

Charles Stevenson, Anihšīnāpē (Saulteaux) Elder, Keeseekoose First Nation

Charles Stevenson is my name. I am from Kamsack. Blowing Bear is what I'm called in Saulteaux.

Could you tell us how people lived before treaty?

The Saulteaux used to always hunt. They looked after one another and they helped each other.

They used everything that the Creator put down here and they looked after things too.

Before they did something, before they took anything, before they went hunting or went fishing, they always smoked the pipe and prayed and apologized to nature so they would eat for survival.

This is what they did. They fished, there were fish in the rivers and streams.

Also some big lakes. That's where they would fish - and us we lived in the bush.

We, the Saulteaux, we were called. We called ourselves the Anihšīnāpē or Onahkawēk, Nahkawēwininiwak.

That's the kind we are. The white people called us the Saulteaux.

That's what they called us. Along the water is where we lived, where they saw us.

We were beside the Great Lakes. Way over there. For sure that's where we got life,

Our survival is from there. Where the Creator left everything that we used. What we use from the bush.

We used everything – āha – birds, big ones and small ones.

All kinds of birds, ducks, geese, we used them all.

We used everything, we didn't waste anything we used everything really

As I know it, that is how I remember it, it was told by the Elders; that's what they said.

I remember that is how life was when I was small, but it was already changing; it was changing.

Already the white man arrived.

The white man had arrived already. Everything changed from there.

How did the leaders lead the people?

They looked after the Indians very well. Wherever we gathered, he looked after everything.

There was one who was just like the boss/chief. He was the spokesman.

This one. He saw everything. He spoke about it to the Indians when they gathered.

Yet, way over there, we also had a boss (the Queen). The big boss I'm talking about - that one.

They told us all kinds of things. It was the spokesperson who told us what we had to do.

They told us how our arrangements were (re: land arrangements).

It was from there they made the promises - from the big boss.

There was one leader who looked after everyone.

He looked after everything in life. Even if you all wanted to make changes, you had to ask.

If you wanted to change anything, that's what you had to do.

That one was always, always the leader.

Also, the old people, the older women were very valuable and held with high esteem.

Clan mothers, you would hear them talk about them. Those ones were powerful.

Those were the ones who gave advice. They were very knowledgeable.

Those were the ones who advised us how to live and how to look after one another.

The leader used to go and see them, and they would talk about how to live.

They would look after him, too.

My grandfather used to say in the past - the one I'm talking about is the great boss.

The Great Spirit had picked him, he said. The one who was the leader/chief,

and from there his son and his son and his son, he said, that's what is to be followed.

That's what you call hereditary chiefs. But now today everything has changed - election system.

From there we heard the term 'okimāhkān' - meaning pretend boss/pretend chief.

And yet, long ago - 'okimā (chief/boss).' He was 'okimāwi', he was a chief that Creator had appointed.

We still have those who should have been if we still followed that way of living.
I know who would be chief where I come from, and he is still living.
We still have one and yet someone else is 'pretend chief.'
What the white man had brought, the election procedure.
I wish that would go away. It goes away, it would be nice.

How can traditions be used to guide leaders?

That's the thing. It would be nice if that's the way things went today.
The one that appointed - Creator, the one that controls everything. He was first, he was the leader/boss.
He spoke to him and told him how we should live.
It was him (pointing up), him that told us what things should have changed. That's what the chief said.
And yet today the white man tells the 'pretend chief' how we should live.
The white man doesn't know anything. Instead he is destroying us, really destroying us.
We no longer have what we used to have long ago. It was very nice long ago, as I know it.
The old ones lived to be old. Anywhere you would go there were Elders, it was nice to see them. Today you rarely
That's probably why today there is a lot of sickness - because of what is eaten today.
What the white man brought here - it wasn't Creator.
Long ago the Creator gave us everything. That's what I'm talking about - how we survived in the bush long ago.
It was the Creator that fed us and looked after us. That's it.
Someday, sometime it will return. Not here, not here. Over there, (pointing above) I'm talking about, not here.

What were the changes that occurred with treaty signing?

That's another thing - elections -that the white man gave us. It's much nicer for getting a chief, they said.
All Indians were to use the election system all over for whoever will be chief/leader.
Long ago the Creator gave us whoever would be chief, long ago.
He knows a lot that one, the one the Creator gave us.
So now today the way things are happening, we are losing everything now.
Long ago we had a lot, that Creator had given us. Wherever we went, we had it.
Now when you go somewhere you see 'no trespassing.' There's no bush now.
So now farmers - they are all ruining our land. Animals, too - they are ruining them.
There are none now, they have nowhere to go. That's what they, the white man, brought.
That's what's ruining us. What they said would be nice - that's what's ruining us.
But that's one thing. Yesterday I went to the big city.
Here in the city I saw two moose crossing the street. They had nowhere to go.
My grandchild asks, "What are they doing here? Why are they here?" They are probably shopping, I said.
What could it be? I told him, they have nowhere to go. No bush to hide in. There's no bush.
The white man's changing too much, I told him. They are ruining our land.
Creator owns this land. We are being ruined.
How did people's lives change (after treaty)?
There's a lot that I think about today. When I was a little boy,
I used to listen to my late dad, my grandfather, when they spoke.
When they were little and hunting, they had good stories, helping each other. It was very nice.
Even I knew that when I was little. Our land was so beautiful. Everywhere we went, it was beautiful.
There was no hunger if we knew how to hunt.
Creator looked after us.
And now today you must have money to go anywhere - to exchange for things.
If you don't have money, you don't have authority. You must work.

You must work to get it, you must work.
And if you don't know anything, if you didn't go to school, you won't find work.
What is called 'education' is what you have to find. You must get an education to have money.
If you don't have that, you will be poor. You will be hungry. No one will help you.
The white man has welfare. But it's very little, welfare.
That's what embarrasses me - that welfare.
Just like begging to be fed. One time I begged to be fed.
I was unable to look after myself. That welfare, that was nice to be fed a little.
But it embarrassed me. That's what the white man talks about today - how the Indians are, they say.
They're on welfare, they are drunk, they are drinking, and drugs.
That's another thing the young men and women are always doing, drinking or doing drugs.
To get drunk and high – that's the only way to have fun, and they are ruining their lives.
However, it makes them do crazy things like killing someone, and they get locked up, jail.
They get locked up. They happen to kill someone, they go to jail; drugs and alcohol.
That's what I say - If you [the white man] bring that kind to drink,
you can bring something different to help the Indians. If they drink all the time, help them quit drinking.
But you forgot them, you hate them and call them drunks, not to be looked after.
That's how things are changing today, that's how things are changing nowadays.
That's it - drugs are in the lead, alcohol, elections, politics, all those things.
Those are not ours, we had our own way, and it was much nicer.
To look after ourselves as it was meant to be without your help. It's hateful. āha

How did leadership and governments change after treaties?

Today anywhere you go, anywhere you look today, the leader/chief is elected.
There's just one thing they follow – money owns them, money. That's what owns them all.
The elected chiefs - that's what they think: "I'll look after me first, then my wife and my children,
All of them I'll look after. If there's money left over, I'll help them a bit, these [other] ones."
But it doesn't turn out that way. Today it doesn't work.
The white man thinks, "Leave it, let it be." As long as they give them money and show the cheque first.
'Responsibility' - That's their responsibility as long as they get back some audit that says money was well spent.
That's not right - the way Indians look after themselves today.
They no longer think of the Indians they sit with. Long ago the leaders came first.
Today they're down there - a lot are not noticed.
(English not transcribed)

Could you tell us how the role of women changed after treaties?

What can I say? As I know it, the late old ones (Elders) used to talk.
I even knew those old ones (Elders), the ones who talked about it.
They used to talk about the Warrior women, the Clan mothers they were called.
They used to talk about them being strong. The women were very strong, that's what they said.
The one that was the leader (hereditary chief) - they helped a lot.
They told advised him on how to look after the Indians. Those are the ones, the bosses, the Warrior women.
They had authority, they knew everything that they were given from the Creator.
He gave them knowledge, how they can know and help the Indian people.
He also gave them the ability to give life. That's where life starts, from the women.
The women are highly regarded today. Even today the women are still highly regarded.
I myself highly regard women.

They used to say a long time ago, they will always run your life, they said.
And they'll look after your water. That's why they sit there, they said.
The old people (Elders) talked about how things would go. It sounded so good, it was so nice.
They talked about your (pl) water. The leaders talked, they were strong.
Even in the lodge prayers, they knew those and looked after them.
They were sure that things would work out. They looked after them.
Someone has to conduct that ceremony, so things will be right.
There would be no life today - we wouldn't have it if it wasn't for them (ceremonies).
Nothing would go right if they didn't highly regard it.
And so today, the white man who came here - what they wrote, the treaty, that's what it's called.
The old people (Elders) who did the ceremonial prayers, they said that wasn't right.
They must quit that, they said. (speaks English) they said.
They will get locked up if they don't quit. (speaks English)
The Warrior women - they said, you men, we will stay here where we will be watched over by the white man.
And you guys go hide in the bush and say the ceremonial prayers, they said.
You will have to carry on the ceremonies and do what must be done.
We will stay here. You will be the boss of yourselves on what you want to do.
That's where it all started from. So from there on until today, the women were pushed over.
They weren't appreciated, they thought. From then on, from there. Although they tried to do right.
You're not treating women right...(speaks English)
The Warrior women will be back. She will have her rightful place.
At that time when she takes her place, when this woman comes to her place (authority),
the animals all over and the people that got along well (lived in harmony), that will change again.
We will know when the time is near, as we know it today. That's what's going to happen.
We hear a lot about 'global warming' - everything will stop.
Everything will change back as we knew it long ago, it will be back.
That's where everything will begin to be nice.
But when they come and sit, sometimes some of us will ruin/destroy ourselves.
Us, not only the white man, not only the white man. But the white man is leading,
The one that was the leader, he was called Trudeau. The '69 White paper, if you read that,
that's where you will know it, there, 'demise'...(English)
Some will succeed. But we will help them succeed, we will help them succeed.
Some of them will follow the way of the earth/land as was given to us.
Those ones, they will work on what our Creator has given us - a new life, that's for sure. We will truly know.
We will catch up to the old ones (Elders), far over there, where everyone is united.
The ones that left a long time ago, we will catch up to them. Everything will be nice again.
That's the real life.
But today, women, they are regarded as useless (unworthy).
There's even places where they are hated, not liked..
I hear of a lot of Indian men talking, talking bad about women...(speaks English)

How did the people make a livelihood before treaties?

It was easy everywhere you go. Everywhere you look there was no need to go hungry, they said.
Everywhere you went there was always something to eat. That's how Creator saw it.
He put it all here for us...(speaks English)
Us, too, we planted a little bit if we ran short of something. We traded with each other. (English)
There was always someone to trade with. We looked after each other. We knew how to make things grow.

We heard a lot about when the white man came to teach us how to plant. We knew how already. (speaks English)

How do you understand the treaty promise for education?

Really, the white man left us very little as they had it written.

That's what they wrote long ago. They had many promises.

Everything you need to know we will teach you (speaks English) they said.

We will pay for it, they said. And yet today not everyone is accepted for an education.

They want an 'education.' Not everyone, just a few will be accepted as long as there is money (speaks English)

What about the treaty promise to health?

(Laughs) That's another thing again, that's another thing, there was a lot promised to us.

Let me speak first about the ones who wrote it - the ones who made the promises, what is called the treaty.

I don't know who spoke for us. (speaks English)

I have read a lot of what was said and we don't have that in our language.

(English not transcribed)

Long ago, we knew how to be an Indian. Long ago, an Indian person lived to be very old.

He was looked after by Creator - he looked after him. They were given everything.

If they wanted anything when they were sick, they knew where to find it in the bush to help himself.

He knew herbs. Creator let them know (English) where to find them.

Even today, we can't do that today. (speaks English)

What do you want to say to the young people to carry them into the future in terms of leadership?

Life, survival is getting difficult, and it's going to get harder.

Those ones today who are trying to help themselves, who go to school – they are helping one another.

They are telling each other (English) to try and make some type of living.

The white man has already implemented policy. He already put it there to make the Indian people pitiful and they're way of life to come to an end, they already said. There is only us now.

These ones today are being taught. They will attain knowledge and they will help.

They will argue against the white man in court. (speaks English)

But at the same time, you have to look after those ones, your children, those are the ones to think about.

Those ones. From there to when you leave this earth, they are the ones you must let know, to give them their knowledge. To give them what you know as you were given.

The knowledge you were given, you pass on to them.

(English not transcribed)