

Francis McAdam, Nêhiyawak Elder, Big River First Nation

I am a Cree, my name is Francis McAdam, but I use my grandfather's name.
I use the name with the governments, Whiteman's governments, Saysewahum, was his name.
But today the things we are going to discuss, I would like to do things right,
if I could hold on to the Sweetgrass, Huhay.

What is your name?

Francis "Saysewahum" is what I am called, but I use Francis McAdam.
My Cree name is "Okank-chinohiwini." One Elder gave me the name.
I just about died as a child. This was the name the old man gave me.
That is the same Cree name I keep. The reason the old man gave the name was,
the spirit I was named after took the responsibility to watch over me forever.
Plus the name, too, this is to take care of me to old age.
This was told by the old man, this name would look after me from that point forever.

Where are you from?

At the beginning, when I was first born in the north, it has different names.
Saysewahum Band, Big River. Now it's called Stoney Lake or Assiniboine Lake.
This is what the old people named this place. That is where we are originally from.
I was ten years old when I was brought to Big River Reserve. I came school for a short time.
Saysewahum was my great-Grandfather. This is where I am from.
I was told about many things at this time about the origin.
In the future what is going to happen, and what happened in the past,
these were the things that were told to me, too.

What was life like before treaties, after treaties?

And these, just like all the treaties, my late great-great-grandfather Saysewahum,
He was the first one to take treaty.
In the days when they began treaty, he was promised land. That is where he had land.
And then, when all the payments were to be made under treaty
My late great-great-grandfather Saysewahum would not take treaty right away.
It was almost two years before he took treaty.
Maybe even a year. It was that time when he went to sign the treaty, he was willing to do so.
plus he was given land, this was Saysewahum.
But one thing that was ruined was when the children were picked up.
My late grandfather was one that was taken,
for him to go to school. It was then when children were taken to the residential school.
It was then when many would flee and my late grandfather was one of them.
His parents would also move camp.
The direction in which the children were taken was the direction the parents moved as well.
In the very same direction their children were taken away.
That was when reserves diminished, they left everything there.
And it was then when they tried going back that they were unable to do so.
The white man, the white Indian Agent would not give back their land.
The land was there.
But, that was how they treated us and we were ordered to do so.

They were to forever survive for them to raise their children,
to raise themselves. That does not happen on our reserve.
And the manner in which we raise our children, it is from there, elsewhere.
All of that to where the sun travels, they said. There were many teachings from those observances.
Treaties. There were many stories about the treaty.
But no one adhered to those treaties.
No one follows those but only the payments. For they had promised, the Queen promised.
And the younger ones promised the Cree so much more. They do not follow those today.
They don't follow them. Many are lost. It worsens as we lose much of what was promised.
That old man would say, When they diminish what was promised under treaty,
no one would ever flourish from that payment, he had said.
he said there will be very few to make payments to in the future,
Many things will keep him busy.
a person who is going to be preoccupied,
there are many things that will to him/her busy, he would say
And when those did arrive, you will stand to lose a lot.
But something will happen in the future, is what he would say.
For the Cree, the Indian Agent was a man with a different jacket.
He would lead the white man's plight there.
And then he would work with the Cree people. And that would work well for everyone.
But there will be hardship before that happens, he would say.
For that reason, the white man uses money so many ways.
For he will not be able to, for the promises he made.
Sweetgrass was one of the promises. For the grass grows continuously.
Water was also promised.
For the water, for as long as it flows. This water here, until it stops to flow.
And also this sweetgrass, for it to grow . The sun, as it forever travels.
What was promised to us from the white man.
For it to never break the promises of the treaty.
For it is for no reason that this has life [*holding sweetgrass*].
For it is like a human, the way in which we live as humans.
This is life and this sweetgrass shows us that.
The elders in the past would say this has a spirit.
The water also has a spirit, they would say.
They would use that when treaty was made.
The sun as well, as it shines upon the land.
That also has a spirit, that's what the elders would say long ago.
That is what they used.
it was for this purpose these spirits were used by the Creator so no two-legged human can break treaty,
For what the white man has written.
The Chief's signatures should not be broken. For a two-legged man should not ever break them.
For these items used have spirit,s and they are still used today.
it is said Cree Laws are powerful, are very powerful, beyond understanding,
Eventually, for whenever a man attempts to break these promises,
it will whip him, he will face trouble
For it is the Creator's laws that they try to break, not for any person.
The white man makes laws and at any time they can make changes.

But for the Cree, there is no way he can make those changes.
For long ago, from the start, they had a vision.
They did many things. For four days they sought a vision using the pipe.
They didn't put it together, they asked the Creator up above,
How are we to prepare for us not to break your law? This was where they were
given the promise for as long as the sun shines, for this sweetgrass to grow, and for the rivers to flow.
For it had strength, and that was given to them by the creator for them to use as laws.
They were given seven laws
For one to follow when one takes on a pipe.
Four laws stand in the forefront,
that is where those seven laws are at.
That is why the person braids this, the Cree braid the sweetgrass.
For everything speaks from there. The sweetgrass speaks, is what they would say long ago.
[Speaks English - not transcribed]
From the Cree names, there are three in this.
The Creator's laws - sweetgrass is one.
for those that pray with the Sun, there are Laws to follow,
for those that use the water, there are Laws to follow,
And it is that there, when a Cree begins to do something, when he speaks of something,
he must first light sweetgrass. He lights this end [pointing to the sweetgrass tie]
As the sweetgrass burns, as you speak to it, you have to use truth.
So as to not bring a curse upon your children of any sort.
When you talk of treaties, you light sweetgrass.
The elders say it speaks for you, for treaty is sacred/spiritually powerful.
They did not make it for no reason
They used truth, that is why they say today
[Speaks English - not transcribed]
For you to use truth, as you are gifted with speech when you speak.
You are not the only one speaking when you speak of things.
The spirit comes to listen to you, what you will be saying.
Be careful, for you will bring a curse upon your children.
Care in what you say before you start to say anything,
to not oversay what you need. Then what you say will be applied to you.
You must always use the truth when you are asking for something.
For all the spirits listen to you, is what they would say.
For it is for the truth as the elders would have always said.
that's why today, I have no problems speaking of treaties and these sacred things,
For when they talk of treaties, they must speak the truth.
For long ago, the elders would say do not write anything
you are not to tell. You are not to write anything.
But what is that when he asks not to write anything down?
For how does this sweetgrass grow and what does it say to pity you?
How does the water pity you and how does the sun pitied you?
You cannot speak to that.
It's a very sacred thing. The pipe is powerful.
But you can speak of it through stories on how they were acquired,
the elders would say. These treaties should be strongly abided, many elders,

believe very strongly of the treaties. Eventually, in the future,
when...when the time comes, when Indigenous people will a higher being fend for them
There will be a big law coming, said the elders.
It is this government who has broken a lot of laws, on this land.
For us as Cree People, we were gifted with this land
for us to live and make a livelihood forever.
We are not gifted with ruining something that we do not own.
We do not own this land. We do not own the medicines.
We do not own the sky. We do not own the Sun,
Everywhere you look you do not own.
he who owns everything (Creator) sets everything each day,
That is why the treaties are powerful, they were embedded.
For it will curse, should we do anything wrong.
This is what they prepared for us, these are very hard to follow, they would say.
For you to follow the laws.
Every day, every morning, you light this sweetgrass.
To say your prayer.
Not to use bad language.
Not to speak bad of another person.
Not to be jealous of your fellow person in any way.
Not to say your better then your fellow human being, daily
Daily, you must use truth daily.
if you want to challenge these laws every day,
You light this sweetgrass every morning, and every night before you go to bed,
This one young person was given sweetgrass by an elder.
You will do what the creator law wants you to do,
In the morning you will light it and you will pray for your children.
And at night you will do the same.
The way in which a person was gifted and passed down long ago.
You will do that, you will honour the people.
the young person used very little of the Sweetgrass [looking at sweetgrass].
the rest he took back to the Elder,
It is hard, it is difficult, I am unable to do so.
In the morning I pray and at night.
It is like I have nothing to speak of,
I don't act accordingly daily. I swear and I do assorted things; I say anything.
I can't do this daily, I thought, how do I provide for my kids and how do I speak to them?
That is what I need to put into my mind/thoughts.
And so he was not able to do that right away.
He went and gave it to the elder and said I cannot do this.
I talk about people all the time, I swear and do bad things.
I cannot follow the Creator's laws.
If a person ever is to truly follow the laws,
He must burn this one braid to its end.
For him to follow this law, he has yet to receive
many gifts if he begins to think properly.
That is what they used to say. It is difficult.

Today our elders' teachings, this is what we follow today.
Just like the treaties you spoke of, the elder was speaking truth.
When he finished he said it would be difficult
Today we have arrived there already, for things have really changed.
When I was child I was small,
when the elders would come speak to me,
there were no trucks, no cars, no horses.
Sled dogs mostly. I was young and small,
and those would be our means of travel during the winter and in the summer.
I have often heard the many elders speak,
it was nice then, today we think we are difficult people,
In the future the youth more difficult, and are going to be very pitiful, it was told
It is just like the Sundance.
My grandfather said,
I was a child [English] by the time, his teepee outside he was making a tea
I sat there, sitting with my grandfather [English]
And he pointed his teepee like that and said look at these teepees, tents all around here [English]
There were wagons there, horses [English]
Me, he said,
I will not see what I am going to tell you he said,
All that you see here are gifts received from prayers, as you see it today.
look around you, all the tents and tipis, see how many horses stand amongst you.
All these have spirits and are still used today.
But you, where your going to end up in the future, he said.
You will see for yourself. Remember my words, he said.
maybe tents/tipis will stand the way they are or maybe not these kind of tents,
They will look differently, there will be vehicles parked right around, shining and glittering,
the clean Spirit that is in the Sky, the one who travels below the heavens,
he will not like what will be is what he said
the Thunderbirds will frequent, many things will happen on the surface,
This is what they don't want.
Eventually there will be no animals around.
They will have no use here, you will see.
One weakens it, In the future the youth will even weaken their prayers more.
Eventually their prayers will not reach above when they ask for something, my grandfather would say.
And I was sitting there, thinking about my grandfather.
He was old. I was looking (moves head to a distant location) one time when a child
what does he mean there will be lots of shiny vehicles parked in this circle? (Sundance area),
Perhaps he is not thinking right. I thought of my grandfather.
Today I see now what my grandfather saw.
Trucks are scattered about, as he had foretold.
Animals are no longer in use. Even now when they do something,
they do not use the animals. They use trucks as they are motorized.
These are my grandfather's teachings.
Even those today that which gives livelihood will change, he said.
And so will the people, he said.
in the future, a wild animal will from the bush, he said,

You will see it amongst the many people. He will be walking there,
preying on one's kindness, a person's kindness.
this being will take the kindness of the people, the person will turn evil,
Money, money has made him evil.
That's what he said, that old man.
I would often wont believe what he said. But I guess he was right.
This was how powerful Elders were, and their words.
Often Elders would tell of their teachings.
There will be difficulty with all the illnesses moving about
Today we do see that now. It will be difficult.
I saw that it was going to be difficult, and it was foretold for the future.
That is what the old man said.
If you sympathize with your child or grandchild, great-grandchild
Hold their hands, showing you have pity for when hardship will arise.
You will not be able to surpass this oncoming hardship when you are standing alone.
Looking about and you are alone, you will loss your faith, he would say.
No one will want to live alone, that's how difficult it will be, the old man would say.
Today we are approaching that.
For there will be hardship; we will be poor, said the Elders.
The Elders know so much.
For we bother ourselves with things that are not good.
It is one of these Laws that were broken.
He deserves a whipping, the Elders long ago would say.
things will begin to happen in towns and large cities,
they will be flattened. Then what will one do?
it's going to be difficult, he will destroy cities, don't live there,
don't frequent there, you will accidently be punished, he would say.
Today I look at the hardship we face and what they had said,
Throughout the land, the tornadoes and earthquakes on the land, water everywhere.
These all cause destruction. Those are their prophecies,
the teachings of the Elders, long ago, its what we face today.
this is not for nothing, the white man calls these
"A wake-up call" is what the white man calls it.
For those hardships that will come upon us, those hardships truly will be difficult.
Many people will be crying, he would say. That old man would often say.
I would listen to my grandfather.
"He was paralyzed," my grandfather, just his head moved, like this [gesturing head movement] ,
I am starting to get sick and my heart is shaking
That's what the old man would say
[There are so many things a person] it is difficult
[English - not transcribed]
And those treaties that were talked about
[English - not transcribed]
Treaties as they called it, he was called the Chief
[English - not transcribed]
. . . believed both people could live in harmony together forever, to work together,
on this earth together forever, not to feud amongst each other,

to respect each other. This is what they promised each other, this was a lot.

[English - not transcribed]

As long as a person lived, he/she was the Chief of the People.

[English - not transcribed]

It was the warrior's son, the son worked for the Chief. Night watchmen, they worked at night to keep the camps.

[English - not transcribed]

This is what old people said a long time ago, this is what was done, they used four things, We will hear something, we will see something, we will feel something, we will understand something. These are called teachings.

This is knowledge - if you can earn these teachings, it would be a great blessing.

This would be protection for you. You had protection, this is what was said long ago. But, I wonder what else? That's all for now?

[English - not transcribed]

Those young people who are going to be viewing this video,

What would you say to them and could the young people use the teachings?

How would they help them with life today, if they become leaders in the future?

[English - not transcribed]

What you asked me is good, it's really good.

you take the children to the bush

[English - not transcribed]

It needs to be understood. A child needs to be taught in nature - what's a birch?

[English - not transcribed]

[English - not transcribed]

To be thankful, to be thankful to the Spirit, while he speaks to the children.

When the child completes four nights and four days, when he/she arrives, then it's your responsibility to talk with the child over and over again,

until the child has total understanding of spirituality. Out of the blue a child will do something amazing. Maybe by mind power, he/she can lift a chair from over there to over here. Maybe he can start a fire without touching it.

Maybe a child could do something that is amazing at the age of 16, 17, 18 year old.

It's possible. Then the child is gifted with powers. Maybe then he's a graduate.

I say, maybe he is the equivalent of grade 12. So the child is old enough,

is old enough to do supernatural things, then goes on to teach him/herself greater wonders that could account as a university degree, maybe more advanced with self education. He can walk through walls or other things.

It's like warriors or gifted people did in the past, becomes self taught because

he/she speaks with the Creator or Spirits. He/She then completes his/her education. Then the cycle starts again with others and others even more.

This was how children were educated, to gain understanding and knowledge.

Is that it?

We can stop for awhile

What do you want to say to young people to think about into the future?

One thing that I spoke mostly about up until recently and even now.

As I finish this dialogue, I really want these young people -

It's really difficult with Elders now. Hardly anyone is listening to them.

It seems like no one is listening to them. But I wish the young people - I spoke of this topic many times - the young people should gather, maybe sit with Elders. Have the Elders talk to them, how to work on their lives as they go into the future. And include their children. This is what I would like to speak with young people about, to tell them how to do things. Not only young boys, young girls, too,. The old women can talk to them. Let's see how they should conduct their lives into the future. but when I think about it, possibly what I think is...

[English - not transcribed]

There were these two young people, two young men. They came to ask me if they could fast, to go try to understand their culture. So I did. The one said, Maybe I won't for now, maybe I will have a chance another time.

[English - not transcribed]

Encourage young people to try and learn their culture. It will take them far to help them survive. This is what I wish for young people. I thank you.

What else? Is that it?

[English - not transcribed]