Three Generations of a Micmac Family
Stories and Conversations

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An Executive Summary?

No, this is not an executive summary. By reducing this text to a brief summation of the central `facts', I feel that I would be contravening the spirit and ethical guidelines that engendered this project. My hesitation is not only because I am a non-Aboriginal researcher who feels the inappropriateness of `summing up' the life experiences of Aboriginal speakers, but primarily because the very nature of this project and this collection do not lend themselves to such a process. Life histories/stories complement more `objective' and fact-oriented approaches. Their `truth' derives from the power inherent in words personally expressed and deeply felt. The personal context in which they are shared, as well as the oral style in which they are `performed', form an integral part of the knowledge they transmit. In this collection the reader has an opportunity to experience something of that immediacy (particularly in the stories sections) since the text itself has been designed to retain some aspects of oral transmission. So instead of a summary, what follows is an introduction to the text.

This life histories study focuses on the life experiences of three generations of an extended Micmac family living in (or near) Big Cove, New Brunswick. Three of the participants are Micmac (an elder, Michael W. Francis, age 70 in 1993; his nephew, Luke Simon, age 38; and his grandson, Peter `Cory' Augustine, age 19). The fourth is non-Aboriginal (the elder's stepson, Forrest Carter, age 28). The work was commissioned in 1993 by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples as part of its life histories study series.[i]

The text is based on tape-recorded conversations in which the participants talk about their life experiences, including events and personal perceptions and values. It also provides some insight into continuity and change as they affect a group of Micmac people over time (three generations) as well as across ethnic boundaries (same age group, same geographical location, within an extended family).

The participants in this project offered important insights into the world of the elders and on contemporary life on the reserve. Therefore I would urge readers to go on to the text itself, to reflect personally on the stories and conversations. The richness and meaningfulness of the participants' stories and conversations are situated there.

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Introduction

Life histories are frequently interpreted as "records of events in the life of an individual, a biographical or autobiographical account". (Kluckholm 1945; Langness 1965; quoted in Preston 1986)[ii] They are usually elicited using a question and answer technique. The `life story', on the other hand, is more a personal narrative, as it emerges in the context of conversation or storytelling. (Titon 1980)[iii] The emphasis in the latter is more on perception, experience and personal meaning than on a chronological account of events. Differences between the two genres tend to blur in the context of Aboriginal narrative traditions. Michael W. Francis (`Mike' after this) weaves Micmac history, personal history, story and anecdote into the fabric of his narration. With him, eliciting a life history using the question and answer technique is quite inappropriate as well as ineffective. A more appropriate stance is respectful and careful listening as the elder responds to the general request to speak about his life. With the younger generations, however, a dialogue approach is more acceptable. Sympathetic conversation between friends is more effective than either waiting for a monologue or using a formal interview technique.

Life histories/stories complement more `objective' and fact-oriented approaches to history. They focus on life as personally lived and provide a rich personal heritage for future generations. They highlight values and beliefs while also addressing some very tangible problems. In the final reflective chapter I summarize some of the main issues drawn to my attention in the process of this work. No quantifying conclusions are drawn; instead a picture emerges of different paths and changing times and the strategies individuals have used to respond to what has crossed their paths. Some of these responses have been more successful than others.

Some of the family members, through marriage, are non-Aboriginal (Forrest); others are of mixed racial heritage, one parent being Micmac the other `white' (Cory). When we listen to their stories we hear how they coped with the unique challenge of being `between cultures'.

Each of the stories and conversations that Mike, Luke, Forrest and Cory have generously shared with us reflects unique personal experiences. Individuals speak for themselves and

usually avoid generalizations that would presume knowledge of other people's perceptions. When I first came to the reserve in 1985, one of the first teachings I was to learn was that having respect means affording each person the right and freedom to speak for him- or herself. Although the knowledge that each of us carries is somehow unique, tempered by our own experiences and perceptions, by age, by our natural abilities, and by the measure of curiosity we have about the world around us, that knowledge also reflects certain experiences and values that are shared with the larger community circle. The elder emphasized that his life is not unique, that many of his people went through a hard time, and that many of the elders feel the way he does. Similarly, when Cory speaks about growing up on the reserve, he talks about his age group and what they are going through. Luke, as a member of a very large family (17 children), expresses perceptions and feelings that are often shared by his siblings, particularly those in his age group.

The following text is based on a series of tape-recorded events for which I used no prepared list of questions. Each of the participants was aware of the purpose of the project; each participated actively in shaping the direction of the conversations. These were then transcribed, roughly edited and given to the participants for further editing. In subsequent meetings I raised questions that arose from the earlier conversations and asked each person to elaborate on certain areas. Thus the process was one of gradually building up an understanding and of developing friendship and trust — and in the process, this text. Criteria for editing reflected participants' and my concerns and ideas about appropriateness regarding the print medium, respect for others in the family and the community, and perceptions about relevance with respect to the project.

The text is divided into three sections. The first section, entitled *Michael W. Francis: Stories of My Life*, focuses on the life story of the elder. This text is actually a compilation based on eight years of working with Mike. It was 1985 when I first recorded his life story. Since then I have heard it many times, and each telling followed the chronological order (from childhood to maturity) as reflected in this text. The point of beginning would not always be the same, but would be determined by questions I asked about certain experiences. But then with a smooth transition from responding to a question to telling a story, Mike would continue with his story along the familiar path. There is a lot of repetition in this process, but with each telling there is a new twist or understanding that Mike offers his listeners. Some parts of this text were transcribed from video footage,[iv] while other parts represent casual conversation or stories shared over coffee in Mike and Ada Francis's kitchen.

The first part of section one, entitled "The Early Years", opens with a brief biographical sketch. This is followed by Mike talking about his childhood: the hard times (neglect, abuse, hunger, racism) as well as the good times (grandfather's stories and legends, living in the woods, sharing with local farmers). Mike never lingers on the bad times. When memories become too painful he turns to humour and satire to deflect his anger. Although his anger did surface occasionally, he was careful to control it. His main editorial guideline to me was, "I don't want to hurt my people. I don't want to be too radical with my words."

In the second part Mike recounts his experiences at Shubenacadie Residential School. Sometimes when he talked about "Shubie" he would emphasize the positive side ─ having enough to eat, learning new skills, getting his first set of watercolours ─ and sometimes the humorous side (see "In the Molasses," or "playing cowboys and Indians"). At other times he would explode with anger about how he and other Micmac children there were mistreated, and how they were deprived of their language and culture.

In the third part, "As a Young Man", Mike blends personal experiences, history and stories in talking about Big Cove and Micmac traditions such as the wakes and the St. Anne's Day celebrations. He draws attention to the historical conflict between traditional beliefs and Catholicism in his story about Little People's Point. Mike then returns to his own life and speaks about the different jobs he had during this period. He emphasizes the value of retaining his freedom, of being able to find work anywhere, and of staying mobile. When a situation became difficult he was always able to leave and get a job elsewhere, usually in Maine.

In the fourth part, "As a Visual Artist", we hear how Mike gradually developed his skills in painting. His works reflect the environment in which he grew up and the stories and legends told by his grandfather and other elders. But again Mike emphasizes that he did not want to be confined, not by the reserve and not even by art. Personal freedom and mobility were more important than public recognition and financial success.

The fifth part, "As a Married Man," closes Mike's life story. Mike usually ends his life story at this point, saying very little about the period since he moved back to Big Cove. It has been difficult, except for those times when he could take the whole family to their summer camp at the mouth of the Richibucto River. We learn more about this period in his life by listening to Ada (his wife), Cory and Forrest.

The second section of the text features conversations with Mike, Luke, Forrest and Cory

(prefaced by introductory comments). "Conversations with Mike" is a compilation of conversations I have had with Mike over the years. Some of the issues he talks about here are identity, colonization, survival, young people and problems of living on a reserve today, as well as spirituality and living in balance and harmony with nature.

From Luke, who grew up on the reserve, I got a sense of strong cultural roots together with a readiness to respond to new opportunities and challenges. With a strong family to support him, Luke was able to get a good education and to develop his artistic creativity. He talks about the reserve as home, but not as a barrier that keeps him isolated. He talks about choices and freedom and the importance of having the opportunity to control one's own destiny, what ever direction that may take.

A central theme in our conversation is education for Aboriginal people: difficulties that Micmac students encounter in non-Aboriginal schools, the importance of having choices on the reserve, as well as approaches to teaching Aboriginal languages.

Forrest also grew up on the reserve, but as a non-Aboriginal person his experiences were very different. He talks about developing strategies of "going with the flow", learning to keep to himself and getting an education. He talks about feeling like an outsider in both worlds. In contrast to Luke, Forrest does not consider Big Cove his home; he speaks of having no status there and no home after his eighteenth birthday. Now his concern is for the future, for financial security and for long-term financial planning for his family.

Cory, on the other hand, lives from day to day, not wanting to set goals for himself that he may not reach. He talks of having little self-confidence and will power. He also talks about growing up on the reserve — the good and the bad experiences. Young people want to leave; they feel isolated on the reserve. There are no jobs for them either on the reserve or in the area. They just become "educated welfare bums", he says. Cory speaks candidly about tension between young people and their parents and of the difficulty of getting rid of all that anger. He acknowledges that he is one of the lucky ones because he has strong grandparents who continue to give him love and support.

In the final section I reflect on and summarize some of the central issues that emerged from these stories and conversations.

Big Cove

Big Cove is a Micmac reserve situated in the northeastern part of the province of New Brunswick, on the shores of the Richibucto River, nearly twenty kilometres from the Northumberland Strait and from the nearest Acadian/English communities. Approximately 2000 Micmacs make their homes on 2,222 acres.

Driving down the main road of the reserve, the first thing the visitor may see is a large recreational arena on the left and the Big Cove Restaurant on the right. Just past that is the Jesse Simon ball field, named after the eldest son of William John Simon and his wife Sarah (née Francis). Then there is the newly built Big Cove Federal School (1992), which provides education for children up to and including grade 8. Across from the school stands the band office, a spacious modern building where 12 large panels of Micmac legend paintings, by Luke, Roger and Ben Simon, hang in the circular council chamber. In the offices and hallways are more paintings, including many by Michael W. Francis.

At the bottom of the street, on the banks of the Richibucto River stands the Catholic church. Along the main road we also passed a community hall, a fire station, a police station, a nursing station and a Catholic convent. Not so obvious to the visitor is the newly built Lone Eagle Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre, which is situated away from the central part of the community, in a quiet area where sweatlodge ceremonies and healing circles can be conducted without disturbance.

Elders are concerned that there is very little for the young people to do in Big Cove. In 1993 Chief Levi listed "unemployment, feelings of isolation and alienation, poverty, alcohol and a feeling of being trapped" as some of the central causes for the high rate of suicide in the community.[v] Unemployment runs at about 90 per cent, and what work there is is often short-term and provided through make-work federal funding projects. Many families are forced to live on welfare. Some augment their income with seasonal employment in the blueberry fields of Maine.

In 1993 there were a few small commercial enterprises on the reserve, including a number of small grocery stores, a restaurant, a pizza parlour, and a gas station. Less visible to the casual visitor is all the creative work that people do in their own homes: basketry, leather work, beading, and wood carving. There are also numerous visual artists who create in both two- and three-dimensional forms. Then there is the music ─ in the church as well as in kitchens,

basements and private studios, there is a rich and diversified musical scene: pow-wow music, traditional Micmac songs and chants, country and western music, fiddle playing and hymn singing, blues, jazz, and various styles of rock and roll, as well as experiments with various synthetic adaptations are all part of the diverse blend.

Michael W. Francis: Stories of My Life

Introduction

The stories begin with Michael W. Francis. He is the elder, the uncle, the stepfather, the grandfather. We begin with him because, I am told, the elders are the teachers, the carriers of traditional knowledge ─ stories and history. Real teaching happens when the old people pass on the stories; they tell them again and again so that you don't forget.

Michael W. Francis was born at Big Cove, New Brunswick in 1923. He was the fifth child of a family of seven, born to William Francis and Mary Francis (née Dedam). At age five Mike and his two remaining siblings, Phillip and Sarah (others had died) left the reserve to live in transient work camps with his father and grandfather. At the age of 12, Mike was sent to Shubenacadie Residential School in Nova Scotia. He stayed there four years and then returned to the camp of his grandfather. As a young man Mike had many different jobs (among others, labourer, cook, musician, fisherman, lumberjack), all of them in the Maritimes. He also developed his skill as a visual artist and gradually became a professional painter.

In 1972 Mike married Ada Carter of Maine and returned with her and her six children to Big Cove. Mike continued his work as an artist by painting and teaching young people in the community. In 1985, when I first met him, he had basically retired. He was introduced to me, by the cultural co-ordinator at the band office, as a valuable cultural resource person, a historian, storyteller and musician.

Mike's primary language is Micmac, although English has become the main language spoken in his home since his marriage to Ada. In editing this text I have chosen not to interfere with the spoken word by `correcting' the grammar. I feel that Mike has an expressive storytelling style and that he gets his point across very effectively.

The Early Years

Way back, a lot of Natives lived along the river there at Perch Creek. The women used to fish perch and smelts. A lot of fish there: salmon and trout, about two- to four-pound trout would come in there. Moose and deer would come down there too ─ a lot of wildlife, in those days. Not so many today because it's all buildings there now.

I was born there, at Perch Creek. Then when I was, say, about five, six years old, mother and dad separated. We lived with grandmother for a while. See my mother married when she was 13 years old. She was still playing with dolls and didn't know anything about bringing up

children. And she got very little help from her parents.

According to my mother we had seven in the family. Only two left now ─ my brother Philip died just a few years ago in Boston. Just me and Sarah alive now. Well Henry was born in Antigonish in Nova Scotia ─ my grandmother's relations lived there. Cecile (1918) was the first one born; she'd be about 75 years old if she lived now. She died young. Tom (1919) was born next; he died young. Then Philip (1920-1986) and then me (1923), then Sarah (1925), then Viola (1926-1928), then Henry (1927-1928). Viola died in her cradle, died of pneumonia, undernourished, half-starved. All of us were neglected. Mother was too young and dad was running around with somebody else. He'd come home and beat up my mother, abuse her.

Well Henry ─ 1928 ─ I was playing with him in the morning. We were laughing and happy. In the evening I brought him in the house. We slept on the floor, mattress on the floor. There was me, my sister, my aunt and Henry was on the side ─ but Henry was supposed to be in the middle...

We get up in the morning. They tell me, Mike go find your brother. He was sleeping here with us last night. I went upstairs, hollered Henry ─ no answer. And my grandmother pointed to the bureau. There was a body lying there, white sheet over it. Dead. See my father left us, my mother left us, grandmother had to take care of us. She got tired. My great aunt had to take care of us, she got tired. She got to have her freedom, not watch the kids all the time. So they got rid of him. He would have been about 66 now if he had lived. Still today my mark is there. I got up and tried to make a cross ─ I was little and I hit my hand with an axe. That scar is still there and today that is still with me. I blame my mother, my father, and my grandmother for that but nobody cares about that now. Even now, there is no justice, no justice for Henry.

And some say how nice the old lady was; well they didn't live with her. Go look for your brother she said. I went upstairs. Henry! Henry! No answer. Outside on the porch ─ Henry! She points up to the bureau ─ I lift the sheet, dead. That's the truth, honest to God ─ I lived to see that.

Well dad didn't get the word from the band or from the chief until about a week afterwards. At that time he was working for the CNR [Canadian National Railway] railroad, making axe handles, pick handles, maul handles and things like that.

The chief saw him in Moncton. He said, "You know, one of your sons died."

Dad said, "That's funny. You didn't let me know."

Chief said, "We couldn't contact you anywhere. You better come to the reserve, and you better pick up your children. If you don't, they'll be all dying out because...".

You see my mother was very young, when she was married. She was 13 years old. You, you can't blame her, can't take care of the kids 'cause she was still basically playing with dolls. And they had three of us, my brother, Sarah and me.

Well dad came on taxi. It was a rough road at that time. Old wagon roads. Dad was making good money working for the railroad. He spent money just like nothing and we thought he was a rich man. Of course he was rich in comparison to us today. So we went in the Maclachlan road, right out here. That was the first time I ever seen wigwam. My grandfather was there, another old man was there, Mr. Newell Clemen, and uncle John Francis, and my father. So my grandfather did the cooking. He made the bread in the frying pan over an open fire. You know we were happy, we were very happy just living right in the woods in the wigwam. It wasn't the best food we ever had, but we got some rabbit, some partridge. Sometimes dad shot a moose and because he shared that with the farmers, they'd trade some pork and some chicken or eggs or butter. So we stayed all winter in that birch bark wigwam, and all we had for a door was burlap bag. Mind you it was warm inside. There was a fire in the centre, rocks around it kept the heat all night long. Open hole at the top, all the smoke goes out there. So we were comfortable.

There were no women in our camp. They wouldn't spend their time way back in the woods. Well dad don't blame them for that 'cause there were too many men, and matter of fact 'cause they had little drink and alcohol that time. It was prohibition time so they'd make their own. Old German seed beer they called it. They'd make big vats and every weekend they'd whoop it up.

I was just looking on. I didn't know what they were doing, what they were saying. I was just dumbfounded to tell you the truth ─ so scary sometimes when they holler and sing. My dad would laugh at them, that is all. He never joined in the Indian dancing and singing. He didn't like it 'cause he was brought up different.

So there was a farmer living about a thousand yards away. You could hear cow bells tinkling and you could hear the kids playing. Every so often the kids would come over to our camp. They wouldn't go across the ditch ─ they stand right in the road, they're scared of Indians. Well you know I didn't know what I looked like with long hair. They had a box, some cooking in there, some bread. So one young boy come along and he just dropped the box right there and he

run right back to his farm house. Grandfather laughed and he said, "Do you see, they are scared of you fellows, they're scared of Indians." Of course at that time I couldn't talk a bit of English.

Well, dad would take that box back in the evening and bring back a big pail of buttermilk. Anything we wanted, potatoes or vegetables, we got from the farm. Of course dad traded with the axe handles and the baskets to the farmers 'cause that was what farmers want. He would make snout baskets for horses [feed baskets] that were woven so tight like canvas. He didn't sell that, he just traded — that's kind of a custom we have. We don't take money. Of course CNR paid us money, but farmers don't. We help one another.

We didn't play too much with the children 'cause, well, there had been a lot of stories going 'round, back earlier times. Those are savages. Those are Indians. And kids in school heard about savages and they want nothing to do with savages, so they keep away from us. And that's what's wrong and we just like to play same as anybody else. And sometimes Indians feel the same way too. Don't play with white people. They are murderers, they are killers. Stay in wigwam, they might attack you. Our people scared us too. We were told not to trust the white people. So we got scared, we didn't want to play with them. Of course it took a long time before we got wise to what they were talking about. It's all right for them to drink with white people, trade with white people, but not us. And white people taught their children too, same way. That's how it goes.

But today it's not so. Everybody is all together right now. But it takes a little time. There are quite a few radicals around, like me for instance. I'm not so radical as they think I am, but I resent those teachings. I resent those school teachings and those history teachings. I resent that.

Well all the entertainment we had in the camp was in the legends and stories. My grandfather would tell them for hours. Those of giants and reptiles and witches and the Great Spirit would come and so on and so forth. And every time he would tell a different one. Oh I love these stories. He used to tell us a lot of things that used to scare me. *Miigemoesso*. He'll influence you, he'll change you into some kind of animal or anything you want to be. He also teaches music. He's a good teacher, he's the one that teaches all Natives in the woods: take care of animals and scare off evil people.

But that music will draw you and transform you. He will cut off all your thinking, the

music will capture you ─ like today, young people and rock and roll, they forget everything. That's *Miigemoesso*. So when you hear that noise there you run like hell ─ wheeeeeee, whee.

One day we were walking.

"Stop."

"What?"

"Just listen." Whee, wheeeee wind blowing. "That's *Miigemoesso*."

"Where is he grandpa?"

"He's over there in the woods. I'll take you."

"No, I don't want to see him."

"He won't hurt you." (Laughs.)

Granddad had a good imagination. You see that is where I get my ideas, from my grandfather. Not only my grandfather, a lot of the old people, drifters would come in to visit us and stay for a few days. They would tell stories and legends too. Of course some of them were very political. They would talk about massacres, about piracy and what piracy did to Native people and then missionaries ─ all political. It was kind of scary the way they told them.

When the old man told stories he'd sometimes use the drum. He'd sing a little song with the drum before telling the stories. "Now I'll tell you a story about this song here." At that time I didn't know if they were good songs or not. All I could hear was dum, dum, dum. But now it's different, now I understand what they mean. They were sacred to him. It was always sacred to him, playing the drum and singing those spiritual songs.

He also sang war songs and hunting songs and all those other things he was singing about in Indian. He would sit on the ground and cross his legs and he got a little stick about a foot and a half long and he would beat that on the ground. Sometimes he would take a little piece of box or something like that.

He would sing those patriotic songs, Indian way, patriotic songs about sea, ocean, moon, stars, what have you. Sing about animals, how they are related, sing to the dolphins in the ocean, the whales, and the whales would answer him back. (Mike sings.) They could hear him in calm weather and they come right up to him and start singing, singing right along with him. That's been known for thousands of years and at harvesting time then he would sing that song to them, and the whales would answer right back. They don't practise that any more.

One time, I was about eight, nine years old, dad took a crew into the woods. They wanted

me to come. Grandfather said, "Pack up your things and get your gear." I got a big pair of boots to wear in the woods. We got into the woods, big hardwood ridge, I remember the trees there, big giant trees. They made a lean-to out of birch trees. Built a fire in front of it.

After a while we heard an owl hooting, way far back in the woods. It would echo in the woods, owl. Grandfather said, "Oh we got company, we got company." I didn't know what he meant. "Don't you hear them, it is our kin, it is our neighbours." Well grandfather's kind of humorous, so he answered back to the owls, and all of a sudden, do it again. Another one answered about half a mile again, another one. He hollered again ─ sounds like real too ─ and other voices came. That tree was full of owls, they all sitting on that branch flapping their wings, they talking. And they got so that they sound just like Micmac talking, sounds like Micmac when they talk, when they all together, congregation. Then my grandfather was answering back. He said an Indian word *Tjiigimag*, *Tjiigimag*, it means meditate, with drumstick. And you swear to

god that you can hear drumsticks up there. He says, "Ho he ho hi ho he" ─ one of them, big owl was dancing on a branch, they were dancing. And this Indian fellah he said, "Noel you better quit they are evil."

"Evil," he said, "what's evil? That's good luck to us, that is great luck." I love those owls, you know. And that night he says, "Go away, I want to go to sleep." So one by one they flew away, one by one and the big one was the last to go, he left. And every night he would come to that there camp. I was wondering why that happened, but grandfather knew their ways, and it

was amazing.

Every Saturday night they would drink and sing — no violins, no nothing, just with their mouths — and they would tap their feet and Indian dance. Well they try to teach me how to dance and sing. Of course, I was too young to learn, that time.

In 1927 we moved to Humphrey's Mills, near Moncton. We lived at the crossroads of the railroad; one goes to Buctouche, one goes to Cape Tormentine and Halifax. Train used to stop there often, going to Buctouche. Well Mr. Humphrey had a big mill there, woollen mill, they have sawmills there too. Every day we could hear the wheels grinding and the saws singing. Dad was still working for the CNR railroad. It was handier to Moncton, Humphrey's Mills, so that was quite a hard time there.

It happened 1933, my sister was very small (Mike, 10 years, and Sarah, 8 years). My grandfather and my father — Veronica was some place else — they got drunk in Moncton. The cops picked them up and put them in jail. He did not tell them [cops] that he had two kids alone at home, in the camp by the railroad track, Humphrey's Mills. First day — there was tea there, a little flour there. I try to make bread, make *losgenigen* in the frying pan — very little. Next day nobody came. I told Sarah, "Let's take a walk." We were hungry. We walk along the railroad track and I hear the sound of the saws and the mill. "Let's go there." On a lumber pile there were some lunch boxes, men's lunch boxes. I opened one up and seen some sandwiches, apples and stuff. Gave some to my sister and sat down to eat. After a while a man came out. Caught us stealing.

"Hey," he said, "What are you doing? Raiding my lunch box, eh? Go ahead." He opened it up, "Here is some more. Listen, I've got to go home and I want you kids to come with me. Get in the car." His home is about five miles away. I didn't know what we looked like — long hair, unwashed, bare feet. "Come on in, come with me." Great big house.

He called, "I got company here, two Native kids."

Woman comes in, "Where did you get those?"

"Mill. I caught them raiding my lunch box. They were hungry."

So they gave us a bath and a change of clothes. Even cut my hair. "Now come to the table." Now we wouldn't want to eat in front of people. We were funny that way. All kinds of food on the table — cakes, cookies and everything. So they went into the other room while we were eating. I took some food and put it inside my shirt 'cause I knew we had none at home. Well

the man came out, said, "You don't have to hide the food under there. We'll give you a box full to take home." So they took us in the car back to the camp. Went as far as the gate and we walked across the field to the camp. Our camp was not fit to put animals in. I don't know how we survived in that camp. Five days' time my father came home. Grandfather was involved too that time. He was ashamed, his tears came out afterwards.

My best entertainment was going fishing back in the woods or fighting with boys. We had French kids come down. Some of them are very radical; they call you names, savage Indians. Young French boys, English boys came down fishing. We play, we fight, you know. We stayed there about four years. I used to pick coal along the railroad track. Have it all piled up there in the fall, for winter. I cut a pile of wood, and dad would go to Moncton to go get groceries. He'd bring home a big wine bottle and celebrate. Oh it was noisy. See, a lot of people from Moncton used to come see us. The old lady used to come there and make baskets out of maple, out of ash. She would make a big bundle of baskets and she would go and peddle them. When they come back they would celebrate.

Then Christmas came one time. Unfortunately dad didn't have money enough. Maybe they drink it all up, I don't know. Anyway there was no money available at Christmas time. So Dad says "Christmas train will stop, Christmas. He'll stop right at that junction." Well there was snow on the ground. "I'm going to ask the train to stop, Santa Claus might be coming." Train didn't stop, didn't stop. Well we didn't think nothing about that, we wasn't sad about that. I was about eight years old. Dad started crying, there were tears coming out of his eyes. Well he felt awful, that there was no Santa Claus for us children.

My aunt Veronica, she use to come down sometimes to make baskets. She had a friend with her, his name was Doucette, Wilfred Doucette. You know that French fellow could talk Micmac better than I could, oh, can he bring it out. He and I would go down to Moncton and peddle baskets and handles and he would talk to me in Indian just like any ordinary Indian. Well Aunt Veronica came after Christmas.

"How did you kids make out?" she asked.

"Oh pretty good."

"Did you have a good Christmas, children?"

"Yeah."

"Well what did you have for Christmas?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

I said, "No, we have nothing for Christmas."

"What your father been doing?"

"Making axe handles."

"I suppose he drank up all his money."

Boy, when father came home, that afternoon, didn't she give him a good lecture. I was kind of scared there at first, they were going to have a fight. My aunt was a very big woman, she was big, husky woman about twenty-five years old.

Well they went to work, went to the woods, made some axe handles. We stayed home with my aunt. She done the cooking and the washing for us. Come fall again. I was doing my chores, same as usual, running errands to the store. At that time you could buy a pound of sugar for 10 cents, 20 cents a pound of butter, and 5 or 10 cents a loaf of bread. That's 1931.

Anyway, it came Christmas time again. There were two little camps: small camp we stay in and big camp that was my aunt's camp and Fred's camp. They had a Christmas tree up. There was no lights but they had little candles. Well, it's about Christmas eve, about midnight, my Aunt Veronica hollered, "Children, come on, Santa Claus just left." Santa Claus? Oh our eyes popped out. We ran to that little camp. Opened the door, there was a Christmas tree all lit up, little candles on it. And my sister just look under there, there was a doll sitting up there. That was the first doll she ever had. And I saw a little airplane, double winged, those Red Baron ones. Oh god, I grabbed that, that was the first toy I ever had in my life. And after a while I heard my grandfather holler, "Children, Santa Claus just left here, he's just gone." I ran back to the other house again. There was little cork gun and other toys in there, oh god, fishing rod and stockings, shoes and underclothing. We were all happy. And that night wasn't there a party, oh god. There was a lot of rum flying around. We didn't give a damn what they were doing. We were playing with toys, we were having fun.

One thing we didn't do at that time was go to school. There was no school for us. Anyway who cares, you're Aborigine, no school for me. There was a school but the way we lived, so far away in the woods. And besides our clothing wasn't fit to go to school, and we had no bath tub to wash. I wonder how I survived. You had to be tough to live in those days, you got to be, otherwise you freeze to death or you starve.

Well that went on for a while and later on they decided to move to Grand Falls. They make baskets over there. Still didn't go to school. I met French boys there. I teach them my language and they teach me theirs. We got along pretty good, yet I couldn't speak much French, but we made communication some how. Later we moved to New Denmark. There was Danish farmers there. We stayed there about three, four months.

We had no car in those days. We never stayed long in any place: Boistown, Grand Falls, New Denmark, Humphrey's Mills, Irishtown, and over to Gordon Falls near Moncton. I remember we lived way back in the woods there [Gordon Falls], and the Mounties from Moncton used to come in there to see how we were doing. They were nice fellas. They keep an eye on us that nothing happened.

Nineteen thirty-four we left there [Humphrey's Mills] and went over to Chipman and then to Saint John. That was first time I seen city in my life and I was terrified. At Chipman there was a boat called *Maggie Miller*, steam boat, old *Maggie Miller*, or *Majestic*. The boat is going to take us through the Saint John River right down to Saint John. And I never was on a steamboat in my life. What a big, big boat and I was scared. See them old model A cars coming on there, and even horses inside there. Three o'clock in the morning ─ ding, ding, ding. By and by whistle blow whoo, whooooo ─ we hear that steamboat whistle blow just plain as day. Then the whole boat begins to shake. I say, "Dad we got to be moving, I see the wharf moving away, it's moving away." We got there after midnight. That's how long it took, 'cause it stopped at every little harbour to take people on and put them off.

Well I never seen a city in my life. And when I got down there I was scared of people. There was negroes, there was awfully many people there. I was really scared. The cars, the electric cars, awful noise. I lived all my life in the woods, living like nomad. Take a man from a nomadic way of life and put him into a city, you scare him to death. So it took a long long time to get used to it. Nineteen thirty-five, Dad was still making axe handles. He would leave us with a coloured woman and her name was Mrs. White. And that is first time I seen negro, so black. I got scared of her. Well, she was a lovely, nice woman. She had six kids of her own and she was very nice to us. What they ate, we ate, cornflakes and stew. Really, she was like our mother.

It took a long time to get acquainted in the city. Well they put us up in Chapel Street. There's one district for low-class tenants, you know, other place higher-class. We had gang wars ─ kids, you know kids. I didn't know the system in the city, so I go anywhere, go anywhere. The

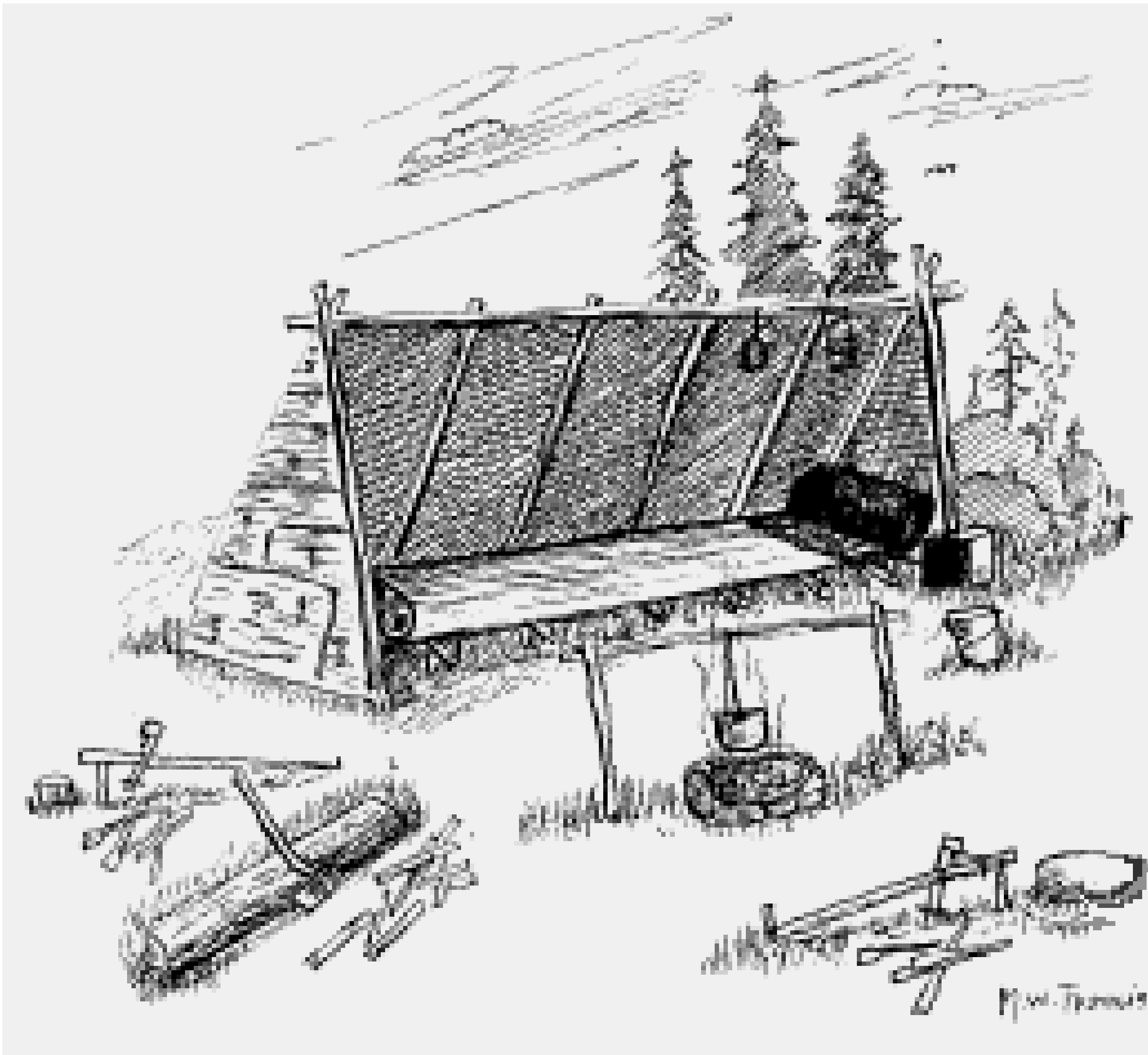
first thing you know, young fella, white fella says,

"Whatcha doin' here? You ain't supposed to be here."

"Why?"

"You live out there Chapel Street, you go back there."

So I told this one fella that. He said, "Oh dark race people don't go there." Prejudice that time, prejudice. Well we fought, we fought street to street. I told dad, "I don't like the city, I



would rather be in the woods. The woods is my home, and I miss it." Dad says, "You get used to it. You grow up you'll find out." So it went on.

Shubenacadie residential school

One day we were playing with negro boys and white guys on the street. I was running around on

bare feet — coal city — my feet were just black and my face was all black. Well one lady complained about us on the street bumming for dimes so we could go to the movies. This woman, old Nellie, old Nellie Francis — little basket under her arm, a little round black straw hat on, little pin up here, long dress on right below her knees — she came then.

"Where's your father? You know I am your great aunt," she says. "You know, you kids are not clean, and bumming on the street," she says. "That's not good, so I have to make a complaint to the department of Indian affairs."

And my gosh she did. She was a little prejudiced herself. She didn't want to see us kids taken care of by negroes. But I'm going to tell you something, that negro took care of us better than she would. Now I realize it, now.

Well dad came home about Saturday, about right time, them Indian affairs people walked in. Top coats on.

"Mr. Francis?"

"Yes?"

"We're coming here to get your kids. It's the order, Indian affairs. I think that you better hand over those kids to us."

Shubenacadie, they called it Indian residential school, run by convent sisters and a priest. They put us on a train. I was crying, leaving home, leave my grandfather, leaving all them. I felt like jumping off the train. But there was no way you could 'cause they were watching you, those people. Had tears in my eyes, my sister too.

Great big building with great big cross on top. At the door you see them sisters coming down, black robes. I was scared of them — coming down with the white crosses there. "Come on children," just like that, "follow me." Took my sister on the other aisle, girl's side. We went in there. Oh, I was lonesome, I wanted to get out of there. But there was no way to get out. It is all barred, you see, it is all barred, everything is all barred like a prison.

We were supposed to be all Micmacs and a few adopted white children classified as Micmacs too. There is one thing about it, they take care of you. Went to mass in the morning. After mass, breakfast, and then go do our chores. They give you clothing and good food. But the sisters there have full control of us and we were warned not to do an imitation of the Indian war dances or sing Indian songs or, "I don't want to hear you kids speak Micmac language. We teach you English language." If you did you got strapping, confinement, or else your liberties were

diminished. That's what hurts, they take away your spirit. You just standing there like statue. If you want to talk Micmac language you got to go out somewhere and hide. But a lot of the boys there were stool pigeons. They would tell the sisters.

Well I kind of understand that I was a captive, a slave, for ransom. At that time, at the convent, there was lack of money, hard times, depression years. Fifty, sixty sisters in there and the government had some influence for them to hold their jobs. Get Indians, and the government will give so much per child: washing, food, education and all that. They held us for ransom for the money. Teach them but don't give them freedom, keep them down, call them savages. You ain't human being. That's the way I take it. Even today I wouldn't send my kid in there. Bad enough to send them to white school, bad enough. Our culture was destroyed by the missionaries and I didn't like the idea either. After when I grew up and told my grandfather about it he said, "You should not have stopped your language."

When I was 14 years old I worked in the barn. They had 52 head of cattle to milk. We have to take a man's job, do the manual work to decrease wages, 'cause the government pay the men money to take care of the farm. They got two hired men, take care of the farm and a veterinarian to take care of the animals. So they teach the boys to take care of horses, pigs and the dairy farm. They taught us all of that. But sometimes we would miss a month of school. I stay there four years.

Well I went to school. I have a pencil in my hand and paper, material. I look out of the window, see the barn. I start drawing picture of barn, and piggery and dairy. I'd draw the fields where the cattle were grazing. All I had was a pen and some ink. That's how I started drawing pictures.

Well it was in June. There was a movie in Shubenacadie. Well the boys first ─ we were all dressed the same, and the girls last, marching just like an army. Two sisters in front, two sisters in the middle and three sisters in the back ─ marching along the side of the road right into town to the theatre. Big grey building there. We sat there and you could hear a pin drop 'cause we were taught to never speak in a theatre, we were silent.

The screen opened up and the music came on, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. My god it was pretty colours. The first coloured movie I ever seen, 1937. You see a castle, just amazing, beautiful castle. And you see horses and huntsmen, and witch. Oh god it was just like they were alive. Walt Disney did a wonderful job on that. My mind kept looking at the little

people, Snow White in the glass-covered coffin and all them dwarfs sitting down and kneeling down praying, tears coming down their eyes. I can't forget that picture. Well I went back to school and I draw Grumpy, Sneezy, Bashful and all the dwarfs just with my pen. Well sister said, Mike, could you draw those on the blackboard. Well it took me two days to draw them all but I didn't draw the witch there, she was too cruel.

It was about June 1939 ─ when the war broke out, when I left the school. Before I left a sister brought in a package. Said, "Mike, this is from Father Mackie and all of us, present for you." I opened it. There was a set of paints and brushes and also paper to use. "Mike, this is yours to take home."

So I was glad to get back to my grandfather. I was so happy to get out of that school. It was good in a way. But you got no privileges. You just got to go by the rules. After four years I could finally go home. My grandfather came and met me in Truro. My sister was right at the front door of the convent. She was crying, she had to come later, she was younger. So I went with my grandfather. He lived in Irishtown, right back of the railroad station. He had a little shack. I stay with him there. Went fishing trout every day, helped him make axe handles. And yet you know the camp wasn't too good, a lot different than a convent and the white sheets. But I managed to live with my grandfather.

As a Young Man

One time, when we were in Big Cove, I took care of two old fellas, two old men. One 90 years old, one 80. One talk to himself ─ talking away, talking away ─ senile. At night no kerosene, no electric lights in the house. I go upstairs, window's open, back window is wide open, and I was sitting down there. It was getting dark. My grandmother went over to the house there to take care of a sick woman. A little away from the house, about a quarter-mile.

She tell me, "You stay home and take care of the old people. Be sure they don't get cold and don't you leave them."

"Alright grammy, I'll stay home grammy."

I went upstairs. I lay down about 9 o'clock at night, 9 o'clock summer, and old fella talking, talking, talking, it echoed all over the upstairs. It sounds weird, scary. All at once the other old fella would holler, "Stop talking, I want to go to sleep." Well he was deaf, he couldn't even hear.

All of a sudden bell rang and someone was hollering: *alasotmamgepô*, holler way out. Then echo again and another holler, *alasotmamgepô*, and that scares you too when someone's dying, all echoing, seems like all ghosts appearing. I tried to be brave, you know. I was about 17, 16 years old. And the bell rang, church, dead sound, somebody died you see. Diiii-ng, diiiiii-ng, that bell sounded like death, like dying and the old fella talking, that scared me more. So I never used the stairs. I just jumped out of the window and down to the ground. Bounced just like rabbit and ran.

I got down to the house where that woman is dying, where my grandmother is, and it is dark at night.

Grandmother says, "What you doing here? Why don't you go back to take care of the old people?"

"Grandma I ain't going back to that house, haunted, you know. That woman is dying here and that ghost might be — you know."

Well my grandmother said, "Since you're here, you're going to carry water. There is no pump, you got to carry water from the spring."

So I carry water, dark just like that ghost was right coming behind me. That woman was dying, big eyes, died of consumption you know. You could just see skin and bone. I could just see her right behind my back, walking, trying to grab hold of me. And I carry that pail up there. Getting worse all the time. So this time I tried to hide from her, my grandmother. I was going to go outside.

So what happened. They laid the body right there near the window there and table right here. Door right here and kitchen outside. Men and women were all sitting down, little bibles in their hands, they were singing hymns for the dead. So I slip under that table where the white cloth is to hide away from my grandmother. I fell asleep, fell asleep. When I woke up there wasn't a soul in the room. They were all in the kitchen having their supper, and lamp is on table and little lamp by the coffin. I don't know, I put my hand on the coffin like that and I got right up. There she is looking at me. Oh boy I took right off through that door. When I went through that door they didn't know I was in the room. They thought it was the corpse open that door. Well the women ran right out there, and I don't know what I look like, my eyes so open and scared.

Grandmother found me. "Oh you here, eh. Go get a bucket of water." I tell you, I carry water until break of daylight and none of them boys would carry water. They were scared. When

we went back home, grandma gave me a good going over. "You left the old people. They could die. You be the cause of it all."

Well there was a funeral and every time I go upstairs to that room I see that face again. I said, "Grandma I'm getting out of here."

It was St. Anne's Day. We went there in June to Little People's Point [officially named Chapel Point]. There was a church and a congregation there, over a hundred went. I didn't take much interest in it. I was just a young fella, I was just manning the boats, transporting the people back to Big Cove.

Grandfather had told me how back in the 1800s they celebrated with the priest and the missionaries. The Native people would try and get permission from the priest or bishop to hold a gathering. Well priest says, "Chiefs and old elders, you fellows gather up what you want to do, set her up but first we have a celebration of Saint Anne's Day. After Saint Anne's Day we will invite all the people to join what you are doing." So they would set up after mass, right in front of the church.

You know where that new church is in Big Cove? There used to be beautiful oak trees, big round oak trees standing right by the shore and the lawn was all beside the oak trees, lawn, where the church is. They would set up blanket there and they would have *oaltes* game there, *oaltes*. All the women would wear the peaked hats. They got *oitjipôti*, it's an Indian purse, tied up here [at the waist] like big giant pocket, and all their pipes and tobacco in there, the old ladies and the old men.

They would all be sitting down there, cross their legs, their dresses there, sitting down playing *oaltes*. Oh they had great fun. They would laugh and play and they got little sticks for tallies. Father there standing and watching them. Want to join us Father? So Father would sit down and join the game. And say about four o'clock they are going to have a big dance. Bring all your *sisoetjgel* [rattles], your *pepgotjetaag* [drums], we are going to have some dancing. Bring your little *tjipasgo* [whistles].

Old ladies, 75, 80, 90 years old, they were dancing around that circle. They dance around and rattlers going and they would sing that gathering song, *goanotaiee*. Now I don't know it all but *goanotaiee* means *maligômitj*, gathering. Grandfather used to sing that. (Mike sings.) And

then they start singing this one here, a little more modern. (Sings ─ more like a fiddle tune.) The women would join in and dance around the circle. There are words for that, but they cut the words off and made the tongue rattle on the palate. Old Aunt Mary used to tell me how to sing that. The priest and the missionaries would join in and dance with the crowd. That is something that was unusual, and well, there was no prejudice, everything was sacred. If a priest had a mass, that was sacred; if the Indians had their ritual dance, that was sacred to them too. The priest would understand that now, before that they didn't.

For the Saint Anne's picnic and gathering they have a pot luck. They bring everything together, so the church is involved in the same category. Same you put tomato in the soup, same thing, you got to make it taste better. So that is how the Indians enjoyed it.

Little People's Point[vi]

Well, it began
long time, thousand years ago,
maybe so, you know
when the Natives were, were in that, in that fashion
to believe in those Little People
which they claim existed, that time.

And I asked my grandfather, "How big are they?"
"Oh they're small, about foot, not even foot tall some of them
they're small little people."
But they had, they had the magical powers
they had the powers, of their own,
and whoever goes by that river,
he has to stop at that point,
give some kind of security,
Little People, tobacco or food of any kind, clothing, or what have you.
And, whoever doesn't do that
he'll have misfortune,
they will come back home with empty canoe,
simply because, they did not give anything to
Little People.

And this time
when a young fella
didn't believe in such ordeal, or what goes on there,
He go out back and he go forward one day, told his father,
"I don't believe in those Little People, and I will not,
I will not give them nothing."
But he got out there,

he had misfortune.
The canoe upset, wind storms came,
lightening struck,canoe, and down he went.

Well he got drowned.
Little People came after him.
They brought him ashore,
canoe smashed up. Brought him to the bank of the shore,
brought him and laid him up there near the tree
on the bank.
Whole lot of Little People carry this man up there,
they were strong you know,
and they just laid him there and let him sleep.

He sleep a couple moons,
two moons, two months.
When he woke up he didn't know where he was.
He said, "Where am I?"
Little People all around him.
He says,
he says, "You slept a very long time."
He says, "How long?"
"Oh let's say about couple moons."
"Well," he says, "I feel hungry, I feel starved."
"Take him food and talk to him."
Say, "Well, that is your punishment?"
"We punish people that way," he says. "They don't believe in us,"
he says, "give us nothing."
He said, "This is supposed to be like a
stopping place
to pay your
security
to go out there.
If you don't we bring you
hard luck and..."

Well, they decided,
the young fella,
to build him a canoe. Didn't take long.
They got the canoe all built up, "Now, you go home now, tell your people
what happened
and teach them young people to
to pay respect
to our People's, Little People's Point."
They call Little People, *Poglatemootj*
Poglatemootj, that's proper word, Native tongue.

So he told his father. "You've been a way a long time, Where have you been?"
Told him story of what happened.
"I told you so."
He said, "Now I believe it, now."
"I shall pack things up," he said, "give it to the Little People.
I owe them, I owe them a lot."
He said, "I've been ignoring them for quite some time now and I am going to pay them all back."

So he goes to work, pack his things up, grandmother fix
him...
"I'm going out fishing, Mom, Dad," he said, "I'm going out fishing."
So he went out fishing.
He stop at Little People's Point, saw there was hundreds of them right by the shore, waiting and they come.
He said, "I just stop here, I'd like to give some food, tobacco, what have you.
They were all happy.

And now he said "You go
out there," he said, "you load your boat,
you got enough supplies, food and everything, berries and everything," he said, "when you come back home
your people will be very happy."

Well, and so, it went on
for years and years, it went on.
Women and men go up there.
You know, even today,
Native people do stop there
pay respects, Little People.

Not long ago, there was misfortune at Little People's Point. There was a party that didn't stop, they were drinking in the boat. They all got drowned. Well you see in 1784 the missionaries built a church there. They were brain washing the Natives to believe in the Catholic religion. They said Little People are demons, don't worship them. We will baptize you and teach you, to believe in God and angels.

But the Little People were real, it was not fake. So they built a church — horses coming down hauling lumber, even hired Indians to get that church fixed up.

Some of those statues brought. Bishop came, Archbishop came to bless the church. The Indians and French got together and they all had a big supper outdoors.

Well, Little People seen this what happening. They packed up and left the Point. Indian says, "Well, my gracious what happened to the Little People, they ain't there no more." Some old

Indian said, "You know, I was right. The priest told them that they were demons but they're not, and the Little People knew that the church is built, kind of take away their friendship; ruined their friendship with the Micmacs." And some say they still exist; they will come back at certain times, so many hundred years, they'll come back and wander around Little People's Point.

Some people say they heard Little People singing. Along the shore they make them little things, make funny looking little carvings on rocks. They found them along the shore. Now I never seen those myself but I was very intrigued all the same. I hope someday to go down pay a little respect at Little People's Point. I shall put some money there for them or anything. I say, I want you to give me good luck. I'm going up to take my wife and family out to the beach for the summer. I just talk to them and spiritually maybe, nothing will happen to my family and I'll have good luck. That's how Little People's Point, that's how it is today.

Well I went back with my grandfather, working in the woods around Irishtown. One day Phillip, my oldest brother, came. I never saw him since I was 8 years old. He was in Shubie too, but when I went there they shipped him over to Halifax, St. Mary's convent. They have brothers there to take care of the boys. He used to be a hellion so they sent him down there so the men could take care of him.

Anyhow, he took me away from my grandfather. That was the first time I hoboed on a train. When I got off in Saint John they thought I was a negro, all black coal in my face. CNR police caught us with a big light. Took us in. I looked awful walking in there. I was ashamed of myself, ashamed. Phillip was a good talker. My brother was stranded over to Sussex, he says he has no home, only a shack. I am taking him over to our father's place. What's your father's name? Bill Francis. Yeah, I know Billy Francis.

Ferry leaves in the morning, he said. Government will pay for your room and board at the hotel until tomorrow morning. We left the next morning and went over to the ferry, and coincidence. My brother was scared to death of the old man, oh he was scared. He was going to put me on the ferry boat, let me go across alone. There we were waiting. Phillip sees a man walking out from the cabin. Oh my god, it was my father. He had a suit on, black serge, felt hat. Oh god, I did not even know him. But he knew Phillip.

"Phillip" he says, "what the hell are you doing here?"

He said, "I brought my brother down to you."

"Mike?" Dad looks at me. "You're Michael?"

Last time I seen my father was at Saint John. Dad grabbed me and lifted me up in the air like that. We got in a taxi, went to Saint John where he sold his handles. He made three hundred dollars. At that time, 1939, that was a lot of money. He was like a king there walking around.

But dad he makes handles so they got to be perfect, or else he would throw them back and polish them over again. He examines every handle. He said, I don't want to get no bad name, son. I've been making axe handles for years for CNR railroad and I don't want to ruin my reputation. Those axe handles have to be well done. You make money, you don't get anything for nothing.

We were a whole crew working with dad. Andrew Francis, he's a relation of mine, Peter Simon the old fella, he was one of them. "Now look fellas, when you work with me you got to do as I tell you," says dad. "You don't stay in bed until 9 in the morning. You get up at 7, be to work at 8 or 9. The handles have to be perfect, then you get your money. Mike is the foreman." That's how we operated. Dad was that way, he was independent, he never worked for the companies. He was hard man, hard. I was slave — I know I was kind of young. But he taught me. That's why I can make baskets and broom handles, fork handles, peevee handles. Nothing you can't make. But now I don't have to. Government take care of me now.

So I stayed with the old man for three years. In 1942 dad told me, "Mike," he said, "you know you got a mother, lives in Mars Hill Maine. She's going by the name of Sock, Mrs. Mose Sock. If you want to see your mother, I'll give you money, thirty dollars. You can stop in Fredericton, Indian agent, he will give you clothes and give you paper."

Master Henry J. Whalen, he was an Indian agent at that time. He asked what my name was. Well he was surprised. "Well I know your father well. You going to pick potatoes, eh? I'll get you clothing."

Army boots, stockings, underwear, big bag that he gave me. He gave me paper to pass. To whom it may concern, bearer of this paper is Michael William Francis, Page Water, King's County.

I was a young fellow about 19 years old when I went to Mars Hill, Maine. I never seen my mother. I seen one Indian fellow.

"I'm looking for a woman named Mrs. Mose Sock."

"Oh yes, she lives up here about a mile. She's working now," he said, "she comes down here to do her shopping. Why don't you wait here, 5 o'clock you see red truck, pickup truck will arrive. You see short woman, a little dark, that's your mother. A man named Mose Sock is with her."

After five I seen the pickup. I seen a man and woman going into the store. All those years. I was four years old. I hadn't seen my mother. And all of a sudden they came out.

"Mrs. Mose Sock?"

"Yeah."

"You Mrs. Mose Sock?"

"Yeah."

"I don't know how to put this. My brother, Phillip Francis, is my brother Phillip and you're my mother right?"

She said, "You're Mike?"

"Yeah that's me."

"My God, get in the car."

She cried. We went to our home. My half sisters and half brothers, I didn't even know them. Sassy little brats you know but I love them just the same.

And they said, "Who is that guy?"

"That's your brother."

"Brother? I don't know I had a brother."

"Oh yeah, you got lots of brothers and sisters."

Well it took a long time to learn that she was my mother.

I always had a job, took care of myself and didn't rely on anybody else. I worked at the potato house on the farm. I was getting about 50, 60 dollars a week. Gave half to mother, kept half for myself. I worked in the woods for the Atlas Plywood Company, Houlton way. I worked in fertilizer plants. Worked anywhere where I can make a living to stay alive. Well they even called me dump picker Mike 'cause I found a lot of things there: radio, TV. Plug it in, it went. We all watch TV — we can't afford one. One time I had no smokes. Went down to the dump — brand new package of Pall Malls, never been opened. I'm not ashamed to tell you this, it's true. We were so poor down in Mars Hill. My sister wanted a pair of shoes, some clothing. I went down to the dump. You know spring cleaning time, I found a lot of stuff in there, dresses, towels, sheets,

stockings, underclothes for girls and men, overalls, shoes, boots. I got home and my mother said they are good things. Almost brand new stuff from the store. Gave the old man shoes and my sister went downtown all dressed up nice.

"Oh, my where did you buy those clothes?"

"Oh my brother Mike got them from the dump."

They walk away. People are prejudiced you see, walk away.

"Dump clothes people."

I always had money, while the fellas running around from my reserve ─ no job, no money. But here I am, my hands and face all black, with my copper, iron and brass junk piled up, and junk buyers come from Bangor or Houlton with their trucks and they give me money for it. Made about 80, 90 dollars a week from picking the dump. That's why they called me dump picker Mike. But during the blueberry harvest I would always go back to Blue Hill, mingle with the people.

For a while there, I was playing with a country music band. We called ourselves the River Ranch Boys; had a nice crew, about three girls, four boys. Well it didn't last long, everybody had families, jobs. They don't stick together more than about two, three months.

We were on radio WRKD, singing them old timers like *Cold, Cold Heart* and *When My Blue Moon Turns to Gold Again*. We played all over Maine. Biggest crowd we ever had was in Brunswick, Maine, about 500 people. The leader would introduce me, "We have a fella here is going to sing favourite old time songs, he's from Canada, up from New Brunswick, he's a good singer, a good yodler too, can he yodel." Then after a fiddler came in, he'd play good. I played some violin but not too much. I'd play *Old Soldier's Joy* and that. The girls were singers. At the end we sang gospel songs. A lot of Pentecostals over there.

Of course the band was beginning, it was starting and they doing pretty good job but I didn't like the system. You know, too demanding. You got to be there practising, you got to be there on time. Of course I like to be out with the boys and having fun and you can't have no fun when you are playing in a band. I told my father I ain't going back to the job. I'm going somewhere else I can make better money than that.

So I landed in the woods working for the Great Northern Paper Co. Working in the woods with saw and axe and driving a team of horses now and then. I worked there for about a year and a half and then I quit. You get tired of it ─ the gang out there, you got problems, they got their

family problems. And you can't have the friends you want. I was the only Indian there.

Before Christmas I came home, Dorothy was born [Mike's half sister]. Mother didn't have no clothes for the baby, no soap, no nothing, and the old man was drunk. I came home with a lot of money. About 200 dollars, a lot of money that time. I didn't know what to buy her. Old woman said, "I'll help you." We bought baby stuff, soap and towels, bought some flowers for my mother. Old lady says, "It's a good thing that your son came home."

"He's an angel," she said. "God sent him. We had no money."

Ever since then I thought I better go back to Saint John. Work in the woods with my father again. Then 1945, we all came to Big Cove, election time, and that is the time they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. We were over at *Egtagnog* when it happened. And all them boats were whistling and cars were blowing, war is over, war is over.

Well I had been drafted in the army in 1943. When I got my call, nobody sent me a letter over to Maine. Mounties got me, said you have to come. They took me by car to Moncton, put me on a train to Saint John. Saint John, put me on a train again to Fredericton. Fredericton, took me on a jeep and took me to the camp gate. They lock me up in a cell there with other fellas. Number seven depot in Fredericton. I didn't pass the medical. One eye was bad, left eye. Gave me rejection paper. But my buddies were in the army, and I wanted to go. Well I got out and went back to Maine. I like Maine, 'cause over there I go free, go anywhere. Meet a lot of people, nice people and we get together, drink together, go canoeing, making baskets or a variety of things.

Then my grandfather died in 1946. He was 85 years old when he died of pneumonia. What happened, dad was out before Christmas. Two weeks before Christmas they were out fishing and grandfather wanted to go too so that he could make some Christmas money. Unfortunately he got cold, fishing in the ice. Well he went home and that night he lay down on the bed, can't get up, so weak. At that time doctors didn't come. They didn't give a damn about Indian. Let him die ─ no hospital, no doctor. It was late and he died. I felt bad about that.

You know I dreamt about him when he died, I dreamt about him, same time when he died. I was over to Maine when he died. I dreamt going up Big Cove road. At that time it wasn't paved, all gravel. It was kind of getting dusk, a bit dark, a little daylight, but not much. I was walking down the road. I met a fella on the road. I don't know who he is today, but I met Indian fella, he was from Big Cove anyway. He said, "Your grandfather is dying." He said, "You better hurry." I ran, turned in Big Cove road. About half to Big Cove from the main road I heard a bell

ring, church bell. Sign of somebody dying, diiii-ng, diiii-ng. I ran, I ran to the house. I seen people standing outside trying to get in. I was rushing in. Before I could open that door I woke up. That morning, Joe Albert came, Joe, my cousin, came. He brought message. He said, "Your grandfather died last night." And I dreamed so accurately, that I was there, spiritually. You know, I never told my father about it. Why was that dream so accurate? Because my grandfather was so close to me. Suppose he remembered me when he was dying. He and I were so close when I was a kid. He always protected me from disaster. Like my father'd get drunk, he used to be rough on me, take axe handle. So my grandfather would step in.

Said, "I can fight back, but the young fella can't fight back, with axe handle in your hand." Grandfather would protect me all the time. 'Cause dad was a very vicious man when he was drinking. When he got older he tamed down, he changed all that.

In 1952 I worked at Bob Blake's Diner in Rockland, Maine. First I was washing dishes and then I was the short order cook. I was there for about a year and a half and then I went to Vinalhaven, Maine. Worked at the cemetery doing maintenance and clean-up and then later on I went clamming, got seven dollars a bushel at that time. Got a bushel and a half sometimes but it all depends on the weather. We clammed there year 'round. Then later in the summer an old fella wanted me to help him with lobster fishing. So I worked in the area for about a year.

In 1954 I came back to Rockland and I was looking for a job when I met Dana Libby, a flamenco guitar player and an art dealer. I had known him before. Well Dana was also a master carpenter making colonial reproductions of furniture. He got me a job making highboy and lowboy chests and tables. One day he invited me over to the house to see some drawings and sketches by other artists. He was an art collector too. He says, "Do you like music?" I said, "Yeah, I love music." He got out his flamenco guitar and played a tune called Spanish Fandango. Boy, didn't that sound good. His music was a real inspiration to me.

Then a year later I went back to Macwahoc, Maine and went to work for a pulp and paper company there. Then quit there and went to work for Great Northern Pulp and Paper Company, driving pulp. Worked there for a while and then went to Mars Hill. In the fall we all went to Blue Hill, Maine to rake blueberries. I worked on that blueberry farm for a while. Had a little camp down there near the mill pond. Lived alone there for a while and I enjoyed myself. I was very independent, made axe handles and baskets there. I didn't bother the welfare department 'cause I was healthy and I can make my own living using the natural resources.

I met some hippies there, near Sedgewick, Maine. They'd drive down once in a while. They were nature people and they always liked to come to my camp at the mill pond. So they invited me over to the house. They were organic gardeners and sun worshippers I think. They came from California ─ like those singers, Lionel Ritchie, Jim Croce and all of them, and some from ABBA. I remember them singing that *Take a Chance on Me*. One of them asked me to tell them about Native medicines. Well I told them a few things. We were down having a picnic near the lake. We had a great time. We'd play guitars and sing. One day I asked if I could borrow a guitar for a little while. Some farmers came down and wanted me to sing some songs. Later I brought the guitar back. Then one Christmas Eve I went up to ask them again if I could borrow a guitar to play some Christmas music for the kids. Well they brought out this classical guitar and said, "This is yours now, for Christmas." They gave it to me and I was proud of it, and I still got it.

I never had any trouble getting a job. When I wanted to get a job I would mingle with the right people. I mingle with Jewish people, I mingle with anybody. I get along and I don't find any problem with them at all. They know that I'm not working and they give me a job, anything. Even joined the AFL/CIO, that was in Rockland. I got a job through my brother-in-law.

"How would you like to get a job?"

"Yeah."

"Well what grade schooling have you got?"

"Grade 8."

"Well as long as you can read and write we can work you in."

So he got me a job in a chemical plant. I was working on washing screens. But I didn't like it because the chemicals are strong. When you walk out of there you think you're drunk. Your clothes smell like ether. I didn't like that so I quit and went back to Macwahoc again, cutting pulp and making baskets. You know I just did common labour jobs, nothing very spectacular.

Well you know, people were wonderful to me. They gave me jobs and there was no prejudice, no discrimination whatsoever. There was no racism against me, only some whites were racist against blacks. Well one day I was in a bar room of one of those big hotels where all the stars go in. I was just raising hell in the bar room.

I said, "Do you know something?"

"What?"

"I'm kind of ashamed of my nationality."

Well he was madder than hell. He said, "What the hell, look, you should be proud you are a pure American Indian. As a Native you should be proud, you are the first people," he said. "To be honest I'd give my right arm to be you."

Well I was just raising hell with him. First thing I know another party heard us talking and they came over and treat us just like kings. I meet a lot of people from all over the country and I get along.

As a Visual Artist

When I came out of residential school I still doubted myself, I didn't think I can make it being an artist. I went to Rockland Maine, about 1950, went to an art museum. Norman Rockwell was there and there were all those Maine artists. Rockwell was small thin man and he was showing his works, realistic works, it was beautiful work. There was a fellow named Frank Amabbe, a Japanese artist from Blue Hill, Maine. He was the director of the Farnsworth Art Museum. He was doing art on canvas with brush and paint.

He says, "Do you like to paint?"

I said, "I'm not that good, I'm just starting."

"Well why don't you hang around here and watch us paint."

I said, "All right."

I just went there to see. I saw Grandma Moses's paintings — flowers and fruits — oh they looked so real. Then I seen the Mona Lisa painting on the wall by that bearded old artist, inventor — what's his name — white haired old man with whiskers [Leonardo da Vinci]. So I asked Frank Amabbe about that. He says, "You can do that but you got to have patience, you got to clear your mind when you do that fine art, can't have no problems. Don't worry about your problems when you are painting. You got to be lonely. Only friend you have is brush and paint."

Ever since then I started painting pictures. The first painting I sold was a schooner in the water with seagulls flying around. Man came along.

"How much you want for that picture?"

"Oh, five dollars I guess."

"Five dollars? All right."

The first painting I sold for five dollars and I thought I was a millionaire, I was so proud of it. Well at that time I was back in Mars Hill. Well there was a Jewish family, had a big clothing store there. Their name was Adelmann. They wanted me to do a portrait painting. I said, "I'm not really an artist."

He said, "Have you ever sold a painting? If you can sell a painting you are an artist ─ if you can't then you're not." So that gave me sort of a boost.

I started painting, wildlife, Indians, wigwams. I sold them for 25, 30, 40, 50 dollars. Also for motel lobbies, I paint big pictures, four-by-eight size on masonite. Wild deer, moose and lakes and ripples in water and even sunrise. Blue, blue, blue sky and ripples in the water and shadows. I put some atmosphere in them.

I went back to Macwahoc and there was a fella there who wanted me to do a portrait of his daughter for a graduation present. But look at me going down the road, carrying an axe in my hand, old shabby clothes, and long hair, you wouldn't think it was an artist probably, but I said I would try it. "Well I'll give you a hundred dollars if you'll do it." So I stretched my canvas, gessoed it, mixed my paints and I painted the picture, painted very slowly. Took me about 7 hours: her hair, so fine and eyebrows and eyes so clear. It was quite a job. He came over three, four days later. Looked at it, never spoke, just looked. He said, "Young man, you got a wonderful talent." She almost spoke right there, almost spoke, painting. I wrapped it good for him. Hundred bucks right there. A couple days later another family came. I had to turn her down, I was out of material. "I'm sorry I can't do it. I'm heading to Blue Hill to rake blueberries, can't do any more." I turned a lot of them down.

It got so I lost a lot of that activity. I took to drink. I just didn't want to be trapped, locked up, wrapped up in my work. I want my freedom in the woods like that, enjoy my way of life. I can do painting but it is not my life, it is not my life. Maybe other painters feel the same way. Writers, even poets have a problem. We all human beings, we have feelings. What I like to enjoy best is when right moment comes, when time comes like season. When the time comes I will do the paintings, do my best work.

Opportunity don't come all the time. Let's say you are alone, all alone. Somebody knock on the door. "Come in. Oh you've come, that's nice, now we can talk together." Well the same with painting and music ─ you got to be in the mood, got to be right time. That's how I take it.

In 1960 down in Fredericton they started a program to get Natives to do their handicraft work, carving, weaving, pottery, painting, silk screening. Dr. Ivan Crowell, an anthropologist, he was the director of handicrafts in New Brunswick. Anyhow, down in Big Cove they hired a non-Indian to do the art work, but they really wanted an Indian. It has to be original work done by Natives. Miss Kineer she was a white woman. She was teaching here at Big Cove at the time.

Well I was in Mars Hill, Maine and I met an Indian fella. Oh they're looking for you. What did I do now. The government is looking for you. They want to start a project on Indian reserve, handicraft shop and they are looking for an artist. They recommended you.

I don't want to go back to Indian reserve, I'd rather stay here.

I happened to come that summer, to Big Cove, to my sister Sarah's.

She said, "Mike they're looking for an artist. They want you."

"I don't want to do no arts. I got no place, I got no home here and I ain't going to paint no pictures in other people's houses. Oh no, I have to have my own roof."

When Dr. Crowell got the word that I was in Big Cove he came down to talk to me. "Michael we got a problem. We're starting a handicraft project in Big Cove, making hasti-notes with Indian legends on them. We want a designer. They put your name in. Can you do some designs for us? We'll pay you so much for your work and so much for the cards."

I said, "Bill I don't think I'll touch it 'cause I got no home here. I'm just tired right now."

"How about getting you a room in Fredericton? They got studios there and a lot of artists working? We'll pay your room and board."

"That will be all right then."

"How many legends do you know?"

"I don't know many but they been passed down to me from my grandfather and all the rest of the elderly people."

I went over there. Started making the cards: the seasons and also later on I got commission to do a calendar. Then cups and saucers were designed with Little People, whole set of them for Expo, Montreal.

The Micmac Legend of Our Seasons

The cloud of the great Winter King
Made shadows everywhere

Snow covered the trees and land
Hiding the food and homes from all the animals
They gathered to talk about
The hardships that came over them

Tattler, the loon said
He heard much talk of the warm Summer Queen
And offered to lead Glosgap
The great god of the Micmacs
To her home in the south.
Glosgap travelled over the sea
On Blob, the big black whale
For many moons
To the land of the warm Summer Queen.
Glosgap gave him a pipe and much tobacco
Today sailors see whales
Blowing puffs of smoke
In the air
For Glosgap's pipe is still among them.

The Summer Queen lives
In a bright flower palace
With many singing birds
Glosgap told her of the cold Winter King
The suffering of his people
And asked for help.
The summer Queen knew the Winter King was strong
That much time must pass
To move him to his land
Far to the north
"But I'll try," she said.

The summer Queen and her maidens
Planned their northward journey
The maidens went first
They melted much snow
And opened many flowers for their queen.

The Summer Queen came slowly
Up to Glosgap's land
She met the great Winter King
He was much pleased by her beauty and brightness
Her warmth melted his coldness
They thought much of each other
And made a pact
That each would rule
For half a year

In Glosgap's land.

The Queen and her maidens leave for the south
Their season's reign has ended
They fold the grass blades, pick much fruit
Paint leaves, drop the flower petals
And call many birds to go with them
Glosgap and Tattler
Stay in their land
To welcome the Winter King
For he is blowing from the north.

Well in 1964, we have this show in Fredericton, at the Brunswick Hotel. We have a variety of crafts: some sewing, some jewellery, some pottery, all kinds of things, tapestries, weaving. Great big room there, tables, all Micmac Indian. It was dinner time. There is a cafeteria upstairs and one downstairs. "Well you Mike, take care of this. We are going to dinner." Well in the meantime they had a press club, lawyers and doctors and even Diefenbaker was there and all them high-class people, Mitchell Sharp and all them, bishops. Great big cafeteria you know.

Now I didn't know where the cafeteria was. All I know was to follow the crowd. I had a little tag here, said New Brunswick handicrafts and all them bishops had a tag too, belonged to press club. Now I didn't read that though. Instead of going down to the cafeteria I went up to the press club ─ participate in their dinner: lobster, salmon and all kinds of steak, beautiful stuff. You

walked in you got to take your tray, and funny thing that young lady come and looked at my tag, looked at me. I didn't know what she was looking at. I was helping myself. I kept looking around for my staff. I couldn't see my staff anywhere. And I kept eating this stuff and I had a coffee and was enjoying it. Good food. Two old people from the press club came over. Must have been 60 years old, sat down.

He turned to me, "Hello friend. Where are you from?"

"I'm from New Brunswick."

"Oh yeah. What's your line?"

I didn't know what to think. I said, "I'm from Indian handicrafts. We're doing some hasti-notes, some cards and legends about Native people from Big Cove Indian Reserve."

You know he said, "That's wonderful, they should have done that a long time ago. Because Natives have good talent."

I said, "Yes, they have wonderful talent. Up in the showroom they have wonderful weaving. You should see that place."

I talked myself out of it fast. After that I never said a word. I just walk out, walk right out fast thinking I ain't supposed to be here. I look down and see people coming out of the cafeteria downstairs.

"Where you been?"

I said, "I been up there."

"Oh my God that's the press club. You ain't supposed to be there. That's high-class people, bishops and all them premiers up there."

I said, "No wonder I seen them high-class people up there."

Well next morning I went back to work, to my art room. And Miss Kineer said to me, "Mike where were you to dinner?"

"I was upstairs."

"Oh my God that's the press club, even Dr. Crowell is high-class, he can't go there." She said, "you must be something, even Dr. Crowell can't get in there."

"I felt terrible and Dr. Crowell laughed."

He said, "Mike is going somewhere, first thing you know he will be premier of New Brunswick."

Oh god I heard about that for weeks. "How's the press club Mike, how's the press club?"

We had a great time though all those years, about four years in handicraft. They pay for my room and board. That was pretty good and I get my art material from the government. Dr. Crowell is still alive, he must be past 75 now.

Well I went to Ottawa to a seminar for Expo '67. Native artists from across Canada were invited. They wanted us to paint something there, but I didn't go. So they took all my work, my pictures and designs over there ─ legends and stories and all that. I didn't go, I was up in Maine. I said I can't go, I can't go to meet the Queen. I don't want to meet the Queen anyway. I just keep away from her.

Dr. Crowell called me up one time. He wanted me to come to Fredericton when they opened up the Indian legend tapestries. I had designed tapestries for the university and he had woven them. He wanted me to come there to show my pictures. But I didn't want to go. It's already done. It's already hanging on the wall, my name is there, my pictures are over there. That is all that is necessary. I was about 35 years old then.

In 1973 they open up the causeway to Lennox Island reserve. I was there to do designs for their museum. They wanted me to paint Glosgap designs on all the walls. About a month of it. They wanted me to live there. The chief said, Mike why don't you live with us. We build you a home here. We can keep you busy for years designing paintings and all that stuff. I didn't want to stay. Mosquitoes. No I better stay in Big Cove.

As a Married Man

We got married in 1971, in a Baptist church. They wanted us to get married again in a Catholic church, but I said no way, I don't want to get born again. I've been married two times. First wife left me after four years. Twenty years until I married again. I lived alone for 20 years. I got sick of it. Man can't live alone. There has got to be something else. So I figured I better go by the bible ─ figured that when God made Adam and Eve he must have made a lot of them, so I went out and found one along the coast. We got along very good. She already had six kids. People told me that I was not all there.

"Take a woman with six kids, what's the matter with you?"

"That's me, not you, leave me alone."

"How can you support them?"

"There is always a way. I can work. I can build a log cabin, make wigwam."

So I got a nice wigwam here now.

So that's how I started doing legends and stories, because of Dr. Crowell and all those people and the encouragement I got. I try to keep it going, I do some drawings. Some are in Estonia, some in Germany and people enjoy them. Now if my wife is hard up and we want 500 dollars tomorrow, I'm in a corner. But God gave me something, gave me talent. I go downstairs, paint that picture all night long. In the morning I take it down to town hall, $500. You know. We don't need it. We pay our bills.

And then I still like to tell stories once in a while to the kids you know and elderly too.

I stopped drinking. Of course I drink now and then but I don't go like I used to. I used to go for weeks and weeks and fall down and they would find me on the street somewhere or near the water. I didn't care what was going to happen. I am savage anyway. But I'm proud who I am. God made me as I am. I'm going to be as I am and you can't change me, no way. I never change. Only body change me is underground. All those little wild flowers growing, and that is it.

All those things I said is true, very much true. Makes me feel like I am living life over

again. Wouldn't it be awful if we had to live life over again. I wouldn't want to go back again. I just want to forget it sometimes. And the painting it is very tedious work. When you get older you think differently about painting. I could paint for hours and hours. Now too much interference. Kids open up hifi's. I wish my paintings could talk. Play back all those songs. There is no dull moment. Knock on the door. Could I see Mike?

Conversations with Three Generations

Conversations with Mike

Well my parents are a variety of different races. They are French, Irish and Scots. Back in the 1800s some of my people on my grandmother's side lived in P.E.I. [Prince Edward Island] and they were evicted from their homes because they were associating with Jewish people. One of the girls had a Jewish friend in Moncton and apparently the girl got pregnant. A girl was born; they tell the family better get out because the Indians don't believe in associating with Christ killers. That's how they were brought up by the missionaries, you see. Indians they are Catholic, and they go to heaven and Jews go to hell. The whole family moved to Moncton.

I'm Indian, Jew, French, what have you. My great grandmother on my grandfather's side she was Irish, she was Mrs. Paul Taylor from Ireland.

"They call you *Lesoiip*, dad, they call you Jew. Why do they call you Jew, dad?"

"I'll tell you a story about that."

I was about 16 years old, he told me the story.

I said, "Why do they call you a Jew? If you're a Jew then I'm a Jew ─ I don't like that. My father ain't a Jew, he's an Indian."

"Well that's a long story son. I think you are old enough to understand it now. Your grandmother was a Jewish girl and her mother was an Indian. She fell in love with a Jew in Moncton and she got pregnant, had a little girl and that is your grandmother, my mother. When your grandfather was a young man, about 20 years old, he came to this village where these Indians live and he see a little girl about 15, 16. He fell in love with her not knowing that she was Jewish. Married her. Later on they moved to Big Cove ─ lived nicely, still not knowing. Later on they got children, so I was born from a part Jewish mother. So you and your brothers and sister are part Jewish."

That's how I got my curls. I'm not trying to hide my identity. I'm just an Indian, or

Micmac, Micmac Jew. (Laughs.) I'm not the only one. You find French and English marriage, Dutch, Jewish, all mixtures now. That's just how it is.

Franziska: How do you feel about your Micmac heritage, Mike?

Mike: I'm proud to be an Indian. I'm proud of my heritage. Great Spirit ─ not Jesus Christ who died on the cross ─ made me. Made the plants and the birds and the animals. Look ─ what a beautiful sight the birds and animals, bears and moose and fish in the waters. Osprey and the birds and fishes in the water, waves and sun is part of ourselves. When the osprey comes, well he is there. We didn't tell him to come, it is inspiration of the wildlife. And it is part of our inspiration because it gives me more power. I feel like I am not alone. I am with the animals see. For thousands of years we have been with the animals, birds, fishes, dolphins, all that. They are part of me because they existed when my ancestors existed, so they are precious.

When the Europeans sailed here they said this is our promised land, that's what they said. They were going to make a better place to live. The biggest mistake Micmacs ever made, not only Micmacs and Maliseet, all of them, when the people on the ship came walking on our land, calling us savages, we should have killed them all. That is the mistake they made. If we were savages we would have killed them all. Now today they say we make a better life for you people, we make a better country. On the other hand they say this is our promised land. Well they promised to destroy it and they did. Not only just the land but the sky, going to the moon and Mars, all garbage going 'round the world. And I wonder who's the savage? Look at it now: air is bad, water is bad, even bad sex ─ AIDS, you know. It's too bad, but they made a better world for us.

You ask me how I feel. Love thy neighbour as thyself it says in the bible. I love you because you are here. I love everybody who is here. We got to help each other ─ red, black and every colour. We all need each other. Plus we need the water, the ocean. Without water we don't live, without people we don't live, without Great Spirit we don't live.

Franziska: But you know young people today, on the reserve, like Cory for instance, they don't seem to have the same connection to nature. They also don't have the same opportunity for getting jobs or meeting a lot of different people.

Mike: They're isolated and isolation is bad. But me, I was everywhere. I keep away from the reserve. But I'm outside looking in and I can find out what is going on. They're hanging themselves, killing themselves because, there's going to be more suicides as long as there is this

isolation. And then there is prejudice in the schools, they worry about their own and never mind educating Natives. And it is going to get worse. If I was the kids I'd get the hell out. Take their band number, their band card and just give it back to the government in Ottawa. To hell with this, I'm a human being, I can take care of myself. I'd rather get a job somewhere else and not be isolated. They have to start taking care of themselves because if they wait for others to do it they'll be ruined.

And if they can't get a job somewhere they can use the natural resources and make baskets or things like that. You don't have to have luxury, you don't have to have TV. there is luxury in the woods, natural resources. You can live there. But you see that is the trouble, not just Natives, people are spoiled today, government is spoiling them — keep them tied down, give them welfare, keep them home.

I told them that here one day, what I went through and that the reserve is not the answer, reserve is for the animals to be fed by the people, and keep them there because they are savages. But now the people on the reserve want to stay because it is the only place they have ever known. If you try to get them out they say no. The young people feel trapped and they can't get out.

I got three young people here now. I got to take care of them. Mothers don't want them. There's nothing wrong with the kids, they're nice kids. But that is the reason they are hanging themselves, no place to go. Parents kick them out. Parents are supposed to help their children. Now another young man just shot himself, my cousin's boy, it's too bad. I blame it on parents, they don't care about their children, let the government take care of them. Kids get money so to hell with the kids. It's sad to see them kicked out because I know how it is. I've been on my own since I was little. My father didn't take care of me and my mother didn't take care of me. I had an awful life. I've been through it.

Something has to change. The kids will start turning on their parents, eight-, nine-year-olds will make Al Capone look like a Sunday School teacher. It's coming to it. And television is teaching them that.

Franziska: What advice or teachings would you pass on to the next generations, to your grandchildren?

Mike: I teach them ways to survive. If you get lost in the woods, you know where sunrise is, where sunset is. And the trees, the branches are leaning, on the south they are stronger and the

moss always grows on the trees on the north side. When you get lost always look at the trees and the plants. Follow chickadee. You get lost in the woods, chickadee will bring you out. If somebody else got lost in the woods, chances are you will hear a raven or a crow go caw, caw, caw. You want to go there, chances are you will find the person. The bird hawk will bring you out too. He circles round, you watch where he is going, he'll help you out. You really have to pay attention, nature is very tricky. But you cannot follow the deer, deer will not take you out. That's what I learned from my grandfather. Thousands of years Natives have lived here and they understand the animals. Today they don't, there aren't the woods there used to be.

Franziska: Your grandchildren are growing up in a different time. Going back to living in the woods is not an option that many of them would probably chose.

Mike: No, but you can teach them to survive in case something happens, in case they were shut off by the welfare. They can go in the woods and survive if they have to.

They have to go to school, learn technology, get a higher education, at least high school today. There's a problem of getting jobs today. Grade 8, grade 9's not enough. You want to make something of the roots and tree, what there is left, to make a living on. You don't want to go to school — all right, I'll teach you — make axe handles, what there is left. You can go dancing, go to drama school — they won't hire you 'cause you got no education — your mind's somewhere else. You might have a family, what are they going to say? My dumb father didn't go to school, that's what they are going to say. They won't say well, you're a good Indian, you know how to make axe handles — they won't say that. They always lean to ways of making a fortune, like being in real estate, being a lawyer or a doctor.

So today they join technology. I'm going to drive a car, white man can, I can. That's good, that is survival today. They can't survive in the same way they can three, four hundred years ago because there are not enough trees, enough animals. And animals now are starving, their homes all cut up by the railroads, highways and bridges. You go a couple of miles, you see a house, five miles, another road crossing. Roads criss-crossing everywhere. Back in my grandfather's time you go miles and miles and it was just woods.

Now I could teach them, but they have to like it. They have to like it, because there are a lot of things that I can do, if I don't like it, I won't do it.

But some boys now they are on cocaine, hang themselves, young girls too, killing themselves. There is no escape, they are trapped, and there is no ambition. Welfare pampers them

and they don't know how to survive. In those days we never had no welfare, nothing. We just had to be on our own. We worked hard to make money to survive on. Today they say you are crazy if you want to take an axe and a saw, cut your own wood, build your own place, when the government provides you with housing and all that stuff. But still I miss, I miss my way of life. We should be in the woods, I like to be working on something, making baskets and axe handles. I like the knives, and working with knives.

I got the talent, woodworking, culture working, that's survival. I can survive anywhere. Grandfather told me, son, you ain't goin' to high school, you ain't goin' past grade 8. You can't just lay around and cry your head off. I'm teaching you how to get by: axe handles, basket making. God gave you nature, use that, 'cause who the hell is going to hire you ─ you are an Indian. They're going to say get the hell back to the reservation. You don't want to hear that. Ok, he said, take your axe, draw shave and make handles and baskets. You ain't going to starve. You don't need a home. Make yourself a shack somewhere, which I did. So granddad taught me to go with nature and to use the skills the Creator gave me.

He was quite a man. I loved that man. When he passed away I really cried. I lost all my philosophy, I lost my prophet. Well part of my life, you know. He wasn't a rich man. He was poor, but he had something that he left me and I am still hanging on to it. You would to, with your grandparents, you might feel the same. Everybody has a feeling. He always taught me a lot of good things. He taught me not to do things I wasn't supposed to. Well he was more or less mother and father to me. When I was feeling bad I would run to grandfather. He'd say, we'll see, we'll see. We ain't rich, we can't just reach up to the sky and get what we want. It takes time, son, time will get those things for you. Time will come and it came.

I didn't know I'd have a house, a home, a wife. But I said, I believe in myself ─ I am the one that has to survive. We are just human beings. But there was degradation ─ that was in the 1930s ─ degradation. You're an Indian, who gives a damn. Then the depression came. At the same time brought in a lot of white people hoboeing in on the train. They were hungry.

All we've got my friends is *losgenigen* [fry bread], a little tea, a little fried pork and potatoes. If you want you can eat that to survive.

My gosh we fed them people. They appreciated it and surprisingly a few months later I seen men coming down with a bag of stuff. Brought some food.

"Remember us?"

"Oh yeah."

"Here's some food for you."

"Thank you very much."

"If you can fit them boots you can have them. Here's an alarm clock we don't use and some blankets."

That's what human is ─ sharing. That's another lesson my grandfather taught me. Your enemy is your friend. That same enemy of yours, someday you might get in a pinch, he might arrive and help you out. So don't forget.

Franziska: From what I've learned from people here in Big Cove, sharing is really what being Micmac is all about. That's what people seem to miss the most in the community today. You've talked about sharing, about how your grandfather and the other hunters divided up the moose meat after the hunt. But what teachings did your grandfather pass on to you about conservation?

Mike: I took my slingshot to shoot at squirrels. Oh, grandfather gave me good lecture. Took my slingshot away and burnt it and said, "If you kill that squirrel someday somebody going to be hungry, be less food for the people. Kill what you want to eat but don't kill what you don't want to eat. If one leftover, too much, give it to neighbour, don't waste it."

He was outraged when my father bought me a twenty-two. All the other fellas had twenty-twos and I didn't. Grandfather was outraged, "Squirrels going to get it now, going to get it now. Let me tell you something son. There are all those milk cans up there for target shooting, practise on them, not the animals. Don't shoot the chickadees and squirrels." I wanted to but if I hit them grandfather might put a bad wish on me, you know. I was superstitious then, you see. He had the powers, he might know that I had hit a bird.

One time we walk through the woods and I break a little branch off a tree. My grandfather said, "Why you do that? That tree didn't bother you. Let it be, it is alive same as you are. Someday that tree is going to grow big," he said, "and you need that tree, or your children might need that tree. Let it grow."

Franziska: Mike, I know that you have been passing on these teachings to young people. You tell the stories and legends and recreate them in your paintings. How do you feel about the work you have done?

Mike: Well you see this work is important to me. To me painting is important, it's not a play. It is a challenge for me, colours are a challenge for me, obstacles and all that stuff, dimensions. Men

are like that, women too, they try to climb to the top of the mountain, it's challenge. You are taking your own life. You might fall off that cliff. Now I do the same thing with my painting, I might fall. Then who cares you know, but the work is there. You could be gone tomorrow, the work shall go on. Rembrandt's paintings are important, it's not him, he is dead. See what I mean. A Jewish man told me that. You learn as you grow older. You learn from other people, you learn from nature: river, trees, birds and animals. Look at yourself, you are an animal, you have a feeling of survival. I learn from them too.

Franziska: Have you ever wanted to use your skills as a painter to express political feelings?

Mike: No, I never did and I don't like politics. That is not my line. If it was my line I could be a son of a bitch, you know. My work as a painter is with nature. No, politics is one of the most agonizing things created by man, woman. Look what happens to women today. They're killing them [referring to the Montreal massacre]. That's not the way to live. You got to live in unity, you got to harmonize. Let people live their own lives. I get along with anybody, with animals, with people. They got to take me for what I am, and if they can't, that's their downfall. I'm just me and that's them. That's the way I was brought up. I like to be left alone. Let somebody else do that job.

Franziska: So your work is to focus on nature and on the stories and legends. What importance do you feel that these have today?

Mike: Well, to me those are my inheritance. So I pass it down to young people, young and old. That heritage is still strong, we love ourselves, we love nature, Great Spirit give us a beautiful territory to live on. The children, their language remains intact. That's what pride means. If it is gone our pride is gone. So those stories mean great things to our people. Archives don't tell us nothing. Some of the archives will say, well that's past. Well it may be past but our culture is still there and our children are still here. Even though today our land is poisoned by the air, by technology, we still love our land, we will die with it too also. That's what stories and legends means to me and my people.

We have nowhere else to go, this is our country. I can't go to England, I don't belong there, Africa, I don't belong there, China, no. This is our land, and we're all going to die with it, our culture will die. That's my belief — that's why the legends and stories are still alive. I feel it in my heart.

I love those stories, sea and water and moon shining and also sunrise and moon. When

the sun sets a beautiful golden, it's just like walking through the golden gate, beckon you, come on, come with me. You feel that way some time? Come on my children, I am going down. We go down, come up other side, sunrise ─ *Oapanagi*. *Oapanagi* means sunrise people. You see younger generation today don't think about those things. They want to be more stronger with money and technology, that's good, good for them, but they forget their culture, the past. Don't forget the past because that is you.

See all peoples have legends. All different, yet all same thing. Back in the 17, 18, 1900s the priests didn't know that we were all worshipping the same God. They were greedy, they wanted all our souls. Look at the Pentecostals today, they come in, they storm the reserve. They get a few souls but they ain't going to get them all. Over here we have Great Spirit ─ nobody sees him. But you ask and he will do wonders for you. You obey his orders, you obey nature. Our God never died, he still exists, and he will as long as the universe is there. When the universe is gone there is no Great Spirit, no life, nothing moves.

My elders tell me that you got to find the truth yourself. I cannot find it for you, you cannot find it for me. I have to go by the law of nature. Death is nature, you got to accept it. Death is wonderful thing to face. Some say it's horrifying. It's not horrifying, death is like relaxing, going to sleep is another term and then it is up to nature what to do with you. Like a farmer with his garden. Well next year it's going to go again where he left off. Start ploughing again. You know like fall, winter, spring, summer. Winter is gone now, same as death, you got to come back and finish your job. So Winter King has to come back again, Summer Queen has to come back again, and tide and moon shall rise again. She shall rock, rock the earth, and again, makes winter and summer and everything change around. But you disturb nature and nature fights back. He's fighting back right now.

So I don't go to church. But I believe in myself, and I believe in outdoors and I believe in the sky and I believe in the sunrise. If the sun didn't rise, I'd be dead. Sunrise is the most beautiful thing to wake up to. That's the heaven and paradise for you and for me too.

Conversations with Luke Simon

Introduction

I first met Luke Simon at a family gathering at Mike and Ada Francis's house. We were there to celebrate the first communion of Daemus Simon, Luke's nephew (Ada's grandson). We were also

there to preview Mike's video, *Micmac Storyteller: River of Fire* which I was in the process of editing.

I enjoyed watching the film with the family. We seemed to be sharing a familiar world: they were serious where I felt the seriousness, they laughed at the humorous parts, and seemed to take great pleasure in watching shots of the children and of nature. There were no critics in the room. "It is really good as it is." From Luke I got the response that he liked the fact that the video was acknowledging both traditional and modern realities.[vii]

Since that day Luke has made it very clear to me that he is part of both of these worlds. As a visual artist, as an educator, as a human being intent on walking his particular path, he is creating his own meanings along the way. The path is one of openness, of curiosity, of recognizing and creating possibilities, and of making choices. The process is one of gathering knowledge and of gaining an ever wider view of the world. The eventual goal is to return home, to make a concrete contribution there.

I really enjoyed our conversations because they ranged over a vast territory, from the very personal to the totally abstract, from the pain of personal relationships to a discussion of Greek philosophy. I don't think either of us was overly concerned about the tape recorder on the table, because we had agreed that Luke would retain editorial control. As a result there is a free flow to our words. Some topics we discuss in great detail ─ generational change, cultural differences as they relate to education issues, `succeeding' ─ having a career versus gaining knowledge, Micmac literacy, the link between language and lifestyle, and finally the inevitability of assimilation and the importance for First Nations that they be the ones to set the pace ─ keeping control of the process. Other topics are hinted at but not elaborated. Absent are the private stories, not meant for the printed page, that are shared only in the company of good friends.

Luke is the fifth child in a family of 17. His mother is Sarah Francis, the sister of Michael W. Francis, and his father is the late William John Simon.

Growing up in Big Cove

Luke: I've always felt I come from a large family, even early on, before the family was finally the size it was. I always felt it was a large family. It struck me that there seemed to be generational differences within the brothers and sisters, from the eldest to the youngest. Like ones older than me, I must have been aware that their thinking was different. And maybe my younger brothers

and sisters, their thought processes were different. I seemed to have sensed that.

Franziska: Where would you draw the generational differences for yourself?

Luke: Jesse, then Junior, and then Dolores and Brenda and then myself. So already by the time I come around, you know, there's my oldest brother, who's probably like five years old when I was born. So, when I'm three or four, being able to walk, my oldest brother might have been eight or nine. And that's quite a mental gap. And it just goes on all the way up to your parents.

Franziska: So you also see the older generations in terms of your future, and the younger generation in terms of where you've been?

Luke: Kind of, but even then the community itself is changing. But within that, as you get older, your mental state reaches a physical maturity. There's kind of a stabilization there for a while. But it seems to happen, in your middle to late teens, that's when I kind of sensed the community of Big Cove, the larger community. When you're a kid there's your society ─ like school kids that you meet everyday. But, I don't know, it was strange, it felt like being part of something different that was happening. Maybe your generation is going through something your parents didn't go through. It's just a time of change, that was what the sixties were for me. I started going to school, maybe '58 or '59, but basically it was all the way through the sixties. You also sensed the older people were witnessing something new. It wasn't just you that was going through something unique, or unexplored, or new territory. Everybody was going through it, dealing with it in their own way. But I always sensed my father's world was a whole lot different. I always tried to imagine my father as a young boy, being my age, growing up. He would always say, "When I was a little boy, when I was your age, my father this, my father that." So my dad had a lot of influence on how I perceived him. He would tell me what he remembered of himself. So, I myself would be picturing my father as a young boy and then I would realize, as I'm getting older, maybe, I don't know, he seemed out of step with the times. Like his times as a young boy were definitely not my times as a young boy.

Franziska: Did you feel he couldn't give you the guidance you needed?

Luke: Oh no, the guidance was there. I was definitely guided.

Franziska: But guiding in terms of a world that seemed so different to you?

Luke: Well, that became more apparent as a teen when you do start naturally rebelling against authority, or questioning it at least. Then you really do see the wide gap between your father's worldview, and your own forming worldview.

Franziska: That's interesting. I don't hear anything about a gap when Mike talks about his father.
Luke: Is that right? Well, that gap wasn't there probably.
Franziska: The world of his father and his grandfather, the woods, making axe handles and baskets to survive, this seems to have been Mike's world as well. Even though residential school got in the way, he was still able to reconnect with it. But from your father's world, from his childhood to yours, seems quite a shift.
Luke: Well, my dad liked hunting whenever he could. He liked fishing. He liked camping, and he'd take the whole family. Those were the good times, memorable, and that he really shared with the whole family. He was a real family man, and he really found great joy in that. But times were changing for everybody. I wish that I could have been a boy around my father's time, or uncle Mike's.
Franziska: They make it sound nice.
Luke: They do, don't they.
Franziska: And yet...
Luke: They did not have it easy. My dad remembers a lot of hard times. But the gap I felt was — it's almost like your dad is telling you one thing, and yet, you have to go to school and learn a whole bunch of things that seem to distance you away from what your father's talking about, what's close to your father's heart.
Franziska: What was different about those years? What was changing?
Luke: Well, you start witnessing all these changes. You remember this real small house. You remember the wood burning stove. And as you're getting older you start seeing this house being added on to. And all of a sudden it's not a wood burning stove any more. You witness these changes. The stove is a very basic example.

As a little boy you're out there helping your mom, dad, everybody else pick up wood, bring it home, cut it, chop it up, pile it. You make sure it's ready for the winter, make sure you get enough. A few years move on, and suddenly it's an oil burning stove. You don't have to go out there and chop the wood. It used to be a family effort. You did that before the fall, before it got too cold so you had your winter supply. So it was changing right before your eyes within a span of maybe eight years.
Franziska: I'm just wondering about consequences. If you wouldn't have gotten that wood the family would have been cold. Certain tasks were directly related to survival of the family.

Luke: Well that's exactly it. You see you would always hear about the consequences. Somebody would be telling stories, personal stories. Your father or your mother would be telling something about their past and you're all kids sitting around, just listening, listening to every detail and picturing things mentally. You know, a good story is a good story, right.
Franziska: But the child sees the oil burning stove, feels its heat and hears the story about firewood. The same consequences don't affect him. Or if he hears about fishing or hunting stories, or about the year it didn't rain and the garden crops failed he will know that there is a store around the corner and a cheque coming in the mail. The child will hear stories of starvation and hunger in a very different way because it's not something that he is going to expect to experience.
Luke: So you're witnessing a lot of change. Your parents are also witnessing that change and maybe that's why they were telling you these stories, just to express the contrast that they see. As they are telling those stories they are acknowledging how different it is now, for their children.
Franziska: You talked about your father being a real family man. What does family mean to you?
Luke: There was a strong sense of responsibility to the family, help your brothers and your sisters stick together. It's like a clan. I think that was there with most families in Big Cove. People really go by their last names. Big Cove can be divided up that way, you know.
Franziska: Who belongs to the clan? How far does the relationship connection reach out?
Luke: I imagine in some families, it would reach quite a ways. In our family it was right down to first cousins. That's as far as it went, my mother's and father's nephews and nieces. They were all first cousins, so generally, we grew up playing games, getting together, and hanging around.
Franziska: So, it was basically just those first cousins who lived in Big Cove?
Luke: I just noticed that. I think that's how it basically worked, you know. I would just assume that would be the natural boundary.
Franziska: I mean, most people today would probably not know their first cousins as well as they do their neighbours.
Luke: Their neighbours?
Franziska: You know I seldom hear people use the word neighbours here. It seems that the `neighbours' actually are all relatives ─ as you were saying, the community divides along clan lines. That's a very different way of growing up, than among strangers.

School years

Luke: I went to Big Cove school right up to grade 7. Then I went to Little Aldouane for two years. All Big Cove students went there. That's the point in the system when Indian students started going to school with non-Indian students.

Franziska: How did that transition go for you personally?

Luke: Well, I got through it. But there were a lot of misunderstandings on both sides, a lot of assumptions, a lot of stupidity, on both sides, including the instructors. Looking back on it now, I think I can say Native students were used to a lot more leeway. Our parents didn't just let us go and do our thing, but in comparison, I think Native students are just used to a whole lot more freedom than the non-Native at that time. The non-Native kids seemed to have less discipline problems because they are socialized to behave that way. But there's this whole cultural difference which was subtle at the time. I think to non-Native instructors, Native students would be rambunctious, disruptive, lacking discipline. They would really create a negative impression.

Franziska: Might that be where the false assumption that Natives are slow learners come from?

Luke: Exactly. And then for the Native student who was used to a lot more freedom, a lot more autonomy, you put him into a classroom, or into a school that does not give you that, sure, you're an eyesore to the whole system. And I think the non-Native students really found that intimidating too. Native students were a lot more independent and it manifested itself in this clash with the administration, with the system. Native students were more outspoken, less `well behaved'.

I lost a lot of classmates because they didn't pass, or they got kicked out or they dropped out. All for that reason. Just at a stage when you do want more freedom, you're put into a system where the system demands that you give up your freedom. So kids would drop out, Native kids, anyway.

That's the flaw of the education system. And some educators know that. Basically, Richibucto does not reflect what's going on in Big Cove and vice versa. The instructors are not making connections for you to the larger society. And that's a big problem still today.

Franziska: Was there any reward system at Big Cove School when you were going there? Were kids given little incentives to keep them in school?

Luke: There wasn't any token economy, no reward system. The reward was that you passed if you did your work. I know we had a principal that was very strict. Students were afraid of our

principal. And the parents generally let him be the principal. If he felt somebody had to be strapped, I don't remember any parent going there and complaining.

Franziska: Where was the freedom then that we were just talking about?

Luke: The freedom comes from society itself. I come from a strict background. But I noticed a lot of my fellow classmates didn't. There was maybe an inconsistent form of discipline in their homes. Kids reflect their society in that sense, you know. It just seemed so different, the behaviours. Native kids, the ones I grew up with in elementary school, when I think back on it now, they may have had strict parents, but somehow they were resilient enough to handle it and still be rambunctious kids. They seemed to be resilient...

Native kids would get along better with the poorer French and English kids because probably the poor French and English kids had that same kind of parental background. They could relate somehow. Whereas the other ones, they would call the goody goody students, were easy targets. And that's where all the trouble came from. Indians became really overbearing. I know a lot of them really took advantage of that. They always kind of bullied their way around with the non-Indian kids, and they weren't afraid of anything.

Franziska: I have had the sense from talking with others here that quite a few young people direct anger against each other when the source of frustration is actually more the conditions at home. Instead of speaking with their parents, they take their frustration out on each other, on property and even on themselves.

Luke: I think what you have been told is true. I think it existed outside of my family. I think my parents made great efforts to be good parents. A lot of the clashes that I used to have with my fellow Big Covers, my age group, were with the ones that had those kinds of troubles. The parents are drinking, the kids are being neglected. So I would be coming right up against that type of student, who number one is not well fed, probably abused, probably disciplined inconsistently, getting all kinds of mixed messages. At the same time this parent has probably been visited by my father, who is a cop, maybe been arrested. So the kids pick that up too, so they naturally direct their anger against their parents, against the school, and also against the Simons. That's where the clan mentality comes in 'cause there were a lot divisions that way, and still are. I don't see them being dealt with, even politically.

There used to be gangs in Big Cove when I was growing up. I kind of had a gang ─ my friends and my cousins. And there really was no leader, just a group of kids sticking together,

having their good time. And then there'd be somebody else, with a gang of other kids, from another part of Big Cove, having their good time. Then there'd be clashes. That's how it works.

Franziska: So going back to the school situation, how did you manage to succeed in this system?

Luke: Well Jesse, my oldest brother, he went on to university, and Junior went on to at least grade 12. Dolores got married first and raised a family and then she got her Bachelor of Education degree. I think she earned the highest honours at UNB, the Governor General's Award.

But I almost dropped out at grade 10. I felt my teacher was racist; that was in Richibucto. I failed a subject that year and had to repeat it. Jesse at the time was a guidance counsellor, he got me into a Moncton school and that's how I managed to keep going.

Franziska: You were saying the teachers in Richibucto couldn't make studies relevant to Big Cove students; to the kinds of futures they might be facing or thinking about. As you were going along these paths, what kind of futures were you able to imagine for yourself?

Luke: There was no career guidance. There was no connection between what you were learning, with how it was going to help you in the rest of your life. There was only this idea, well, you've got to get your grade 10, before you can either go to industrial, or go on to high school and then to university. There was very poor information for everybody. I didn't have any clear picture of what I wanted to do. All I knew was that I had some kind of artistic ability, and maybe, I was interested in law. If I was going to go to university, I was going to study law or study education.

Franziska: Why those two fields?

Luke: I don't know. Education it seemed, was the only exposure to a career I had, being surrounded by teachers all your life. And law, well, my dad was in law, right; also Native rights. You know, as you're growing up, you start hearing things like that. Native rights, court cases, lawyers, or education, it seemed all related anyway. It was either in one or the other that I thought I would succeed.

Franziska: You felt that you could succeed?

Luke: Oh yes, in those two areas. Everything else, like architecture, or physics, or biology, all these sciences, no way. Even writing, I felt I didn't have it. It was too much of an effort. But then life — four years — when you're 18, just out of high school, then you say, well, four years, that's a long time. And if you wanted to be a lawyer, it was six years. That's way too long, you know. I mean, how old are you going to be — 22, 23. (Laughs.)

Life means freedom, and education was not freedom. Education was preparing for

something, whatever it was and you felt you weren't going to get there sitting for four years in a university. So I took three years off. I got married, and I had two kids ─ by that time I had turned 19. I stayed for three years, but it wasn't working out. I left.

I left and went to Toronto for the summer. My brother Roger was there and on the spur of the moment one day, we decided to check out this ad in the paper advertising for new students. George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology. We were both accepted so we said, looks like we're going to be artists. It was purely an accidental, spur of the moment thing.

I seemed to really learn a lot in that graphic art technician course. It's simplification, it's study of design, illustration, corporate design, colour theory and art history. It just opened up a whole new world that I didn't know was there. However, we later both felt we should have gone to a real Fine Arts school instead because we both were fascinated by the fine arts aspect of it.

Franziska: I was wondering how your curiosity got so awakened.That you saw this world of possibilities for yourself.

Luke: Well, I think it's the visual art that has a whole lot to do with it. Had I chosen carpentry instead, that curiosity might not have ever been awakened.

Franziska: It seems to have made you curious about more than just the drawing. It's made you intellectually curious. Some paths just seem to lead to a world which opens up more and more and other paths just close in on themselves.

Luke: That almost happened a few times in my life, where the art itself closed in. You automatically have to decide, are you going to be the artist or the art historian or the curator. A few times I've narrowed my focus down to the making of art. Well there is that bottom line truth that a true artist is the one that is there, making the work. The all or nothingness, that's the bottom line. Then the making of art has to provide you with a living too because you're shutting everything else off. It becomes very frustrating after sustaining it, maybe two or three years, because the economics of the situation is compromising everything else. And that feeling again causes you to start opening up all those options.

I don't want to identify myself solely with what I do. I don't want to narrow my life down. I've tried it a few times and it's always led to frustration, to an almost total backing off. Time to take a wider view. Same with being in Big Cove. When I could get out, I got out. Now I'm back. That's all right, because I know I can get out again. Same with the arts. I've struggled with it. I've achieved some success. And I've kind of backed out. I know I can get back in, because I've done

that before. It's the knowledge of it all: that you have done something, that you can get back into it, that you can pull yourself out of it again and that you can again take a wider view. After you've seen this wide view, then you can again dive back into another aspect of it. This is the cycle, you know. That's it. I think that's basically what I've been doing all my life.

The wider view is an accumulation of knowledge, a greater clarity. You are knowing more about everything. I'm expanding my boundaries, is what I see it as. That itself is a reward, that's a great freedom.

Franziska: But it takes self-confidence and courage to be able to do those things. A lot of people, Native or non-Native, simply haven't got that self-confidence to challenge themselves in that way. I'm wondering, where does your self-confidence come from?

Luke: Early on it's self confidence, it's an adventure into the unknown. You know good things are going to happen because you're fresh into the scene. That's the guiding force behind it. Then society, or whatever experience, tells you to narrow it down. Narrow that focus down, make something of it.

When you are making something of it, narrowing your focus, establishing a career, or a reputation, you are getting that self-confidence. You're taking good advice, you're working with it, and you're getting somewhere. You do feel a self-confidence. But for me personally, after a while, I think I'll try to weasel my way out now, I think I'll go back, check out that other door that I passed before, because that door leads to a wider view, a higher perspective. You see more.

Working and studying

Luke: When I came back from Toronto, which was in July of '78, I focused on painting, experimenting with different styles, but using Micmac folklore as subject matter. So the next summer, when Kouchibouguac National Park wanted to present the three local cultures — the English, the French and the Micmac culture — I had accumulated a body of work depicting Micmac culture. They saw my portfolio and decided that I would be very useful to this project as a commercial artist, as a painter, or just even in telling the stories through paintings.

That job lasted from May 'til September. It went really well. Four or five other people from Big Cove were hired to do various things: talk about Micmac herbal medicine, make baskets. I was presenting art shows, slide shows of my work and other people's work: Uncle Mike's, Roger's and some other people's work.

Just after that I got another job at Eel Ground reserve teaching art at a drug/alcohol rehabilitation centre. I had 16 or so students, from young kids who had no drug and alcohol problems, to the very old people who didn't have alcohol or drug problems either, to the in-between group, more my age, that did have some kind of alcohol or drug problems. The idea was just to give them something to do. Just to see what they could do.

Franziska: How did you get the job?

Luke: I wasn't out there hustling for a job, knocking on doors. It was just this thing that kept snowballing, I guess. Connections were established, and I'd follow through on them. And that's how it basically worked.

The following August I drove down to Santa Fe to the Institute of American Indian Arts. There a whole other experience was waiting.

Franziska: Your life seems to have fallen into place well.

Luke: Yeah, it just kept moving. One thing kept leading to another. The only thing I was pushing was my direction and the timing. I had a pretty strong general idea of where I was going, not necessarily in the visual arts, but where I was going physically and what I was going to be doing for employment.

Franziska: You have said before that your interest in the southwest was not just because of the art though ─ that it was also a personal journey.

Luke: In more ways than one. The curiosity was not just in the art, but in the Native people, and the Native spirituality. I was curious about what I felt was lacking in the east coast Native world, you know. I felt there was something missing in the Micmac...

Well, the desert, to me coming from the east coast it was just so mysterious. I have to go see the desert. And the Native people of that land ─ you want to find out first hand.

When I did get there ─ I've never met so many different tribes from all across the United States, Canada, some people from Mexico. It was interesting. And a lot of them were urban Indians. And a lot of them were from the southwest as well. So it was very exciting, and informative and fun.

Franziska: And you were able to stay focused on your art?

Luke: Everybody there was trying to be an artist, and the whole town, Santa Fe, was just a gallery town. It was just unbelievable. So many galleries were surviving by selling arts and selling crafts. So that ignites something in you. That it is possible, and if it's going to be possible

anywhere, it's going to be there.

You know, we were all ambitious in that sense, and it just seemed like galleries were interested in anything that the Natives were doing.

Franziska: So, would they then expect you to paint along Native themes?

Luke: Oh yeah, a stereotype, well, there was that. Obviously, that's the majority of the market.

Franziska: Nativeness was being marketed?

Luke: Oh yes, the Native art of the southwest. Not the Native art of the west coast, not the Native art of the east coast, or the Florida tribe. It was the Native art of the southwest. That's what it was. You might see some Plains Indian type of art. Very little west coast. Very little other kind of Native art. You saw a lot of Mexican Indian imports too. But the big thing was the southwest tribes, like the Hopis, the Navajos, the Pueblo Indians. Their art was everywhere. And the tourists from New York City and California and Europe and Canada and anywhere else, they came to the southwest to see and buy southwest art.

But luckily in the process, other artists doing other things, maybe even their own cultural thing, were able to sell their work. Anything that was really traditional ─ based on old traditional materials. And they were doing very well.

It was an eye opener for me. I'd never seen so many things in all my life that were Native and the different tribes that did things. Old blankets, new blankets, old pots, war shields, clubs... Even objects that were supposed to be sacred that wound up in these galleries, you know. Artifacts that were for sale. A lot of Anassasi pottery that had been pilfered from ancient ruins was finding its way to private collectors.

Then amid all that, there was the non-Indian cowboy art. The cowboy western art was just as big as the Native art; the cowboys with the herds of cattle, the depictions of the cavalry and Indians shooting it out. And then the modern or contemporary Native art was there. That's where you found pop inspired art. And then abstract expressionism. Famous names like Fritz Sholder, he was big. And other Native artists being inspired by European artists, like Gauguin and Van Gogh type of painting depicting Native people. Native people depicting Native people, in that style instead of the old highly romanticized realism.

That was still there too. So there were a whole lot of things going on. There's just so much, what do you do? You do want to explore this, and you want to try that, because it's new territory for me. So that just fed my desire to keep experimenting. At the same time it really

brought to my attention that to be successful you do have to establish a style. That's what I saw. Just the superficiality of a style was the important thing in a lot of ways, because a person was identified very quickly if that style was consistent.

And that was the key to success. But I felt that I didn't want to do that yet. So I kept exploring. I kept exploring, and in a way, I kind of suffered career-wise. But I did not suffer artistically.

Franziska: Success meaning money, recognition...

Luke: Yeah, recognized by the gallery, then you're being marketable. You're marketable because you've decided to be consistent. Establish a style that somehow blends in with what's going on. That was always a struggle for me because I didn't really want to confine myself to that. And I didn't, so I kept experimenting.

Franziska: With the idea in mind that this was just a stage and that you were going to settle into a style later?

Luke: In a sense I kind of had that preconception, or misconception. That one of these days I will use up all my curiosity and finally really settle down to a particular style. I'll do that later, is what was in the back of my mind. And I did that when I had to do that. And in that sense I became a successful Native artist. And I did that in stone, of all mediums. Created a style, but even then, I would once in a while do something that's totally different, totally out of character. By that time I had a pretty clear picture of the market.

Franziska: But then you returned to Big Cove.

Luke: Well I got tired of all that. So now I'm here for two and a half years, basically settled down again.

Franziska: When you came back was there anything different about Big Cove?

Luke: What struck me, when I got back, was that there was some kind of a revival of Native traditional religions, here. That wasn't there when I left. It may have just been starting but I wasn't aware of it. By the time I got back, well, by '88, there were people getting right back into the sweatlodge, the Eagle Ceremony, the Feather Ceremony. Trying to revive it, or bring it back. So that was, I think probably still is, controversial in Big Cove.

For myself, when I was in the southwest ─ in my search for meaning ─ somehow, along the way I arrived at some answers that allowed me to put the whole issue to rest. That was an issue that somehow got resolved along the way for me.

But to get back to the community of Big Cove, I think the revival of traditional Native spirituality is a good thing. But even there, there's no one way. And I think people realize that. There are personalities involved as well. It's almost like you would prefer one minister over another. Or you would prefer one priest over another. I mean, it's just natural.

So my focus was on education and I did wind up being an educator even before I got that degree. I took a job teaching life skills here in Big Cove, teaching drop-outs. So the energies are working in that way. So that's where it is now. I'm in education at University of New Brunswick and that's leading into a whole other area. But I have an intuitive sense where it's going. Art is more an interest instead of a passion now. It's not the centre of my world any more. So now I'm in education and I'm pursuing art education because that was the only door open to me into education.

I'm probably going to teach in art education. I would like to do that, if the opportunity presents itself. If there is no opportunity, something else will come up. And there is more along the way, away from the art, maybe some kind of career with government. It's hard to see exactly, except to say that there are new possibilities ─ a productive thing that can benefit society, a more concrete contribution.

Franziska: It's interesting how your art, how your path has led you there.

Luke: Yeah. But it's always been there. That concern for yourself, your identity, your community, your ethnicity, your culture, your history is there, with you. With that you go through various experiences. The art is there with it, too, somehow. I've never really dealt explicitly with those two for a long time. Not really trying to blend those two together.

Franziska: But I have heard you talking about periodically taking the wider view. And it seems with your art that you periodically take the wider view. Maybe this will be another wider view.

Luke: It's hard to say. But you feel like it's new territory, and you know it's going to work out for you, you know.

Franziska: I'm just thinking, when Mike talks about the experiences in his life, he keeps saying, "Well, I don't go out and look for these things. They come to me." In fact, it seems to be a critique to go out and look, to try and actively pursue life. Mike's teaching suggests that we should keep our eyes open and respond appropriately when opportunities cross our path. What's your philosophy on that?

Luke: Well, I guess that's how it's worked out. The unfolding of these things is happening

without me necessarily going out there and looking for them. When the opportunity does present itself, you do know that's what you want. And you do go for it.

If the roadblocks are there, maybe you are manifesting those roadblocks. And if your intention is to by-pass or overcome these roadblocks that are throwing themselves across your path, because your direction is there, and the roadblocks are also there, separating you from your goal of the time, then somehow you've got to find a way around those roadblocks, or through those roadblocks. Because that's where you've decided to focus.

Like me, when I came back from the southwest, I knew I wanted to pursue that art education degree. If there's going to be a sequence of events, then now is the time. I'm here in New Brunswick and it's time I got to know this place, as an adult, go through the university system here, become familiar with the Natives and the non-Natives, who are my peers, see how this part of the world works. This is where I'm from and maybe now I can make a contribution. I wanted to know the province. I wanted to know the whole other level of life here: the bureaucracy, the education system, how do Native people fit into this.

The only way to find out is to experience it as a student and bring with me, my own accumulated experience as an artist, as a Native, as an individual, as a person who's been away for ten years, who's come back. That's the mix, bring it all.

Language and literacy

Franziska: So now let's say you're the teacher in Big Cove, you're aware that this is not a discipline-based society, you yourself have grown up in it. How do you now work with the students?

Luke: It depends. I would have to be in that situation. All this would be just an abstraction of a possibility, and I don't know exactly how I would do it, except that I would do my best, knowing that the prime concern is the child. That's number one, not you. Not how comfortable you are. You're secondary.

I mean, looking back on my own elementary education, the teacher came first. It's how the teacher felt and there were some really nasty vicious teachers. For them it was a job. A ruler right across your knuckles if you're not paying attention. There's a lot of focus on how inappropriate that was for Native children, but it happened throughout society, on the reserve, off the reserve to white kids.

But then there was also the language difference. It was a big, big difference then, for me. You're learning and everything is written in English. It would have been nice if there were things learned, or written in Micmac. Because it could have been, you know. My mother's mother was literate in Micmac, and they just learned it as a form of communication. It was a very practical thing. They did not learn adjectives, nouns, pronouns. They did not learn the mechanics, or the structure of language. They learned to write how they spoke the language. And it was a real natural way of learning. There was a practical end to learning how to spell Micmac. It was people writing letters. It was a real form of communication. The Christian bible and hymns had also been translated into the Micmac, so our elders were quite familiar with reading and writing in Micmac.

The flaw is in trying to educate Native kids to write their language, when they don't even speak it, because they don't hear it enough. A lot of kids don't even understand it. So to them it's learning a new language, not their own. Their language is English. The only way to make that kind of thing work, is not to teach the grammar, not to say, "look at this" and say "cup" in Micmac. You're not learning a conversational language that way. There's no practical end to it. You're not learning communication.

The way I see it, to promote Native language literacy, you must promote Native language fluency. The best way to promote fluency is in the home when children are still learning to speak. To promote Native language literacy in the home, parents must be made aware of the importance of starting their children off early into learning how to read.

Parents themselves need to be educated in Native and English literacy and encouraged to read to their children. This way, children will associate positive feelings with the act of reading, and will actually develop a love for reading. There should be adult classes and support groups for this purpose.

Reading material needs to be made available in the Native languages. The books have to be visually and narratively enjoyable to the child. They have to be age-appropriate and culturally relevant.

The way to make Micmac literacy work for kids is to start a little newsletter project in the school and not worry about the spelling. Just let them write little notes to each other. Pass letters to each other. Make the language alive; that's the way to learn. This would make literacy a fun and practical skill for children.

I learned English automatically. I learned Micmac automatically. In Newfoundland, I guess, Micmacs there don't speak Micmac any more. In this one particular community anyway. They're teaching it in class, just by pointing out objects and naming them. The Native kids there are very fluent in English and they resent the Micmac class. It's a requirement but the kids have no connection with it. So, I mean, that kind of raises the serious question, once a language is lost, can it really be revived in a community? I think it can, but it would take great effort.

Franziska: You'd almost have to bring other generations into the classroom.

Luke: That's right. If the adult does not know how to speak it, or doesn't speak it, and secondly, doesn't write it,...and the adult will have to read it to the kid. I mean, how many adults take time to read to their children?

Franziska: Were you read to?

Luke: I don't think so. I don't remember. But none the less, I probably would have read more if I had started off earlier.

Franziska: But you sat and listened while your uncles told stories. The teaching was oral. And it seems as if some of the elders are still adapting, are still functioning, and in a sense, taking care of their responsibility, as they may perceive it, which is to tell stories. But the book hasn't replaced the oral story telling yet. I mean, I grew up with having stories read to me, and I read stories to my kids.

Luke: That's appropriate for you, for your society. But it isn't with Native society, only because somewhere along the way, there was a break, because as I just mentioned earlier, adults were writing to each other in Micmac. They were writing letters.

Franziska: That's interesting. That's the first time I heard that.

Luke: Well they were. My mother's mother, was always writing to my mother. My mother had all kinds of letters, written to her, from her mother, in Micmac. That was the form of communication. And it was a practical purpose. So the elders were not illiterate in Micmac. It's those that went to Shubenacadie, that generation are illiterate in Micmac. They know how to read English, because they were forced to, and they were even forced to abandon their language. But their parents were not illiterate. They communicated in Micmac. It's my parents generation that lost that. Well I guess my mother must have learned how to read Micmac, because her mother wrote to her in Micmac.

But my mother never wrote to me in Micmac, never. My dad never wrote to me in

Micmac. They would speak to me in Micmac. But ironically, literacy was not a foreign thing. And that is where it could have gone on; what Mike was saying about stories could have been written down. That was cut off. It had been flourishing.

Franziska: So you're saying that the non-Native school system interfered with this practice and in a sense created illiteracy where there had been none before.

Luke: Exactly, that's what it did. I mean, everybody who tells you that they went to Shubie, tells you that speaking Micmac was punished. So how can you write it, if you can't even speak it?

Franziska: It's a very interesting point because the general assumption has been that Micmac society was basically illiterate.

Luke: That literacy is impossible if you don't learn it in school. But it's been proven, the elders proved it themselves, that they could learn it quickly. Writing was quickly, easily learnable. You just tell us how these letters sound, and we'll write it the way we speak it. That's it.

If this process had been uninterrupted, Native language literacy would have been very, very strong today. Within the culture, reading to your children would not have been a dumb thing, or a foreign thing. Maybe that's why even all these legends have survived for so long. When you consider the acculturation that's been going on for so long, yet so many of these stories that go way back have survived. Maybe that's how they did survive.

Language as a reflection of lifestyle

Franziska: One of the main teachings that I hear from Mike has to do with how to survive in a particular environment. He speaks of being in the woods and being able to read the trees; he knows how the moss grows; he knows about the habits of birds and which ones will help get you out of the woods and which will only take you deeper. Mike understands the cycles and seasons of nature. He knows when certain tasks have to be done in order that one can survive though the year. He pays attention to his environment and he can read it like a book. That's his special literacy. So I'm wondering how some of those teachings transpose into other life situations.

Luke: That's an interesting point. It's tied to the language. The language is so closely tied to the land in uncle Mike's childhood, my father's childhood. The grandfathers were even more closely tied to that world: the sea, the land, the harvest, what's ripe, what's good at what time of year. The practicality of when is what ready. How do we align ourselves to nature so that we best maximize the benefits of it. That isn't here any more.

So, again, with the issue of language, supposing that we did revive it in Big Cove. Our present-day Micmac society is so different from our fathers' time, our grandfathers' time, where they were so closely tied to seasons and the plants and animals and the subtle changes and relationships. The whole thing. That language was alive that way. There would be a word for, "That crop is ready for this time of year". The Micmac would have a word for that particular plant, at that particular time. If somebody was trying to tell me about that activity, and it's not being done any more, well that part of the language has no useful function any more, right. It's good to preserve it. It's good to document all these things. But for sure we're not going to be using that vocabulary on a daily basis.

Franziska: If it has no relevance to your lifestyle.

Luke: That's right. So it's good for documentary, historical purposes. It's good to have these older people talk about these things. But is it our lifestyle? If you're going to teach me Micmac now, you can save all these old words, but how much of the Micmac language will actually be forgotten. Look at how much we've probably lost already because the language was so closely tied to a way of life.

Franziska: I'm just remembering a conversation I had with Steven Augustine a few days ago. He was telling me how his grandmother has special words for all the various sections of a leaf and how they relate to each other. Just imagine the rich conceptual world you live in when that's the kind of naming power you have. But look how impoverished it becomes when the lifestyle and the language no longer connect.

Luke: Right, because there's no reinforcement of the verbal, the naming of things. You're not out there interacting with the environment. The Micmac language is very environment-oriented, very nature-oriented. And here we are all cooped on the reservation watching MTV, watching the news, watching world events, talking about Native language literacy, talking about math, science, ecology. All these things. It's all so abstract. It's all so detached. I think the Micmac language can be preserved within that context. People can obviously still communicate in Micmac, but look at how much is being lost. The view of things, the knowledge.

Franziska: But can you bring Micmac into your conceptual world and have the creative room to describe and be able to live in that Micmac context? Can you shift a language which has been so tied for thousands of years to a certain lifestyle, suddenly into a different environment in a way that preserves its meaningfulness for the speakers? In a way that still preserves some connection

to that old world? This is not the same process of gradual change and adaptation that every language goes through over time.

Luke: You know, that's an interesting point. And I think, yes, it is possible. But it obviously won't be the same language of your forefathers. It is the Micmac language adapting to present realities, present social, economic realities. Any language survives if it can adapt. So, if the things are outmoded, then those things are outmoded.

There is a forgotten part of the language. The only way you can save those things is to write them down and store them for posterity. Like Latin, it's written down. People can revive it if they really wanted to. The sad part of it all is that a lot of Micmac is not in the record, from Micmac daily existence a hundred years ago.

We are a different type of Micmac from the Micmac a hundred years ago, or the Micmac of fifty years ago. Our social world is different, our language is different. It's Micmac but we don't talk about the same things they talked about fifty years ago or a hundred years ago. My generation, they're not out there making baskets, making herbal medicines. That's gone with our ancestors, a lot of it. But the language and the basic way of thinking, we still have that. But that is fast disappearing too.

Franziska: But if the way of life shifts radically, if the world is experienced objectively instead of relationally then it seems as if the fundamental structure of the language would have to shift as well.

Luke: We would experience the world in the way North American society as a whole sees it, and not in a uniquely Micmac way. That's the way it is. The old language would be in the record, saved, preserved, but essentially not being used.

The language shifts only because everything else is shifting. Language evolves from its surroundings.

Franziska: And yet you know, there are theories that insist that language shapes experience.

Luke: You know, I think, probably in Old English, you would have something equivalent to the Micmac. The Old English would probably have a very particular word for a particular situation. Maybe a bird in a storm fluttering, really trying to stay afloat in the air through a rain storm. Maybe you could find words in the English language that would be an equivalent of something that a Micmac would have said about that same situation.

Franziska: Probably, as you said before, it depends on necessity, that was something one needed

to draw attention to.

Luke: And so the English language itself is becoming a bland language in comparison to Old English. Micmac itself is becoming a bland imitation of this new language, this English, this modern-day English. Maybe that's where it's all going.

Franziska: English as we know it today is a language that draws attention to boundaries.

Luke: It's a language of detachment and that's what Micmac will become as well because we're not living the life our people lived fifty years ago. Speaking comes from describing what you experience.

Franziska: So as we speak and experience, then language keeps getting renewed and keeps getting created.

Luke: That's right. For example as Professor Robert Leavitt pointed out one day ─ Micmac children are talking ─ use the red crayon. And they'll say, "red one eyo". The grammar is Micmac ─ red one use. It's incorporating something that was not part of Micmac culture, like a red crayon. It's inclusive. It changes it, and changes the Micmac world to that extent. But, isn't that life? Does that not mean the culture is alive? It's an organism that's adapting.

Franziska: The same thing really applies to other aspects of culture as well. We can talk about loss or we can talk about practical adaptation.

Luke: It is true, it is being depleted in the process of adapting to its new situation. It's adapting poorly, I would think. But then to other people's notions, maybe they are adapting in the most practical fashion. Maybe the time has come, maybe it is inevitable, at least to the extent that the culture itself decides, calls the agenda. What is the parents' view, what is important to their children, what should they pass on? Generally speaking, maybe the adults are saying we can revive a lot of this stuff. We can adapt a lot of other Native cultures to our present-day thinking. We can also adapt a lot of whatever we have of Micmac. But it has to be practical. But maybe the most practical thing for the Micmac people to do is learn English. People made these choices along the way, and are still making these choices. Basically this is an English-speaking world. English is the language of communication.

Franziska: It's the language of survival here, getting a job,doing business.

Luke: It's the language of the twentieth century. So here in New Brunswick we have official bilingualism. And here French schools have the legal right to bar English students but French students can go to English schools. And when they go to English schools, they have the right to

French education if there are enough of them. But English students, if they do go through French school, they have to speak French. That's the law. So that's the protection of the language. If the French, whose language is written, who live in French communities, need to have that kind of legal protection, and they are getting that kind of legal protection from the federal and provincial governments...

Franziska: What about Micmac, then?

Luke: That's right. I mean that's probably how radical Micmacs would have to be. And are Micmacs prepared to be that radical anyway? I don't think so. I don't think Micmacs are that determined. The kids aren't that uptight about it. It's the parents that are protecting their interests in the French language through that child. Now, are the Native Micmac adults that vehement, that fanatical about the Micmac language? No. And is it practical, that's another serious question.

You will probably get a politically correct answer. Yes, I am a Micmac, we must preserve the language. But in our hearts, individually, when we're not among each other discussing the issue, how do we really feel about it? Are we living it? We're not pushing for it. They're not teaching Micmac in Big Cove. They had a Micmac language course in, of all places, in Rexton. By that time, it's too late. Native kids are looking at it as just another language course.

In the end I think it's all just a question of who calls the shots, who sets the pace of assimilation. Assimilation might be the best thing, it could be the worst thing. I don't know. But it can't be the worst thing. The worst thing is not being able to call the shots. That's the worst thing. So with self-government at least you decide how fast you're going to go, this way or that.

Conversations with Forrest Carter

Introduction

At this point in his life Forrest is a `house-husband'. He has temporarily given up a career in chemistry in order to raise his two-year-old son Marcus. His wife, Bernadette Simon, Luke Simon's sister, is currently the director of mental health for the Big Cove reserve. She has two older children of Micmac parentage. The family lives in their own home off the reserve.

Forrest was born in Blue Hill, Maine, on 2 September 1964. His father is Albert Carter and his mother is Ada Francis [then Carter]. He is the youngest of six children who all moved to Big Cove three years after Ada's divorce and subsequent marriage to Michael Francis. Their father, Albert Carter, a non-Native from Maine, is a seasonal worker, working in the woods

during the winter, driving truck in the summer, and in the late summer working in the blueberry fields.

In conversation with me, Forrest talks about how difficult that initial move to the reserve was, how different "Big Cove city" was in comparison with rural Maine. Big Cove never really became home for him because, as he says, he had no status there; as a non-Native male he was expected to leave after age 18. Forrest's strategy for survival was to "go with the flow" and to avoid confrontation.

In these conversations Forrest shared with me both the good times — shared experiences with his new `cousins', the tremendous support he got from his mother, the ease with which he achieved academically and was able to find employment — and the bad times — feeling alienated from both cultures, essentially having no home, the problem of `falling between the cracks' for educational funding, and not being allowed to work on the reserve. At the end Forrest also talks about the next generation and the difficulties they may have to face.

When Forrest speaks it is very straightforward and from the heart. Although he has known me for at least five years, it was always in connection with work that I had done with his stepfather. So it was a new experience for him to have me ask about his life. He took the responsibility seriously and carefully worked through and edited the written transcripts of our conversations. He wanted to make sure that I got it right.

The early years

Forrest: I knew Mike before he married my mother. He and my father were very good friends. They used to work together in the blueberry fields or in the woods, and Mike used to bring him home and they would drink together. We always looked forward to Mike 'cause he'd always tell stories and he'd always treat us. He was always good that way, that was the kind of fellow he was.

Well, you know, the Natives always came down to Maine to rake blueberries and when Mike was around they'd sometimes come to our house and we'd go to where they were camped out, and play the guitar and sing. Never really thought much about them being from a reserve though. While they were in Maine, you know, it was just Maine. We were just kids playing, never thought much about them being Natives or Indian. It was no big deal for me.

Franziska: What was your relationship with your birth father?

Forrest: He will always be my father so I'm not going to hold a grudge against him, but he physically and mentally abused us. My mother more than us kids. There would be occasions where he would try to abuse us and my mother would always step in. She was always there. But I was five when we left so I don't have a lot of memories.

Then October of '72, shortly after my mom married Mike, we moved to Big Cove. I was eight years old and in grade 3. That was quite an experience for us. I was really young so it didn't affect me as much as it did my older brothers and my sister. But, when I look back on it, it did. It was quite a move. I never knew how much it would really affect my life.

As soon as we moved from Maine to Big Cove we became the minority. Before we were the majority. In Maine everybody raked blueberries, everybody was the same. Moving to Big Cove, that's when I really realized there's a difference.

At first it was really exciting because Mike had always talked about, "Oh it's going to be a lot better" and "You're going to have a nice house" and everything. But it took a while. We stayed with Mike's aunt for a while ─ that was a very small house and it was crowded and cramped. A lot of drinking going on and that was really discouraging. Then we moved to his sister-in-law's house, and again, same idea, a lot of drinking. Even the teenagers, my older brother, would go out and drink.

In Maine, just with my mom, we were very quiet, not too many people around. In Big Cove, everything is close, one house here, here, here, here. If you're having a party everybody can come join. So you have a lot of people in your house.

Big Cove is almost like a city within a rural area. A lot of people actually do call it Big Cove City; a lot of the conditions are like a city. And it's a very tight-knit community at the same time. Maybe that was the biggest change. We had more freedom in Maine. I remember when we were kids we used to run around naked during rain storms, take a bar of soap out and wash yourself. In Big Cove, one little four-year-old girl went out without a shirt, the other little kids threw rocks at her to make her go back inside because she wasn't wearing her shirt.

Franziska: So how did you make out as an 8-year-old coming into this community?

Forrest: Not very good, because I was never very assertive. I would let other people push me around, and boss me around. I wasn't picked on, but you knew you were different. I was the minority in my classroom, and a few times some guys would sock you in the stomach just because you were different. I ended up being a very good runner. I was one of the faster runners

in my class. That was the skill I had, so I worked on it. I ran away from quite a few people. When you first get there people test you, new white kid, a bit different. I was never assertive, never put my foot down, never fought back — maybe once or twice, but it did no good, because I was never, never a fighter. But I made alliances. When I was 10 or 12, I made friends with one of the biggest guys there. So I was quite safe after that. But I made a lot more friends than enemies I guess. So now

there are a lot of people in the community I call my friends. And then my mother was always there, no matter what; right from day one to even now, she's still there for me.

But I saw a lot of violence. Not so much toward young kids but between men and the teenagers outside. There were actually street gangs in Big Cove when we first moved up. They're not there now. But I could actually look out my bedroom window and see street gangs fighting. Sometimes with clubs and chains. My brothers were a little more involved maybe, but I don't know that they were ever in life-threatening situations.

But those guys never bothered me, and they were actually better friends through high school. I lost a lot of touch with the reserve when I came to university because a lot of the kids my age dropped out after grade 9 or 10. But that was a big difference for me. I always knew that I needed an education. Go for it. Don't waste it. You have a chance. And like I said before, that was the big difference, from Maine to here. In Maine, I don't think I ever would have had a chance to get an education.

Franziska: What gave you that chance here?

Forrest: Well actually, it's the government. The student loan programs are so easily accessible here. The cost is very much lower here than it is in the States. I just hear horror stories in the States that your tuition is over $10,000 a year, whereas in Canada it's $3000. My first year at university, the government paid more than half — free. I got a bursary. They give you a loan and they give you a bursary. I got a 1500-dollar loan, and 3500-dollar bursary, which I don't even have to pay back. It was very accessible. So to me that was the big thing.

Franziska: When your mother married Mike, she got Native status. What about you?

Forrest: We never had status, no free education. We could have if Mike had adopted us when we were younger, but he never did. There was kind of an unwritten rule — I don't know whether this is a by-law in Big Cove — but as soon as a white male who's living on the reserve with his mother and father, as soon as he turns 18, he has to leave the reserve.

When I was 18 I chose to leave. I went to university. And when all my brothers turned 18, they chose to leave. There was nothing on the reserve for them anyway. One time my brother got a student job in Big Cove. He was like 15 or 16. He was working right alongside all the other guys in Big Cove, cutting down brush by the ball field or something. Two or three days later, this guy said, "Hey look, there's a white guy working, and my son's not working. What's going on?" Sure enough, next day, "Sorry, we got to let you go. You can't work here." I don't totally disagree with it, because the funding that has come in is for Native students. He wasn't a Native, and he wasn't on the band list.

But Maine has always been my real home. Big Cove has been a place where I lived for a good part of 18 years but I knew when I turned 18 I was going to be out. And probably I would have gone to Maine if I didn't go to university. All my brothers went to Maine, and that was my family. My mom is my family, and Mike is my family too. But I had a father and grandparents and aunts and uncles, almost 100 relatives within a 50-mile radius. So it was family, home.

But our life improved a lot moving from Maine to Big Cove. We finally did get into a house, the best we've ever lived in: running water, an indoor toilet and colour TV. There was more money coming in and we were fed better.

And there were the good times in the summers. We used to spend summers on the beach. That was all a whole new experience for us kids. We'd get out there, and we were back to having our privacy. I guess that's what it is. We had our camp and there were a couple of other camps, but they weren't occupied. The first two or three years, as soon as school got out, to when school started, we were on the beach. It was a big sand lot that a kid could play in; four miles long and two or three hundred yards wide. So you could run up and down, beachcombing — all the shells and sand dollars you could imagine. Treasure hunting, you'd always find great stuff. We built our own camp out of material we found there. We didn't bring any new material except polyethylene for windows and tar paper for the roof.

Franziska: And from what I hear, Mike use to tell a lot of stories there.

Forrest: Storytelling? I'm sure he told stories, but we just...I guess I don't remember them right now, all the stories. Glosgap, a lot of Glosgap stories.

Franziska: What about visitors out there?

Forrest: Well one year my cousins spent almost all summer there [Sarah's family]. That was when I was 15 or 16. Probably the last summer I was out there. It was a great time. Also this was

a time when a lot of the stories were told, not so much by Mike, but just the younger people would tell their own stories. We'd go to the back beach, the ocean side, and we'd build a big bonfire, just the younger group and gather around. See, that was the great thing about it, you could stay out there and nobody would bother you. There was only the darkness.

Then in Big Cove it was always enjoyable to go to their [the Simons'] house, because there was always somebody there and always something going on: rumoli or poker or some kind of gambling. We spent a lot of time there, probably more so than with any other family in Big Cove.

Franziska: So in a way you became part of the Simon clan, is that right?

Forrest: Our families were very close but I don't think I would ever say we became a part of their clan. It was always known that they were family and that was, I guess, the big thing; we had cousins. My sister really appreciated that because she used to have a hard time with other girls and her cousins really helped her out a lot. When we first moved up it was really useful to have cousins. We could actually call them cousins. They were okay with that. It was very close-knit.

School years

Forrest: When I started going to Big Cove Federal School the only really different thing was that we had to take religion. My mother and Mike were never religious. We weren't churchgoers, but we were learning it right in school as part of the curriculum.

Another thing was the French influence in the school. We had French teachers teaching Native children in English. I found all the Native kids spoke English with a French accent. And we had no Micmac curriculum whatsoever. I learned Micmac from the kids in the school ground; learned quite a bit. I'm not fluent but I can comprehend it better than I speak it. Now I don't use it much except at home with the kids.

But there was no Micmac culture being taught, only the basics: reading, writing, arithmetic and catechisms. And the principal at the time, was a very strict fellow. He'd come in and try to scare you half to death. You screw up, you're going to get it. He'd come in with the strap. But I never had a Native teacher myself in Big Cove. Never once. Shortly after I went to high school, they had quite an influx of Native teachers: Bernadette's sister started teaching, and then her sister-in-law too.

Franziska: Was school a good experience for you?

Forrest: School was okay. Academically it was never a problem. Getting along with the other kids ─ like I say, I was new. I made some friends but I was different. And because you were different, you were constantly reminded that you were different. Got beat up a couple of times.

I used to get asked to do a lot of errands for other kids. "Go buy me some cigarettes and tell them it's for your father." Everyone knew Mike smoked. So, "Sure, no problem." See, they wouldn't sell cigarettes to kids unless it was for your father. But that's another thing, I guess maybe because we were white they [salespeople] always believed us more.

Tobacco was the big thing, if you were a smoker, you were tough and cool. You had to try to maybe steal it from your parents or steal it from your brother or something. Or kids would save up their allowance and give it to you and say, "You go to the store and buy a pack of cigarettes and tell them it's for your father." They used to open the packs and sell them one at a time in Big Cove, 'cause people didn't have a lot of money. Five cents a cigarette, and for kids, that was bang on.

Franziska: What ways did you find to be cool?

Forrest: I think I never did, I never was given a chance to think I could be cool, so I never was cool. There were so many other people that were cool, that I wasn't, so why try. I did smoke, because you fit, more than anything, I tried to fit.

Franziska: You've told me that Big Cove looked different when you first moved here?

Forrest: It was a lot different. There was basically just a main entry way, and the two roads just came to dead ends, and in between that was all wooded area. That was a great place to play cops and robbers, and, not so much cowboys and Indians, not enough cowboys.

But in the woods, where we were playing, there were old glue bags scattered around. But I never knew what they were for. I didn't pay any attention, never bothered to pick them up, it was kind of like a fact of life. You'd see one here, go a little ways and see maybe another one over there. But you know I can't remember anybody that I hung around with from Big Cove ever contemplating suicide, like they do now. I guess we were more innocent then. Maybe that was it. Fifteen or so years ago I think there was a more upbeat mood in the reserve. I don't think it was so dull and dismal.

And you know, we weren't so dependent on material things then. You were more dependent on yourself, more dependent on your parents, or your friends and everything to entertain you. So I guess there was a lot more to do. We'd play road hockey until 12:00 at night,

and stuff like that. More community and less interference from outside.

We'd have people come in for Sunday dinner, and anybody was welcome. And they did. Some of them were just down on their luck and they didn't have any place else to go. So sure, they come in. A lot of kids even. Maybe kids that weren't getting fed at home. They always knew where to go. Like my mom always had food ready, and she'd never refused anybody. There was less greed, I guess. You didn't keep for yourself so much. And you always were able to give to somebody else.

Now people are out to make a profit more so than anything else. Instead of taking upon themselves to help, they want to push people towards the ones that are getting paid to help. See, before there wasn't a lot of professional care for them, so the community felt obligated to care of their own anyway. And you took it upon yourself to care for a guy who was down and out on his luck. Whereas now, call that help line. Get this guy to help, he's getting paid, let him do it.

Franziska: That seems to be the way it is in most communities today, not just Native ones.

Forrest: Maybe it's something newer to the reserve. Because maybe it's the white man's way of thinking. Maybe that's it. If it's not profitable, don't touch it. I think that's maybe the attitude that's come into the reserve now.

Franziska: So, going back to talking about school, what changed when you went to Bonar Law High School in Rexton?

Forrest: Well most of my friends were still from Big Cove. So I found myself hanging around with the Natives even though I was a white person. The biggest problem though was that a lot of the guys from Big Cove, after grade 7 or 8, tried to stay back. So by the time I got to grade 11 or 12 I had more white friends, and less close Native contacts. It was a group pressure thing. If you were smart, you were kind of like a `geek' or a `nerd'. It seemed as if it was grade 9 where they wanted to stay. They had to open up a new grade 9 in Rexton just to accommodate them. Like a guy I know, he's gone to university now, he's smart ─ this is the big guy I used to walk to school with in Big Cove ─ used to win awards in school in Big Cove. But he wanted to stay behind with all the other guys. Didn't do the work and stayed behind.

Franziska: For you Rexton meant being part of the majority. But if you're in grade 9, and all your friends are there, and you look ahead of you and don't see many Micmac faces there, you may feel that there's not enough support there.

Forrest: Not enough encouragement. Yeah, I guess so. Richibucto Junior High was my first

off-reserve school in New Brunswick. A lot of people say the transition from Big Cove to Rexton is hard. They expect you to do the work and if you don't do it, they don't try to sweep you by. I find, in Big Cove, a lot of times, they don't try to keep the kid behind, because they don't want to lower his self-esteem. So that was a big argument, that the school off the reserve was a lot harder and that Native kids couldn't handle it.

Franziska: Did you feel prepared?

Forrest: Yeah. The only thing is that it was a different system. You had more work, it wasn't harder work. They expected written essays from you and that might be the big thing. I can't remember writing too many essays in Big Cove. Like actual written papers, and documents. Whereas in Rexton they want you to write reports and essays. They showed you how to do it, and they showed you what they expected, but it was something that you hadn't done before.

But I didn't think I was ill-prepared. That's another place where Mike would come in. When I came home from school he'd make me sit down and do my homework. But I guess I was a good student because I did what I was told and I did what was expected. I followed the mould well. I didn't try to go against the grain. If they told me I couldn't do something, I didn't want to or didn't feel the need to do it. Yeah, I can see that maybe coming from the Native background. Maybe at that stage a lot of the Natives do say, I've had enough of these people telling me what I can do and what I can't do. But to me it wasn't a problem.

Anyway I didn't go out much. Every now and then I might go walking with a friend of mine. But after dark I stayed in. But you know, you never could tell. I'm not saying everybody, but there could have been just one or two guys that just didn't like you, like the looks of you or something. See my brothers didn't have such a hard time because there was four of them with only one year between. They had a little bit of backing amongst themselves when they got into trouble. But my sister and I were on our own. I can't say we weren't allowed to go out because we probably could have gone out if we wanted to. But we weren't encouraged to go out, either. I spent a lot of my grade 11 and grade 12 just in the house. I'd go outside during the day, but not at night. Didn't socialize much. Went to a few sports events in Rexton or Richibucto. But that was another thing. We didn't have a car, so it was hard to get around.

I enjoyed track and field a lot, but to be on a team ─ I guess I looked on it as not having the transportation. I might have even had to walk to get down to Rexton. It would have been rough.

Franziska: How did all of this make you feel?
Forrest: I guess isolated. To make up for not having other friends, I used to have a lot of hobbies. I had a coin collection, and I'd actually categorize my coins. I kept very meticulous account of them. I had music. I always had my turntable and I was really into listening and knowing the words. Even now, like I start singing, and the kids go, "Gee, you know the words to every song." And I did.

So, to get back to school, I found I got the worst of both worlds because some people from Big Cove were prejudiced against me and then the kids from surrounding areas knew I was from Big Cove, so they also kind of shunned me a bit. I can't say it was too difficult because I just went with the flow and found the ones who didn't really care about the difference, saw you for who you were.

Academically, I achieved and I probably was in the top five. There was no pressure on me to fail because I didn't really belong in Big Cove, so they understood that. My best friend from Big Cove did go right up to grade 12 with me. He felt a lot of pressure, I know he did. He was in the main stream of socializing: girls, the hockey team and all this stuff. He didn't get his grade 12 English and couldn't graduate. He went back and graduated the next year though. I think he didn't make it the first time just because...well, a lot of the kids didn't know what to do after graduating. To graduate is to go to university. If you were going to work on the reserve, you didn't really need grade 12 for most of the jobs. Now a lot of them are graduating on time from high school, and they do go on to university. Like we were saying last night. Jesse Simon was one of the first from Big Cove to get an education at the university level. Whereas now, there's a lot more people with degrees.
Franziska: I guess at that time, that was a big achievement.
Forrest: Yeah, tremendous. When you came back to the reserve you could pretty much have the pick of the jobs you wanted.
Franziska: So after high school you went on to study science at the University of New Brunswick.
Forrest: The only reason I decided to major in chemistry in my second year was because it was my highest mark from my first year. So I thought, okay, it must be my strong point, so do what you're best at. Don't go against the grain even if you might like geology better.

But the big reality when I hit university was that you are no longer one of the exceptional

ones, no longer one of the top five, university you're fighting to be average. And then I socialized more. It was the first time I was away from home, 18 and almost legal drinking age. Hit the bars. I drank because people around me drank. But if I had people around me who didn't drink, I didn't drink. I guess I was just, you know, going with the flow, with whatever happens. I guess maybe my first two years, I might say I was an alcoholic because I drank every weekend and looked forward to it.

In 1987 I knew I was going to graduate, I had all my courses, hadn't got my degree yet, but everything was lined up. A bachelor of science in chemistry. So what do I do now? That really got me thinking. Nothing else came up. I applied for unemployment insurance as soon as my last day of exams was out. But then I heard about this summer job at the university, cutting up star fish, and cutting up jelly fish, and mix them up in blenders. It paid twice as much as unemployment was going to pay and I could get some more chemistry experience. So I got the job. It was very easy. Which is, I think, too bad because a lot of things in my life have come too easy. I might have had some hard times back then, but...

Whereas my sister, she had a horror story. The student loan people asked her if she was going to get any funding from Big Cove, because she was from Big Cove. In Big Cove they said, "Oh yeah we can fund you. You go and talk to this guy at Indian affairs at Fredericton. The guy [DIA]took her in and asked her a few questions, then he looked her in the eye and asked her, "Are you an Indian?" And she says, "No, I'm not Indian." "Well then I cannot help you in any way." And that was it. She didn't get to go to university that year.

I think in Big Cove they thought they could squeeze her through the red tape. In Big Cove she's just another name on a piece of paper with some money coming in. No problem. What do those people in Fredericton know? If we okay it here in Big Cove, what do they know? The same thing almost happened to me.

Franziska: What I'm hearing you say is that because you were a white person who grew up on a reserve you sort of fell in the crack between bureaucracies and cultures, is that right?

Forrest: Yeah, I guess you could say that. In terms of bureaucracy and money and stuff like that. That was mainly the issue. Actually, I imagine, that while we were going through high school that Big Cove did pay. We were one of the people on the list to get funded. So instead of the money coming from the provincial government the money for myself and my sister, and all my brothers came from the federal government. So we were just another number on the federal list.

But we weren't really on the band list. See that was the fine line I was talking to you about. Once you turn 18, you are no longer considered a dependent on your parents. So because we were no longer considered dependent on our parents, funding dropped. Your life ended. You're no longer a number on this list, you have to try to start being a number on the other list. So you get your social insurance number and go to work. Get on with your own life without any backup.

So after that summer job I applied for UI [unemployment insurance] again. That's a way of life around here. You apply to UI no matter what happens. So then I moved back to Big Cove, went back to my mom's house, never thinking I was going to stay there. I was just regrouping and thinking about what was going to come next. Twenty-three years old, waiting. I was collecting UI, so I wanted to take a while to relax. I had just finished five years of university. Figured I deserved a break.

Then in November I was working in Fredericton, at the RPC [Research and Productivity Council], under Colleen Northcott, a lady that I had just met, maybe a month or so earlier. I had a lot of connections and so it was easy to get the job. For a young chemist just out of school it was worth starting there. We did a lot of research, mostly on the bud worm program. I did a lot of the background work. And we also did some work on the Sidney [Nova Scotia] tar ponds.

Married with children

We got married in July of '88. I had to actually go and ask Bernadette's father [Willie-John Simon] if I could have his daughter's hand in marriage. We couldn't get married unless he did approve. I asked him and he said, "Yeah, if you guys want, it's okay with me." He really liked me. Whether or not he approved of me marrying his daughter, I don't know. He didn't verbally disapprove. But he liked me a lot 'cause him and I used to go riding around, stop off and have a beer. Talk about anything. He used to talk to me a lot about things that he used to do. I have nothing but respect for the man. He was great to me.

Bern already had two children when we were married. Starlit was four and Daemus was five. I am the stepfather.

Well, I continued to work for RPC until October. I gave them notice then 'cause I just couldn't take living away from my family and Bern didn't want to move to Fredericton. I wasn't making a lot of money at RPC so we didn't really have enough to actually move and rent an apartment. So Bern and I together decided that it'd be better if I leave my job, and she would

look for work. So she found odd jobs here and there and her odd jobs' take-home pay was quite a bit more than my salary had been. She has an education degree and she was supply teaching on the reserve.

So we lived in Big Cove. That's one thing, when I was growing up in Big Cove, I told myself that I'll never live in Big Cove. Once I reach 18, I go to university, I'll never live in Big Cove. So I told Bern, "This is very temporary, because I'm not going to stay here." Within six months we were looking for a house. October of last year we moved into this place; a beautiful house for the price we paid. It needs work, but it's work that can be done at your leisure. Which I'm doing.

Franziska: So when you married Bern did that change her status or yours?

Forrest: Just before we were married they changed the law that it wouldn't change her status. I don't think we would have been married so quickly if she were going to lose her status.

Franziska: So now by being married to a Micmac woman you could live in Big Cove, no?

Forrest: I could have but I still wouldn't have been on the band list. She wouldn't be getting welfare or anything for me. There wouldn't have been any benefits for me.

Franziska: So did you have any other jobs?

Forrest: The next job I had was at the university department of forestry. And there I worked for a professor who wanted to find out what were the optimum conditions and what was the optimal chemical formula which made trees grow. Again, I was in the background doing a lot of testing. We'd get samples from trees, scrape off the bark, scrape off the cambium of a tree growing in the spring time. Get it, and freeze it right away, so it was kept pure. And we'd analyze that cambium exactly for what's in the stuff, making the tree grow. And then we'd try to optimize the chemicals in there. See if he could grow a faster tree, meatier tree, better for lumber. That was his sole idea. And that job, again I left because Bern had started working in a different job.

My main objective, financially, was to collect my UI stamps. It keeps the money coming in and makes it easier financially.

Franziska: So what about your career? What are your dreams about that?

Forrest: I think they're going to be on hold for a while until Marcus gets older. See, when Bern and I got married we agreed that we weren't going to have any more children. She had her two kids and she didn't want any more. Then after a year or so, I thought I'd like to have a kid, a son or a daughter of my own. So we made a compromise. I said I'd stay home and look after the

baby. Then again, she was getting a fair pay cheque at this time. So here I am staying home with Marcus.

Hopefully I'll be able to start back on my career later. I don't know whether or not I'll have to take a career change, because in this area there's not a lot of opportunity for a chemist or a chemical technician.

Franziska: I was interested in how difficult it is to get a job here. Cory was saying that in his experience it is really hard for a Micmac to get an off-reserve job around here.

Forrest: They've had people work at the Irving in Rexton, and they've had Natives working at the Co-op store in Richibucto. But you can't get very far in this area if you don't speak French.

Franziska: So that excludes you to, doesn't it?

Forrest: Yeah, especially in Richibucto. In Rexton, it's different. But then again there is some prejudice around here. Sometimes the population around here don't want to be served by Natives. It's sad to say but it's true. The business might lose from white people not wanting to go to their store, but they would gain maybe a lot more Big Covers. And I think at the Co-op that happened, because they hired three or four other Natives.

Franziska: Some of the elders from Big Cove might feel more comfortable having their own people serve them.

Forrest: Yeah, they can talk to them, and speak Indian with them. There's some people in Big Cove, who don't speak English. They speak Micmac only. And you know, they're looking for something, and they can't find it. They'd be a lot more comfortable going up to a Native person and saying, you know, I can't find what I'm looking for.

Franziska: Do you think it would it be easier for you to get a job in this area?

Forrest: A job within the Rexton and Richibucto area? Well in the Richibucto area, the problem is my lack of French. I applied for a job just recently for a public health inspector. I went for the interview and it was fine. But I called and they said, no. You're not going to get a government job in this area without being bilingual.

As for me to go and try to get a gas attendant job, or grocery clerk job, I'd take it if I needed it. But a lot of times they don't want to hire somebody who has some kind of education like mine. They want somebody they can on depend to stay.

Stay-at-home dad

Franziska: So what's your life like now, on a day-to-day basis?

Forrest: I'm basically a house-husband. I keep the house clean, and in general working order. I take care of Marcus. I do almost all the cooking, all the shopping. I'm pretty much in charge of disciplining the kids. Something goes wrong, I have to sort it out.

Otherwise, I go to my mom's once in a while, and that's about it. I don't have very many friends to drop in on. Tuesday nights I bowl with some friends. I go to occasions, like if there's a birthday party somewhere but most of my friends are in Fredericton. So I feel isolated a lot but I keep myself occupied with doing some small carpentry projects around the house.

Franziska: Three years and Marcus can go to school. Will he be going to the kindergarten in Big Cove?

Forrest: If there's no kindergarten in the Rexton area, because there never used to be, then I'll probably take him to Big Cove.

Franziska: You've lived on the reserve. And knowing that he looks `white', knowing he's got a Micmac mom, and all these Micmac relatives, what are your plans for him?

Forrest: Well, I'm not going to move back to the reserve. So he won't live on the reserve, I don't think. But he'll spend quite a bit of time there, because he has all these relatives there. We're not going to exclude him from the reserve. He'll go to some pow-wows and the Big Cove picnic. That's a pretty big event. He'll probably go to church in Big Cove, because Bern still goes. So he'll be within the community, and he'll probably make a lot of friends in Big Cove.

I think we'll probably start him off in the Rexton school system because we live in the Rexton area. Then he never has to make that transition from the Big Cove to the Rexton school. Even now there's a lot of students from Big Cove that go to Rexton so he'll have contact with the Native people. But Bern really wants to start teaching all our kids at home, let them learn at their own pace and not as part of a system.

As far as the language and everything goes, we'll teach him as much as he wants to learn. We all speak Micmac to him.

Franziska: What's the main language spoken in your home?

Forrest: English, but there's some Micmac in there. I find our two older kids are almost embarrassed to speak Indian, and they're embarrassed to hear it. And they're also embarrassed because they don't know it, I guess, maybe that's why. But they don't want to learn it either, it

seems. Daemus, he looks so Indian, so dark and everything, that he's almost embarrassed to be Indian. I think he said before he wished he was not Indian, which is terrible. I mean, I don't know why or where he got that from. It must be because they've gotten such a hard time from white people, even though you think, well, these are the 1990s, there shouldn't be this kind of discrimination, but...

My wife is definitely not ashamed to be Indian, and I'm not ashamed that she is an Indian. And I'm white, but that doesn't mean we're not a family. We can all be who we are. And we speak Indian. I talk to them in Indian, and I expect to get an answer back in Indian. Usually though they'll answer back in English. Particularly when their friends from next door [non-Natives] come over.

What happens in Big Cove, on the other hand, I don't know really, because usually Bern takes them to Big Cove to church and then they hang around with their friends there.

Franziska: Bernadette has talked to me about the importance of going back to a traditional way of life. How would that affect you, and how would you feel about that?

Forrest: We are trying to get back to some of the traditions of older times. What we started in our family is having a talking circle, where everybody, me, Bernadette, Starlit, and Daemus sit around and first have a family meeting where we discuss openly all the things that might be bothering us. It could be anything from watching TV or setting chores or allowances, anything they want to talk about, or things that me and Bern want to talk about. After that we have a talking circle where we express other ideas too — "tell a story if you want". We started that the last two or three months. It's going well. We're just trying to get to know ourselves better as a family. But we haven't gone back to Native tradition ("traditionalism") if that's what you meant.

But even if she wanted to go back to Native tradition, I would have nothing against it. Of course, how far I'd go along with it, I guess there's certain things maybe I wouldn't do. We'd discuss it. I'm more willing to go along with it now than I would have been when we were first married. I've learned.

But getting back to this career thing, next year I'll be thirty. I don't see my life ending, it's not over yet. I might end up staying home for the rest of my life, but hopefully during that period, I will have accomplished something. I know Bernadette wants to start a business. Get all our bills paid off, try to save up a few dollars, and she would quit her job,and go start her business and I'd go look for work. We'd go on that way.

She's more business-orientated, idea-orientated, not afraid to take a chance. I don't see myself as running my own business. If I had a couple of set-backs, I'd probably say, forget this. Whereas she would have a set-back, and okay. But I couldn't.

Franziska: What kind of business does she want to start?

Forrest: Books, like used books is what she's trying to get into. She wants to put out a few ads and get everybody's old used books. Have them on display and some people can buy them, or just sell, trade all this stuff. Not really to make any money. That's why we'd like to be financially secure before she sets it up. That way she could just do it for her own pleasure.

She loves reading. I don't mind reading, but I find more than an hour would kill me. I can sit and watch three hockey games in a row, 9 hours of TV, you know. As long as I can get up during the periods and grab myself a beer and a bag of chips or something.

Franziska: Do you and Bern ever get into discussions about political issues, or do you stay away from it?

Forrest: Okay, we discuss it, but we don't try to blame. She doesn't blame. She doesn't try to blame the white people and look at me as an enemy. And I don't try to pick a fight with her and say, these damn Natives trying to claim all this land. We don't get right into it. No. We accept each other for who we are. But when I think of it, it seems to be very unfair. It seems like an unfairness that can't be really dwelt upon. We have to keep on going.

But sometimes my in-laws start talking freely, and then they sort of look at me, or look at Bern and try to calm themselves down. Like one time my mother-in-law was reading an article in the paper. Bern was sitting in front of her. I wasn't there. She was reading the paper and she goes, "Oh damn those white people, wish they'd all just go and leave us alone." Then she looked up and saw Bern and goes, "Well, except Forrest, of course." Just an article in the paper can instil that much anger. I don't blame them for being angry. Especially a lot of the things that the government thinks they can get away with. If I feel any anger in Big Cove, a tension, I avoid it 'cause I'm not going to make anything better.

I'm not really and I never actually have felt like part of the community. I've always seen the community as not being fair toward us as a white family on the reserve. We were prejudiced against. But I'm not going to prejudice against anybody else. So I just try to avoid confrontation.

Franziska: How does it affect your relationship with your wife?

Forrest: We try to lighten the tension, joke around it, you know. Sometimes Bern will say, "Well

we're living off the reserve, I've got to pay taxes. I might as well divorce you and move back on the reserve, and then you can just follow me here, or just live here and we'll meet each other sometimes downtown. You can come live with me for a week, and I can come live with you for a week. But my house will be on the reserve, so we won't have to pay tax." So we joke around like that knowing it'd never happen. But we're not resigned to the fact that we should pay tax either, just because we do live off the reserve.

Franziska: Let's talk about something different, about what you do or don't believe in — about spirituality.

Forrest: I'm not a very religious person. I find I believe, but I don't have to go to church. I can believe and pray five minutes at the foot of the bed. I can sit at the table and talk to God if I want. If God's everywhere, then God knows where I am. To me, it's more important, to live a good life. Keep your record as clean as you can. Don't harm anybody else and hopefully no one will harm you. You'll just live your life.

Franziska: What about the years you lived with Mike and the question of spirituality?

Forrest: No, it never came up much at all. He didn't push us to do anything. We had rules and curfew and stuff like that, so they were followed. Saturday night, go to church, or Sunday morning, go to church. None of that. No spirituality there.

There was a drumming ceremony at our house once. I didn't get involved. It was during the summer. I was home from university. I might have been 19 or so. I think it was William Nevin's group. They came to our house and they drummed up a storm. I just stayed downstairs in my bedroom. Didn't bother coming up. I heard it but I didn't relate to it.

Mike was there. He is considered an elder, a very respected man. *Ginap* they call it in Indian. A lot of people will look at Mike that way, almost a medicine man, but not quite. But people come in and talk to him. And they knew he was an artist, and a lot of them liked to see his drawings, and things.

I know Bern and her family, her brothers Rubin and Benjamin, they enjoyed his company so much, they would spend more time at our house than they would at home. And even their father would say, "What's going on at Mike's? How come it's so popular a place over there?" 'Cause he'd spend the time, sit down and tell them stories.

I on the other hand related better to their father, Uncle Bill, because he was more of a serious type. Money was very important to him, which to me is important too. So we'd spend a

lot of time talking about cars, prices, buying this, buying that. More of the modern world, I guess, than the older times. Whereas Bern and Rubin would spend time with Mike and talk about the older times.

Franziska: I wanted to ask you what goals you have set for yourself.

Forrest: I'm not very proud of it, I guess, but I'm very materialistically inclined. And right now my main goal is to get a new car. That would make me very happy for maybe two, three years in a row. If I could go and hand-pick the one I wanted, without worrying about price, that would be even better.

I have no real big goals, just living happily and healthy and secure. Financial security is a big thing for me. If I feel insecure, I tend to worry, get nervous. Whenever Bern speaks about quitting her job my stomach ties in a knot. Where's the money going to come from if she quits her job. 'Cause her job pays so much more. As for my own personal goals, what I would like to do is to just get back into the work force. I don't want to change my career. I'm very happy with being a chemist, technologist.

Franziska: What makes going out and working important for you?

Forrest: How can I say it. I'm not so much bored, but I need to have a feeling of self-worth, I guess. Sometimes I look at the end of the day, and I say, "Gee, what have I accomplished today. I looked after a kid, and kept him out of harm, and that kind of thing. Put him to bed, did the house work, did this... There's got to be more than this." It's not really enough. I need to feel like I'm doing a good job. Well, I guess I'm doing a good job, but to feel, to feel needed, I guess. Sometimes I feel like if I had a babysitter, the babysitter could have done what I did today. I could have gone out and done my work.

The next generation

Franziska: What about Daemus and his life in Big Cove? As far as you know, does he experience the same difficulties you had?

Forrest: A lot of his difficulties are because of me, I think. He takes a lot of abuse. I think that's why he wants to go to school in Rexton.

Franziska: So he doesn't go to Big Cove school?

Forrest: No, he goes to school in Rexton, and I think one of the main reasons is that he has a stepfather who's white, and in Big Cove he has to justify it. Because the kids say, "Hey, who's

your father?" And he tells them I'm his father. "He's not your father, he's a white guy. He can't be your father." So he has to justify it.

Franziska: So it seems that he's living your life, but in reverse, a Micmac boy trying to fit into a `white' school.

Forrest: Well, no. For him fitting into the white school doesn't seem to be a problem. For him it's more the education. It's not so much the friendship. He plays baseball, and he's on a team, and they all seem to like him. I don't think he has any ill-effects. Maybe he does. Maybe he just doesn't tell me. Maybe he sees me as a person who doesn't take action against his grievances. Which is maybe what I got from Mike and my mom. But he does complain, but he tells his mother more than me. She's more a person of action.

Franziska: What about Starlit, does she also go to school in Rexton?

Forrest: No, she goes to Big Cove. She went to Rexton school for a month. Bern gave them an ultimatum. Put both of them in Rexton in September and said, "At the end of September, if you don't like it, then you can go to Big Cove." So when the end of September came Starlit said, "I don't like it [Rexton school]." Daemus said he wanted to stay in Rexton. He's never really complained. Every now and then when his report card comes out he wants to go back to Big Cove.

Conversations with Cory Augustine

Introduction

Peter `Cory' Augustine is Mike and Ada's 19-year-old grandson; they have raised him since he was four months old. His birth mother is from Big Cove and his father is Ada's oldest son, who lives in Maine. When I first met Cory, he was a good-looking ten-year-old with a wonderful smile and a warm heart. Since then he hasn't changed much, but he's the father now of three-year-old Samantha. So he carries more responsibility, but he hasn't lost that warmth or respectfulness. When I asked him to participate in this life history project, Cory was going through a difficult time. He and Samantha's mother had just separated. He had given up hockey and was taking upgrading courses with the goal of getting into the RCMP. Hockey had been Cory's real love. He had quit school to play and he had been a star player for the Big Cove team. When his daughter was born he was in the major triple A league, but soon after he quit to spend more time with his family. In May 1993, when we began these conversations, he was looking

forward to a summer job of netting and tagging salmon for Buctouche reserve. "It teaches me what I should have known when I was a kid, teaches me how to make nets," he said. "It's a good experience, and it pays me $400 a week."

Although Cory has both a Micmac and a non-Aboriginal parent, he identifies himself as Micmac. The central guiding figure in his life has been his grandfather. Like his grandfather before him, Mike has been telling Cory the Micmac stories and legends so that he will remember them and carry on the tradition.

But Cory is struggling with his own world. In these conversations he talks about his grandmother and grandfather and the good home life that they provided for him. He talks about the good side of living in Big Cove. "We're all a big family," he says. But he also talks about anger, violence, racism, and depression in relation to the reserve and the local [non-Aboriginal] communities. He is in the same age group as many of the young people who have recently taken their lives in Big Cove. Cory talks candidly of the frustrations of growing up on the reserve, the difficult home lives [of some young people], and the frustration and anger that get turned against peers (or self) instead of being discussed and resolved at home.

He talks about schooling in Big Cove and how it did not prepare him to deal with the white world outside. Quick reward systems on the reserve give a false sense of achievement. Native hockey does not prepare you for the tough competitiveness of off-reserve hockey.

Cory is very aware of his mixed parentage. His feelings of alienation include, to some extent, both the Native and the non-Native community. On the reserve he feels excluded by not being able to speak Micmac, although that still is the primary language of his friends and peers. Off the reserve, trying to get a job, he feels discriminated against because of `being Indian'.

When I talked to Cory about this life history project he was not sure whether he could express himself well enough. His model was his grandfather, who is well known for his storytelling abilities, and he knows that Mike would like him to follow in his footsteps. But once the tape recorder was rolling, Cory had no problems at all. He talked and talked without me asking very many questions. He had things on his mind that he wanted to say, and I sat and listened. This printed version of those conversations has been edited by both of us.

Growing up in Big Cove

Cory: My grandmother and my grandfather, they were the ones who brought me up, took care of

me. Brought me up the right way. They taught me how to respect things, how to respect people. I was about four months old when I started living with them. Since then I've been with my real mother off and on. I'd go over to my mom's on weekends, and grandpa would come pick me up a couple of days later because grandpa missed me. He didn't want me to stay long. I was his little boy. Anybody touch me and you got in trouble. That's the way it was with me and my grandfather. Even now, all my life, I grew up with him, and he never raised a hand to me.

Franziska: What about your father. He's living in Maine, isn't he?

Cory: Yeah. But I don't see him much. 'Cause I don't like going over there. He drinks. I go visit him once in a while, but I couldn't live with him. We'd get in a fight in a minute. I'm his son, and he's my father. That's all there is. That's the way he's been all my life.

Franziska: Tell me about growing up in Big Cove.

Cory: Well, a lot of the times I was fighting. Everyday I'd fight. Because the kid next door, and the kid beside him they'd say, "Let's go beat up Cory". I had to learn how to fight, protect myself, take care of myself, outside of the house. And I got in fights every day.

I had a friend next door. We played a lot of ball hockey, played cars, drove bikes. Around here, when you're young, everybody knows everybody. Every adult knows who's kid you are and what's going on. So, not like a big city where you have to stay in your yard. Here you can roam free. Like a lot of my friends, I used to go there and they'd be eating, so I'd eat too. 'Cause my friends came over to my house and ate. That's one thing about Big Cove. It's like that.

Franziska: Did the fact that your father was not Native make a difference in your life here?

Cory: In a way it did, and in a way it didn't. No one really knows about my past here. But when people talk to me ─ I could speak good English, 'cause my grandparents spoke English all the time ─ it's English, not Micmac. I'd love to learn my Native tongue more but they don't speak to me in Micmac. They dig back for that second language, English. Sometimes the older people talk Micmac to me and I try to respond, but I don't always get what they say. For most people here Micmac is the first thing that comes out. But now, you know, they're speaking more English.

When I was growing up in Big Cove, kids my age didn't want nothing to do with me. So I always had a bunch of big guys with me, right, because they didn't mind me hanging around. I was a good laugh. Even now I'll joke around, make fun of myself, do this stupidly because it makes them laugh, so that they'll say, well, he's a nice guy and all that.

Still it was fun growing up in Big Cove. It's very hard to explain because you've got to

experience it yourself. You've got to go with the flow. But I had my good times, all kinds of laughs, barrels of laughs.

But one big problem I had was that I wasn't too rich. Cory Cat, they called me, because we had a whole bunch of cats, 25 cats at one time. Girls didn't like me 'cause I didn't have new-style clothes. When everybody got a motor bike, I didn't. When everybody got a new bicycle, I was still riding that same one. But my grandfather taught me to take care of it. Save us money. But my grandparents gave me a lot when I was a kid. They gave me love, food, and a roof.

Franziska: What was good about growing up in this community?

Cory: When you wake up in the morning, you see people you know. That's the good thing. When you go down the road, people wave to you. It makes you feel better. There's a lot of hospitality when you go in homes, eat, stay here if you like. They open up and bring you in, because we're all a big family. One family throws you out, someone else will pick you up.

But the best time was summertime when we used to go to the beach with my grandparents. Stay two or three months. That was the best time because I didn't really like Big Cove because there I used to always get beat up. But at the beach, I ran every day. That's how come I was a fast runner ─ you got a new pair of shoes from town and you took them out there to test them out.

Safest place I can be out there. Went to bed, I knew I was safe, because grandpa was there. You got up in the morning, grandpa was there. Or, he wasn't there, but you knew he was awake, because the fire was going and he'd be back in a few minutes because he just went for a walk on the beach. He was always up before sunrise. Sometimes I'd go up and look on the beach and see him walking, He always walked on the beach, always walking. Sometimes you'd see him carrying a huge log on his shoulder. Then at night, near the fire, he'd sit there and tell us nice stories.

Grandpa was always there for me. When something broke, grandpa fixed it, right away. Just to make me happy, eh. Always make you laugh too. I'm not embarrassed of my grandfather. Maybe he doesn't dress like this other guy's grandfather, but, hey, he's not like the other grandfathers.

I remember one time, I was playing hockey, just got done playing hockey. This was three years ago. Grandpa was on a good drunk. I was sitting there getting undressed, guess who slides

in beside me with a big smile. Grandpa comes sliding in beside me. Didn't say nothing. Just sat there drinking his beer, and I was getting undressed talking to him. And grandpa is hard to understand sometimes 'cause of his tongue, what happened a long time ago. And he started getting the boys laughing, and they were having a great time in there. So we eventually left and went home. Was fun though. He made life easier for my friends in a way too. When I first met Paula,[viii] that's all I did, was talk about my grandfather. If I ever lost grandpa... Because he told me one day, you're going to wake up, and you're going to find me sleeping, and I'm not going to be sleeping, I'll be passed away. I wasn't going to stay here, because I'm scared of that, eh. It's going to be hard on me because I don't know what to do. I just thought about it one night, and I just started crying. I know grandfather's hanging on hard. If I lose him, he's going to be the closest thing I ever lose in my life.

Every once in a while I'll be doing something with the boys and I'll hear, "Cory". And I'll look around, "You guys say my name?" "No". Or if I'm off by myself I'll hear, "Cory, Cory". And to me, that was always a sign to come home. I never heard it for a while, because like he let me go. But as I was growing up I'd hear that faint voice, "Cory". Or, I think of something, and it felt like he knew. And when something is wrong, I always come home. It's the way we are.

They always called me little *Ginap*,[ix] always, 'cause I knew when my mom was around. Like no one called me, no one told me, yet I always knew when she would be at my other grandmother's. So, I'd get dressed, no matter what, I'd go. I said I wanted to see my mom. 'Cause I really loved my mom. I knew she was already there and I was only two years old.

Franziska: We talked about your grandfather. What about your grandmother? How did you get along with her?

Cory: My grandmother, she was like the enforcer of the house. When it come down to enforcing my ass with the spatula, that was granny. I still remember that. But when I had a real bad problem, even now, when I have a problem with money, or I have a problem with anything. If I need a babysitter, if I need this, I always turn to granny. Because grandpa was more or less like a guy who stayed out of things. Like he was always there when it was time for him to be there, but he would always be outside. It was like a guy over your shoulder keeping an eye...

My grandfather taught me a lot of wisdom, in certain areas, but my grandmother taught me about respect because my grandmother's that way. She taught me things, and my grandfather was there with different things. And they both mixed together and they taught me a different

way.

When I was crying or anything, I'd go see grammy because she was the more loving person. My grandfather loves me, but it's different love, totally different. My grandmother had a lot to do with the way I grew up, because when I'd fight, she's the one that put my ass in the house. But my grandfather enforced rules when she couldn't. As soon as my grandfather stepped in and raised his voice to a certain height, that was it, he'd be like, like government.

Franziska: Did family members, like your grandparents, try to guide you in a particular direction for the future?

Cory: No, they always let me do what I want, all my life. That's how come a lot of times I don't have will power. I don't have that will power to stop smoking or will power to stay in school. I need someone there to back me up.

Franziska: You say you don't have the will power. Is there any way that you think they could have helped you?

Cory: Not really. Just give a person a lot of confidence. Like I got a lot of confidence from them, but I would have liked to have my mom and dad go watch me at hockey games, but it was my grandparents who came. If I were to have had my mom and dad, that would have made that much difference. I'm glad they [grandparents] were there for me, but my parents would have made me feel that much better because my friend over here, has got his parents taking him.

Franziska: What were some of the things when you were young that were really hard?

Cory: Some things kind of made me cry once in a while. My mother would drink very heavily. Sometimes leave for a week, not come home. And that really made me feel like we weren't important. And that's how come I'm not so close to my mom. I don't talk to her about my problems.

Franziska: Were there good moments with your mom too?

Cory: She let me do what I wanted, let me be free, let me grow up. Ain't always nagging that your clothes are dirty, or your shoes are not tied. She was never nagging at me. I liked it. And I had a nice place up there; woods, trees to climb. Winter time, go out sliding, and skiing. I really enjoyed it there. But I missed Big Cove because all my friends were here. There was one point in time where I didn't really care about Big Cove. I wanted to stay there [mother's place]. My brothers were there, my cousins were there. I was closer with my mom's side of the family, once I started living there.

Franziska: There seems to be so much musical talent in your family. What do you see as your special talent?

Cory: I'm the most recognized hockey player in my family. I do sing once in a while, you catch me singing, but I don't know if I sound good. But every once in a while, when I'm alone, I'll turn up the music, grab my daughter's machine, karioke type, and I'll sing with the radio. I like singing. My mother's a beautiful singer. She's one of the best in Big Cove.

I tried to learn to play guitar, because it looks beautiful when someone's able to make music with their fingers. I'd like to play some day. But I don't have that will power to grab that guitar. I don't have that.

Franziska: When you were a bit older, what kinds of things did you find to do in Big Cove?

Cory: They have a friendship centre now, but you don't go there drinking, and you don't go there on dope; they'll kick you out if you are. You can go there and play pool, arcade and whatnot. You got baseball on the reserve. You can play hockey. You can go bike riding, 'cause there's a lot of places here. Say you had a new friend over from a different reserve, you can go sightseeing. You can show him, well, this is where someone lives, and this is where this happened. There's a lot of good stories in Big Cove, a lot of stories about gruesome things. Kids always talk about gruesome things.

One time, a long time ago, there used to be a dance hall. And they used to have dances there. Certain time of the evening, they would hear a wolf howl. And I guess, that wolf, or that dog never had a head. That kind of gives you the willies. And another time they were having a dance for the church. I think 'cause the church burnt down. And a white man came in with a pure white suit. He kept to the girls, asking them to dance. And the priest said, "Don't dance with him. Don't go near him. He's a devil." And when the dance was over, he spoke out loudly, and said, "You guys are lucky you never danced with me, and he went into the floor." Gives you the chills.

Another time, a friend of mine's father ─ he was very sassy, hurts things, breaks things ─ one time he was walking down the reserve. This was a long time ago, when he was a kid ─ well he seen something red streak across to his right. When he looked behind him he seen a devil: half human body, half horse and the hooves and the horns and the tail. It chased him, chased him about three-quarters of a mile home. And he never ran so fast in his life. Sometimes walking down that road I think of that. I still get scared and it gives me the chills.

Franziska: What kinds of pressures does a young person go through here, Cory?

Cory: Well I started drinking when I was 13 because of peer pressure. You got your friends that drink here, you got your friends that smoke, and they always bug you. "Aw, you wimp." They always put that on you. So I started drinking when I was 13. It was occasional, once every month. And then it started getting more. Then it started getting every weekend, every Friday night, Saturday night, and Sunday, I'd drink. And then summertime I was starting to drink real heavy, and getting into dope. 'Cause anything you need you can get it here ─ drugs to alcohol, because of the way it is. You got a brother who has an older brother, you got a friend...

Franziska: Where did you get the money?

Cory: It was no problem getting money. Hang around with a couple of guys who had money all the time, and get drunk. That's one thing I've been noticing about my friends around here. When it becomes friendship, you don't worry about money. Because someday, it'll come back around. Money is no big deal.

Franziska: You know we haven't talked about school at all. What was that like?

Cory: I went to the school in Big Cove until I was in grade 3. I learnt that you have to fight and I started winning. People started noticing and leaving me alone. I was quiet. Wasn't very popular, just like I told you.

I went to a white school in grade 3. Started going to the school in Rexton. I hated it. Me and school didn't get along. I didn't like to be told what to do. That's the way I am. And they're always on your case. Plus when you're Indian, going to school, off the reserve, it's even that much harder. Because the racism is there. They give you a little more lecture than the next guy who's doing the same thing. Or you get punished a little more than the other guy. It's no good and Native kids start feeling it. And then they go fight with the other boys, the white people. Big Cove was better though.

In Big Cove they weren't strict. They don't buckle down and say, "Hey, you're going to go in the white man's world soon. Buckle down, eh." That's how come a lot of kids who go to Bonar Law [High School, in Rexton] have problems, and a lot of times quit. I think, in the schooling system here, they teach you a different way. It's easier to make it here. A lot more verbal, you talk a lot instead of writing it down, and then studying it. 'Cause a lot of people, like me, I don't like taking homework home. Can't stand it. In Big Cove I always passed. Here I was passing with an 80 average.

Franziska: When did you quit school?

Cory: I quit while I was in grade 8 [in Big Cove]. I was going to school in Rexton Elementary to grade 6 and then to Bonar Law for grade 7. Then they changed it around when they built a bigger elementary school in Big Cove. They wanted me to go to school in my community [for grade 8]. I didn't really want to come back. I was nervous more or less. Had to take my different culture again. I was getting used to the white culture. Come back to a Native culture is totally different. And the rules ain't so hard on Natives in Native school. They're more lenient. Like here [Big Cove], they rewarded you in a certain way. You got a dollar a day ─ not real money, but paper money ─ if you were good all day. Within a year you saved up enough money to buy maybe a walkman. There was a little store ─ take four bucks and buy chips or something. Then they just stopped it all of a sudden. I don't know why, 'cause a lot of people liked it.

At the beginning I got quite a bit of money, but after a while, I started to get fed up. I'd go to school in the morning, take my hockey stick and my hockey gloves and skates and puck to school in a gym bag. Dinner time I'd take off and go play hockey for three or four hours. Every day I used to do that. Didn't help my schooling but I had a great time skating. I quit 'cause hockey season. Like I just like hockey.

Hockey is a big thing on the reserve. You're a good hockey player, you're known. And hockey is something that I like. I wasn't good when I first started, but I got better, and I'm better now. People started to know. Oh, there's Cory.

Franziska: Your team did quite well, right. I kept seeing you in the *Micmac News*.

Cory: Yeah, that was in Native hockey. Indian hockey is about the easiest hockey. Indian hockey is where you got to be a band member to play hockey. There's a big tournament. There's a lot of people from the reserves come over to play hockey. It's fun, but if you want to go somewhere, tell you right now, the worst thing to do is start playing Indian hockey.

You're young, you're playing for your reserve and people see you play. They notice, "Hey, you're a good hockey player." I'm being recognized. I'm having good games. And one thing that brings a lot of Natives back to playing Indian hockey is trophies. Because you can get a lot of trophies easy.

But if you play outside the reserve, you got to play a full year. And at the end, chances of you getting a trophy are slim. Even though you're one of the top players in the league. Don't matter. That's how come a lot of kids come back. They want that trophy. And I told one young fellow, "Don't turn back. Indian hockey is going to screw you up forever even if it makes you

popular with your reserve."

I started playing Indian hockey when I was 12. Started a little late, started Peewee. After that year, I didn't play. I just practised skating with the older guys. My last year, Bantam, I went and played in Maine. Then I made the major triple A, but I had a problem with the manager. One time I didn't do something right, and he shoved me. And he said, "Do it right," and he got mad at me. I almost quit that time.

But I don't like fighting. I never got in a fight on the ice before. But I do have a temper; when it goes, it goes. That's the thing about me. And sometimes I scare the living shit out of myself because I feel so much hate and anger. So much destruction in me, it's unbelievable.

Franziska: Do you have any sense what that's about? About that hate and anger and destruction?

Cory: No, when it comes to my personal life, I'm quiet. When it comes down to what's bugging me, when you dig deeper, I have no problem. When you start digging deep about my feelings, I won't say nothing. I'll throw it down deeper. My girlfriend does something, I'll drop it again deeper. One day I'll just blow up. I'll go crazy. And that scares me. But there is so much anger and destructiveness here.

Like I noticed when I was a kid growing up, I used to go over to somebody's house, his mother would be drunk. His father would be drunk. Yelling, screaming. The kids don't get fed, have to cook for themselves. They did a lot of things by themselves. They didn't go after their parents, because their parents would beat the living crap out of them. So what they do, is they take it all out on destroying things. They can't have nothing nice. Like, they break everything. I went to school, and they break everything.

When they play hockey against people, they have to hurt somebody. That's why a lot of people don't like playing hockey with Natives. A lot of kids around here know me as a hockey player — about six- or seven-year-olds — and they say, "I want to play hockey just like you, but I want to fight." And I'll go, "You don't want to fight. What would you rather be known as, a guy who fights or a guy who plays hockey?"

I'm known for my rough stuff, eh. That's what they know me as. But I don't take cheap shots or anything like that. And I'll sit down on the ice, when I have all my gear on and talk with the kids. It makes them feel better.

But lately I notice that there's so many people, my friends, they want out. Not just out of Big Cove, out of this area period.

Franziska: Why do you think they want to leave?

Cory: Because when you go downtown, people look at you funny because you are Indian. You go in the store, they stare at you because they think you're going to steal. And the people who don't steal are the ones who are mostly affected by it, because they're the ones that notice it. Because the other guys notice it, but they're stealing anyway.

One time, me and my friend, he must have been 14, 15, and I was 13, 14, went down to the Co-op in Richibucto, at the Shopper's Drug Mart. He needed some contact fluid, and he had some money. We went in there, and we looked at it, and he said, "Nah, I'll wait till my mom buys it for me." So he put it back, and we were walking out, and this woman ran up to us, and said, "Whoa, whoa whoa." And they started checking us all over. As soon as she noticed we didn't have it, she took off. I was only young but they said we could have charged her, because that's invading your privacy, and she'd been embarrassing us. Made us look bad in front of people.

It's racism and I dealt with that all my life. Go and play hockey around this area. "Wagon burner. You no-good Indian. Go back to the reserve." That's all I dealt with playing hockey. Of course there's a lot of young kids doing it, but you hear a lot of things from their parents too.

That is hard on Native kids. That's when they don't come back. They don't want to deal with that. When you're on the ice, you're skating, you're playing hard, you want to make the coaches happy. You're skating, it's beautiful. And then you have that behind you. "Get the fuck off the ice you Indian. Go back home."

Franziska: How would you deal with it, Cory?

Cory: Like, you notice these people yelling at you. Notice through the game who they like, who they're cheering for the most. And then you hurt that player, and he's off his game. Makes them more pissed off, and I love it 'cause I didn't go out and swing my stick at them, or go tell them shut up and all that stuff. So I just went around it different way.

Last year I put a guy in hospital overnight for concussion. I nailed him out at centre ice, and I put him in hospital. And they're still talking about it this year. But we're good friends, me and him, we visit together.

I never wanted to be noticed as a fighter. But in Big Cove I had to fight, I had to fight. If guys feel that they're threatened by you, they want to fight you; like getting close to their girlfriend, or you play good hockey. They're threatened if you're liked more by people. Then the only way to make themselves feel better is to beat you up. And that's how it always is. If they felt

threatened by you, not in physical form, but as you move your way into life, they want to hurt you and stop you. I notice it all the time.

Franziska: So when you show your anger it's usually against your own age group. But I'm still trying to understand why young people feel so frustrated and angry.

Cory: I don't know. Because I build up, and then I explode, and everything comes with it. This happened, and this one said something I didn't like. But I just make that fake laugh. And this guy did something to me. And this guy said something to me I don't like. I just sink it all in.

This guy is scared of his father, so he don't say nothing to this young fellow. And this guy don't want to say nothing to this fellow because of this certain thing. But this fellow, he doesn't give a shit about. So he'll focus a lot of energy on you.

That's how come young kids of today, in Big Cove, have the problem of taking their life. Because they feel that every time something is directed towards them, it's usually bad. And they get tensed up and frustrated and they say, "Fuck this shit, I'm taking my life." And I know a lot of people who just sink it in. Like my friend, he passed away. He sunk it in. He sunk everything. It's unbelievable how much pain and hatred he sunk into himself. It's unbelievable. And one day, he said, "I'm tired," and he passed away. Sometimes when I play hockey, against the team he played hockey for, it really bugs me 'cause he's not there any more.

That's the way it is. Tired of not working. Tired of getting welfare. Tired of bumming for the next cigarette, because they don't have enough. Tired of going out stealing. They want something but they can't get it because they got no money. Don't have a job, you ain't working because maybe you don't have a car or a motorbike that your friend has. You don't have it, and it bugs a lot of guys.

It's hard really. Because if you don't have your grade 12, you can't even wash dishes these days. And when you try to work outside the reserve here, you got to really kiss ass. A lot of Natives won't kiss ass and a lot of Natives won't get the jobs. You know, Richibucto wouldn't be there if it wasn't for Indians. Because the Native people spend money. They don't have to budget their money as much as white people. So they got that little extra money to go out, rent a movie, or go to a store and buy some chips and a whole bunch of pop. That's what's keeping the video store and everything going, is Natives. But funny, how many Indians you see working at the stores?

Franziska: Not too many.

Cory: I applied at Irving's for a job. I didn't get hired, but students were hired because they're white. It really pisses me off. I don't have my grade 12, but I'm doing better than most of my friends in Big Cove are. Let's just say they're educated bums on welfare. My friend graduated last year, he doesn't have a job, collects welfare. He's trying to get into the RCMP, and it's going good for him. 'Cause he wants out.

Lately it's been very strong, what do you call it, where all our friends are passing away. I had a lot of friends die in six months. The most important ones, I went to their funeral, eh. I didn't want to feel the tension. That's how come I left. Like in Buctouche I didn't feel it.

Then me, I always get down, at least once a year where I don't want to do nothing but just sit down and say, frig to everything. 'Cause I just go through a depression, every year almost. And I end up quitting everything. That's one thing about me, I always quit at things. I don't know why.

Franziska: You seem to have a lot of will power, though, when it comes to hockey.

Cory: I'm a very aggressive player. If someone was better than me, I'd try that much harder to be better than them. When it comes down to sport, I try to do my best ability. But I don't get the same rush, from a higher mark, or being popular with the teacher. It's all to do with the popularity. You know when you get that winning goal, or you run that much faster than the other person, they say, "Oh, he's a fast runner" or "Oh, he won the game, way to work." I like that little bit of attention. It makes me feel that much better about myself.

But one thing I never ran from was my family. I was 16 years old when Polly and I had Samantha. I was kind of scared, eh, but I made it through, and played hockey for a while. The coach even said, "You even made it this far, and it's unbelievable, because people would have quit already." And I took that, but I felt like all my life I was a burden on people. 'Cause when I went to play hockey in major triple A, I often didn't have money to eat. Because the only thing I had was welfare and that wasn't much, 86 dollars a week. So I spent that. Then my coach would give me money to eat, and I didn't like it. And they were all French, and I was the only Native on the team. I felt like they always give me money, and I couldn't pay them back. I hope some day I could. People pay for my place to stay. People pay for gas. And I don't like being a burden. But there's not much I can do when I have no money.

Franziska: What's your best way of getting rid of tension?

Cory: Playing hockey. Hockey and fishing. 'Cause fishing is just being outdoors. It's beautiful.

It's just a rush I get from fishing, it just takes me away. If I had a choice to play hockey or fishing, when I'm all tensed up like that, I think I'd take hockey, because fishing, if you ain't getting bites you tend to think more. But in hockey you don't have time to think that way. You think where am I going to skate next, or where am I going to shoot it, or where am I going to get the pass from, or who can I pass to.

Then after, I'll go back in the dressing room, talk with the boys, laugh a little bit. And then once I leave, things come back again, so sometimes I don't like getting off the ice.

Summertimes I can always go out swimming or do something. This spring I had a hard time. I lost everything. Had a hard time, but it wasn't too bad. But I'll never take my life because I want to see my daughter go through life. I'm going to have a good time. I know that, 'cause my daughter's kind of wild and free already and she's only three years old. I say I'm going to have fun, but it's not going to be fun, but I might as well joke about it now. Like she's going to run into problems and whatnot.

Franziska: It sounds in a way like you're trying to be the parent that you didn't have.

Cory: That's the way I want it. 'Cause a lot of what's holding me and Paula together lots of times is our daughter. Because her mother wasn't around and my father wasn't around. So she wants to be the mother she never had, and I want to be the father that I never had.

The best thing that ever happened to me is my daughter. That was the happiest moment for me. Because it's very weird for me, because I didn't really understand how I was supposed to feel, because I was so young. But now I know the feeling. Because you brought in your child, and your child is with you now in your world, and it's the best thing that ever happened to me.

We had Samantha when we were both 16. I just stayed home, stuck around. But every summer, I'd work here and there. The year after I went to school again, and I stayed in school for three weeks. I quit again. And now I'm back in school again. I don't know how long I'll last. I'm not going to set a goal for myself, because it's no use. When I set a goal for myself, and then I don't meet the goal, it gets me down. So I'm not just going to set a goal. I'm just going to go day by day. If I go, I go. If I don't, I don't. Trying to set a goal for myself and not come up with it, it's going to screw me up. A lot of my family members expect me to go. Like I always tell them I'm going to go to the RCMP. I always tell them that but every time, something happens.

Today I was downtown and we're talking about friends of mine that were drafted to Quebec major junior and Ottawa OHL [Ontario Hockey League]. And the guy at Como Sports

knows a lot about hockey, and he told me, you could have made it too. That really made me feel funny.

Franziska: Would you have liked that?

Cory: I think I would have but I screwed up once, and that was enough. I didn't really miss my chance, 'cause I had another year triple A, but it wasn't the same again.

Franziska: You know, Cory, with your looks you could pass as a non-Native. Have you ever wanted to do that?

Cory: Yeah, I could pass, but I'd rather be passed as an Indian myself 'cause I'm not embarrassed of my culture. I'd rather be Indian than white. A lot of people look up to Indians because they have their beliefs and culture, and I don't regret I'm an Indian one bit, not once in my life.

Franziska: What about the traditional ceremonies that people are reviving here in the community, were you or are you involved with them?

Cory: I was a little bit. One time, at Buctouche reserve, they were having a Sundance. And I didn't know nothing. I was only 15. And they wanted a little dog to sacrifice because it's considered medicine now. Because where the dog saved their lives a long time ago in the past, now they consider it medicine due to the fact it helped them a long time ago. I said, "Okay, I'll get you a puppy." Me and my friend we didn't know nothing. We were just going with the flow 'cause someone told us to do it.

So we went to see my aunt. "Do you still have that puppy around?" She goes, "I know why you want that puppy." "How do you know?" "'Cause I know, I know these ways." And she said, "Go ask your grandfather first." So I did. I was driving here, guess who was walking on the road already. Grandpa, grandpa was on the road. So I stopped. He didn't even say one word. He said "No." He just said no. He was mad as hell. I didn't even ask him that and he was mad as hell at me. I was scared shitless. I felt so bad. I told him, "Well they want this." And he said, "You want to sacrifice an animal for that, no way. Never sacrifice an animal for a man 'cause animal is much better than a man." After that I kind of backed off. Because my grandfather, he still brings it up.

My grandfather say if you want to pray, you want to be helping people, go in the woods, sit down and pray. A lot of people know that you're going to sweats because they see you there. They know you're praying and they hear you praying. But when you go out in the woods, you're praying and no one sees you. You're going direct to Great Spirit, or God.

Franziska: What about some of the other lessons that you've learned from your grandfather?
Cory: No man should hurt a woman. I never hit my girlfriend. That's why my hands are all screwed up. Because I usually hit the doors.

He also taught me about nature. The white man is so eager to make it that much better and that much more interesting. You should just leave it the way it is. But I can't complain, I like the white man's stuff. Love TVs. I love VCRs. I love machines like this. It makes life easier, but the earth is having a hard time. And my grandfather keeps telling me, "Someday the earth is going to fight back. Next thing you know you have this big hurricane, or this big tidal wave, and it has no mercy." Like the water, I love the water, but I have a respect for it. If water wants to take you, it's going to take you. My grandfather tells me this, "Never trust it, because it'll take anything it wants to."

Ever since I was two I used to sit on the back of the boat with my grandfather driving. And they were surprised I never fell in. But I have a lot of respect for the water. You can't dominate nature, because nature is a very powerful thing, but still, to me, to go out in a winter storm with my car is a real rush.
Franziska: You like testing yourself against nature?
Cory: Yeah, beautiful when you can beat nature. Survival. The thing about *egtaanog*, that's the way it was to me. Your being out there when it was a stormy time, can't just get on the boat and go. Sometimes you'd be stuck there three or four days. That's why my grandfather always told me, when you go out there for a day, you bring two days' food.
Franziska: How about the woods, Cory, do you feel safe there?
Cory: I don't trust the woods. 'Cause in a way, woods and nature can be very deceiving. You never know, you might walk into a cub and a mama bear, and she might tear you apart. Or you run into a bull moose, or cow moose. One time my grandparents were driving down the road. My grandmother stopped. Two moose on the road; the moose wouldn't leave. "Get out of the way." So my grandfather got out and started talking Indian to them. "Get off the road or you're going to get hit by a car. You shouldn't be on the road because it can hurt you," or something like that. The moose, usually he would have charged, but he just looked at him, and my grandfather gives that funny long face he always does — moose got real long face — and the moose just got off the road and kept on going. He had that moose on the road, and two more moose in the ditch. But my grandfather's always been like that, all his life. A lot of people are scared of hornets. But grandpa

will go up and hold them, they'll crawl on his hand. He's not nervous at all. He'll go up and catch some mice, and the mice are not nervous. Animals are not nervous around him. I seen him pet dragonflies one time. Dragonfly would land, and he'd go up and pet it on the back of his tail. Real amazing, him and animals. It's like he can speak with them in a certain way.

I sometimes get cruel to animals, like when I was a kid I wanted to experience the B.B. gun and shoot at birds. Grandpa he don't like it, and he got real mad at me a few times. But I regret it now. If I see kids, I tell them, don't shoot at birds.

Franziska: You know your grandfather has talked about Chapel Point, near your mom's house, as a very special place. He calls it Little People's Point.

Cory: It's funny, when I was growing up there, all my animals, like my hamster, and my turtle, I kept in the house. Well I could wire up the cage, and the son of a gun would get out. Doesn't matter how it was, he'd always get out. I had so many hamsters get loose in the house. And I asked my grandfather how come they were able to get out. And he said, "The little people don't want to be caught and kept in a cage all the time, so they let them out." That always comes to my mind, and it makes me believe it more. Because when you're young, you're kind of thick-headed, and you don't want to believe in that stuff. But I believe it more, and a lot of people misinterpret little people. They think they're evil, but they're not. Little people are free, and their souls are free, and their spirits are free. Chapel Point is a beautiful place and it's a good place to grow up.

Franziska: Are there other special places around here for you?

Cory: Yes, right across from our island where *egtaanog* is, is a very special, a very powerful place. My background, my grandfather's background, hunting and fishing, all winter he used to stay there. Or his grandfather, or his father's grandfather. Sometimes I get them mixed up because I heard so many stories of his father and his grandfather. His grandfather and father used to go there when they were kids. And it was actually like a tradition really. And some day, I'll pass on my tradition to my kids. But there's so much confusion in the world today. Always, even when I was growing up, there was a lot of confusion. TV — can't complain about TV, I like watching it myself. But when I'm out there, I forget about all that. I don't miss it, 'cause there's so much to do. On the beach, it's different every day. The tide rises higher, and moves this way, and brings different things to the shore.

Franziska: Is there anything that you want to add, anything that we haven't talked about that you think would have been good for me to know?

Cory: Well, this is going to come from my heart. I hope someday everybody in the world is able to become as one, and help work on certain parts. We have to or we're just going to die out. The earth is tired of being polluted, tired of being chopped down. It's tired of being dug up. Someday she's going to blow up and she'll take every thing with her. My grandfather told me that the earth is fighting back. You hear about a lot of thunderstorms, earthquakes, hurricanes. I'm scared for my daughter, because I don't know how it's going to be in her lifetime. I notice there's so much hatred now.

I take it day by day and I don't know if my next day is going to come. Might pass away tomorrow, might pass away this evening. I'm not scared to pass away but, like, I'm scared because my family'd be hurt. I'm not going to be able to be there to hold her. And I'm scared for that. I'm scared for her life.

Three Generations: Reflections

In this final section I reflect on and summarize some of what I have learned from Mike, Luke, Forrest and Cory. My words reflect my perceptions of what I have been taught and was able to learn from people in Big Cove. They are tempered by my feelings of love and respect for Mike and his extended family; they are shaped by the framework of the life histories research project as designed by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People.

The discussion focuses on four areas: concepts of relationship, place, identity, and survival. These four are linked to each other as well as to other themes such as spirituality, tradition and culture. Discussion in these four areas in no way exhausts the wealth of experience and knowledge that is contained in the stories and dialogues. Instead, it creates a place of beginning for further dialogue, interpretation and learning.

Thoughts About Relationship

It is primarily within the framework of the family that the legends, oral histories and personal stories continue to get passed down. In the 1920s and '30s Mike, his brother Phillip and their sister Sarah listened to their grandfather tell stories as they lay beside him in the tipi deep in the woods. In the '50s and '60s Luke and some of the older brothers and sisters sat around the woodstove on a stormy night and listened to uncles, including Mike, share their experiences. In the '70s and '80s, on summer evenings on the beach at *wta'nuk*, family members sat by the fire

and listened as Mike told stories. Mike hopes that Cory will follow in his footsteps and carry on the tradition of storytelling.

Some of the stories that get told are about Micmac legendary figures: *Toneel*, *Miigemoesso*, the *Poglatemootj* and *Glosgap*. Others are more historical, and they recount interactions between Micmacs and Mohawks, between Micmacs and Viking, or Micmacs and the French and English. For Mike, Luke and Cory as well as many of the other family members, these stories represent a part of their oral history. Forrest, Mike's non-Native stepson, on the other hand acknowledges that this is not part of his history. He remembers more clearly the ghost stories that the kids told each other when they gathered around their own fire.

Family represents the most important unit of support for the individual. Family provides a `homeland', a place where you get encouragement and recognition. Where there is no strong family support, young people in Big Cove seem more likely to lose their confidence and their will to survive. Cory talks about this and adds that young people, instead of talking with their parents, turn their frustration and anger on each other or even on themselves. He saw this as one of the reasons why so many suicides have happened in Big Cove in recent years.

Each of the people involved in this life history project had some family support. In Mike's life it was his grandfather more than any other person who gave him that support. Mike, who grew up without a mother, talks about his grandfather being there for him as guide and teacher, as his inspiration, and as a source of love and comfort. Cory, who was raised by his grandparents, also looks to his grandfather for many of the same qualities. On the other hand he also has the loving support and firm guidance of his grandmother. But Cory talks about not having had the support of his father when he grew up, and of feeling that loss.

Cory's father (Forrest's older brother) lives in Maine. From Forrest's story I gained some understanding of how difficult it would have been for his brother to try and make his home in Big Cove. By emphasizing our diverse cultural identities and histories we support social and political barriers that divide families and that leave some individuals struggling in a cultural vacuum.

Luke, Mike's nephew, the fifth of a family of 17, born on the reserve, speaks of having had the advantage of a strict mother (and a strict school system at the time) who encouraged his art and who pushed him to get an education. Sarah, Luke's mother, appreciated the education she received at residential school. She saw the advantage of a good education and pushed all her

children. Each of them mentions their mother as the driving force behind them. The older ones, like Luke, also talk of the uncles (like Mike) who inspired them with their stories. The woods and the beach are familiar and loved places, even though they do not have to depend on them to survive.

Another aspect of relationship that was emphasized by people in Big Cove was sharing. Being Micmac means to share, I was told. In his life story Mike talks about a particular form of sharing that he experienced as a young person. He draws attention to the relationship that his family used to have with local non-Native farmers. They had a bartering system from which both the farmers and the Micmacs profited. No money was exchanged. The Micmacs provided the farmers with wild meat, with woven baskets and with handles for their axes, pitch forks and so on. The farmers, in turn, provided Mike's family with garden produce, fresh eggs and some pork and beef. According to Mike, this was a system that worked well. From Mike's life story one also gets a sense that during this time there was less polarization of cultures. Especially during the depression, people helped each other out whether they were Native or non-Native. "We were all in the same boat," says Mike. Sharing was a way for all to survive.

When the conversation turns to Big Cove, I am shown how much people feel life has changed there, particularly since the 1960s. You used to be able to divide up Big Cove, geographically, by clans, I was told. In earlier times clan members would support each other more. Representatives from different clans used to work together for purposes of hunting and feeding of the families. Community would be enacted in the co-operation between the clans. Being Micmac meant sharing. Now many people feel there is a loss of community. People talk about how this kind of support and sharing has almost disappeared. Many extended families have broken up into smaller units, I was told, and people look more often now to government rather than to each other for support. Even smaller family units are dissolving, and some young people end up depending entirely on government support. Their sense of pride and dignity gets lost, along with their freedom and independence.

Thoughts About Place

With my video camera focused on him, Mike gives a passionate monologue about his feelings for the place he calls home. "Nowhere else to go, this is our country. I can't go to England, I don't belong there... I feel it in my heart."

Mike knows the country through personal experience. When he was young the family moved from place to place. They would set up camp wherever there were sufficient materials to make baskets and axe handles. As a young man he worked throughout New Brunswick and Maine, in the woods, on farms, in the cities. There were some very special places: Brown's Yard ─ the place where, in the 1700s, his great great grandfather was said to have freed the Micmac slaves from British `pirates'. There is the summer camp at the mouth of the Richibucto River ─ the place where on August the 15th he experienced a visionary replay of an event that had happened on the same date but in the eighteenth century ─ a burning British `pirate' ship set aflame by the Micmacs.

Mike has made it very clear to me that `home' for him is not defined by the boundaries of the reserve. More often he will speak of the reserve as a cage, a place that represents loss of freedom, a place that he is confined to in old age. Although Mike was born on the reserve, home is the whole of what he considers to be Micmac territory: the places where he lived and worked, the places described in the legends and stories that have been passed down to him. Mike has never left this area; instead the world has come to him. He plays the guitar and fiddle because, as he says, that is what the European brought to his area. He speaks English, he watches television and he owns a car ─ all because these were brought to him. These have become part of the place where he lives and therefore part of who he is. But really being home, as Mike explains, means being able to return to a life of self-sufficiency, a life built on using the skills of survival taught to him by his elders.

From my conversations with Luke I learned that the reserve does not represent a particularly significant barrier in his life. The reserve is home, the place he was born and raised. This is where the family continues to live; brothers, sisters, cousins ─ most of them are here. But the reserve does not represent confinement. It is a place to "come home to", a place to "kick back" and find time to dream. There is nothing desperate in spending time there, knowing that one can leave if one chooses to do so. Luke has expressed that he feels at home in both worlds. As a visual artist he spent long periods studying and working in Toronto and Santa Fe, New Mexico. He achieved recognition for his work in both the United States and Canada. But now, as Luke says, the path is starting to lead him back home. It is time to get to know his home territory better and eventually to contribute more concretely to his home community.

Forrest, on the other hand, talked to me about the difficulties of growing up as a

non-Native on a reserve. "It has never really been home," he says. Home is Maine, the place where he was born and where most of his mother's and father's relatives live. I sense a feeling of exclusion and isolation when I listen to Forrest talk about Big Cove. It seems that for him it was not so much a problem of racism as the fact that he had no status on the reserve. The reserve was never home to him, he said, because as an adult he could never live there or work there. At age 18 he was expected to leave. And yet Big Cove is where he grew up, and it is where his mother lives. He has friends and many cousins there. Through Mike, Forrest and his brothers and sister got support until they were 18. But they were never on the band list and, according to Forrest, they were therefore never allowed to work on the reserve. Now, being married to a Micmac, Forrest could live on the reserve, but he and his wife have chosen not to. And, as Forrest points out, he would still have no status and therefore no voice in community affairs.

Thoughts About Identity

In a candid moment, in answer to Alice Norton's query about why he has curly hair, Mike talks about his family's mixed cultural heritage. One grandmother has some Jewish blood, while one of the great grandmothers was Irish. "I'm not trying to hide my identity. I'm just an Indian, or Micmac, Micmac Jew," says Mike laughingly. But "I'm not the only one," he adds, "You find, all mixtures now, that's just how it is." There is no confusion in Mike's mind about who he is ─ he is a Micmac and very proud of his heritage. But my understanding of Mike is that he is mainly a humanist. In his eyes, I believe, we are all humans and we should all treat each other with respect. He was angry about the way young people have been taught intolerance: Native youth taught to fear `white' children and `white' children taught to be afraid of `Indians'. "We are all together and we should love one another," he keeps saying.

On the reserve, however, when you don't speak Micmac, the question of identity becomes more complex. In Cory's home English was the primary language. (His grandmother does not speak Micmac.) Now Cory feels somewhat isolated from his Big Cove friends and cousins who all speak Micmac as their first language. But for Cory there is an even greater loss. By not understanding Micmac he is somewhat excluded from his grandfather's world. (See discussion below about language and lifestyle.) Mike's teaching and storytelling to Cory (who, he hopes, will follow in his footsteps and be the next storyteller) has been in English, and in the process of translation they have lost some of their essential qualities.

Cory made it very clear to me that he identifies himself as Micmac, and that he is very proud of his heritage. Yet Cory also spoke of his feelings of alienation that include, to some extent, both Native and non-Native communities. He speaks of experiencing problems with racism off the reserve, problems with feelings of isolation on the reserve. Being between cultures is how he expresses his situation.

As a `white' person growing up on a reserve, Forrest had similar feelings of being in a liminal social and cultural space. Unlike Cory, Forrest speaks and understands Micmac quite well, yet there was no question of his `white' identity on the reserve. Off the reserve, particularly during his high school days, he was also identified as `other' because he lived in Big Cove and had Micmac friends.

Survival

Ultimately the question for all of us is one of survival. In European history books, Native cultures are usually doomed to extinction. But in recent years histories are being rewritten. Theories of assimilation and acculturation are being challenged and frequently replaced by theories that give prominence to strategies of resistance and survival. In undertaking this life histories project, I felt that it was essential for me to gain some knowledge of processes of survival. I wanted to understand how Mike, Luke, Forrest and Cory developed ways of coping or, even better, succeeded in reaching their goals. Obviously certain conditions change over the span of three generations; each person faces unique circumstances. Each person is also at a particular stage in their own life cycle, which also has an effect on choices and approaches.

When Mike speaks about survival, he remembers and recreates images of the woods, of making baskets and axe handles and of living in his own cabin or lean-to. The reserve "pampers" Natives, he says. There were no ration cheques when he was younger. He had to work to survive, and it was his father and grandfather who taught him the skills he needed. In the depression years Mike moved from job to job in Maine and New Brunswick: dish washing, furniture making, fishing, making axe handles, cutting pulpwood, playing in a country and western band, raking blueberries, and many others. According to Mike he never found it difficult to get a job. With his added gift for painting, Mike was also able to draw on his Micmac heritage as another source of income. "*Glosgap* is still paying me," he jokes.

Mike's grandfather had taught him a philosophy of life that made him feel at home in

nature. It was a philosophy of non-interference, respect and survival. Mike was taught to `read' the trees, to study the moss which usually grows on the north side. He knows about the habits of birds: which ones will help get you out of the woods and which will only take you in deeper. Mike understands the cycles and seasons of nature. He knows when certain tasks have to be done in order to survive through the year. He pays attention to his environment and can read it like a book. That's his special literacy. If I understand him correctly, Mike is not just equating this form of knowledge with `street smarts' transferred to a rural context. Instead, acting knowledgeably means carefully balancing passive acceptance and active response. Survival depends on knowing what is appropriate at any given moment. Alert passiveness is usually more appropriate than frantic action, according to Mike. I wait for opportunities to cross my path, he explains.

The teachings and the skills Mike learned from both his father and his grandfather served him well. In talking with Luke I was trying to understand whether this teaching was still viable for him. Was it transferable to a different way of life, and does it represent the kind of thinking he uses himself?

"Well, I guess that's how it's worked out," says Luke. "The unfolding of these things is happening without me necessarily going out there and looking for them. When the opportunity does present itself, you do know that's what you want and you do go for it."

But Luke also talks about setting goals, about working your way around roadblocks and of staying focused. These are familiar words for me, having grown up in western society. But these words are only part of what defines the path that Luke seems to be talking about. There is also all the personally accumulated experience: as artist, as Native, as individual. And maybe most important there is the seeker who has been shown his path in a spiritual ceremony. "That's the mix, [you] bring it all," says Luke.

As an outsider on the reserve, Forrest has developed a strategy of "going with the flow", following the path of least resistance and "learning to run fast when necessary". He created a space for himself between cultures and became a very private person. He concentrated on academics and in this way gradually distanced himself from Big Cove. Through his marriage to Luke's sister, Bernadette, Forrest has again edged closer to the community. But they live off the reserve, and Forrest has the role of house-husband while Bernadette has a well paid job on the reserve. Forrest's strategy of "going with the flow" seems to work for him, but it is Bernadette (who like Luke has a lot of self-confidence) who takes the lead in challenging obstacles, teaching

the children, and setting a direction for the family.

Forrest takes a more active role when it comes to finances and planning for the future. His concern, as he expresses it, is to "succeed in a material way": a new car, a bigger house, money in the bank for his children's education. These are his main aspirations. Forrest's concern is with keeping control over his own life. Government, as he says, "may not be there to take care of me and my children in the future." Good long-term planning is what survival seems to mean to Forrest.

Survival, Cory tells me, is not so easy for young people of his age. They find it difficult to adapt to the world outside the reserve. The school system in Big Cove, he says, did not prepare him adequately. By using a token economy and quick reward system, students were given a false sense of achievement. The same problem occurred with hockey. "Native hockey isn't tough enough," says Cory. There are too many quick rewards. His advice to other Natives who want to make it (Cory wanted to make it to the NHL) is to stay away from Native hockey.

If, like Cory, you are not inclined toward higher education, there is the feeling that very few doors are open to you. Many of his friends want to leave the reserve but see no way out. There is no particular encouragement to continue in school either because, as Cory tells me, even having a grade 12 education does not ensure one a job or a future. You just become an "educated welfare bum," he says. Unlike when Mike was a young man, now there are few jobs to be had. The Maritimes have a very high unemployment rate, and if you are Native that seems to make it even more difficult. According to Cory, there is prejudice against hiring Native people among local businesses. On the other hand Forrest points to his lack of French as a reason for not being able to get a job in the area — the three main cultures in the area being Acadian, Micmac and English. But it is the Acadians and the English who own the businesses, and the economic times are very difficult. So for Cory and his friends the situation is frustrating. The reserve can be a very depressing place if you have no work. Welfare is not something these young people want to be on.

From listening to Cory, survival for young people is not just a question of getting a job. Survival means finding a positive way to get rid of anger, frustration, and feelings of helplessness. Just trying to keep it all inside, or turning against your peers or, worse yet, turning on yourself — these are the usual non-solutions chosen. Some "lucky ones," I was told, have an opportunity to leave, to live with family members in larger cities where there are more

opportunities. But Cory has found a way to cope through playing hockey. This is what he does well, this is where he gets recognition, and this is a socially acceptable way of letting off steam. So for Cory hockey naturally became far more important than school.

Cory's grandfather is also a continuing source of stability in his life. "Grandpa watches me from a distance," says Cory. Mike has a philosophy of non-interference. He prefers to let young people choose to follow rather than dictate to them. He has taught Cory the survival skills that his grandfather taught him. So Cory feels at home on the water, at the beach and in the woods. Mike feels that at some point these skills may become crucially important, but for now he knows that Cory has to struggle to find his own way.

When I listened to Cory talk about growing up on the reserve, talk about tension, about fighting, anger and frustration, it seemed as if he was talking about a very different place from the one Luke described. Although Luke had talked of gang fighting, there was not the same sense of desperateness or hopelessness that I heard in much of what Cory spoke about. At 19, Cory is in the same age bracket as many of the young people who have committed suicide in Big Cove in the past year. Some of these have been close friends.

Why do so many young today people feel that life has no value? In July 1992, Chief Levi refused to release the figure for attempted suicides for the month, because "The numbers are unbelievable — so, so many."[x] Band officials point to unemployment, lack of housing, isolation, family breakdown, alcohol and drug abuse, and violence as the main problems. When I listen to Mike talk about what is meaningful in his life, I hear him speak of his work. "It is the work that is important, not I," he explains. It is important to develop and use the skills that were given to you by the Creator. Mike teaches me that his sense of values is grounded in spirituality, in a recognition of his responsibilities in relation to the continuing process of creation.

Freedom is another primary value that Mike speaks of: freedom to move, freedom to choose your work. Whenever he felt trapped by a place, a job or a situation, Mike would leave. "This is not my life," he would say. Imagine, then, a young person having these same feelings, living on the reserve, under the conditions outlined by band officials; imagine the frustration of feeling trapped and isolated, feeling that there is no support for developing your skills, and finally having no work available. No wonder that for some young people here, life seems to have so little value. There are of course some who are doing well, those who have confidence in themselves and in what they have to offer. In part this seems to be a matter of strong family

support. But there are so many other factors involved that when I ask why someone seems to have succeeded, they usually answer, "I was lucky."

Although there is a lot of discussion here about the problems Big Cove faces, there is also another side to this community, one that I have frequently experienced: very welcoming friendly people and particularly warm hospitality. Laughter, sharing, and caring have not disappeared from this community. Everybody knows each other, and young children have many aunties and uncles and grandparents to watch over them.

There is tremendous creative energy and talent here in the visual arts, in music, in various forms of craft work and so on. And parents are concerned for the future of their children and are struggling to find appropriate answers. Some of those involve a revival of spirituality and Micmac traditions; others focus on improving education and creating job opportunities. Some are concerned with health, substance abuse and strengthening the families.

Survival of a Way of Life

The traditional context in which elders shared their stories and knowledge is rapidly disappearing. The Micmac language that Mike speaks is one that is at home in the context of a subsistence life based on fishing and hunting. The next generations do not have enough experience of that life. Their language is adapting to a modern technological context. Language that expressed the fluid world of natural cycles and relationships is now losing some of that fluidity and is becoming more object-centred. With Luke Simon, I discussed the difficulties of shifting language contexts and problems of education.

Luke raised the issue of schooling on the reserve and the lack of choice that parents face with respect to their children's education. For some parents the primary concern is with loss of language and loss of culture. Other parents feel that the three R's need to be taught more rigorously so that their children are better able to compete for jobs. Because of the lack of choice on the reserve, education becomes a political football in a game that creates a great deal of community dissention.

Change is inevitable, according to Luke. His is a pragmatic view: What is practical under the circumstances? What needs to be adapted? What can be retained? His approach is ultimately one of survival. But the bottom line is having choices. Who calls the shots? Who sets the pace of change? Micmacs have to take control of the process and chart their own path, Luke affirms.

"With self-government at least you decide how fast you're going to go, this way or that."

Closing Thoughts

What about the future? What about change? Mike talks about all life in relation to the seasons. A human life is no different; it too is subject to change and to renewal. "There is no need to fear change," he says, "only don't forget your past, don't forget your culture."

Mike: We love ourselves, we love nature, Great Spirit, give us a beautiful territory to live on. The children, their language, remains intact. That's what pride means. Some of the archives will say, well that's past. Well it may be past but our culture is still there, and our children are still here. Universe, moon shall rise, sunset, sun shall rise, tide shall come and the green grass shall grow, it's still here. Even though today our land is poisoned by the air, by technology, we still love our land, we will die with it also.

We don't own the ground, we don't own it. Great Spirit owns us, and the ground and the earth owns us. I often heard, I own this and I own that, but no, the ground owns you. You turn to dust, and dust shall rise, and then the culture will rise again, keeps it going, there is no end to it.

Notes

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[i]Each of the life histories studies was designed by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples to focus on a particular cross-section of the Aboriginal population. Thus some of the studies focus solely on women's experience, while others were designed to represent the life experiences of men. Other studies, again, were designed to explore relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people living in close proximity to each other. "Three Generations of a Micmac Family" reflects male experiences and runs across three generations as well as across cultures.

[ii]Sarah Preston, "Let the Past Go: A Life History", Canadian Museum of Civilization Mercury Series no. 104 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1986).

[iii]Jeff Titon, "The Life Story", *Journal of American Folklore* (1980), pp. 290-296.

[iv]In 1990-91, Mike and I co-produced the video, *Micmac Storyteller: River of Fire*, in which Mike tells stories and talks about the importance of stories and legends for his people.

[v]*The Times-Transcript*, Moncton, New Brunswick, 27 July 1992.

[vi]This text is presented here in ethnopoetic style; see Dennis Tedlock, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983). In the storytelling mode Aboriginal narrators tend to evoke emotions through their style of performance rather than describe them. Representation of this style of performance by means of written text can be conveyed more meaningfully through poetry than prose (Tedlock, p. 51). In the following story each new line of text marks a significant pause or breath in the performance. Sections are marked off according to longer pauses.

[vii]While Mike is talking about young children today, saying "They don't listen like they used too," we see images of his daughter's room covered with posters of New Kids on the Block (NKB). Then the audio switches to NKB and we see Lisha lying on her bed lipsynching to the music. Later we see her at the beach listening to Mike tell a story.

[viii]Polly-Anna Sanipass, the mother of Samantha.

[ix]Michael W. Francis is referred to frequently as *ginap*, meaning "a spiritual leader of any age who is physically and mentally strong. He can do almost anything he wants to do, because he's so close to our creator. A lot of young people are ginaps, they are finding their own culture now, beginning to understand these things, what they can do to help their people". (From *Introductory Guide to MicMac Words and Phrases*, compiled and edited by E.T. Pritchard, annotated by Steven Augustine (adviser to Big Cove Band for history and cultural affairs), with observations by Albert Ward (MicMac elder and medicine man). Beacon, N.Y.: Resonance Communications, 1991.)

[x]Quoted in "Tangible Demons Haunt Big Cove", *The Times-Transcript*, Moncton, New Brunswick, 27 July 1992.