-il) as told by Elder Loretta Perley

One traditional Wolastoq food is fiddleheads. They come out in the Spring when the water recedes and frost is not likely. They are tightly curled ferns that are nutritious and delicious. Once gathered and individually cleaned, they are rinsed in cool water. Then they are parboiled for one minute. The water is poured out and fresh water is boiled and the fiddle heads are put back for about three minutes or until desired tenderness is reached. They are strained again and fried salt pork is drizzled over them. They are good with trout or salmon. They act as a physic or laxative if you over indulge.

Healing Tree

Photo and story by Elder Jean Crane



Medicinal use

Pick the needles and place in a flat pan on the stove with 1 cup of water for 3 cups of needles. Crush and steep. The medicine is in the sap from the needles. Make a cotton bag and place contents in the bag. This can be used as a poultice on an affected area such as boils or other aches. Keep heating the mixture and make a new poultice after 1 day. (Wrap the bag in a towel to keep the heat in)

Traditional Food

Inuit as told by Elder Jean Crane

When the Inuit lived off the land and the sea, the foods available were mostly seal, char, trout, salmon, caplin, caribou, ptarmigan, ducks and geese. They dried, salted, and smoked the fish and meat. We picked blackberries, bakeapples and partridge berries. We still use these as our preferred foods.

Innu as told by Elder Manishan Nui

I remember as young girl we spent a lot of time in Corenbry with my parents. We never ran out of food. My mom was a busy woman sewing stuff for us, and my dad was busy hunting for the very healthy meals we had. My parents never wasted anything in Corenbry. Everything in the caribou was eaten. We used the skin of the caribou to make jackets, caps, or moccasins.

Those were real good old days. Dad would tell us stories before going to bed. I still remember those legends and, sometimes, I try to tell my grandkids about them. My parents are gone now. My father was 95 when he died. He was a hard working man.

Mi'kmaq as told by Elder Vince Barlow

The Mi'kmaq had a favourite dish. It was baked dried eels and luskinikan (Indian Bread). Oil that was left off from baked eels was used for ear medicine for wax build-ups. Boiled wild blueberries were made into jam or spread.

Wolastoqey as told by Elder Imelda Perley

I have fond memories of fresh salmon, brook trout, codfish, rabbit stew, moose meat, venison, muskrat, fiddle heads, my first taste of maple candy and maple syrup over homemade bread and Lakalet (Fry bread). I do remember enjoying the taste of head-cheese. Since all of our families had gardens, we were fortunate enough to enjoy fresh produce from our gardens. My grandmother would prepare pickles in various forms, chow chow, mustard pickles, salted pickles and mixed pickles. Various jams were also prepared from the bounty of seasonal berry picking. Homemade marmalade was another treat. Chokecherry jams were more common then but not so much today. Hulled corn soup called Piyehskomnap was also an art and so much better than today's canned versions. Saturday night baked beans with homemade bread, pies, ginger bread and various cakes are memories to cherish. Piksey (Pork) was used for a lot of our cooking, like lakucie (potatoes with onions), poor man's soup using beans called pinsuwekin. Fresh bacon with turnips, carrots and potatoes is still one of my favourite meals. Once pasta was introduced, macaroni and tomatoes became the new tradition, today sometimes called hangover soup. My favourite version is with piksey and onions. Wolihpukot! (so tasty). Fried bologna known as Indian steak is another new tradition along with Indian Tacos.

Goose Wings

Photo by Elder Jean Crane



This says " Hunters were here".
They celebrated the hunt and left the wings.
Who ever saw them knew that was a good hunt.

Easter Ceremony

As told by Elder Vince Barlow

My mother was from Big Cove Indian Reserve. Every Easter a group of men would go to every house to sing. This was done on the Saturday night of Easter weekend. Big Cove population was not as large as it is now. The population was about eight hundred at the time. Three groups of men would sing. One group did the main road to the Church; another group did the East side of Big Cove “Em bap kegk”; and the other group would do the West side of Big Cove “Em bi dow wegk”. A few men would follow the singers to gather the donations given, such as pies, cakes and other baked goods.

They would sing all night ending up at the Church for Easter Sunday Mass. It would take all this time to cover all the homes. All the donations collected would be auctioned off at a dance on Easter Monday night. Proceeds, I believe, went to the upkeep of the Church.



Photo by Elder Vince Barlow

Medicine Gathering

As told by Elder Loretta Perley

Now this is something I am familiar with. I recall gathering food, water and various medicines from a very young age. I used to go with my grandmother to tag the medicine in the summer for fall gathering. When the proper time came around she would take me with her. She never took a shovel so I would ask "What are you going to dig it up with Gijew?" "We'll find something to dig with when we get there," she'd say. Sure enough there would be a sharp rock or stick near by when we got there. I'm sure she made an offering but I didn't pay close attention so I can't say she did. She would dig up the root, but put the dirt back so that it looked as we had found it. She would put the root in a handkerchief and we would go home to clean and prepare it. Whenever my mother and aunt would walk in the woods or along the shore they would point out medicine or edibles or poisonous plants. They would encourage us to eat the berries, nuts or leaves and tell us what they were good for. They would show us how to find fresh water on the ocean shore and how to access it. We learned to dig clams, pick snails, and oysters. We usually cooked the clams but the oysters we ate raw. The snails were cooked as well.



Mary G. Nicholas & Loretta Perley neé (Barlow), taken in Indian Island 1956 or 1957

We harvested May flowers for sale in May, picking gull eggs in June, goose tongue greens in July as well as strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, cranberries, hazelnuts, choke cherries, acorns, pin cherries. Every month there was something to harvest. As a child, we would make blueberry necklace and bracelets with the long grass. The grown-ups would gather sweet hay to decorate baskets. The men would go spearing eels at night for food and for sale down town. We all dug clams to sell to tourists or buyers would come ashore to buy them. My grandmother and aunt would make baskets and cedar brooms and would go sell them. We walked every step of the way. Once Gijew sold or traded them all we would hitch hike to town for necessities. Sometimes she would notice baby clothes on a clothes line and she would trade my aunts baskets for them. People would feed us at lunch time as they were afraid if they didn't we would put a spell on them. That worked out well for us.

Although we walked fifteen miles or more selling baskets, I never got tired or hungry. I didn't realize what a special time that was at the time, but looking back I do.

Hunting and Trapping

As told by Elder Loretta Perley

My father, the late Chief Peter J. Barlow, never hunted big game. He hunted ducks, geese, partridge, rabbit and he fished, but when someone got a deer or a moose, he would say, "There, now your job is done." For shooting the animal he would get a hindquarter. Whoever skinned and gutted the animal got the other hindquarter. The animal would hang for two weeks to a month in cool weather before it was divided. Whoever helped would get a portion after the Elders and widows got a share. Nothing was wasted. I used to feel bad for the deer as they were so beautiful. My mother would say, "Never pity your food. They were sent to us to eat to help us live."

My father used to snare rabbits and my mother would make rabbit stew. We loved rabbit stew. There was/is a bone in the frame of the rabbit that has a hole in it. He would play a little game with this bone once it was picked clean. He would put it over his head with one hand and with the other hand, he would try to make the forefinger go through the hole without looking. He would say in Indian, "Here he comes. Here he comes." If the finger found the entrance, he would say, "He's arrived." These little games all had significance as he found his way through the hole he would have luck snaring again the next day.

There are other stories about the hole representing a lake. If someone were trapping on the lake, wherever the finger touched would be where to set your next snare or trap. Girls and women in my day didn't go out hunting so I don't know if they offered tobacco. But we do today. We used to help skin the rabbits so none of the hair would get on the meat. The favourite part for the children were the heart and kidneys. We thought they were all hearts so two rabbits ended up having six hearts.

My mother would make these big fluffy doughboys in the rabbit stew. This is food that is natural to us and we should still be eating.



Artwork by: Sarah Solomon

Sawonossouk: South Emotional/Social

The Stories of this direction reflect our emotional wellbeing, our relationships with our families, communities and all of creation. Our Element teacher is water reminding us to give gratitude for gifts of water, including all tears in our emotions. Within this direction we are reminded of our youth, when our love reaches out beyond our families and we begin to love our neighbors, our friends, our Elders, our four-legged family, our winged family, our finned family and all our earth families. We begin to learn of our social responsibilities as a member of a family and community. Summer is the season of this direction and is a teacher of generosity when we pick berries, medicines and have abundant fish to sustain us. Our gathering time or Maqiyatimok is celebrated in this season.

Walking Stick

As told by Elder Jean Crane

HECLA Island, Winnipeg, 1995.

Sometimes it's hard to not talk. I wanted to listen to the sisters in the circle but I also wanted to talk. Since I don't have the talking stick, I can't talk.

It was wisdom who brought the talking stick.

This time we were to choose a sister to team up with for the whole conference. I wondered how we would choose a sister. I decided to wait and see. If I could select one, there she was, a lovely young woman with a beautiful aura. She was a closed book. Before I got past that thought, she spoke up with great determination. Could she choose one? We all agreed she could. Guess what – she asked me to be her sister. I was sure I had not spoken my thoughts out loud. I was in shock. The spirit shook, then danced.

The sister had seen a stick outside earlier, wanted us to use it, went and got it. It was about 4 feet long and crumbling. We used it on the floor, pushed it along to the next one and rested a barefoot on it while talking.

While someone was talking I experienced a vision. There was only me and the talking stick. The stick seemed to shimmer in a violet light. I wanted to walk the talking stick. I reached out my foot to touch the talking stick. I told the sisters that when they all finished I wanted to walk the talking stick.

When they finished, I asked my sister to walk with me. She held my hand and walked beside me. That helped me balance. I have now walked the talking stick. Then I held her hand while she walked the talking stick. This vision tells me that while it is sometimes difficult to balance our walk through life there is no need to always walk alone.

Thank you circle sister for bringing this one. Also thank you for walking beside me.

It was wisdom who brought the talking stick.

Ancestors

As told by Elder Jean Crane



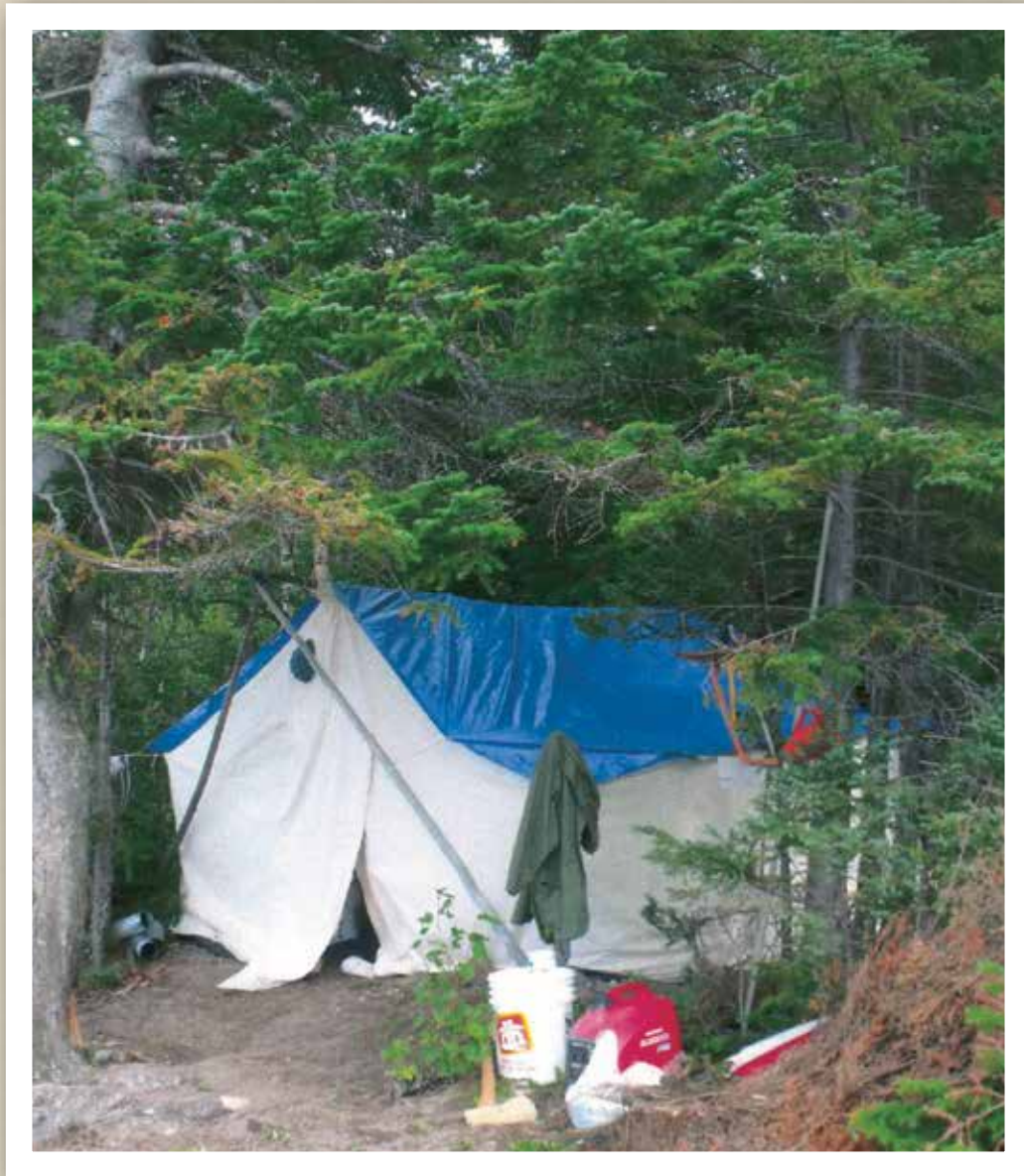
Lydia Campbell, 1818-1905. Lydia is Jean Crane's Great-grandmother. She was the first person from Labrador that we know of to write her own story in her own words.

Theirs were the voices of this land
They spoke in ancient tongue
They often spoke and were not heard
As if no meaning to their word
Where was justice way back then?
The heart beat faint
The spirit wept

We come full circle in this place
The stranger and the ancient race
Healing now
The heartbeat strong
The spirit sings

Tent

Photo and story by Elder Jean Crane



This tent was made by me, Elder Jean Crane, in my kitchen with a treadle foot machine. We have always camped on Grand Lake which was my father's trap-line. On this particular trip two bears came. One bear was chased away with a bear-banger and the other smelled the smoke from our fire and went the other way.

Drum

Story and photo by Elder Jean Crane



Years ago when the Moravian missionaries came to Labrador, they claimed that the drum was heathen. They forbade the drum. The Inuit people who followed their teachings hung up their drums or put them on the shelf.

The drums were silent.

In recent years an Inuit Elder was passing away and some of us were bringing traditional food. We asked him what else we could bring. He said his father had taught that there will be peace in the land when the drum comes back. He fancied he would like to hear the drum calling him when he goes.

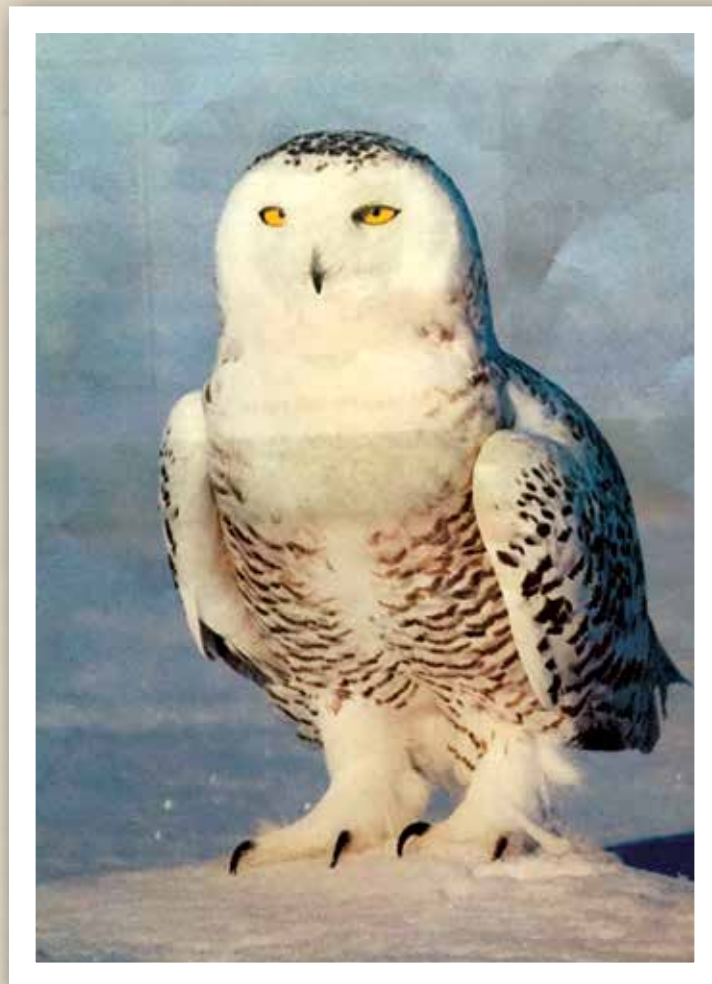
We are a group of nine. We found a youth group drum teacher. She came to teach us three lessons and stayed with us for three years. With her help we drummed for him. He heard the drum calling him as he passed away.

Apart from this, there is a well trained youth group who plays the drum and school children who are learning to play in Labrador.

The drum is heard again in the land.

Snowy Owl

As told by Elder Jean Crane

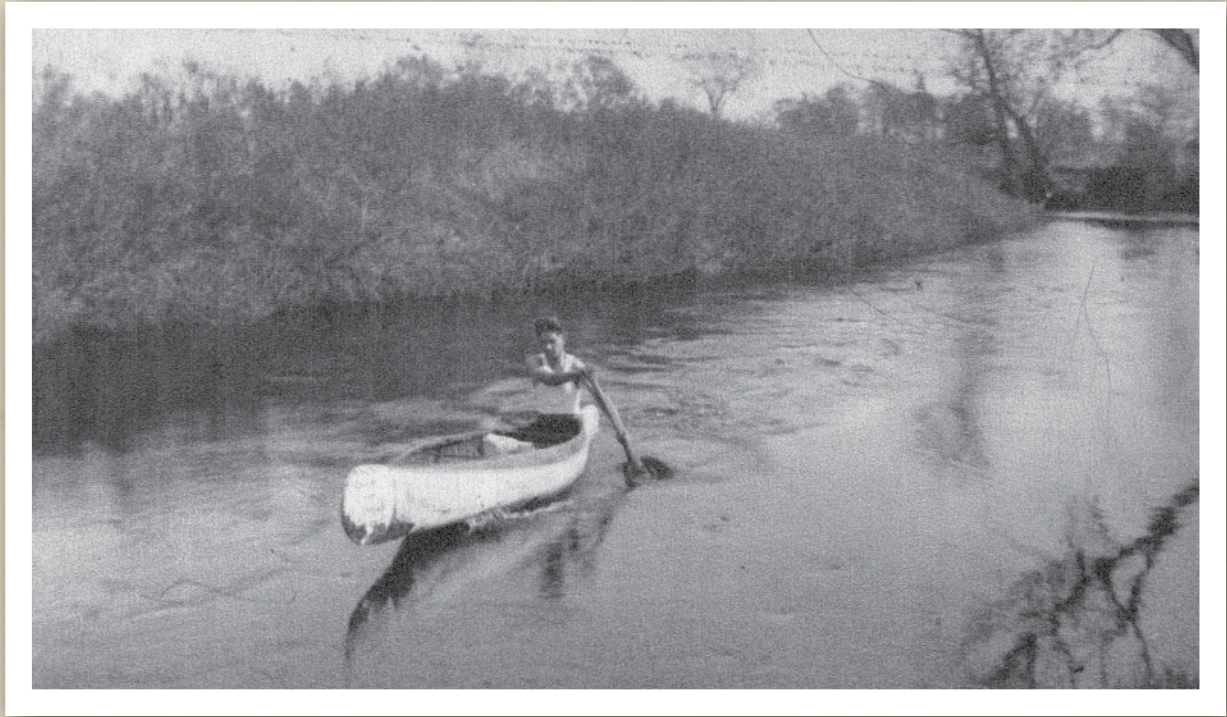


© Rachel Bilodeau
Location: Quebec, Canada

The Inuit name for snowy owl is Ookpik. History has it that when some Inuit hunters were lost on the ice in a blizzard, they thought they would starve. They prayed. There was a flutter in the snow. It was Ookpik. The hunters killed it and ate it and survived till they found their way again. Ookpik is the sacred bird and the feathers are used in ceremony to honour the bird who saved the hunters.

Prayer for the Glooscap Seniors and Elders

As told by Elder Shirley Clarke



*Elder Shirley Clarke's Uncle Lorimer Brooks, in his homemade birchbark and spruce root canoe.
Taken in the Annapolis River near Middleton.*

Oh Great Spirit and Creator,
Grant us trust and faith,
Grant us, love, compassion
For our well being for one another

May we grow with strength to forgive
One another's mis-comings.
May we take the time to listen and
Be still for our seniors and elders to share a
History rich in wisdom and knowledge.
We should respect and not fear other
Peoples religious and political beliefs.

Lastly, we must walk beside our leaders,
And never forget where we came from.

Seven Sacred Prayers of the Mi'kmaq

As told by Elder Shirley Clarke

O Great Spirit who art before all else and who dwells in every object in every person and in every place, we cry unto Thee. We summon Thee from the far places into our present awareness.

O Great Spirit of the North, who gives wings to the waters of the air and rolls the thick snowstorm before Thee. Who covers the Earth with a sparkling crystal carpet above whose deep tranquility every sound is beautiful. Temper us with strength to withstand the biting blizzards, yet make us thankful for the beauty which follows and lies deep over the warm Earth in its wake.

O Great Spirit of the East, the land of the rising Sun. Who holds in Your right hand the years of our lives and in Your left the opportunities of each day. Brace us that we may not neglect our gifts nor lose in laziness the hopes of each day and the hopes of each year.

O Great Spirit of the South, whose warm breath of compassion melts the ice that gathers round our hearts, whose fragrance speaks of distant springs and summer days, dissolve our fears, melt our hatred, kindle our love into flames of true and living realities. Teach us that he who is truly strong is also kind, he who is wise tempers justice with mercy, he who is truly brave matches courage with compassion.

O Great Spirit of the West, the land of the setting Sun, with Your soaring mountains and free wide rolling prairies, bless us with knowledge of the peace which follows purity of striving and the freedom which follows like a flowing robe in the winds of a well-disciplined life. Teach us that the end is better than the beginning and that the setting sun glorifies not in vain.

O Great Spirit of the heavens, in the day's infinite blue and amid the countless stars of the night season remind us that you are vast, that you are beautiful and majestic beyond all of our knowing or telling, but also that you are no further from us than the tilting upwards of our heads and the raising of our eyes.

O Great Spirit of Mother Earth beneath our feet, Master of metals, Germinator of seeds and the Storer of the Earth's unreckoned resources, help us to give thanks unceasingly for Your present bounty.

O Great Spirit of our souls burning in our hearts, yearning in our inner most aspirations, speak to us now and always so that we may be aware of the greatness and goodness in Your gift of life and be worthy of this priceless privilege of living.

Honour Song (Gathering Song)

As told by Elder Shirley Clarke

This song was written by George Paul from the Metepenagiag First Nation in 1980. The inspiration for this song came to George Paul in a Sweat Lodge while he was on a Spiritual Quest.

The song is important to the Mi'kmaq people and is sung often at gatherings.

Kepmite'tmnej
Kepmite'tmnel ta'n tel
L'nuwulti'kw

Ni'kma'jtut mawita'nej

Kepmite'tmnej ta'n
wettapeksulti'k

Nikma'jtut apoqnmattutlinej

Apoqn matultine'j ta'n kisu'lkw
Teli ika'luksi'kw

wla wskitqamu

Eia hei hai ya (x3)

Ta ho

—

Let us greatly respect our nativeness

My people let us gather

Let us greatly respect our aboriginal roots

My people let us help one another

Let us help one and other according to the Creator's

intention for putting us on this planet

Wolastoqey tribute to language and river

As told by Elder Imelda Perley

Wolasuweltomuwakon

This honor code was gifted to me in my first fast in Garden River, Ontario under the guidance of Elder Sue Ann Robinson. My teacher, Elder Gwen, invited us to join her in the fasting ceremony with her guide Sue Ann October 1994. My purpose was to ask for guidance in revitalizing, maintaining and preserving my Wolastoqey language. I was willing to sacrifice my physical comforts to seek guidance from my ancestors. Within two days, this prayer came to my consciousness. The message was to not blame our parents and grandparents for the language shift leading towards language loss but to give them gratitude for surviving the brutality and shame they faced as speakers. It was now our generations' responsibility to reverse language shift towards revitalization, maintenance and ultimately preservation. The honour code is recited at the beginning of classes in our community schools in many different languages around the world. The Honour Code is as follows:

Wolasuweltomuwakon
Nuhkomossok naka Nmuhsomsok
Woliwon 'Ciw Latuwewakon
Kisi Monuwehkiyeq 'Ciw Nilun
Nilun oc Tokec, Wolankeyutomonen
'Ciw Weckuwapasihitit!
Nit Leyic.

Language Honour Code
Grandmothers and Grandfathers
Thank you for the language
That you have saved for us
It is now our turn to take care of it
For the ones not yet born!
May that be the truth.

Wolastoq Song by Saqatay

This song is a gift from our late Elder, Gwen Bear. The song is considered an honour song by the Wolastoqiyik since it pays tribute to our great grandmother Wolastoq, our beautiful and bountiful river that has been renamed St. John by the settlers. Elder Gwen went to Wolastoq to pray for strength after the loss of her beautiful mother Yvonne. As she sat under a tree close to the bank of the river, she told us that she heard our river sing to her, not to forget that she too was still our mother. The song is sung like a lullaby that a mother would sing to her child. When she first sang it to us in ceremony, we were all touched by the melody and the words. The words of the song are:

Wolastoq Pomeloqe
Acite Pomiku
Wolastoq Olmeloqe
Supeq Olomiya
Nikuwoss Pomihphin (2x)
Wasis oc nil Askomiw (2x)

Wolastoq is flowing
Flowing and Growing
Wolastoq is flowing down
To the sea
Mother Carry Me
For A Child I will always be

Burial and Funeral Services on Reserves

As told by Elder Vince Barlow

As far back as I can remember, when anyone passes away in our Indian Community, a warning would come from that person's spirit in the form of a knock on the door, window or other means. When I was young, a church bell would ring for about a minute or two intervals, then we would know someone had passed on.

The wake would be held at the deceased person's home, for two days and two nights. Neighbors would bring food and donations to that person's home. Around six or seven in the evening, a rosary would be recited. When a priest was available, he would lead the prayers and blessings.

After prayers were offered, an auction would take place for items that belonged to the deceased and items that were donated by friends and neighbors. The proceeds from the auction would be presented to family members to maybe purchase a headstone. Another person would be selling Mass stipends in remembrance of the deceased. After the raffle, the Elders would sit around the table and sing hymns in Indian and English, but mostly at that time it would be sung in Indian.

About eleven or twelve midnight, the table would be set for everyone to join in for a meal. Food was donated and served by community members. There was always plenty to go around.

The wake would go on for twenty-four hours, around the clock, while the body of the deceased was exposed to prayers.

Before the roads were modernized, a team of horses was used to bring the coffin to the church. All the parishners would follow behind the horse drawn wagon accompanying the body to the church. Pallbearers would carry the coffin into the church and then to its final resting place. In those days, we had no mechanical means of digging, such as a back hoe or a vault to store the remains till spring. When someone passed on in the winter, while the snow was on the ground, the ground would be frozen sometimes two or three feet deep. A couple of men were asked to do the digging using pick axes, shovels and crow bars along with regular axes. They would shovel the snow and then commence to dig about six feet down. This was done every time someone would pass on, no matter what time of the year. Most times, payment was minimal. Sometimes, they would do it for nothing.

In the olden days, funerals were all done the same. Everyone would attend the wake, the funeral service and the final good byes at the cemetery. There was no honor songs or sacred fires. All songs were hymns.

But slowly the MicMac Indians advanced into the States and a change seemed to take place. If you had status and a little bit of money, a lot of people came to your wake and funeral service but at the same time, if you had less money and less standing in the community, fewer people came to the wake and funeral services.

Our MicMac people forgot that we were all poor at one time!

I personally feel much more blessed when I attend the service of the less fortunate. We have forgotten our basic underlying nationality. We are Indians – together we will stand!

Part of this story is based on stories from my mother, Rose Ann Peters of Big Cove reserve.

Sigiliem negah Tojoge (Cricket and the Ants)

As told by Elder Loretta Perley



Photo source: www.treehugger.com

This story was told to my mother, Laura Anna Barlow, by her grandmother Mary Esther (Molly'sol) Nicholas who was a Passamaquoddy woman.

During the cold winter months often all the animals and insects were snug in their winter homes. Sigiliem would go begging to the ants to let him in as he was cold and hungry and had no place to live. He said that in the spring he would surely prepare himself better for the next winter. The ants felt sorry for the pathetic looking chap and would let him in. "I swear I won't let this happen to me again," he'd say.

Now the ants weren't too happy to have Sigiliem live with them as he was quite lazy and ate a lot. Of course he was much bigger than them. They would chastise him and make him promise to get ready better for next winter. Come spring, Sigiliem left unnoticed and he laid in the sun all day and sang all night every night. The ants warned him he was supposed to be finding a house and gathering food but Sigiliem seemed to have all the time in the world. His plan was to go live with the ants again that winter. This was repeated over and over again because so much of a nuisance as Sigiliem was the ants had big hearts and lots of food.

That is why we sometimes get Sigiliem in our houses in the fall. They are looking for a warm place for the winter. My mother said that if we do get Sigiliem in our home, they bring good luck. But they still like to sing through the night.

Spirit Plate

As told by Elder Imelda Perley

A Spirit Plate honours those who went before us. One is prepared at all Feasts where community members are celebrating an event. An Elder who is called upon to Bless the Food, will ask a young person to prepare a Spirit Plate to remind the community of their responsibility to honour all our ancestors, especially those who have recently left the physical world. The Spirit Plate is blessed and taken outside near a tree or water source to feed the spirits before we the community members begin to eat our meals. It was told to me by the Late Elder Gwen Bear that when we prepare a Spirit plate at feasts and especially at Death Feasts to offer a very small portion of the food that is being shared by the community. The Teaching is that when we feed our Spirits first, our bodies will be better nourished, physically and spiritually.

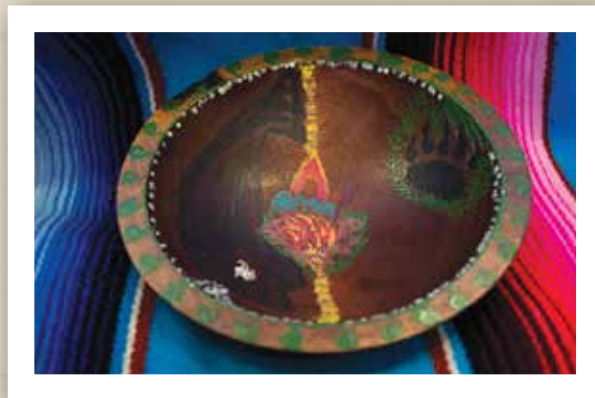


Photo by Elder Imelda Perley

When the Spirit Plate is offered to Earth Mother, it is important to pray to the four directions and gift each direction with the offerings. A wooden bowl, or small basket may be used to carry the food and only the food is offered to Earth Mother on behalf of the community and their Ancestors.

Onheltomuwakon

Onheltomuwin nkisi wapoleyulan kosona nkisi wapolikolulul

Forgive me if I have done you wrong or have used words against you

Woloma weckuwikotok 'kisi sankewuhsepon naka kwitapehtinen

So that in the New Year we can walk in peace and friendship

Kisiyulinaq naka psiw elakumeq oc nomihtuniya onheltomuwakon.

Our Creator and all our Relatives will witness the gift of forgiveness.

My Teaching from the late Cozi Nicholas and Elder Charles Solomon
Opolahsomuwehs 98

The Sacred Fire

As told by Elder Loretta Perley

No one ever referred to it as the 'Sacred Fire' when I was growing up. But when my great-aunt Susan MacDonald Barlow died in the mid 1970's, the family was burning her clothes. This was the clothes she wore on a daily basis. I felt bad that they were doing that and asked why. Now, back then, no one sat you down to explain anything. All they said was "This is what had to be done as it was the custom."

My younger sister, Pat, said, "Don't you remember them doing that when Gijew died?" Gijew means mother in Mi'kmaq, but we all called our Migijew (grandmother) that because we heard our aunts, uncles and parents refer to her as Gijew. So I did remember them doing that but I remember not liking it. I just didn't understand why they had to burn her clothes. That is about the closest thing to a sacred fire I can recall on a personal level.



Artwork by Patricia Bernard

You have to remember, we were far removed from our own culture for centuries. We had become such staunch Catholics that anything from our past was demonized. Although the customs had been practiced it wasn't talked about. But then, I only first encountered Sacred Fire as we now know it in the late sixties when Ernest Benedict and Richard Laughing, Mohawks from Akwesasne/St. Regis, came down in their North American Indian Travelling Workshop (or College) with Jerry Gamble. They re-instated the drum and dancing of their people and then our people started to come out of the wood work with our songs and dances that I didn't know still existed at the time. They started a Sacred Fire. I remember wanting to throw my gum wrapper in the fire and they said, "No, this isn't a bonfire. You can't put any garbage in this fire, but you can offer tobacco." Then they said that there had to be a fire keeper to make sure the fire didn't go out day and night for, I believe, three days and nights. I just couldn't see anybody doing that, but that is what they did.

Now, when someone dies, they start a Sacred Fire and people volunteer to watch it for three or four days and nights. Another thing they do is gather the ashes from that fire and save them for the death feast which can be a year later or whenever the family feels it's the right time. They then mix the ashes in with the new fire and ceremony. I am not really familiar with all these customs, but I have participated in at least one such feast.

This 'death feast' was for my daughter-in-laws mother, Glenna Perley. They had a fire and they used the prettiest table cloth and someone's finest china. They prepared a Spirit Plate and said who it was for. Some people put in some food other ancestors would like too and said, "This is for Gokum, and this is for Uncle Louis." Then they put it in the fire to send it to the Spirit World. I thought it was nice, but I've always believed we should let the dead rest in peace. I don't like to bother them unless they come to me in my dreams and then I will pray for them.

I very much respect the old ways, but I wasn't brought up with it so where I'm not really familiar with it I am reluctant to practice it. I do smudge frequently and offer tobacco to the four directions as well as the sky and the earth. I gather medicines and always offer tobacco for them.

Drum

As told by Elder Imelda Perley

In our journey from the Spirit world to the physical world, Creator places our development within the womb of our Mothers. Within the darkness of her womb, we hear the echoes of our grandmothers before us within the heartbeat of our own Mothers. The Sacred Drum symbolizes the heartbeat of creation. The Standing Ones, our Tree family, gifts us with the rim of our drums to teach us about our interconnectedness and interdependence. In this way our Sacred Drums also teach us to celebrate our “roots” each time a hand drum or a community drum is shared. Our four-legged family also gifts us with their skin for the drum, whether it is from moose, deer, elk or caribou. Again we are reminded of our co-existence with all of Creation.

My memory of making a Grandmother Drum guides me to always honour all of Creation. In earning the right to carry Grandmother Drum, I was taught to give gratitude to the Standing Ones for the rim from one new moon to the next before the next stage of the making of the Drum could begin. The next stage was to ceremonially request from the spirit of the animal which one wanted to gift me with the skin of my drum. Each aspect of stretching, measuring, lacing and designing was steeped in ceremony. As Grandmother Drum was being “created”, Bear Medicine was used to bless the rim of the drum and the sinew used to complete the physical aspect of creating Grandmother Drum. The third stage was to create an altar for Grandmother Drum in order to honour her spirit. For four days, Grandmother Drum rested on her altar while we smudged, prayed and sang to her four times a day. The final stage was to “birth” her within a Sweatlodge ceremony with her relatives which included 6 other drums from the same tree and the same animal skin. Seven of us women then entered into Earth Mother’s Womb to ask permission and grace to carry our Grandmother Drums for our people. I have carried Grandmother Drum for 20 years, and she is one of my personal healers. I am full of gratitude for Elder Gwen Bear for the teaching and Elder Carlos Gomez for his teachings from his Grandmother’s land.



Photo by Elder Imelda Perley

Naming Ceremony

As told by Elder Imelda Perley

In our Creation Stories, we are taught that we are Spirits first and humans next. Therefore as we journey from the spirit world to the physical world, our ancestors protect us within the womb. Once we are born, our physical being is named, and traditionally our spirit was also named within a ceremony. Our spirit names, if not gifted at birth can be gifted anytime throughout our lives, possibly at puberty, or at a vision quest. Spirit names are earned through fasting or through an Elder's recognition of one's spirit. There are various ways a Spirit Name is gifted. In my experience, my Spirit names came at different times in my life from two Wolastoqi Elders. My first spirit name is Monqon Aluhk, which means Rainbow Cloud. It was gifted to me in Aeteoroa, the Land of the Long White Cloud. The name connects me to my Elder, Charles Solomon, who was a Medicine Man. He said that my responsibility was to heal mind, heart and spirit by using his teachings to reach all human families. He said "Samaqan nil, knamkomihptuw in ntokehkituwakonol". (I carry the Spirit of Water, you will carry the healing powers of water to future generations in the same way a cloud carries water). Elder Gwen Bear and Cree Grandmothers gifted me with my second spirit name at Cranberry Portage, Manitoba at a river ceremony. They gifted me with the name Uhkomi Komiwon, translates to Grandmother Rain. Both names connect me to my Elder's teachings and reinforce my identity through wolastoqey ancestry.



Photo submitted by Elder Imelda Perley

Through my years of fasting and learning from many Elders, I have earned the right to conduct Naming Ceremonies. I practice and rely on ceremony to request spiritual guidance for each name. Once a spirit name is accepted, the recipient must feast their name annually to request permission to carry it forth for another year. Spirit names are used in all ceremonies, to let our ancestors know that our spirits are waiting for instructions and guidance.

Ponapsqinuwok - The Stone People

As told by Elder Imelda Perley

Neket Pihce, Pihce..mesq nomihqosultiyeq, iyuhpon kotok skitkomiq kenuk nisiqatihtit nokka wapolehtuniya psiw keq, elatomeq, elawsultiyeq, eluwehkasik samaqan naka psiw keq kci kikuwossonuk. Kcitposulticik Nuhkomossuwicik kisi mawitahatomuniya weci kikuht Kci Kikuwosson. ‘Tapi akinuwehtuwawa psiw yuhuht mawsuwinu, ‘ciliw yukt woli psuhunahtitit, kcicihtuwinuhticik, wasisok, nutsihpiluwewicik, naka nutokehkitomuhtit woli pomawsuwakon eli koti metkomikek.

‘Tiyawal eli koti piluwawsultihtit , qeni kikuht Kci Kikuwosson. Kiluwaw oc kwicuhketomuniya piley pomawsuwakon peciyewik. Ktuwehkaniya ktopisunuwa, eci kciposultiyeq. Ktoliwiyukepac Nuhkomossok naka Nmuhsuksok tan ci wikutomuhtit nutalsuwikuwamol, Kci wotomakonok naka kiluwahtutit ‘pisunuwa. Nit oc tan ci apatawsultiyeq, wasisok oc kosiciyukuwa eli kciposultiyeq. ‘Kiluwuhukuwahc naka ‘kotuwapemkuniya ‘ciw kinitahasuwakon, kinsonuwakon naka latuwewakon.

Aki, minuawawsultuwok Ponaqsqinuwok, kmikuluwemkun weci wolankeyutomeq psiw eyik Kci Kikuwossonuk. Wicuhketomone weci skicinuwatuwakon namkomiyewik ‘ciw weckuwapasihtit.

Psiw Ntulnapemok
Opolahsomuwehs’10

In the world before this one, the two-leggeds broke the Circle of Harmony. They abused their sacred gifts of fire, air, water and earth. The Clan Mothers who were responsible for all life gathered around their council fire. They decided by consensus to take all the gifts away from the human family in order to mend the Circle of Harmony. The Clan Mothers gathered all the Medicine People within the Circle of Hope to prepare them for the next world (this world). The Medicine People were healers of mind, body and spirit, Elders, teachers, children and all those who embraced the teachings within the Circle of Harmony.

All the “Medicine People” were spared from the destruction of the world and were transformed into Stone People. The Clan Mothers promised the Stone People that they would become healers and carriers of good medicine for the next world (this world). Today, the Stone People are used in our Sweat Lodges. We call them, respectfully, Grandfathers and Grandmothers. The Stone people are also present in our Sacred Pipes. Our children recognize the Stone People when they choose one of many as the “special” one to carry with them for guidance and strength.

As you see, the Stone People are ever present in this world to remind us of our obligations to the Circle of Harmony. Today, the Stone People our ancestors gifted to us help us to carry forward our treasure (our languages) for the ones who are not yet born.

Psiw Ntulnapemok!

Opolahsomuwehs ‘10
Moon of the Whirling Wind

Vision Quests

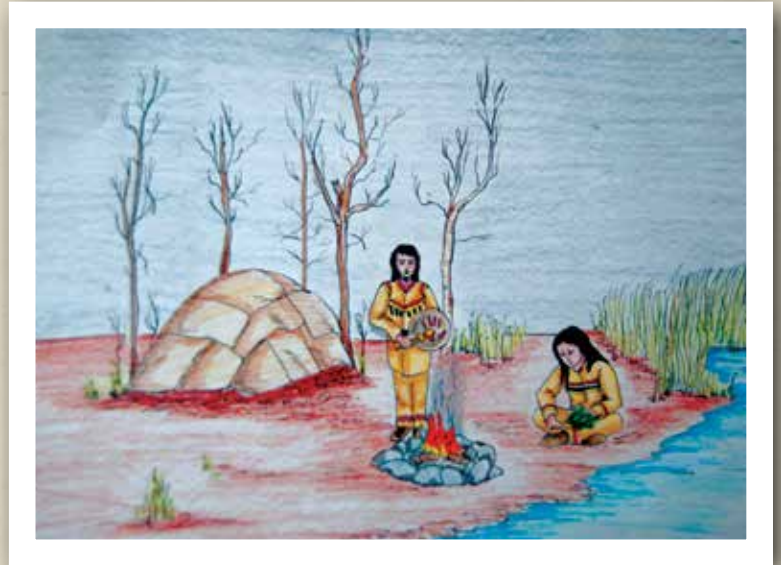
As told by Elder Imelda Perley

There are many styles of vision quests. A vision quest refers to an individual seeking wisdom through sacrifice. I will speak on my experiences of fasting. The solstice fast was revived by Elder Gwen Bear with the guidance of ancestors and Elders. It began as a four year commitment, meaning we fasted one day the first year, two days the next year, three days the third year and four days the fourth year. Once our four years were complete we repeated it again to gain more knowledge from the shared experiences. Sacred Pipes were gifted for fasting from traditional pipestone pipe-makers, therefore we had to do another four years to earn our pipes. Elder Gwen Bear also re-introduced the Puberty fast for women and eventually after 6 years offered the sacred ceremony to me to maintain and preserve. Today the ceremony is ongoing and is training future keepers of the ceremony both male and females. Traditionally, these puberty ceremonies were designed to assist our youth in the rite of passage to becoming a responsible and productive member of his/her community and ultimately his/her nation as a global citizen. Fasting is to sacrifice one's physical wants and needs such as food, water and comforts of home in order to nourish one's spirit with prayers, songs, solitude and stamina. Another form of fasting is the Sundance, and requires three four day fasts per year for a minimum of four years and longer for those who want to pursue becoming Sundance Leaders. All vision quests require a preparation period complete with ceremony to prepare one's mind, body and spirit for healing. Our Elders teach us that there is a sacred doorway between this world and the spirit world and fasting is one way to seek the sacred knowledge between the two worlds.

Sweat lodge

As told by Elder Imelda Perley

The Sweatlodge is considered the womb of our earth mother. It is shaped similar to our own mother's womb. During our physical development within our mother's womb, the first sound we hear is the heartbeat of our mother and the echo of our grandmothers before us. In our mother's womb, we are free from worries, resentments, anger, and pain; therefore when we enter a sweat lodge, we are given the opportunity to release these human emotions and trust that our earth mother will take them from us. When we exit the sweat lodge, we are re-born without these negative emotions as long as we trust our earth mother. There are usually four rounds to remind us of the four phases of life, birth, youth, adult and elder as well as four winds, four elements, four medicines and four ways of understanding natural law. Each round is guided by the lodge keeper and is dedicated to healing human pain, human weaknesses, human fears and all of creation. Purification of mind, body and spirit is essential to well-being and is therefore honoured within the sweat lodge ceremony. Stones are heated outside of the lodge in ceremony, varying in number from 13-60+ depending on the lodge keeper and the purpose of the lodge. These stones are referred to as grandfathers and sometimes grandmothers. In some lodges, the stones are grandfathers and the water poured over the stones as grandmother medicine. When the steam rises in the lodge to generate heat, our bodies are being purified as they excrete toxins through our sweat glands. This purification rite is sacred and provides the human family with a healing ceremony for all stages of life.



Artwork by Patricia Bernard



Artwork by: Sarah Solomon

Kuskiyahsonuk: West Physical/Medicine/Economical

The Stories of this direction are specific to honoring our physical gifts; in particular our bodies. Since this direction symbolizes the season of Autumn, it also reflects our physical growth as an adult. Sharing is a sacred gift and traditionally in this season, hunting, harvesting and food preparation was a communal activity. The teacher element is air and we must honor ancestral breath by giving more praise to each other as opposed to complaining to each other. We must be conscious of the circle of life when we ask the spirits of our four-legged family and the plant families to feed, clothe and heal us. Gratitude is vital to our survival and co-existence within creation.

Prayer by the water

As told by Elder Jean Crane



Elder Jean Crane standing in the waters surrounding Prince Edward Island.

When you have dark days, go down to the water
Walk where the ancestors trod
Be still and listen
You may hear whispers on the wind
You are not alone
They will show you the way
Touch the water and give them thanks

Canoe

As told by Elder Jean Crane



This is a photo of “The Tommy Jean”. It was the last canoe built by Elder Jean’s cousin, Joe Goudie. Jean’s friend, Gwen, learned to paddle a canoe to overcome her fear of drowning while on retreat paddling with Jean, and had this canoe built for herself shortly thereafter.

Waltles

As told by Elder Loretta Perley

Waltles is one of the ancient Micmac games that has survived to the present. The Waltles games used to be played mostly just before Shroud Thursday. Many of the Micmac games were discouraged by the Missionaries because they were believed superstitious or unchristian.

The Waltles bowl used in the game is believed to have special powers. It is said if you leave the bowl overnight it will tell about the past, present, and the future.

Part of the Game:

The game consist of four notched sticks. One old man and three old women sticks, and fifty-one playing sticks. These are considered the children of the old man and his wives.

Six dice. The dice are marked on the one side with a flower made by the imprint of the thumb. In ancient times, when a stranger came to the house, the children came out first, the wives next and the head of the house last.

The game can be played by two or four players. Two players play at a time. The players sit face to face with the bowl and the dice between them. The object of the game is to get points. To get points the dice have to be turned the same way for what is "Qamuey" or one dice different for a single point which consist of three sticks. The game is played until all the sticks have been divided and the Old Man and Old Woman have also been won. This brings you to the second half of the game, and how this second half is played depends on the outcome of the first. As the game is in progress the right hand is swung over the dice as if trying to catch a fly.

I've played the game of waltles only once and I enjoyed it immensely. I was told that I shouldn't show anger when the dice fell the wrong way or I would have no luck. Also I was told that when you pass your hand over the dice and talk nice to them, they could fall the right way for you. This one old lady enjoyed watching me play so much, she made me a little basket (shown here) which I keep to this day. Her name was Maggie Paul from Eskasoni, N.S. I played the game with my Aunt Mary and Uncle Archie Barlow.



Photo Source: www.mikmaqmama.com



Photo by Brandon Mitchell

Innu Gatherings

As told by Elder Manishan Nui



Photo submitted by Elder Manishan Nui

This is how my people dressed in my community back years ago. Now, going back just a few years, whenever we had a gathering in our community, we still dressed like this. We would dress like this when we wanted to show our culture at meetings or when we'd meet new people who didn't know our culture or how we lived in our community. Our culture is very important for our community and our people.

We still respect our traditions and dress like our ancestors, both man and woman. You can see in the picture how boys and girls dress.

Greetings

Mi'kmaq (As told by Elder Vince Barlow)

When someone comes to your home, you always greet them with “Epjilasié”. It is customary to offer a cup of tea. When they would leave, we always say “Upnumulettess”, meaning “I’ll see you again”. Reason being, we do not have a word for good bye in our language.

Wolastoqey (As told by Elder Imelda Perley)

In our Wolastoqey (Maliseet) language, our greeting is “Tan Kahk olu Kil?”, meaning “How is your spirit today?” We usually respond “Mec ote Pesqon, Woliwon” translates to “I am one with Creation or I am in good spirits, thank you”. This response refers to our Sunrise Ceremony that gives gratitude for our mind, body and spirit well being. Today, we tend to lean towards a European greeting of “good morning” which greets the time of day instead of greeting each others spirits. There is no word for goodbye, instead we say to each other “apc oc knomiyul” meaning “I will see you again.”

Innu Greeting (As told by Elder Manishan Nui)

Innu people do not say hello. We say “How are you?” The word for this greeting is “Taetin”. When we part, we say good-bye with the word “Iamen”. We thank each other using the word “Tshimaskumatin”.

Inuit Greeting (As told by Elder Jean Crane)

We greet each other with “Salutitsinik”. Good bye to one person, we use “Tavvauvutit”, and for more than one person we would use “Tavvauvusi”. The word for thank you is “Nakummek”.

The Inuit and Innu languages are the ancient languages spoken in Labrador. Both languages are still spoken. In some places, the languages remain the first language of Labrador Aboriginal communities while other communities work towards maintaining and increasing the use of the ancient languages.



Artwork by: Sarah Solomon

Lahtoqehsonuk: North Mental/Political/Customs

The Stories of this direction celebrates the wisdom of our Elders. The season is Winter and the element teacher is fire. Council fires were lit to address political and communal concerns. In order to maintain harmony within the groups, consensus was sought for all communal decisions. The Wisdom Keepers maintained traditional values and ensured that sacred ways of life were passed on to each generation. Oral traditions are one way of preserving our languages and our worldviews. Today our Elders still share their stories for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Walkers

As told by Elder Jean Crane



Photo submitted by Elder Jean Crane

Elder Elizabeth Penasui, from Sheshashiu, in the red skirt, is well known for her walking and paddling.

Elder Jean Crane, from Sheshashiu and Happy Valley - Goose Bay, in the blue skirt, still walks with snow shoes at 87.

This was the day these two Elders, among many, received the Queen's Medal. Jean's daughter saw them talking to each other and took this picture.

Creation of Lennox Island Reserve

As told by Elder Doreen Jenkins

In 1764-1766, Capt Samuel Holland was tasked with surveying Prince Edward Island. He divided the land in 67 lots, but some of the islands off the coast of PEI including Lennox Island, were not attached to the lots. Also, the Acadians and Mi'kmaq living on PEI were not consulted. In 1772, Lennox Island was attached to Lot 12 and given to James Montgomery, who allowed the Mi'kmaq to live there.

By 1800, it was realized there was no land left for the Mi'kmaq to continue their traditional way of life. The year 1808 brought about a petition from the 'Indians, inhabitants of Lennox Island' to the PEI government requesting from them to purchase of Lennox Island from them. Thirty years would pass, and then a petition was sent from Chief Thomas Labone of the Micmac Tribe of Indians with the French to the Queen and the PEI Legislature, not so subtly reminding them of their former, and better, association with the French. This spurred a flurry of activity in the 1840's, as several areas of land were suggested and discarded. David Steward, owner of Lennox Island, was approached to sell the island to the PEI government for the Mi'kmaq, but he asked for far too much money for the small area of land.

In the 1800's, Indian Commissioner Theophilus Stewart urged the PEI government for more land, a place for "Indians who have no land to call their own", but received only negative replies. In desperation, Stewart approached the Aborigines Protection Society in London, England to purchase Lennox Island for the Mi'kmaq. Stuck with the idea, the Society immediately began a subscription to raise money to purchase the island. It was eventually purchased in 1870 for £400 and was held by the Society for the 'use of the Aboriginal Population of Prince Edward Island'. The title to the land was to be held by a board of trustees, one of whom was PEI Indian Commissioner, Theophilus Stewart.

In 1873, PEI joined Confederation, and responsibility for the Mi'kmaq of PEI was transferred to Ottawa. Stewart was appointed Visiting Superintendent in charge of the Mi'kmaq of PEI for the Federal government. Lennox Island also gained the title of "Special Reserve" and fell under the direction of Ottawa, as well.

By 1912, the trustees for Lennox Island had either died or were very elderly. The land reverted to the Crown (King George V) and became known as an "Ordinary Reserve". This designation was made official by an Order-in-Council in October 6, 1970.

Today, Lennox Island First Nation (LISN) is located on Lennox Island on the north shore of Prince Edward Island, in the Malpeque Bay area, approximately 50km northwest of Summerside. The Mi'kmaq have had a permanent settlement on Lennox Island since at least the early 19th century. The community covers 1,328 acres and has a mix of residential, public and commercial buildings including an Administration Building, a Health Centre, a Fire Hall, a Community Access Program (CAP) Site Building, a John J. Sark Memorial School for grades one to six, a Day Care Centre, Saint Anne's Church, a Culture Centre, and an Ecotourism Centre (encompassing a full service restaurant and a 6.7 km hiking trail). According to the 2006 Census, the population of Lennox Island is 2,522.

Lennox Island Reserve Split

As told by Elder Doreen Jenkins

In 1972, with a growing population, the Lennox Island Reserve split. Abegweit First Nation was formed consisting of three small reserves: Rocky Point, Scotchford and Morell-Rear. Half of our family went with Abegweit and half stayed with Lennox Island. My parents, my sister and brother, and I chose to live in Rocky Point.

Rocky Point was used as a fishing spot when our people migrated around the Island.



*A Mi'kmaq family at Rocky Point making baskets.
Photo of the PEI Public Archives and Records office(PEIPAR).
Access No. 34466/HF72.66.1.18.1.2*

Indian Island

As told by Elder Vince Barlow

To me, being a Micmac Indian has been and is a very fulfilling way of life. I've lived my life as such, speaking Indian and also speaking English. I've never encountered direct racism towards me and have been accepted for who I am. I think the reason is because I accept people as they are, no matter what walk of life they come from. I've travelled and met people from many walks of life. I treated them as I wanted to be treated. I'm sure people had their own ideas about me but once they got to know me, I always felt treated equally well.

When I was growing up, we lived in Big Cove. My Father, Louis Barlow, was from Indian Island. I remember we used to visit Indian Island. My cousins, Archie and Wilson Barlow, along with my brothers, Lawrence and Tom used to go digging clams. At night, they used to go spearing eels. They also did day fishing. This was done mainly in the summer months. At that time, cranberries, blueberries and all kinds of medicine was very plentiful. After travelling for many years, in 1967, I relocated and I now reside in Indian Island.

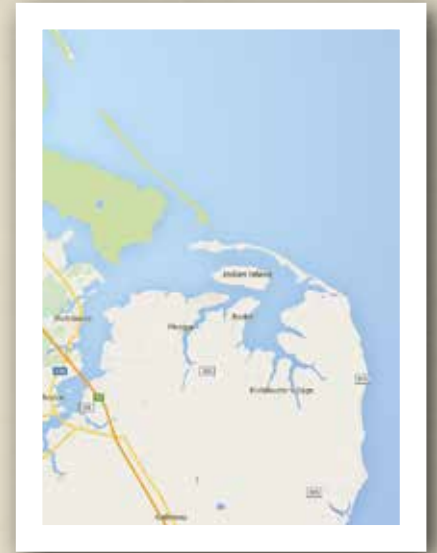


Photo by Elder Vince Barlow

Ceremonial Practices

As told by Imelda Perley

Kci Wotomakon/ Sacred Pipe

The Sacred Pipe teaches us about the balance of physical and spiritual energy. The Stem of the pipe is considered the male essence and the bowl represents the female essence. Some Elders teach that the piece that joins them together is the child. Before the Pipe is put together, a ceremony is done to cleanse and bless the carrier and the participants. As the Pipe is being prepared, each piece is directed to the seven directions to honour the cardinal directions, above, below and within. Then it is put together and again the seven directions are honoured. Although the pipe is filled with medicine, prayers are also included for each pinch of medicine. Even though some pipes may be used for personal use, the Sacred Pipe is earned through fasting and sacrifice.

The Pipe Carrier commits to walk a sacred path void of alcohol, recreation drugs, gossip, and chooses to pray for all people while remaining humble.



Photo by Elder Imelda Perley

Sacred Bundle

In 1997, I was given the opportunity to travel to Aoteora, Land of the Long White Cloud (NZ) for a language revival journey. While there many ceremonies were being shared, and there were language warriors from all across Canada. On the last day of our trip a Potlatch ceremony was being conducted in my honour by the Bella Bella Elders. I was in shock as I accepted the sacred bundle from the Elders. The sacred bundle contained a ceremonial blanket to be used in healing ceremonies, a large Eagle feather symbolizing a gift from the sacred element air, a large seashell to honour my gift from the sea and, nestled within the seashell, was a medicine pouch to remind me of the sacredness of our Earth mother's gifts. The generous Elders instructed me to pray for their people and all people between the East and West Coast. It has been 19 years since I accepted the bundle. I am honoured and blessed to continue the sacred path the medicine bundle has shown me and look forward to choosing the one who will accept the responsibility of carrying the Medicine Bundle for all our people. There are many gifted ones who carry these Sacred bundles for their people. They are our Medicine People, our Sweatlodge Keepers, our Sacred Pipe Carriers, our Sundancers, and our Language Warriors.



Photo by Elder Imelda Perley

The Spirit of Baskets

As told by Elder Imelda Perley

In our Wolastoqey Creation Story, we are taught that our people are spiritually connected to the Ash Tree. Therefore, our communal values are also weaved in the same way as our traditional baskets. An Elder in Houlton, Maine, at a Sunrise Ceremony, shared with me the teaching of our worldview from the creation of a basket. He held a basket as he began his teaching. Turning the basket upside down, he began to describe the first piece used to form a basket representing the Leader of a community. The leader must be humble enough to know that one person cannot be responsible for an entire community; therefore humility must guide the leader to invite other community members to assist in shaping a well rounded community, complete with shared vision for the well being of the entire

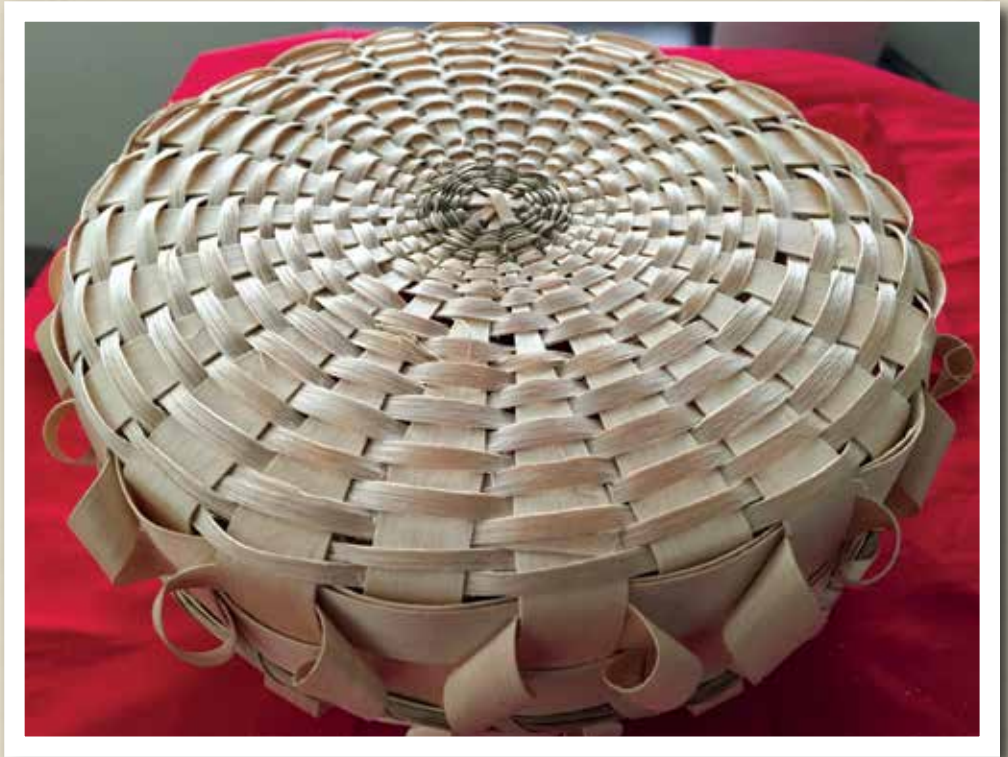
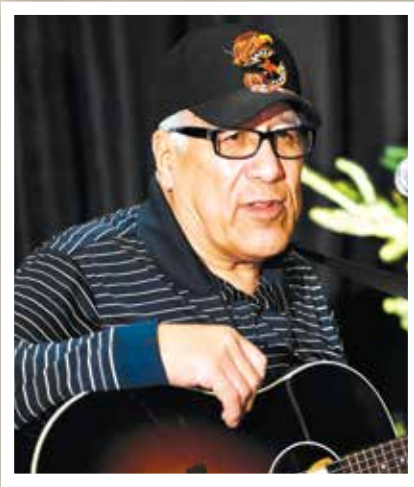


Photo by Wanda Ralph

community. The next piece forms a cross that embraces the four directions, the four sacred elements important to our survival, the four gifts of seasons that teach us about our own stages of life from birth, youth, adult and Elder. The next pieces are added to the bottom of the basket to form a foundation for the basket as well as our communal governance. These pieces may be interpreted as the Elders, Clan Mothers and/or leadership Council. He pointed out that all the pieces are facing Earth Mother to remind us of our past and our connection to Earth Mother. Once the foundation (leader and councillors) are formed, the basket is placed upright to face the future, the basket is then in need of the weavers, interpreted as the community members who contribute a shared vision that will benefit all community members. As the basket is weaved with all the vision of the weavers, the main part of the basket is weaved. However, the basket is not complete until a handle or cover is made to represent the spiritual aspect of our community and its members and our connection to Earth Mother and the Sacred Ash Tree. The Elder noted that without our individual and communal spirituality, the leader, councillors, and the weavers will remain empty of spirit and will never be satisfied and will sway from our ancestral thirst for Traditional Knowledge. Hence, our baskets must be honoured again to teach us about our interdependence with Earth Mother and all of creation.

In his conclusion, he pointed out that today, with the absence of sacredness among our leaders, councillors and community members, our baskets will remain void of Traditional Knowledge. He added that some of today's leaders do not want to be at the bottom of the basket, instead they want to lead without the guidance of their councillors and community members. He gifted me with a basket and asked me to fill the basket with more knowledge embedded within our language, our stories, our songs, our ceremonies and our spiritual beliefs.

Biographies



Elder Vince Barlow

I was born in USA to Canadian parents. I started singing and playing music at an early age. At age 17, I started singing and performing professionally which spans into many years to date. I've been honored in Canada and U.S. for my years of music and respected by my peers in both countries. Although being an Indian entertainer has its drawbacks in Canada, in the United States it is an asset. I still perform professionally and still enjoy it. Music has been good to me.



Elder Shirley Clarke

Shirley Clarke (Peters), Elder for Glooscap First Nation and Mi'kmaq community was born in 1952 on the Bear River Reserve to the former Chief Joseph Peters and wife, Doris Peters (Brooks). She was the granddaughter of the former Chief of Bear River, Louis Peters and wife, Charlotte McCumber. Her ancestors were professional hunters, guides, canoeists and basket makers. She was born into a family of sixteen, and in 1971 married Peter Clarke and together raised two daughters, Twila and Monica. Shirley is now the proud grandmother of three grandchildren, Clay, Waverly and Isaiah. She was originally elected in as a Band Councilor for three years with Horton and in total served 22 years as Chief of Glooscap First Nation, retiring in 2012.



Elder Jean Crane

My parents were Gilbert and Annie Blake. We lived at Sheshashiu, south side of North West River, Labrador. I was born on March 12, 1929 as a Blake. I married John W. Crane of PEI. We had 7 children, 15 grandchildren, and 19 great grandchildren. We went to Yale School, the Grenfell Mission Boarding School. I am number 12 of 13 children, the only one to go through high school. The others got about grade 6 and then went trapping or working. I paint mostly oil on canvas, knit, hook mats, play the drum, camp at the cabin and in tent. I learned earth medicine from my mother.



Elder Doreen Jenkins

I was born at Lennox Island, PEI. I was raised in the United States for 7 years until 1975 when I moved back to Canada. I have always had a passion for helping people and I enjoy spending quality time with my family. Being a barber is my passion and is a part of my life today. I enjoy volunteering and fundraising for various organizations and doing my part in order to support the greater good. With all the trials and tribulations in my life, I am thankful it has shaped me to be the strong Mi'kmaq woman I have become. I am blessed to have a loving and supportive husband and family.



Elder Imelda Perley

My traditional Wolastoqey name is Opolahsomuwehs meaning "Moon of the Whirling Wind" given to me by my maternal grandmother. My Spirit Names are Monqon Aluhk (Rainbow Cloud) gifted to me by Elders Gwen Bear and Elder Charles Solomon and Uhkomi Komiwon gifted to me by Cree Grandmothers and Elder Gwen Bear. My English name is Imelda. My greatest accomplishment are my three sons, P.J., Matuwehs, and Atole. Their greatest gift to me are my five grandchildren, Mosqon, Stephanie, Wocawson, Toqaqi Spasuwolan and Orion. Presently, I am gifted with the role of Elder-In-Residence for the University of New Brunswick. As a descendant of Wolastoqiyik, it is my life's role to honour and carry the treasure of my ancestors and those yet to be born, my beautiful language! Cultural knowledge is embedded within my language therefore guiding me to share many ceremonies and provide culturally relevant workshops to interested organizations.



Elder Loretta Perley

I was born in a little hospital in Rexton, NB about seven miles from Indian Island. My parents were Chief Peter J. Barlow and Laura Barlow (Paul). My father was a WWII veteran and my mother was originally from Red Bank, NB, but she was brought up in Burnt Church, NB. I have an older brother and sister and a younger brother and sister.

I've worked many jobs over the years, from clam digging and blueberry picking as a youth to many office jobs. I've worked a summer job with Health Canada, and as a youth worker for UNBI. I taught beading and leatherwork at Mah-sos School. I worked as a bookkeeper for Manpower Projects, and I've worked for Medical Transportation. I was a Board Member for the NB Native Women's Council during the Constitutional talks and traveled a lot for that. I took a business course and received a grant to open my own business for a time. For the last twenty-four years, I've worked for the Tobique Rehab, Tobique Addictions and the Wolastaqewiyik Healing lodge. I am a certified Addictions Counselor, level two. Presently, I am retired and looking forward to life with no restrictions. I am married to Larry Perley, a Maliseet of New Brunswick. I have three sons, three grandsons, and three granddaughters. I lost two grandsons and I keep them in my heart. I am a survivor of ovarian cancer and consider every day a gift.



Elder Manishan Nui

My name is Manishan (Mary Jane) Nui. I'm originally from Old Davis Inlet, Labrador. I was born in the country. I was raised in the country too. My parents are Nuk and Munik Nui. We moved to Sheshatshiu in 1958 and I have lived here ever since. I also started my education here, working as a nurse's aid with the International Grenfell Association from 1969 up until I went to St. John's for more nursing training in 1974. After I came back to my community, I worked at the hospital for many years. Then, I worked with Social Services as a community worker for 13 years. I'm also an elected politician since 1989. Still today, I'm also with Sheshatshiu First Nation as a band council member. This will be my ninth year.

I'm mother of 4 boys, grandmother of 5, and great grandmother of 2, all of whom are a big part of my life. I have three brothers and three sisters. I'm the youngest one in the family.



