

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE – THE ELDERS SPEAK**

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### **Abstract / Résumé**

This article presents the words of First Nations Elders as they look back over their lifetimes at the changes that have taken place in the environment. These interviews were conducted by Brian Scribe for the SCAPE Project – a Study of Cultural Adaptations in the Canadian Prairie Ecozone (Nicholson and Wiseman 2006:231-232). A brief introduction to the question of environmental change is presented from the recent literature. This is followed by the actual statements of twelve Elders from Dakota, Assiniboin, Anishanabe and Arikara communities in the northeastern prairie region. A short section, composed of concluding remarks by the authors, is then presented.

L'article présente les paroles d'aînés des Premières nations qui examinent les modifications subies par l'environnement au cours de leur vie. Des entrevues ont été menées par Brian Scribe pour le projet SCAPE (« A Study of Cultural Adaptations in the Canadian Prairie Ecozone », Nicholson et Wiseman, 2006, p. 231-232). L'auteur offre une brève introduction à la question de la modification de l'environnement en résumant la documentation récente. Suivent les déclarations de douze aînés de diverses collectivités (Dakota, Assiniboin, Anishanabe et Arikira) du nord-est de la région des Prairies. Une courte section présente ensuite des observations finales.

Concern for a human-induced deterioration of the natural environment has been voiced for some time (Hickey 1961). The first comprehensive and widely read account of lethal environmental contamination was clearly *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962). In this volume, Carson presents a well thought out call for a reevaluation of the practices of using the environment as a dumping ground for a wide range of dangerous chemicals coupled with the ill considered, widespread use of toxic pesticides and herbicides. She states,

For the first time in the history of the world, every human being is now subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals, from the moment of conception until death. In the less than two decades of their use, the synthetic pesticides have been so thoroughly distributed throughout the animate and inanimate world that they occur virtually everywhere. They have been recovered from most of the major river systems and even from streams of groundwater flowing unseen through the earth. Residues of these chemicals linger in soil to which they may have been applied a dozen years before. They have entered and lodged in the bodies of fish, birds, reptiles and domesticated and wild animals so universally that scientists carrying on animal experiments find it almost impossible to locate subjects free from such contamination. They have been found in fish in remote mountain lakes, in earthworms burrowing in soil, in the eggs of birds and man himself. (Carson 1962:15-16)

In this book Carson (1962) presents the results of hundreds of studies that detail the devastation of plant and animal populations around the world. She also details the death and debilitation of human subjects as a result of this universal spread of toxic materials throughout the environment. Consequently, she advocated radically diminished use of chemical agents to control pests and a corresponding increase in biological agencies for any such control.

As might be expected, the chemical industry attempted initially to suppress the book and to this day continues to attack her science. This is, however, balanced by strong support from many research ecologists and some politicians, including former US Vice-President Al Gore who recently won the Noble Peace Prize for his support for action to halt global warming.

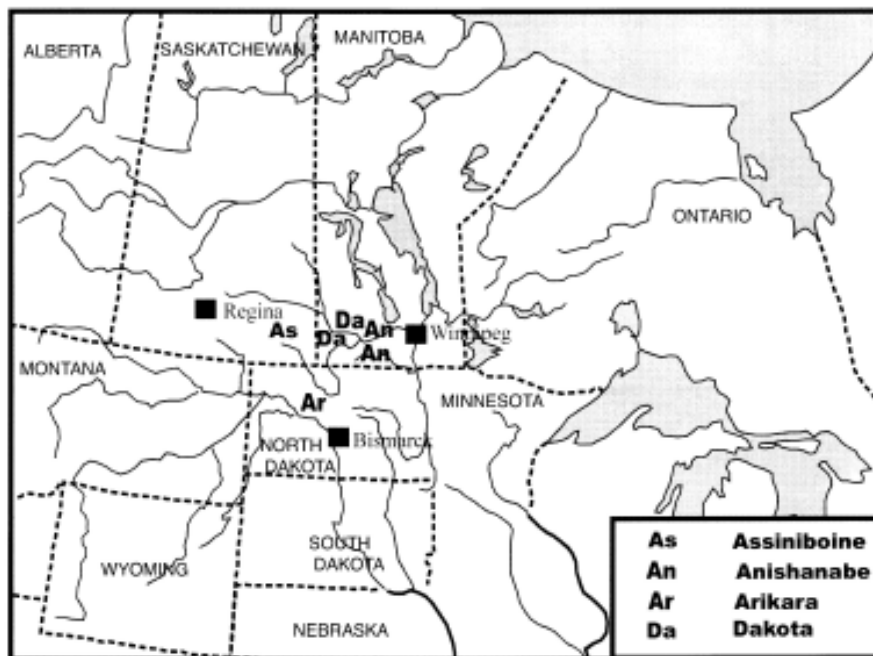
More recently, environmental concerns have focused on climate change. Predictably industry has attempted to divert efforts at pollution control by arguing that such control would result in higher production costs and a consequent loss of markets and jobs. However, the mount-

ing evidence of global warming has resulted in a widespread public demand for governments to initiate legislation that requires industry to take steps to reduce emissions of green house gases. It appears that in 2007 governments around the world are responding, however reluctantly, to these concerns.

**Elders and the Environment**

Following upon this brief historical introduction to the growth of a worldwide popular environmental movement, the article progresses to present the longstanding concerns of Aboriginal Elders in the north-eastern plains of Canada. The substance of this article is based upon interviews with Aboriginal Elders from several First Nations groups in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and North Dakota (Figure 1). As noted above, Brian Scribe conducted these Elder interviews for the SCAPE Project (Nicholson and Wiseman 2006). For this article those sections, which were believed to be particularly relevant to this discussion of environmental deterioration, were extracted from the individual Elder accounts. Similarly, it is our belief that there has been a demonstrable and cumulative deterioration of the natural environment over the past century or

**Figure 1**  
**The Elders Home Reserves**



more. Following upon this introductory section, we present the words of the Elders whose life experience has led them to share this concern.

The majority of the Elders that have been cited in this paper were born in the 1920s and 1930s and, within their lifetimes, have witnessed the degradation of the land, water, plants, and animals. It is their belief that this degradation has resulted from industrialization and its associated pollutants, as well as the rise of industrialized farming. On the positive side, and in support of their observations, they have also been the recipients of traditional knowledge passed down from their parents and grandparents. The knowledge that has been shared with us is the knowledge of people living on the land, harvesting its resources in a responsible way, and watching in sorrow as the sacred circle of life that they and their ancestors were a part of, is carelessly destroyed in the name of a foreign concept of progress. They have also watched as their children are taught to follow this new and destructive way and to abandon the precepts and knowledge that is their cultural heritage.

Many of the Elders began their responses with an unambiguous declaration of their conviction that an understanding of the true nature of human-environmental interaction, and of a personal and collective responsibility for the environment, cannot be achieved apart from a clearly understood relationship between the Creator and all of his creation. It has been asserted that all living things are sacred. The recognition by the people, of this gift of sustenance by the Creator, and their need to show respect, is fulfilled through ceremonies that are appropriate to every situation and that follow traditions that have been in place from time immemorial.

In addition to the traditional knowledge that has been handed down through the generations, these Elders have, in their lifetime, observed many changes including a demonstrable deterioration in the land, the plants and the animals around them. These changes include pollution of rivers and streams and a reduction in the numbers and in the health of aquatic plants and animals. This pollution extends into the ground water, and consequently wells have also become unfit to use. Certain important medicinal plants have become scarce or locally extinct and those that remain have lost much of their healing power. Some Elders have noted that traditional foods, particularly animals, are no longer safe to eat because of the chemicals and other pollutants that they have ingested. Certain species—particularly birds—have become scarce, and predators or people cannot even eat gophers, because they have been poisoned. Mutations in some species, such as frogs, have been observed and correctly attributed to toxic pollutants in the water.

The linkage between the Creator and the sacredness of his creation

calls forth a duty to prayer and ceremony. These sacred responsibilities are appropriate to all occasions where harvest takes place, whether for food, healing plants or materials harvested for shelters. They are also intended to convey respect for the land, the plants, and the animals, that support the people and permit their continued existence. Respect also includes cleaning up one's garbage around a camp or dwelling. It means that a person only harvests what is needed and nothing is killed needlessly or left to rot or be otherwise wasted. The gifts of the creator must be respected and thanks properly given through ceremonial and prayer. There is also, in many cases, a responsibility to maintain a trans-generational bond between the people and the landscape. Oetelaar and Oetelaar note that,

The landscape of the Blackfoot is a series of named locales linked by paths, movements and narratives. The places are often outstanding natural features, river crossings, or resource patches perceived as focal points of spiritual energy. Myths and oral traditions explain how these landmarks were created.... This landscape is also created by people through their experience and engagement with the world around them.... From this perspective then, the landscape is not only the natural and cultural features of a region but also the names, oral traditions, and ceremonies which establish the continuity between ancestral beings, social groups and the land (Oetelaar and Oetelaar 2006).

In marked contrast to the traditional perspective of First Nations people, the Elders see European values as being motivated by indifference to the natural order of the land and to the plants and animals as acts of the Creator. European values are epitomized by a focus on monetary issues and an inherent greed for personal wealth. This lack of respect for the environment, as the handiwork of the Creator, leads to a casual destruction of this environment in the pursuit of ever increasing personal wealth. Industrial processes, including industrialized agriculture, destroys the land, water, plants, and animals, primarily through the use of chemicals, in the pursuit of ever greater personal wealth. It was noted as well, that compensation payments from government and industry encourage the purchase and consumption by Aboriginal people of unhealthy, chemical rich and fat-laden processed foods. This in turn leads to diseases such as diabetes and an unhealthy lifestyle overall.

As people, particularly the young, reject or drift away from traditional values, the healthy respect for the land, water, plants and animals is lost. As the values of the larger society become internalized by First Nations people, a culture of waste and greed becomes the norm in many

cases. In the following section we present transcriptions of relevant portions of the Elder interviews.

## **The Elders Speak**

### **Mike Hotain – Sioux Valley, MB**

Spirituality of our Indian Nation is based on the land, the universe and all the things that are a gift of life on Mother Earth. Medicines, animals, trees, rivers, waters, that's the spirituality of life. It cannot be changed. It can not be changed because God gave that to our Indian Nation, its to all life itself, because we can not survive without water or air. I often heard them say then, when time goes on, the grandchildren are not going to be able to drink this water. In those times I use to wonder because we use to get blocks of ice from the river. The river use to be nice and blue and you could actually see the bottom of the river and the fish going underneath. Down on the Assiniboine River, and then afterwards it started to change more and more, it started to become greener and to become a brown, greenish, grayish in color and eventually you couldn't touch that water anymore. That's what they meant they knew that ahead of time, twenty to forty years ahead they knew that was coming up.

They often said that the medicines of mother earth are going to starting to weakening (sic). They often said that too. There is going to certain places that are useable and other places where they would not be usable because of the land itself is going to be poisoned. That was said by the old people and I was a young boy when they said that. As time went on, sure enough, the farmers, people they were trying to be materialistic in an aggressive way. They were spraying the land without working it and destroying a lot of medicines of Mother Earth, the waters, animals. It started to go up in the air as well. What we breathe and all that.

I seen a lot of changes in my time, today now the environment, I guess when we say environment, we mean weather and all that. How it works, it all is totally different now, like the rains this year; everything is totally a month behind. Some parts where it is supposed to be spring is still winter and all that, its just catching up and yet we are spring already (sic). Those kind of things are happening. The rain is totally different as well too. The thunders are coming and they are totally different again. Because in the past, there were times when the weather, that's going back about thirty-five years. There was (sic) different kinds of winters in those days. Those winters were able to give you a message that you had to be strong and be ready for this particular winter that was coming. The winter was a teacher within itself and it gave you the ability to teach

themselves as to what to do and all that. Now it's unexpected and you figure it's going to be spring in March and it wouldn't be. It will end up being too late or too early (sic). Some cases it's too early, the environment has totally changed.

The universe is in turmoil and somehow it is becoming something that is swirling around and making change. I feel if we don't aggressively look at our inner feeling, and a pure inner faith awe, are going to be at loss at some of things that we should be aware of. For example why is the weather changing so much, what's causing that. Just by talking about those the old people said that *Tokadakia* in the future the weather is going to change because the thunders are hearing something else. So, when I think of that, what is the thunder hearing? What is the West, the west is always the thunder beings and the buffaloes, they are hearing something different. So, what is it they are hearing that's causing this change to happen?

**Morris Daniels – Long Plain MB**

*BRIAN: What are the peoples perception of the environment and the land long ago as compared to today?*

*MORRIS:* The people respected the land at one time and they didn't dirty the land. When they camped some place, they cleaned up and left the camp as it was and moved on to the other camp. You see, it is because of time again what has happened. It was easier to do that; you had to move with the season at one time. When hunting for bison, you had to move to this area. When the berry-picking season was on, you had to move to this other area or the fishing season. You moved with those seasons. Today we can't do that anymore. We are stuck on these Reserves. We are not nomadic like the way we were. That is one of the problems, but there is nothing from looking after the land we have right here on the Reserve (sic). There is nothing stopping us from cleaning up around the house, picking up the garbage. People don't do that. People have a house some place, they move out of that area, they demolish the house and they don't clean up that area after that.

We want to talk about looking after Mother Earth – lets look after Mother Earth. We don't do that today. We throw something out the car window and we don't give a damn, people don't care anymore. People have almost lost that bond with Mother Earth. It's there, but we have to revive that. We have to bring it back, we don't have that anymore.

I remember being told the Indian people had respect for Mother Earth and the animals. When they shot a deer, they would use all they could use and the rest of the bones were buried because of the respect they had. The same thing, the different things you do when you shot a deer,

you would cut the legs off and tie them as high up as you could in a tree. Then you put tobacco there. The same thing for the belly or tripe of the deer. Things that we do that a lot of people do not do anymore. There are certain things you do for different animals. The moose, you take the beard, you cut it off and make a hole in it and hang it in a tree in respect.

Fish, there is not too much fishing going on here now. The water is dirty, even way before the Maple Leaf plant, the water was dirty. When I was kid, we use to go swimming down here on the river. We use to go fishing and we would catch all kinds of fish here to eat. We would catch pickerel, catfish, gold eye, white bass, all kinds of fish. People today are afraid to eat the fish. Today the water is murky. We use to see almost see to the bottom of the river at one time. Now it is murky and unclean, there is too much poison in the water. People do not do any fishing anymore, people have to go up north to do that now.

My father use to tell that people had wells on the Reserve for drinking-water. You couldn't find water just anywhere, however, there were places you could. If there wasn't a place to put a well some people use to go right to the slough to get water from there to drink. That's how clean the water was. That was a time when there was mostly bush on the Reserve. I remember here when this was all bush, there was the odd little field. So, now we have all these crops all over the place and farmers use these pesticides. The biggest drug addicts in the world are the farmers. They are into all these pesticides like round up, you name it, the whole works. In the mean time, all the bush is cleared off. Now we have these runways to drain water that go into the river. All that is polluting the river where as we did not have that before. It is a different story today within our Reserve and it is all done by, because the farmer wants to make as much money he can from that piece of land. He will have the best crop, but God knows.

That's another thing. People are afraid to hunt the deer because of that. Deer eat the crop, so there are people out there who are afraid to eat wild animals because of that. They are afraid because of the sprays so they would rather go and buy bologna at Safeway because of that. So, what is worse.

All the years I hunted I had only one deer that was bad. It was not because it ate anything like that, it was because it was snared. Somebody snared this small buck and it struggled and struggled. It had gotten free by the time I shot it. That was in Carberry. You know that the fat is supposed to be a nice cream color. Well this one, it's fat was all red. When I cut it up, and all that the meat was bad. I have never shot an elk that was bad. God knows, we have shot a lot of elk.

So, when the animals get sick out there, they die off. Nature is all



designed by God. It's the same thing with storms this year we had a lot of snow in this area. A way more than we had in previous years. A lot of deer are going to die off this year because of that. The whole thing is designed that way. You can't have too many deer or animals in an area they get sick. So these big storms that come in are to cleanse the herd, the weak die off and only the strong survive from there.

People also had to be strong to live in the olden days. My mother said that there was no doctors or modern medicine in her day. They had to cure themselves. They had their own medicines that healed sickness in them days. Now today the people are overwhelmed by sickness and the medicine can't keep up. Every day there is a new sickness and how can our people keep up. Medicines more powerful back then. I will give you an example, twenty years ago, if you got a cold the doctor would give you antibiotics. Today you go to a doctor with that same cold, the doctor does not want to give you antibiotics. He will give you cough medicine or something because you have become immured to that antibiotics. After a while it's no good for you. I think Indian medicine worked in the same way for you. You take a new medicine, something that is new and you did not have all these toxins in you, but something is making you sick and you took that Indian medicine, it would work more for you then it would work today. Today, you don't know what you are sick from today. There is so much sickness out that that we don't even know.

It's different today, we don't have the Indian medicines to fight the sicknesses. If we had the cure for diabetes, imagine what the government would do to the person who had that cure. They would ether kill that person who had that cure for those people or they would take them to court. They would literally take that medicine away from you. We also have our own people who are money minded and they would sell that medicine. I think that God does not want to give the people the medicine today because a lot of our Indian people are money minded today. The medicines are here, to cure the sicknesses. I think that is why God is holding this back from the Indian people. He holds back these things and does not want the people to do these things. There are too many money minded people. Not too many people talk about this, but there are medicine men who are there to make money. To many, it's a money game, it's not a cure and a lot of people get fooled by this. A lot of our people do not think for themselves today, we are part of the sheep and we go over the cliff. You have to think for yourself and if you are a follower, you are not thinking for yourself. You talk about the bible where it says there will be many false prophets. Well we have a lot of them today. You see that all over, it's a money making business today.

Aquatic plants, the one that comes to mind is *weekay*. That is used

if you have cold. You chew it and a mild stringent (sic) is what it is used for. It is a good medicine for that and it soothes your throat. You pick that up in the creeks or sloughs or what have you. People still use that here. It's well known all over.

In terms of land, the Shilo Ranges, boy, that's a beautiful area but the army has made a hell of a mess of that area. From Shilo to where there ranges are, it is roughly thirteen miles to south of Carberry there. They shoot into there and make a mess of the area. You get a tank that weighs thousands of pounds going into a delicate area. Yet that is where the Yellow Quill trail goes through that area south of Shilo. In fact there are signs out there telling you that it is the Yellow Quill Trail. It goes to prove that this area was our traditional hunting area. It is a beautiful land. Hopefully somebody, Long Plains or whomever, our people lay claim to that land and turn it into an environmental area or ecological site.

#### **John Taylor – Sioux Valley, MB**

*BRIAN: We have been talking about hunting and gathering medicine and foods, how do you see this relating to the land? Is there an interpretation to it?*

*JOHN: The way that I see today, is that years ago, the animals were clean and Mother Nature was clean. There was no bad stuff laying around, good air. Ever since insecticides came in, everything turned bad. Even the animals are dying, even the trees are dying. You can see that today. Where we live there is field on the north side of our house, the farmer there, he sprays in the spring and in the summer time we look at the trees, the leaves are all dead and they are all brown. Its killing mother nature. I think that's why today we don't seem to get that nourishment from the wild foods we eat. It also seems to go along with the food we eat today, that our animals are no good to eat anymore. Our animals drink a lot of that stuff that goes into Mother Earth, It comes out diseased, and it's not pure anymore. It's not like years ago, that's what I think about today. Nothing seems to work right anymore because of that. It would be nice to go back and see all these.*

*BRIAN: How about the birds?*

*JOHN: We get a lot of birds where I live, however, after the farmer sprays, the birds are all gone. You see dead birds in the bush, dead hawks, dead crows. They are not killed by anybody they are just killed by different insecticides that is used to spray the fields. Even small birds they die, they can't seem to breath that air. Our granddaughter finds dead birds on the trails behind our house. Our house also has an odor after the spraying and we have to wash all that. We are surrounded by agriculture.*

*BRIAN: With this we all talked about, how would you relate it to before the coming of the European?*

*JOHN:* I think back then families were much better off and when the European people came those were the ones that wrecked Mother Nature for us.

*BRIAN: What was the relationship to the environment, generations back, Even before your fathers time, the way the people lived a long time ago, can you make that connection?*

*JOHN:* I think myself, the old people years ago, our relatives, the way they lived, them days, is really different then the way we live today. Today we depend on the white people's food. And a lot of the young people today, if we didn't have that food we eat today, a lot of use wouldn't be here, put it that way. If the young people today don't know about the olden way about having to look for food and go hunting. The young people wouldn't survive today. I know of one area in the USA, Washington. The tribe over there, the Yakima tribe, today, I was really amazed when I went with my family how they live over there. The tribe celebrates spring, summer and winter. All the traditional foods that they use to eat years ago is all still on today.

I was invited to one of their traditional feasts and I could not believe what was on the table, all the traditional foods their ancestors ate, they were eating that day and it's still carried on today. And they respect the mountain where they get all that food from. That's one tribe over there, and if there was nothing left on this earth that they couldn't make anymore. If they couldn't make flour, canned meats, canned milk, you name it processed food, however, that tribe over there will survive. Even today the way they have their meal. Indian breads out of plants, there is no modern day flour, no modern day baking powder, everything is traditional food, everything, is right from Mother Earth. Wild onions, celery, turnips, everything is over there. When we sat down to eat we did not see any white mans bread or nothing. All, different kinds of food and filling. I had a plate full of stuff that I never seen, my gosh, when I tell you, when I was finished that meal, oohh.... boy!

*BRIAN: And you were just in your glory?*

*JOHN:* And they respect Mother Nature. They prayed with that water, life giving water, they drank that first and then they had food. There was no canned Klik, bologna or ham or anything, just wild meat, elk moose and deer.

*BRIAN: In terms of the land, how can you see changes from long ago? How can you see that it has changed?*

*JOHN:* There is a big change in the land as far as I am concerned from what I can see today. Years ago when I lived with my parents, my

parents did not have to put fertilizer or anything in the ground to grow vegetables. Seeds, the government supplied seeds to the people and they would plant them in their gardens. At that time we didn't need fertilizer of any kind, just put them in the ground and they would grow, at that time Mother Earth was clean. Today, you go put a seed in the ground today, it wouldn't grow, because of all the different stuff they use to make stuff grow. They use different herbicides to grow wheat, oats, potatoes, corn. Everything the white people use today they got to have that help. They are ruining Mother Earth with all that.

*BRIAN: Other plants can't grow, is that what you are saying?*

*JOHN:* That's right, everything else dies out. Its not natural today, I'll call it suicide. They are killing Mother Earth, nothing else. I gave you an example about the trees back home. In the summer time they are supposed to be green and here they are all brown, no birds around now. That's what's happening. It's going to get worse. Years to come, you wouldn't hardly see any trees, they would be all gone.

#### **Dave Daniels – Long Plain, MB**

*BRIAN: So, the old people had a relation that dealt with the animals and plants, do you have any stories relating to that?*

*DAVE:* The term that is often used is animism, that is, the worship of animals, I disagree with that. Observers say they see the creation, but they don't see the creator behind it. I disagree with that point of view. Like I said earlier on, I came from a long line of traditional peoples. I have heard of Elders praying and I have witnessed them praying. Their prayer would go something like this when they were picking medicinal plants for instance. They would say, our God, he who planted these wonderful plants here on the face of the earth, I give you thanks and [ask] permission to use these plants for its intended use. They would then make a small offering. They were not making a tobacco offering to the plant, they were thanking creator for providing this plant and for its intended use. They were making an offering and giving thanks to the creator God, they don't actually use the word creator, they use the word God. *Kisheway Manito* or *Kichi Manito* and the other optional word for creator is *ka debansigate*, the one that owns all things. So, I witnessed these Elders when they were praying, they were not asking permission from the plant, they were asking permission from God to use this plant.

I have also been in the presence of hunters who when they took a life such as a deer, a moose and elk, a squirrel, a rabbit, they were actually giving thanks to God for this life that they had just taken. They would then use the products and by-products of the animal. The carcass the flesh, the bones and all that stuff and if they were not going to use it,

they would very respectfully put it away in a place where it was clean to show respect to that animal because it has sacrificed its blood or its life. It was there for use to continue our life. It was not to feel sorry for them because we have a purpose and they have a purpose. Their purpose was fulfilled when that blood was spilled. So, when we hunted and wounded an animal we would search and search until we found it. If could not find the animal, we felt bad and awful because we took a life and haven't accounted for it. If we did not find proof of its death, we felt bad for making it suffer.

*BRIAN: So some of the traditions old people had, were they carried forward?*

*DAVE:* With some of us, it was ingrained that we carry on these traditions. You do not abuse animals, you do not abuse life, you do not abuse these sacred things because life is sacred. The blood that they sacrificed for us is sacred and we cannot just take it lightly. We do not like to waste food. I was trained not to waste food. I was trained not to waste animals. I was taught only to take what I need and not to be greedy. When we needed medicine, we only needed a certain number of plants; we did not have to harvest the whole crop. We do not have to kill the whole herd or the whole net of fish or the whole flock. We only took what we needed that was necessary to survive. That was important because it not only provided conservation, but it also provided assurance that you will eat tomorrow.

There are certain traditions that are like skinning muskrats for example. They bust the teeth of the muskrat before skinning it. They did not explain that to me. There are also other things they did with the animal parts. They showed respect to that animal. So there are many little traditions in the way that you treat the animal.

Also the plant, there are certain things you have to do with a certain plant. It sounds funny now, but there is one plant that you have to sneak up on and let it know that you are there. Then you have to shoot it or club it with an axe. Whether that is true or not, but this is one particular way that was used to harvest that particular plant. Now, I don't know why they did that but that was how they harvested that particular species of medicine tree.

*BRIAN: How about camps, where did they have specific camps?*

*DAVE:* There are specific names of camps they had; there is one camp between here and Portage. There is another camp between here and Swan Lake. They called it lunch creek, where they would stop for breakfast or lunch and then they would pack up their bags and be on their way. There were strategic spots there they camped. I know some of the areas myself because I camped there myself and I can pinpoint

them on the map. They camped at these spots because of the natural spring water that was always clear and cold.

*BRIAN: Were they attracted by the spring water?*

*DAVE:* Yes, they knew where the spring water was, where the best game was and where the best plants would be for harvesting. They had a knack for knowing and remembering where things were. I have been on trails that are grown in. My father said there is a trail here, I might have been walking on a trail and my father would remember walking that trail fifty years ago. He would remember that old trail through the bush. I do not dare show...[others]...these trails because they may go in and harvest everything. I am afraid they would go in there and damage or abuse the trail because it is a unique hunting area. I do not like showing people my hunting areas that my father showed me because I am afraid that these younger people will go in there and harvest everything out. Experience has showed me this. You go in there and there are no tracks of the deer and the elk, because they would harvest everything out. So I learnt that over the years and I remember where I killed elk, deer and moose. That is the difference now a days, why kill five or six elk when all you really need is one to feed a family.

*BRIAN: Was there any aquatic plant foods that were used?*

*DAVE:* Yes, there was a lot of aquatic plant foods that were used. There are medicinal plants in the water. I know four or five of them off hand. There were a lot of aquatic animals that were used. They harvested turtles, great turtle soup. There were snapping turtles, there is also the painted turtle and I can show you on a map. You can go there on a Sunday afternoon and there would be about 20 to 30 of them. You sneak up to the pond and they would all dive in because they are sunning themselves off. You sit there quietly for a while, they all poke out and they all come back. I have seen snapping turtles that were 18 inches across, you cut off their heads and they make good turtle soup. I have seen turtle rattles, ceremonial instruments made out of turtle. It's also a spiritual animal that is used in our ceremonies.

*BRIAN: What were the perceptions of the Elders towards the environment, how they viewed it and all that?*

*DAVE:* I was taught by my grandparents [to] take care of the land and respect the land and to do whatever I can to maintain its cleanliness. So, if you passed by in any environment, not to make a track sort of speak (sic). Leave the environment intact and enjoy the beauty of it. We were taught to be very observant. As we walked by we were encouraged to look for different plants, different animals and different patterns in the environment because as you remembered [it], grandfather or grandmother would ask you if you saw this plant in a particular place. This

was because their eyesight would be failing because they were in their 60's or 70's. So, we would have to go and show them the plant, we had to know the name of the plant in our language, we had to recognize the plant, we had to know its location. So, we were taught to be very observant of the land. In terms of how we saw the land, we were custodians of the land; we were to preserve it for other people in the future. Because we were only allowed to take only what we needed to take and not to exceed what isn't an allowable limit for harvesting. If you harvested all the medicines in one area and you go back there next year there is no more medicine. So, our environment was important, the water, the air, the soil and minerals that were in it, were all very crucial to us.

*BRIAN: How does your generation see the environment?*

*DAVE:* Well, there has been an attitudinal change, everybody else is polluting and so, you might as well too. The respect for the land is not there. We were there for a week and when we leave, we clean up the environment. You would not even know that we were there. I have seen where people have been there for a day and the place looks like a pigsty. And we are discussed with it, its not only our people form our culture, its other people too who come in and just wreck the environment. We were taught to respect the environment and leave it for others.

*BRIAN: So, you have seen that change too?*

*DAVE:* I have seen it change within my own family. They abuse the land and they are not as careful as we were. They throw their garbage out, they were not taught the same way that we were taught.

*BRIAN: How about in terms of the changing in the land like in terms of water?*

*DAVE:* Yes, there has been change, I was just doing another health survey and I did a historical view what the land was like here. I use to be able to hunt out of my back porch and now a days you have to [go] for miles to hunt. We use to know where all the berries were and now a days we rarely eat the berries. Our diet has changed.

Even in the 70's all the trees were knocked down on the Reserve to make room for agriculture. When the plants and trees died, in the ground there were a lot of roots with a high nitrate concentration that affected the health of the people. In the short 50 years that I have seen this environment, certain species of animals and plants are gone. I can't find some of these plants I use to know as a youth because they are simply gone. There has been a lot of damage by agriculture. There are certain species of birds and animals that are not here anymore. Rarely do I see them anymore; like the burrowing owl. They used to live near my dad's place. The antelope, the bear and the wolves are gone. My dad used to hunt wolves; I used to see him bring large carcasses home. The prairie

chicken is gone, even the grouse, I can't hear them anymore. I use sneak up and watch them drum. I don't see that no more. To me that's a great loss, my child will not be able to see them. My child would not see the plants that use to grow here. They would have to go far to see them.

There was a plant used for eating disorders, it would stimulate your appetite, if you had throat problems and if you had hearing problems. I know the formula for curing someone who is stone deaf. There were medicines for sterility problems. There were other birth control (sic), there were many cures and I know some formulas. I know the cures, but some of these plants are not there anymore. My father and I searched for this one plant for two weeks. I knew where it grew and where it used to be as a kid, but we could not find it. My father was disappointed in me. My father died several years ago. This was in 1982 and in 1992, I was visiting a friend and I stumbled into it. It took me 10 years to find it again. I know now where to find this specimen again. The species of plants are getting harder to find. This was our medicine chest and it is getting harder to find them to maintain our health.

#### **Rose Scott - Swan Lake, MB**

*BRIAN: How about when your grandfather was alive did they do that?*

*ROSE:* No, it was not like that we were all free. We were free to go wherever we wanted to go. Now you can't do that. Now a days, there is no hunting, there is only one boy who goes hunting from this Reserve and he is my grandson Kelly. He is the only one that goes hunting and he is the only one that brings me a rabbit once in a while. Sometimes he brings me a duck or some geese. Muskrats and beaver too. It's a big difference today.

Look out here today its all different, there use to be a big bush over across the way there. When my mother was alive we use to pick all kinds of berries there, saskatoons, chokecherries and all other kinds of berries. They even use to pick seneca root there, my mother and my mother-in-law. Look at it now, that used to be a big bush at one time, there use to be deer and animals in there. They would shoot the deer from our old log house. The first snowfall they would be out hunting.

My father-in-law, the one that gave me my Indian name, he was one hundred and two when he passed away. He use to put up snares there for rabbits and jumpers, then I would go and check his snares, I like checking his snares, especially for jumpers.

*BRIAN: Do you know any old stories, any the old people use to tell you about hunting, trapping and fishing?*

*ROSE:* Oh yes, my mother told me that when she was young, they



use to go down to they lake and go ice fishing. Of course the old people use to come along. The men would go out into the bush to hunt. They would be gone for [a] month. There was one man here that used to go out for a month and when he returned he would bring back a lot of fur and meat. He would start in the fall, he use to live next door here but he passed away.

*BRIAN: So, how did they keep their food?*

*ROSE:* They use to dry their food, they would dry meat. They use to smoke their meat, even ducks. My grandmother-in-law use to also smoke fish. My grandmother used to also dry tripe and we used to have that in the winter. I liked that tripe.

They also use to dry berries, saskatoons and chokecherries, they use to crush them. I still do that, last year I wasn't able to do that last summer because I had trouble with my back (sic). Another thing is that there are hardly any berries.

*BRIAN: Why do you think there are no berries.*

*ROSE:* I always think it's the spray they use in farming, it blows all over. Another thing is you can't trust just to go ahead and eat from the trees anymore; you have to wash them really good. I always tell my grandchildren, don't eat anything from along the sides of the roads. They always spray there.

Today there are no more berries, not like what it used to be like. A long time ago I remember every year my grandmother would dry saskatoons. She would have a big bag. I remember picking some for her. She would keep them for the winter. There were chokecherries, I remember her sewing the bags shut and we would sneak in there.

*BRIAN: So, did a lot of people live like that, eat a lot of dried meat and berries and store it for the winter then?*

*ROSE:* I never saw anything like bologna or anything canned or anything like that growing up at home. I went to residential school in Portage La Prairie and that was when I first saw canned food. One summer we came home for holidays and saw my mother put a can of tomatoes into soup. I was wondering why and where she got the idea and that was the start.

*BRIAN: The people long ago were taught to respect everything in nature then?*

*ROSE:* Yes, they were taught to respect everything, the trees that grass everything. I remember we use to ask our grandmother—talking about *Manito* (Great Spirit or God)—do you ever see *Manito*? She said yes, *Manito* is everywhere, he does not have to stand in front of you, and he is in everything. Everywhere you look there is God. We told her that Jesus was the savior and God, she told us to put that away. She use to

say, look outside, that's God, look at your neighbor, that's God. Even you are God. In those days they really respected that. It seems like today, the kids are going in a different direction. They don't respect Elders; they don't respect the animals. Even them trees and plants, they don't respect anything. They are following the *Moniash* (White Man) and the *Moniash* does not care.

*BRIAN: A long time ago, did the people used to gather a lot of plants to eat. Do you remember any of these plants?*

*ROSE: Iyishana* (that one) I don't know what it's called in English, *mituskoshenima*.

*BRIAN: It's called wild turnip.*

*ROSE: Neeneensha* (wild onion) *kosa*, my grandfather, *Kichineka* Sundance *ka eyat*, the last day of the sun dance, the last day. *Neeneesha ka keeshisawawat* (he cooked wild onions for them). They would fast for four days and he would cook them for the fasters. *Anishinabe* eat those *Neeneensh* and *metuskosemina*. They are still there, where you find a clean land; you will still find them. You have to look hard. *Weekay* is another medicine root that they used to use. They used to make it for colds and sore throats and headaches. I used to go with my mother to pick medicine, there is also (sic). There was a hollow in the middle of the field and there was this one old guy who transplanted *weekay*. We use to go there and pick it. These are the things that the *Anishinabe* used to use whenever, *muskekey* (medicine).

*Kane wegat ke akosi Anishinabe* (The Ojibway people never use to get sick) *Kona ka ke mening ekotosi* (they used to doctor each other). Cancer and heart trouble would be around now and then, but they used to be able to cure that. *Ke minite muskikey kemachetew anishinabec* (they gave medicine to the person to drink). Indian medicine *ke tawentagoshew* (was wanted) because of these new diseases. Sugar *kaweenka ke ischnoogoshew* (they never heard of) diabetes. Oh my God, I don't think it was more than fifty years ago that the very first time I ever heard of sugar diabetes. A woman from Long Plains had it and it wasn't too long after that she died. It was a new thing.

*BRIAN: So, did they have special places where they would pick their medicines?*

*ROSE: They use to go all over looking for medicine. I knew one medicine that used to grow near Sandy Bay. There were many Old people from Red Lake Minnesota and from Rousseau River and Sandy Bay who, during the sun dance, would get together. People used to travel to Red Lake and there are many people that originated from there. The Indian people were poor. In the olden days there wasn't too many things—not like today—there are many things that are bothering.*

*BRIAN: Did the old people ever tell you stories about how the people saw the land and how they saw the environment?*

*ROSE: My grandmother never told me anything other than that this was the way that the people use to live. Explain environment to me?*

*BRIAN: I guess how the weather and what condition the land may have been at that time.*

*ROSE: Everything was pure and then it began to change. It was the White man that changed all what you see in the land today, it is his doing. In the old days there was forests and grasslands and they use to camp here and there. Today we are afraid to eat the food from the land. Even the sky, even at night we use to look for the constellations, today you can barely see them.*

*BRIAN: There was one I forgot, the birds, were there a lot of birds back then as compared to today?*

*ROSE: There are hardly any birds and small animals today, not like what it used to be like a long time ago. It's getting difficult to find the animals we use to eat even the jackrabbits are not as plentiful. We used to hear owls in the woods and even those ones don't seem to be as plentiful as they use to be. Yes there are very few birds now.*

### **Vincent Rider - Carry the Kettle, SK**

*VINCENT: My grandparents told me their traditions. I would see them when they were at home when they use to hunt or when I use to hunt too, when we used to hunt and when we would get an animal, he'd would tell me to cut a piece of the tongue. Face it to the south and pray with it and offer it for thanksgiving like. And dig in the dirt and place it in ground and cover it with earth. In this way, Mother Earth supplied them with this and they give thanks that way. By doing that they would receive more and this would make the game more plentiful for the coming years. They would put that in the ground. That's how I learnt from the old people. If they had any wild food or wild game, ducks they would do that, when it was cooked or something they would offer it and throw some into the fire. That time they had a stove and an open fire and pray as thanksgiving and this was a way, traditional way of offering to the relatives that passed on. It was a way to offer and to feed the spirits from that you know. Anything, any food, I remember my grandmother use to pick fruit like saskatoons or chokecherries and before we would eat it, she would throw some in the fire. That was her way of offering and giving thanks – giving and offering it to the spirits you know.*

*BRIAN: So has hunting changed from the time your grandfather hunted and from when you hunted?*

*VINCENT: Yeah, today we have better guns, firearms, but they told*

me at one time they used to hunt buffalo. That was when they were back in the States. They came from the South Dakota. They use to tell me that the whole tribe would make a surround, they would make one and they would lower the buffalo in there. There was a spiritual way they did that. One medicine man would lower the buffalo by singing a buffalo song or something. Then the buffalo would come. All the women and children would be around and they would hide. They would hide and there would be an area where the buffalo come in. That was where they would have to work in unity. If someone jumped too soon they would scare them away. So they all had to wait till one gave a signal and they would all close that circle and that's when they would shoot them with bow and arrows and spears too. They said that if somebody jumped too soon or scared the buffalo away, they would be severely punished. This was because it was their livelihood and if someone spoiled it they were punished.

*BRIAN: How about plants and stuff like that, did they gather plants for food and medicine and do you remember which plants they gathered for food?*

*VINCENT: I remember when we use to go and look for medicine, we use to go in a wagon that time. They would go in the valleys and places. My grandfather was a medicine man. I remember when we use to travel they would be looking on the side of the road for medicine. They would say this medicine is good for this and they would stop and dig it out.*

*BRIAN: How about food, were there plants for food.*

*VINCENT: When I was with my grandparents there was gardens already. But, I remember grandma used to say that they would plant on the prairie and what they used to plant was corn. They used to have those big heavy hoes, I don't know what kind of hoes they were, they used to break up the sod and plant their corn. They used to grow everything and they would grew (sic). They would break up this sod and plant their corn, quite a bit of corn. After a while they would have a single plow pulled by a team of horses. Grandma used to call that Indian corn. I have some there. In the fall they would bread (sic) them all together, the leaves and that. After a while they would husk them, take the kernels off of them. Then they would dry that. They used that for making *wasna*, I always called that popcorn. They use to mix that with brown sugar and lard and they would put it in the oven to bake. Boy that was good.*

They use to pick a lot of berries – saskatoons and chokecherries. She used to have a flat stone to crush them on. She would crush chokecherries and put a cover on the ground and in the winter they would cook it. They would soften it by adding grease. They made a lot of dry meat in the summer. I remember saying that he[r] grandmother told

her, when they used to hunt buffalo in the fall, August and September, the buffalo would be fat. Most of the time they would lay around. That's when they would get them by surprise, they would sneak up to them. After that they had horses and chased them, the buffalo wouldn't run too far because they were fat. They would get tired and shoot them that way (sic). Then they would dry a lot of that meat in the fall.

*BRIAN: Did they ever talk about hunting buffalo in the wintertime?*

*VINCENT:* Yeah, they said when the snow was deep they would run them down, run them into the snowdrifts.

*BRIAN: How did the old timers look upon the plants and the animals, how did they perceive them.*

*VINCENT:* They hunted them and they believed in conservation, they only took what they needed, they did not over kill. The plants too like that. They had their way too, like they had ceremonies when they picked the plants for medicine. Like today we put tobacco, sort of like that too. They had their way of picking plants, making sure they never took too much. Just like the animals too, they give an offering so they would get more. They believed in Mother Earth. Like put back to Mother Earth they believed in that strongly. At that time that's how we made a living. That time the laws were not so strict. We were allowed to go and trade with farmers for eggs and stuff like that.

*BRIAN: So did they hunt a lot of birds like ducks and geese?*

*VINCENT:* In the fall, they use to hunt ducks when the ducks came back from the north. There is hay marsh west of here, just past Pasqua and between Mascoptung Reserve. There is a big marsh over there where we use to hunt ducks. It was pretty good.

*BRIAN: How about eggs, did they gather bird eggs.*

*VINCENT:* Yeah, we use to gather duck eggs in the springtime. I use to go out, if a duck flew up, I use to go over there and find eggs.

*BRIAN: Did they ever gather plants from the water for food or medicine?*

*VINCENT:* The only one I remember is, they use to pick, they call it rat root, the bitter root, the one they use to use for colds. They use to go to that big marsh over there by the river. Closed in water and grandma use to be picking those roots, pull them, cut them and all that. They use to get a big pile. They would clean and dry that. When it was dry they would grind it and use it for medicine. It was good for colds especially for kids. They called it *Shinkpaytotay*, *shinkpay* is the rat, muskrat. Rat root is the only plant I can remember they use to pick. They use to pick other medicines along the river but, I can't remember all what they use to pick.

*BRIAN: How about wild turnips, did they used to pick those too?*

*VINCENT:* Oh yeah, wild turnips, they used to pick them in the hills, dry them and mix that with their soup. They were pretty common, there was lots. I think now it's pretty hard to find.

*BRIAN:* *How about wild onions, did they pick them?*

*VINCENT:* Oh yah, there was wild onions but, I don't think they used to use that too much. There were other plants but they used to use that for medicine I remember.

*BRIAN:* *So, how did they get along with the Cree?*

*VINCENT:* My grandfather use to get along good with the Cree. I remember my grandfather use to have friends, like on the Pasqua Reserve. I remember he used to have [a] name, Peter McDonald, but he used to have an Indian name. The Indian agent gave them *Wasechew* names you know. Anyway, he use to go down there and they use to make maple syrup. Down along the valley near the Pasqua Lake along the Pasqua Reserve, I remember that when I was a kid. Oh around April, when the sap was running, you would see the trees were wet, we use to go and camp down there in the coulees. It was right along the lakeshore. It is right along the Reserve and when we go fishing today I always see that valley, that coulee. We use to camp there for a week or so, when the sap was running.

We use to gather pails. I remember my grandfather used to make a little piece of wood they cut and they would cut the bark and you could see the sap dripping and they would put their pails there. They would do this all over in there. They had those big cast pots that time, you don't see them anymore and they would make a fire. I remember they use to make me go and pick up the pails when they were full. Then they would make it boil, boil for hours. The sap in the cast iron pots would boil right down. What was left was the maple syrup. They would take that out and put it [in] containers, at that time they would put it [in] cans mostly. They would leave it out and then it would get hard in there. And that's how they made their sugar and it was nice. Today, when I go down there I don't see anybody doing that now. I ask the people over there if anybody has made sugar and they say, oh once in a while someone makes syrup.

*BRIAN:* *So what was the old timers perception of the land and the environment? Do you ever remember what they said about it.*

*VINCENT:* They respected Mother Earth and everything that grows. Like in the spring, when the berries flower, I remember my grandfather used to have his ceremonies; he would hang these cloths in the trees. Sort of like his thanksgiving, everything would be green. He would pray and then hang these clothes in the trees. I often wondered when I would see all these clothes hanging on the trees. They respected Mother Earth.

In the fall, like this time of the year, this hard winter coming ahead he would pray so that nobody gets sick. I remember those old guys when I was a kid; they used to have sweat lodges. A lot of the old people there, they were old men. In those days, I remember I was young and there were three of us boys, we were all the same age and they used to make us pick the sage, *zeegougha* and we were to put it by the sweat lodge. One of the older guys, a bigger guy, we used to go and get rocks on horseback. They had a bag and they would fill that with rocks. They would tell us what kind of rocks to pick and how many to bring back and we would each bring back a bag of rocks, tied on a horse. We used to help them heat rocks, we would get wood. We watched the old guys go into the sweat with no clothes on. They would go in just like that.

They made a fork with a stick and it would get burnt, they would make a new one every time that one would burn out (sic). They had a pile of them there and they would haul the rocks in like that. With a forked stick, sometimes with two. Sometimes they would use deer antlers, deer antlers. Put them at the door and then they would take them in. That sage we brought and when they would use that, they would wipe themselves with that. Today we use shorts and towels. Some would use gunny sacks, potato sacks I call them. They would put them around like this and tie a string there. They would come out. I was telling the boys that, our grandfathers long ago never had towels they would come out and they would use that sage to wipe themselves off. And they said that was real purification, a real purification ceremony.

*BRIAN: Have you seen a lot of changes through time?*

*VINCENT:* Since the White Man came there was a lot of change. In the dirty thirties, there was a drought and there used to be dust blowing. Grandpa used to say before the White Man came it never used to be like this. It used to be dry he said [and] when they had droughts; it never blew dust like now he said. It was because they plowed all the fields up; all these dust storms. I remember going to a town north of Standing Buffalo called Lipton, we use to go over there on a wagon. Sometimes we couldn't stay on the road, we had to go in the ditch. The dust was coming off the fields like snowdrifts. That was all light land there, like sand and it used to drift. I remember going down in the ditch because we couldn't stay on the road there. I remember sometimes I would get off the wagon and run on the drifts and I would only see these pickets sticking out, the fence, huh. That's how bad it was, oh the dust blowing. Sometimes in the middle of the day it used to get dark. That was one of the things my grandfather seen that was changing or was changing since that White Man has come. The land is changing.

You can tell today, that is why everything is polluted, the water, the

air. It has changed from away back since I was a kid. You use to be able to drink slough water when I was a kid. I remember my grandfather had two barrels and I use to go with him from the Reserve, Standing Buffalo, we would go east, there was a big dam up there. It was nice clear water. We use to get water from there. There was nothing wrong with water at that time you know, it was not polluted like it is today. We use to drink that slough water. Today we can't even drink water from this well here. We have a well here and we can't drink it. Its contaminated, we got it tested last year. They told me to boil that water before we can drink it. Even when we boil it we can't drink it today. That's a big difference there since I can remember. The land changed quite a bit.

*BRIAN: When they use to hunt buffalo it was different, huh?*

*VINCENT: Yeah!*

*BRIAN: Did the people live in different places before they lived on Reserves? Before they lived here.*

*VINCENT: The old timers used to say that before they lived on Reserves they used to go anywhere, mostly where the game was. My grandfather used to say when he was a kid they used to travel looking for game. There was buffalo yet at that time. He said they had to go south more to find buffalo. I think already they were already starting to settle. So, they would go to Moose Jaw in that area that way.*

#### **Arthur McKinney – Swan Lake, MB**

*ARTHUR: There were a lot of rabbits and muskrats back then, there were lots, you don't seem to see that many anymore. There are hardly any.*

*BRIAN: So do you see a lot of changes?*

*ARTHUR: Yes, I have, oh my goodness, it's not like what it used to be. Since people started farming all over everything went down, it poisoned a lot of animals.*

*BRIAN: So, were there more wild animals before farming?*

*ARTHUR: When my parents lived over here, my father used to tell me that he used to shoot prairie chickens right out of his back door. There was a lot of bush then and now all that bush is being pushed down. They scared everything away; the rabbit populations are away down.*

#### **Joe McArthur – Pheasant Rump, SK**

*BRIAN: Do you remember when they used to dry meat?*

*JOE: Oh yes, they would hang big slabs of meat; make a fire under it to keep the flies away. Pick them up at night and put them away, take them out during the day again. It used to be nice; we used to eat pounded*



meat.

*BRIAN: Were there a lot of berries in them days?*

*JOE:* Oh yes, there were a lot of berries, a lot of moose, elk, jumpers, and rabbits and ducks. Now the White man spoiled everything by using chemicals on their crops to kill weeds, that's what spoiled and killed off everything.

*BRIAN: So, did the people long time ago live off the land?*

*JOE:* Oh yes, I used to eat gophers, I use to drown gophers, gut them and singe them and eat them, they were good you know, I enjoyed them. That was away before the White people used that poisoned you know. After that no one bothers them.

### **Morris Merrick – Long Plain, MB**

*BRIAN: What kind of fish would they catch?*

*MORRIS:* I don't know, all kinds of fish. I remember in later years my grandfather had a fish trap. He used to catch all kinds of fish, Jackfish and of course at that time we didn't really care what kind of fish they were, we just ate them. In those years he used to catch a flat fish he called a buffalo fish. Today, I don't know what kind of fish; you know I think those might have been carp.

The point about that is that they used [to] spear fish. Do you think you can manage to do that today? No way, no way boy. What that says is that the water was clear way back then, they could see into the water a foot or two. Now you can't see one inch into the water. Now its contaminated and it should be an environmental concern. You know all the pollutants and all that's being put into the river and coming down stream, is all full of garbage.

*BRIAN: What about wild life, how is this effecting wild life?*

*MORRIS:* It got to because, you have in the spring time, where it floods the water backs up into these big sloughs where it its low and fills them up. What happens when the water goes down after the flood is that the water is trapped there. That's where wildlife raise their young, muskrats, birds, raccoons, deer, they bring their young there to drink. What happens now is the water is polluted because, one of them is [the] hog killing plant in Brandon. You know that water is polluted and the animals live in it, that's where they have been living for thousands of years that's where they raised their young. Beavers, you know there is very little amount that the beaver and the muskrat and the likes raise their young on the river (sic). That's where they raise them in these places where the water backs up because nothing is floating everything away. There were a lot of nutrients in them and things would grow.

*BRIAN: So, the people use to hunt ducks along there too.*

**MORRIS:** That's right, and ducks lay their eggs and now they have the wildlife raising their young in this sewage. Pretty soon they are going to see the effects. That's what I call the beginning of the killing fields for all this wildlife. Those places are where they raised their young for thousands of years. Are you going to teach them to raise their young somewhere else? There is no way you are going to get away with it unless those guys are stopped upstream from dumping their sewage into the river. There have been cases where Brandon has intentionally dumped raw sewage into the river and the environmental people catch them. Then they say oh, we will fix it and they get away with dumping sewage for a couple of weeks. They say that they wouldn't do that again and they manage to get away with it.

I don't know what consequences are and the city of Brandon has done that on more than one occasion, dumping raw sewage into the river. They have been caught a few times and they manage to talk their way out of it. It's got to take effect and one of these days, when you start having five legged muskrats and three legged deer. People are going to be saying what's happening? Then you are going to have a few million dollars poured into a study to see what's happening. Over a period of time, why is that happening? Simple, simple, why that's happening, you know. Like that's what happening in the states, in Minnesota right know, you have two headed and six legged frogs. That's happening because the ground is polluted. We expect to animals raise their young there and it's going to have an effect and that's what I don't like. I speak out against it. We are put here to be equal and our responsibility [is] to look after this earth. Animals were put here for a reason – a lot of them to coexist with us. Some to provide food for others. We are part of that whole chain and when part of that chain is upset, then it affects everybody.

**BRIAN:** *Do you know any traditional teachings on nature and environment? How do the old people perceive it?*

**MORRIS:** Well, what I have been told is that we have a responsibility here to the rest of Gods creation. We were put here as care takers of that whole creation of God. They (animals) have just as [much] right to reside here as we do. We do not have the right to kill them off to destroy them. We don't have that right at all, but it has happened. The coming of the White Man and the fur trade industry, they went crazy over how much they can make over these resources. That's how Hudson Bay is so rich today and all the rest of Europeans, because of the natural resources in this country that we are suppose to take care of and coexist with in this country and we have a responsibility with the rest of Gods creation to see that this does not happen to them. That's our responsibility, but we lost that responsibility, it has been taken away from us, someone else is

in charge now.

That's what I know about the whole circle of life and how we survive. Once the buffalo were killed off, that was it for our people depending to live off the land. That was it, there were all other types of animals to depend on, but as hunting pressure increased, then it started to take its toll on that too.

*BRIAN: So, did they know if anyone else hunted there (Carberry Hills)?*

*MORRIS:* I don't know, I know that the Sandy Bay people quite recently have been finding their way into there. I know my brother Mervin did not like that, he said they should have hunted in their own traditional hunting area. Swan Lake people hunted across the river in the Cypress Hills. On occasion, we would go that way, that river was kind of a boundary. I guess there was traditional territories. Guess that's how fighting took place between two groups, when someone came into another's territory, but that is my own interpretation. That place was rich in hunting, it was rich all over, but that is going now.

In my growing up years, we ate from the land and we never had sugar diabetes. We were healthy. As we grow older and eat processed food from the stores we are getting sick. That was a result from switching foods. We used to eat wild foods and grow gardens. Now we don't know where this food is coming from.

Land and environment is an issue that has to be put on the table. We have to say hey, you got to stop here and we can't allow this to happen any more, you can't do this anymore. We have to start doing our job.

### **Percy Rider – Carry the Kettle Reserve, SK**

*BRIAN: How did they see Mother Earth?*

*PERCY:* They respected her, they prayed to the four directions and to the Great Spirit and to Mother Earth because she provided them with everything you know. She provided them with food and shelter and they respected her for those reasons. The holy spirit provided Mother Earth as being because she provided for them with clothing food and shelter and all that stuff. Even today we still do that, I respect Mother Earth for what she provides. I don't see them, you know, what they are doing today, like the sand hills over here, they should be respecting that and taking care of that.

*BRIAN: How about the environment, how did they see that?*

*PERCY:* Well, pretty much the same way, we were...we get used to living where we are today but long ago they would move with the certain season. Like in the Cypress Hills, they would winter in the Cypress Hills and some move out onto the prairie, like the Wood Mountain area and places like that wherever they were hunting.

*BRIAN: How does your generation see the environment today compared to the old timers, was it a little different?*

*PERCY: Yes, no one really respects it; we have all think the White Man way (sic). What it can produce for us is the modern way of living. Today, my people we don't have that respect like the old people, they respected and took care the earth. Even with the berries, they would say don't bother those berries, next year we will have a big crop again, that's how they thought. But now with machines, they plow over everything, even with bulldozers, they don't care about berries. Even the animal life, it's gone. I don't know if it's going to get worse. Most everybody thinks that way today, we got to get all we can out of this land like the White Man does, like oil and gas and stuff like that. Every time you talk about something they say, oh we will drill a well over here. They do not respect that relationship to the land today.*

*BRIAN: You were talking about animals, do you notice any changes, like the birds for instance.*

*PERCY: There is a lot of change, it must be in the environment and what's in the land today, how they treat their crops and stuff. You kill a bird today, like a prairie chicken or a duck, it don't taste like it use to. Even the deer today, they don't have that some taste like they did long ago.*

*BRIAN: So, you have seen a lot of changes through your time and your grandfather's time.*

*PERCY: Even long ago we use to eat muskrats and stuff you killed, you cooked it and ate it even birds and today now, you don't even think of it. We had duck a couple of yours ago and it did not taste like it did a long time ago. The flavor of the meat has changed.*

*BRIAN: Is there anything else you want to add or is there anything else you want to say.*

*PERCY: I can't think of anything right now, I think I said all I could for now.*

### **Rosylina and Frank Eastman – Chanupawukpa (Pipestone), MB**

*BRIAN: Do you notice the difference in the way plants grow today?*

*ROSYLINE: To us it's different around here because we used to have a lot of berries and I don't know what you call them but the rabbits used to eat them. They were about this high and the rabbits and prairie chickens used to eat them. We used to have about three different kinds of prairie chickens. We used to have pheasants and partridge too.*

*BRIAN: Do you notice any effects from farming to the environment?*

*ROSYLINE: Yes, that's what I was going to tell you too. Our deer meat isn't as good as it used to be. When my husband and I used to go*

out hunting and if we brought back a buck or something. His mother used to be good at skinning them; they used to be nice and fat. My son, I lost him a couple of years ago, when he would bring back a buck or something, I couldn't skin them because of poison ivy. So, they tell me not to touch it. They would skin it and cut it up. My nephew still brings us meat, but it isn't as good as it used to be. I was talking to some ladies in Sioux Valley and they told me the same thing, the meat is not as good. I blame that there is too much spraying in our area, they kill off our trees, we do not have any fruit at all. Even a plane crashed down here, he was spraying. When the wind blows, it blows all over the trees.

*BRIAN: You were saying that you used to drink water from the creek at one time; do you still use it today?*

*ROSYLINE: No, nobody uses water from there anymore. The people used to have horses at one time and the horses used to go and drink down there. No, nobody uses it anymore.*

**Alfreda Goodbird – Fort Berthold (Arikara), ND**

So, some of those stories about hunting animals in my home, I will start with that. I can remember then hunting animals; I will start with that deer. I can remember when my uncle hunted. My dad never hunted a deer but he, all those other feathered birds, why he would go out. That was our survival and cottontails. That was our meats in those days you know.

But, I have to tell you something you know, because after we got that flood monies up here you know, people you seen never had diabetes. But, I blame it on that, we had a lot of money and, oh, people bought brand new cars. You go into their homes there were cases of pop just sitting there. Then they would have sweet rolls and they just would have, oh, steaks and you see them in a restaurant and they were just eating the fried steaks and everything you know.

So all these, and that was in 1951 they started getting those per capita payments, that money they gave us. It wasn't every year or anything but, we got that payment in lieu of this Garrison, Sacagawea, and this lake. And then finally it took its toll now. It seems like to me, I tried to look at it. It seemed like about after 20 years, almost, you could start seeing these cases of diabetes was coming up. Because we are not eating our fruits and vegetables.

We had gardens back down in those early days and I remember the whole family working out in the garden, pulling weeds, oh. Then my dad would cultivate too and he had cattle for our meats. We had the good foods but now I call these fast foods and some of these frozen foods, some of the can goods, those are the ones I always call the killer foods.

Because they also add salt into those can goods you know. It's better if person ate those fresh ones you know. That's what's taking the toll on the people you know. But, this environment, I was always thinking about all those chemicals and in the food you know.

Indian people have to recognize that you know, they don't want to eat the good things and they say this is my life and I want to eat anything. But, if they knew their culture good they would quit eating these killer foods as I call them. All these fried foods, fast foods not that big pot of that one kind of food you know. We are not garbage disposals. I always say that about myself too, I am a diabetic but I always try and watch what I eat. So many of these younger ones just don't obey or try eating well. I always say if they want to be like that, then they should prepare for their death you know. Around here they have these big giveaways and that becomes costly you know. We don't need to do that, they should just put them away, but that's another subject you know.

Food is really important you know. The Arikara believe you do not kill yourself because if you do you don't get to the other side, your family in that good place or the happy hunting ground. I thought to myself, we are killing ourselves or giving ourselves a slow death by just eating those foods that are not good to eat. They should just give us pistols and get it over with if we are not watching what we eat you know. Or get all your material things like Penaltions and star quilts, that's what they really do here. So I say you might as well, get all yourself because you are just giving that problem to your relatives you know. You just do that for yourself because you are eating those killer foods. I did not realize that, it was when we received all that money that was when we started killing ourselves. Otherwise we should be putting in our gardens. Look we have a casino here and that's where we come to eat all those fast foods.

*BRIAN: So, are there people still gardening here?*

*ALFREDA: There are a few; I used to put in a garden myself. I used to plant vegetables and stuff. But with the environment there is a lot of does and don'ts for the Arikara but nowadays we just follow the White Mans ways.*

## **Concluding Remarks**

The Elder's statements support the conclusions that Euro-Canadian scientists have recently recognized in our country. Namely that the unrestricted use of herbicides, fungicides, pesticides, and chemical fertilizers in modern agriculture is severely damaging, in fact destroying, the natural order of the environment in a cumulative and, in some cases, likely irreversible catastrophe. Similarly, these trends are being accelerated by the irresponsible implementation and expansion of industrial

processes used in manufacturing, power generation, pulp mills, mining processes, and petroleum development, that dump huge amounts of pollutants into the atmosphere, the soil and the water.

There is also a moral crisis that must be addressed. There is little in the way of either secular or religious practice in mainstream Euro-Canadian society that leads us to the idea of the importance of respect for the land, water, plants and animals. The traditional spirituality and accompanying ceremonial practice of Aboriginal people has served to maintain balance and harmony, between the people and the creation over the millennia. While recognizing the fact that a highly structured and industrialized society, such as that of present day Canada, requires that wealth be generated and employment be provided for its citizens, the need for respect and conservation of the resources of the country, and the planet, remains. In the larger society there is, at best, a self-serving call for sustainable development, which is consistent with the prevailing secular religion of consumerism. That is, if wealth production is to serve the next generation, we need to manage our resources more efficiently to sustain the yield of goods and services. This is not in any sense spiritual, it is rather, cynically secular in many cases. That being said, it is however, better than what has been going on in industrial society and more recent post-industrial society in the developed world over the last century.

Although tardy and sometimes reluctant, the increasing recognition by governments, that an environmental crisis is at hand, is a positive development. Perhaps the wisdom of the Elders and the findings of research ecologists and climatologists will allow us to slow the destruction and to redress the commercial and industrial ravaging of our environment. It may also create an opportunity for humans to find their appropriate place in the circle of life as responsible participants, rather than as ruthless exploiters.

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