

# 3



## Elders' Perspectives

One of the things that we found out...as we talked with many different groups, is the common motif that occurs all over the place which makes reference to Turtle Island. Turtle Island encompasses the whole North American continent, Ellesmere Island in the north representing the head, Labrador representing one of the flippers, Florida another flipper, Mexico the tail, California another flipper, Alaska another flipper, and then the shell is divided into 13 areas. There is a custodian in each area — and we belong to one of them. In our language we use the word Spoo-pii to describe the Turtle, which means an area which is high.

This area that you are in right now, what we have here is that the water flows off in all directions from this area, which represents the high spot. All these areas, as in the live turtle, are what represents our sacred constitution, the Constitution of Turtle Island....

This Constitution has been there for a long time. It still exists. We can still utilize it, which we do. It has its own legal system; it has its own economic system; it has its own education; it has its own philosophy; it has its own language; it has its own logic. We can utilize those things. We have been doing it for the last 500 years. It's nothing new. It is something that, if more people realized what it was and realized it's not a threat, it's who we are, it's what we are, it is something that is very real and we can use it. I use it every day.

Stan Knowlton, Sik-oooh-Kotoki Friendship Society  
Lethbridge, Alberta, 25 May 1993\*

**THE LAND WE OCCUPY** is known to First Nations people as Turtle Island. The relationship of Aboriginal people to Turtle Island is governed by rules

and principles formed in the distant past. Aboriginal people believe the Creator preordained how that relationship should be and provided the tools and the means to live a life that expresses that relationship. The nature of that relationship with the Creator, the natural world, the animal world and other human beings is described in Aboriginal languages, which are seen as gifts from the Creator. For thousands of years, each generation learned the lessons of Turtle Island from preceding generations. The ancient wisdom, the traditions, rituals, languages and cultural values were passed on and carried forward. In this process, a primary role was played by the Elders, the Old Ones, the Grandmothers and Grandfathers. As individuals especially knowledgeable and experienced in the culture, they were seen as those most closely in touch with the philosophical teachings of life lived in harmony with the Creator and creation.

Guided by the teachings of the Old Ones, the people survived and flourished. Great nations coexisted. Extensive trade networks thrived. Alliances and confederacies formed for mutual interest, and complex international relationships emerged. Compatible attitudes toward the Creator and Mother Earth formed the basis of agreements among nations. Rules of conduct, whether in peace or in war, governed behaviour.

Then there came a great change. About 500 years ago, strangers from across the ocean sailed to this ancient land — Turtle Island — and called it 'the New World'. To the newcomers, this was unexplored country. They knew little about the original inhabitants, whose footsteps had worn a patchwork of paths and trails across the continent. When eventually they did come to know the First Peoples, the newcomers understood little of their laws and customs and the values that underlay their relationship to Turtle Island:

The Great Land of the Inuit is the sea, the earth, the moon, the sun, the sky and stars. The land and the sea have no boundaries. It is not mine and it is not yours. The Supreme Being put it there and did not give it to us. We were put there to be part of it and share it with other beings, the birds, fish, animals and plants.<sup>1</sup>

The new arrivals had quite different beliefs and sought to promote their beliefs in the hope that the original inhabitants would come to see things their way. It did not happen. The Old Ones continued to teach the ancient

wisdom about the way to live, how to relate to the Creator, and how to coexist with their brothers and sisters of the plant and animal world. The lessons of how the Creator intended people to live with one another persisted.

These teachings form part of the intellectual tradition of the Aboriginal nations of Canada. They are the foundation upon which an Aboriginal community is built. Aboriginal peoples' understanding of their relationship to Canada and Canadian society is shaped by these teachings. To appreciate fully Aboriginal peoples' view of this relationship, we must look at the philosophy that informs it.

In this chapter, we hope to shed some light on this North American intellectual tradition. The Commission was instructed to investigate and make recommendations regarding the position and role of Aboriginal Elders. We gave close and careful attention to the Elders who spoke to the Commission, both at our public hearings and through written submissions. We also devoted a portion of our research to investigating issues raised by the Elders and exploring their perspectives on these issues.

This chapter is an attempt to convey their perspectives. We do not intend to homogenize the many world views embraced by Aboriginal peoples. We recognize, however, that there are common human problems for which all societies — if they are to survive — must find solutions, and that there are a limited number of solutions to them. Aboriginal peoples share some common values because of their experience of life as peoples rooted in the land.

The Elders spoke to us of their deep concern about the lack of knowledge of non-Aboriginal Canadians about Aboriginal peoples, their culture and history. They believe this is directly responsible for the current misunderstandings between First Peoples and other Canadians. We hope to convey in this chapter the message of the Elders. It is a message rooted in the past but speaking to the future.

## **1. Who are the Elders?**

Elders are respected and cherished individuals who have amassed a great

deal of knowledge, wisdom and experience over the period of many, many years. They are individuals who have also set examples, and have contributed something to the good of others. In the process, they usually sacrifice something of themselves, be it time, money or effort.<sup>2</sup>

Elders, Old Ones, Grandfathers and Grandmothers don't preserve the ancestral knowledge. They live it.<sup>3</sup>

Elders are generally, although not exclusively, older members of the community. They have lived long and seen the seasons change many times. In many Aboriginal cultures, old age is seen as conferring characteristics not present in earlier years, including insight, wisdom and authority. Traditionally, those who reached old age were the counsellors, guides and resources for the ones still finding their way along life's path. Elders were the ones who had already walked a great distance on this path and were qualified to advise based on their knowledge of life, tradition and experience.

In the Ojibwa world view, there are Four Hills of Life: infancy, youth, adulthood and old age. For an individual to live a full life, he or she must pass through experiences unique to each stage of life. This personal and spiritual evolution culminates in old age, generally a time of wisdom and reflection. Among the Gwich'in, people are considered old only when they have seen five generations. It is then that an individual can be considered an Elder. The Old Ones have received gifts they can return to the community: the gifts of experience and knowledge.

Age itself does not make one an Elder, however. Most Aboriginal peoples have a special word or name for Elders that distinguishes them from what we would call senior citizens. In Inuit communities, for example, elderly people are called inutuqak, but those considered Elders are referred to as angijukqauqatigiit, a 'union of leaders'.

Elders have special gifts. They are considered exceptionally wise in the ways of their culture and the teachings of the Great Spirit. They are recognized for their wisdom, their stability, and their ability to know what is appropriate in a particular situation. The community looks to them for guidance and sound judgement. They are caring and are known to share the fruits of their labours and experience with others in the community.

The communities will define who they have as...community Elders. But in the true sense of Elders, they are people who are spiritual leaders, who have dedicated their lives and continue until they go to the Spirit World....They live the culture, they know the culture, and they have been trained in it. These are the true Elders. We have some Elders you might never, ever hear of. They stay in the bush, they stay in their communities, but they are Elders. They are spiritual Elders, and they live that way of life.

Elder Vern Harper  
Toronto, Ontario  
25 June 1992

For the Mohawk Nation, Elder is a sacred title. The Ojibwa word for Elder, Kichenishnabe, means 'Great People'. To Inuit communities in the Keewatin region of the Northwest Territories, Elders are "those who are able to see what they used to do and what they remember from what they learned from their parents and grandparents".<sup>4</sup>

While Elder is a distinguished title, traditional Elders do not seek status; it flows from the people. Communities elevate their Elders, but the Elders keep their feet planted firmly and humbly on the ground. Even though they have walked far down life's path, they feel young in relation to their culture's ancient knowledge. "Even me, I am an Elder now, but I am still learning yet," said Virginia Alexander of the Nak'azdli Elders' Society at our hearings in Stoney Creek, British Columbia.

The teachings they have learned began with the Creator and have been passed on from generation to generation. Said Ojibwa Elder Alex Skead at our hearings in Kenora, Ontario, "As an Elder, I am grandfather of all you people here. I am seventy years of age and I still feel very small. So much things to learn in life".

Elders will step to the fore, but often only when asked. It is the community's responsibility to seek out the Elders' gifts of knowledge and insight. Elders are rooted in the morals of the Creator. They are the conscience of the community:

When we talk about economics and we talk about development and we talk

about money, we have to balance that with reality. We have to balance that with quality of life, with peace, with community. I think if there is anything that Indigenous people have to offer this Commission, it is that perspective. And it is fundamentally important for survival. Every question that is political is also moral. Every question. And you have to answer it morally. That brings responsibility to governance and governors and people.

Elder Oren Lyons  
Onondaga Chief and Faithkeeper  
Iroquois Confederacy  
Akwesasne, Ontario, 3 May 1993

Elders are neither prescriptive nor intrusive in their teachings. They live their lives by example, according to the laws of the Creator. When asked in an appropriate manner, they offer their teachings. They will recount the stories and legends that flow through their culture but will not impose their personal interpretations of the lessons to be drawn from them.

They are good listeners, a quality born of humility and patience. For people with an oral tradition, listening is an important and essential skill. One does not presume to know; one listens and learns. As the Elders say, the Creator gave us two ears but only one mouth. An Ojibwa Elder told us:

You can be very, very knowledgeable about book learning and everything, but that does not mean you have wisdom. You have to listen to what the people talk, how they talk, and what they say.

Elder Dominic J. Eshkawkogan  
Ojibway Cultural Foundation  
Sudbury, Ontario, 31 May 1993

Elders can be men or women. Both have many common responsibilities as the keepers of wisdom, but it is acknowledged that men and women have different and distinctive life experiences. In some situations, their roles and responsibilities are different:

We also like to involve, as much as possible, our Elder traditional midwives. The Elder woman is a traditional midwife, and the training of the community midwife is done both in the modern hospital way and the traditional way. There is a balance as much as possible between the two, so that the

community midwife retains the traditional values.

Aani Tuluguk  
National Round Table on Aboriginal Health and Social Issues  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
11 March 1993

The women's role within the Elders, my grandmother's role and my aunts' roles, we were almost like hidden leaders, as we used to learn in community development days.

Everybody that needed advice went to my mother, went to my aunts, went to my grandmother. Even the men, when they went to the meetings and organizing, they never went before we had a meeting and a gathering of the total family unit, the total community unit, and the women told the men what to say. It was a consensus of the total family unit.

Senator Thelma Chalifoux  
Metis Nation of Alberta  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, 22 April 1992

In the Métis Nation, the title 'Senator' is bestowed on individuals in recognition of their knowledge and insight. It carries many of the same connotations as the term Elder in First Nations cultures. In some Aboriginal societies Elders are called Grandmother and Grandfather, titles that acknowledge their role as teachers and wise ones. These familial designations also allude to the important role of Elders in raising children. Elders apply their spiritual understanding of relationships among the elements of creation to relationships within the family and the community. The Commission heard about how this happens in some Inuit communities:

Children learned respect from Elders....From ten years on, more responsibility was placed on the child. Boys and girls had different chores to do. They were encouraged to help Elders with their tasks. They began to learn the importance of co-operation and social aspects of traditional Inuit lifestyles.

Elder James Panioyak  
Cambridge Bay, Northwest Territories,  
17 November 1992

Both Elders and parents had a role in rearing and teaching the children. We were taught to respect all our peers; respect and obey the rules; respect and knowledge for the life and ways of all of the animals, killing only the mature and/or only what was required; respect and knowledge of weather-related elements and the lay of the land. We learned the language, life, survival and hunting skills. We learned to respect others, share with each other and care for one another.<sup>5</sup>

Presenters of all ages spoke passionately about the importance of Elders in contemporary society. As many Aboriginal people rediscover themselves in their culture, Elders are seen as living connections to the original teachings of the Creator. Some presenters commented on the seemingly diminished role Elders have in modern Aboriginal society, viewing this as a reflection of the breakdown of traditional Aboriginal culture:

It seems that time has taken its toll with the new ways. Our Elders' ways and teachings have now become unheard by young generations. Their once powerful guidance and sense of direction were completely ignored. 'We are now lost'. There was, it seemed, no hope. We cannot go back into the past.

We don't know where this fast stream of life is taking us. Even our spiritual medicine, our guidance of the Dene ways have left us. We are now in limbo.

Robert Norwegian  
Foothills Pipe Lines  
Calgary, Alberta, 27 May 1993

It is precisely because of this loss of direction that many Aboriginal people are looking to Elders for guidance. It is said that Elders remind us of our responsibility to the future. Looking to the future and not the past, their teachings become the foundation on which to build healthy, self-determining communities.

## **2. The North American Intellectual Tradition**

The knowledge, this thing called knowledge — I know we can learn some



things in school, but the real knowledge comes from the Creator. The knowledge that grows in the mind comes from the Creator. The one who created all the people....The things that we know now in our lives, in our mind, it comes from the Creator, not from our fellow human beings.  
[translation]

Steven Chapman  
Big Trout Lake First Nation  
Big Trout Lake, Ontario, 3 December 1992

Elders approach all issues through the traditional teachings of their culture, teachings seen to emanate from the Creator. Because the knowledge a person receives is given by the Creator, it is considered sacred. As learning continues throughout one's life, so life itself is a sacred ceremony.

In our teachings, your spirit lives forever. It is only using this vessel for the period of time it is in this realm on Mother Earth. And when we were placed here on Turtle Island, the Creator promised us forever that life and that love.

He promised us all of those things that we would ever need to go to that beautiful place. Everything you will ever need is there for you. If you get sick, your medicines are there. Your food is there with those animals, with the fish, with the bird life. Those trees, those rocks, that water that gives all life, the life blood of our Mother, the Earth, flows in the rivers, lakes and streams and brooks and creeks. That is our lifeblood. You will nourish from that. All life nourishes from that.

Elder Roger A. Jones  
Shawanaga First Nation  
Sudbury, Ontario, 1 June 1993

The North American intellectual tradition is an ancient system of knowledge that takes its meaning from a set of assumptions about the world and how it operates. These assumptions have governed Aboriginal nations for thousands of years. They address the basic philosophical questions posed in other intellectual traditions. Who is God, the Creator? How was the world formed? What are the rules of appropriate behaviour? The answers, sometimes different from those arrived at in other intellectual traditions, are no less profound.

The thinker in the North American intellectual tradition has, in the words of James Dumont, "an all-around vision" in contrast to the "straight-ahead vision" of modern thought.<sup>6</sup> Areas such as the study of dreams and the knowledge of spiritual planes do not form part of the western intellectual tradition but are integral to the all-around vision. Because of differences such as these, it can prove difficult to discuss the Elders' holistic way of explaining phenomena with those trained in a linear way of thinking. For the 'all-around' thinker, the natural and supernatural intertwine. Past, present and future mesh in the life of an individual. The realm of the sacred becomes part of everyday experience.

This spiritual aspect of knowledge is central to the North American intellectual tradition. Knowledge is sacred, a gift from the Creator. This affects how knowledge is protected and used, as well as how it is acquired and validated.

In Aboriginal societies, those who have this knowledge can 'see' in ways generally not possible in western societies, grounded as they are in a linear view that seeks understanding in terms of continuums, opposites and specific categories. The linear approach to knowledge leads one to think of isolated causes and effects, of what happened and in what order. The relational approach to knowledge sees the relationship among things as well as the unity and integrity of things. Such a way of seeing is called holistic. A non-Aboriginal academic compares the two approaches:

[T]he methods of [western] science are essentially reductionist, that is to say, they seek to understand organisms or nature by studying the smallest or simplest manageable part or sub-system in essential isolation.... Traditional knowledge seeks to comprehend such complexity by operating from a different epistemological basis. It eschews reductionism, placing little emphasis on studying small parts of the ecological system in isolation....

[T]he non-western forager lives in a world not of linear causal events but of constantly reforming, multi-dimensional, interacting cycles, where nothing is simply a cause or an effect, but all factors are influences impacting other elements of the system-as-a-whole.

Linear approaches to analysis cannot be applied to cyclical systems and, as everyone now realizes, ecosystems are in fact complex cycles of re-circulating energy, matter and relationships.<sup>7</sup>

For many Aboriginal people, knowledge — like all things — emanates ultimately from the Creator. But usually a distinction is made between two kinds of teachings. Objective knowledge comes directly from the Creator. It is the source of the sacred laws that govern relationships within the community and the world at large. It is the source of the traditions and sacred ceremonies. It tells one how to lead a good life.

Equally valid is knowledge that comes through experience gained in the physical world. This is subjective knowledge, the knowledge acquired by doing. It is how children learn to hunt, make tools or gather medicines. They watch and, at some point, make their own attempt (often under the watchful eye of a parent or Elder). As they gain experience, their skills are refined. This kind of knowledge is subjective because it can change: an individual may find a better way of doing things. This learning and refining can continue throughout a lifetime. In many Aboriginal cultures, knowledge is often suspect if it is founded on events outside one's personal experience.

For Aboriginal peoples, both types of knowledge inform everyday life. To illustrate the point, imagine a hunting party. The skills used to track and bring down the animal are rooted in experience, learned in the subjective realm. Objective knowledge, directly traced back to the Creator, teaches that the spirit of the slain animal must be honoured and thanked. The ceremony itself is a teaching from the Creator. Objectivity and subjectivity intertwine like a braid in the daily act of living.

### **3. Cultural Wisdom and the Oral Tradition**

Traditional wisdom is both content and process. It speaks of how things should be done as well as what should be done. It is normative. It embodies the values of the people in the lessons that are taught. What is right and appropriate can be found in the teachings.

The North American intellectual tradition is, for the most part, an oral one.

This means that the transmission of knowledge is an interpersonal and, often, intergenerational process. All that must be remembered must be spoken aloud. The relationship between the speaker and the listener is a personal one. They share an experience. Each person hearing the stories of the past feels the pain, joins in the laughter, and relives the victories as a part of his or her own experience. The past, present and future become one:

The human voice leaves a lasting imprint on human memory and feelings, because so much heart and spirit can be communicated through the voice, like no other medium.

I resist writing down the stories and legends of our past because I have experienced the value of sharing them through close human contact. I also respect that the spoken word is sacred and powerful because I have seen instances where hearts were moved into action simply through listening to the voice of a storyteller. I have witnessed people change after listening to their past speaking to them through storytelling.

There is a particular kind of magic or force that reaches out from a storyteller and touches something deep inside a listener, to respond. I have been led to believe that we carry some ancient memory inside ourselves that only the human voice can unlock and awaken, but how this happens I cannot explain.<sup>8</sup>

In the western intellectual tradition, the emphasis is on the written word. Reality is objectified on the pages of a book. Marshall McLuhan, who could be called an Elder of the western tradition, noted the subtle yet profound effect the shift to the written word had on western consciousness:

Western history was shaped for some three thousand years by the introduction of the phonetic alphabet, a medium that depends solely on the eye for comprehension. The alphabet is a construct of fragmented bits and parts which have no semantic meaning in themselves, and which must be strung together in a line, bead-like, and in a prescribed order. Its use fostered and encouraged the habit of perceiving all environment in visual and spatial terms — particularly in terms of a space and of a time that are uniform, c,o,n,t,i,n,u,o,u,s and c-o-n-n-e-c-t-e-d.

The line, the continuum — this sentence is a prime example — became the

organizing principle of life....'As we begin, so shall we go'. 'Rationality' and logic came to depend on the presentation of connected and sequential facts or concepts.

For many people rationality has the connotation of uniformity and connectiveness. 'I don't follow you' means 'I don't think what you're saying is rational'.

Visual space is uniform, continuous, and connected. The rational man in our Western culture is a visual man. The fact that most conscious experience has little 'visuality' in it is lost on him.<sup>9</sup>

The mind-set described here is wrapped around empirical evidence and the 'burden of proof'. There is little room for reconciliation between this view and the Aboriginal world view, which accommodates the physical and the metaphysical.

Oral societies depend on cultural memory. Each person carries his or her personal story but also those of parents and grandparents. Elders link the coming generations with the teachings of past generations. The cultural teachings are the foundation of Aboriginal peoples' identity. If the culture is allowed to die, the identity of the people is buried with it.

## **4. When Cultures Collide**

Our languages, our spirituality and everything that we are — that was given to us and that was carried before by our ancestors, our grandparents who have passed on. When they couldn't carry it any longer and they went to join that spirit world, they handed it to us and they said, 'Now you are the real ones. You have to carry it.' Now they are in the spirit world. They are our past.

Charlie Patton  
Mohawk Trail Longhouse  
Kahnawake, Quebec, 6 May 1993

Traditional knowledge consists of a world view, organizing principles of life, laws of behaviour, and a knowledge of the sciences, from archaeology to zoology, framed and presented in a unique way through the power of the

spoken word. The spoken word, itself a gift of the Creator preserved by the Elders, is the fabric out of which the pattern of the culture is fashioned. This is the content of Aboriginal cultures. Here we will touch on some aspects of culture, but for further exploration, see Volume 1, Chapter 15.

Cultures are dynamic, not static — they evolve, adapting to new conditions. But if their essence is not interfered with, they change in ways that leave the core values intact. They build on new knowledge and past achievements, but their foundation remains fundamentally sound. Aboriginal cultures have struggled to maintain their traditional values and knowledge despite aggressive external attempts to destroy cultural integrity.

The western intellectual tradition is perceived to be the standard by which knowledge is measured, the superior tradition. Western cultures have considered themselves more advanced (their societies being 'nations', for example, and Aboriginal societies, 'tribes'). Simply stated, the western way is seen as the right way and if Aboriginal peoples are to advance and enter the modern world, they must abandon the North American intellectual tradition (categorized not as an intellectual tradition but as 'ritual', 'magic', 'folkways').

For most Aboriginal people, this deculturalization has been too great a price to pay for modernization. Moreover, it is an unnecessary sacrifice. A return to traditional values does not mean turning back the clock. Many people live their lives according to other great teachings and philosophies, some of which are thousands of years old. Elders are crucial if traditional knowledge and values are to become a source of strength and direction in the modern world:

Elders are the carriers of knowledge of our culture and our Nations. They should be listened to because the teachings are from their ancestors and are the 'way of life'.<sup>10</sup>

The most powerful message heard by the Commission about Elders was that Aboriginal people see their Elders as a contemporary link to traditional knowledge. Elders are the keepers of the traditional culture. They know the teachings of the ancestors — the ceremonies, rituals and prophecies, the proper way to behave, the right time for things to happen, and the values

that underlie all things. Elders are essential to the perpetuation and renewal of the traditional way of life.

Many presenters told us that any new institutions — if they are to be genuinely Aboriginal institutions — must have at their core the teachings of traditional knowledge. Aboriginal Elders can make important contributions in this area. They hold the knowledge that is essential to design and sustain new institutions and practices. Elders must be included in the construction of new institutions.

## **Recommendation**

The Commission recommends that

### **4.3.1**

Aboriginal, federal, provincial and territorial governments acknowledge the essential role of Elders and the traditional knowledge that they have to contribute in rebuilding Aboriginal nations and reconstructing institutions to support Aboriginal self-determination and well-being. This acknowledgement should be expressed in practice by

- (a) involving Elders in conceptualizing, planning and monitoring nation-building activities and institutional development;
- (b) ensuring that the knowledge of both male and female Elders, as appropriate, is engaged in such activities;
- (c) compensating Elders in a manner that conforms to cultural practices and recognizes their expertise and contribution;
- (d) supporting gatherings and networks of Elders to share knowledge and experience with each other and to explore applications of traditional knowledge to contemporary issues; and
- (e) modifying regulations in non-Aboriginal institutions that have the effect of excluding the participation of Elders on the basis of age. Throughout this chapter, we consider how traditional knowledge and culture — and the

repositories of that knowledge and culture, the Elders — can be reintegrated into Aboriginal institutions.

## **5. Traditional Culture in the Modern World: The Elders' Role**

### **5.1 The Context**

Our way of life is so different. The two lives — the Native life and the white life — are different.

Tonena McKay  
Big Trout Lake First Nation  
Big Trout Lake, Ontario, 3 December 1992

Aboriginal knowledge — the North American intellectual tradition — is indigenous to this land. It sustained Aboriginal cultures for thousands of years, enabling them to thrive and grow strong. Strangely, this fundamental truth eludes most Canadians, who seem to believe that knowledge arrived with the Europeans. Government, laws, education, religion and history itself are thought to have been transplanted to the continent with the first settlers. History books, written from the perspective of the newcomers, do nothing to counteract this misguided impression.

Elders deplore the fact that most Canadians do not learn about Aboriginal peoples and their ways of life, information that would help them understand issues from the Aboriginal perspective. Many Elders say this knowledge is vital to bridging the gap of understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. The Elders who spoke to us often provided teachings they considered a starting point for mutual understanding.

Experts on relationships, Elders understand better than most people the original relationship that existed between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians. For the Mohawk Nation, the nature of this relationship is symbolized by the Two Row Wampum:

From the beginning we realized that the newcomers were very different from any other people who lived on Turtle Island. Consequently, our people



proposed a special agreement to be made between the two parties. It is an initial guide for developing relations between ourselves and any other nations. It is the timeless mechanism. Each succeeding generation is taught the importance of the Kaswentha, or Two Row Wampum, for generations to follow.

As you can see, the background of white wampum represents a river. The two parallel rows of purple wampum represent two vessels travelling upon the river. The river is large enough for the two vessels to travel together. In one vessel can be found the Kanien'kehaka, and in the other vessel the European nations. Each vessel carries the laws, traditions, customs, language and spiritual beliefs of the respective nation.

It shall be the responsibility of the people in each vessel to steer a straight course. Neither the Europeans nor the Kanien'kehaka shall intersect or interfere with the lives of the other. Neither side shall attempt to impose their laws, traditions, customs, language or spirituality on the people in the other vessel. Such shall be the agreement of mutual respect accorded in the Two Row Wampum.

Edward J. Cross  
Chairman, Kanien'kehaka Raotiohkwa Cultural Centre  
Kahnawake, Quebec, 5 May 1993

Elders see the differences in perceptions and the resulting issues of contention. Testifying at our hearings in Port Alberni, British Columbia, Moses Smith, an Elder of the Ehattesaht community, spoke of the "audacity of the whiteman" to say that he was giving land to the Indians when the land was not his to give. The land was put there by the Creator to be used with respect by the original peoples; the concept of ownership of the land, as understood in western law, is not part of the traditional world view. At our hearings in Maniwaki, Quebec, Elder Mike Chabot explained that the Indian Act undermined the moral authority of some traditional chiefs because they were no longer recognized as community leaders by the government. The act also prescribed and limited the powers of the elected chief and council.

Understanding the world holistically, Elders know that relationships must be in balance and harmony. They see that the relationship between Aboriginal

and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada is out of balance. Harmony must be restored.

## **5.2 Freedom to Live a Traditional Spiritual Life**

Our traditional spiritual beliefs are not a religion. Ours is a holistic spiritual way of life. This spiritual way of life is our traditions, beliefs and government.

Dennis Thorne (Tungán Cikala)  
Edmonton, Alberta, 11 June 1992

Elders told the Commission of the hardships they face in trying to live the way of life they inherited from their ancestors. For Aboriginal peoples, spirituality permeates all aspects of life. Life itself is a sacred ceremony, each moment alive with awareness of the presence of the Creator in the gifts of Mother Earth.

In the modern era, however, the sacred laws of Manitou, the Creator, have been impinged upon by the legal constructs of the new arrivals. Dennis Thorne, an Oglalah Sioux, described the problems confronting those trying to live a traditional life under these foreign precepts.

When traditional spiritual people cross the border to come to Canada or go to the U.S., we are molested and harassed by border customs....Another question asked [us] is: do we have any animal parts? When I cross the border I may have eagle feathers, eagle wings, eagle bone whistle, eagle claws, bear grease, buffalo fat, animal skins — these are used for ceremonial purposes — as well as many medicinal plants and herbs. Again, I have no recourse or protection....

Our sacred sites, such as medicine wheels, petroglyphs, rock paintings, fasting places, pipestone quarries, mounds and other ceremonial places are all controlled by man-made and non-Native institutions. Traditional people do not want to be tourists to their culture but have access for spiritual practice and beliefs. Many traditional people do not have their own land today. We are charged by different agencies if we pick medicines or cut willows for ceremonial purposes in national or provincial parks. They are often the only clean places left to pick medicines.

Dennis Thorne (Tungán Cikala)  
Edmonton, Alberta, 11 June 1992

Others reiterated concerns that access to the trees, animals and natural resources necessary to conduct ceremonies be available to traditional people without the need to obtain licences or the threat of being arrested. Commissioners were asked for assurances that sacred sites would be protected and access to them guaranteed. People from Treaty 4 and Treaty 8 communities also explained that the mountains — sites where sacred ceremonies are performed — were never a part of the treaty negotiations. These sites are not part of reserves but are on what are now deemed provincial and federal Crown lands.

For these compelling reasons, the Commission urges reconciliation to ensure that Aboriginal people have the freedom to practise their traditional spirituality. In Volume 2, Chapter 4 we set forth recommendations aimed at achieving this goal through the reallocation of lands and resources and the re-establishment of Aboriginal authority over traditional lands.

One mechanism we recommend is the use of co-management boards to ensure Aboriginal involvement and consultation regarding traditional lands. Sometimes referred to as joint stewardship, joint management, or partnership, co-management has come to refer to institutional arrangements where governments and Aboriginal groups (and sometimes other parties) enter into formal agreements specifying their respective rights, powers and obligations with respect to the management and allocation of resources in a given area of Crown lands.

The term co-management has been used loosely to cover a variety of institutional arrangements, ranging from consultation to the devolution of administrative if not legislative authority to multi-party decision-making bodies. It is essentially a form of power sharing, although the relative balance among parties and the specifics of the implementing structures can vary a great deal. Most (but not all) examples of co-management to date involve Aboriginal parties in a central role, either sharing power with governments exclusively or in conjunction with interested parties.

What exists today is a compromise between the Aboriginal objective of self-

determination or self-management and government's objective of retaining its management authority. This compromise is not one between parties of equal power, however, and Aboriginal peoples regard co-management as an evolving institution.

Whatever mechanisms or institutions are in place to govern land use, Elders must have a say in designing policies and procedures aimed at preserving and protecting sacred sites and traditional lands.

## **Recommendation**

The Commission recommends that

### **4.3.2**

Aboriginal Elders be involved in the formulation and implementation of policies for the preservation and protection of sacred sites. In co-management situations, Elders should be board members.

## **5.3 Elders in Culture, Language and Values**

Does it confuse you when I refer to animals as people? In my language, this is not confusing. You see, we consider both animals and people to be living beings. In fact, when my people see a creature in the distance, the thing they say is: Awiiyak (Someone is there). It is not that my people fail to distinguish animals from people. Rather, they address them with equal respect. Once they are near and identify the creatures' shadows, then they use their particular name.

Alex McKay  
McMaster University  
Toronto, Ontario, 25 June 1992

Aboriginal people know the power of the spoken word. This is the essential component of the teachings in the oral tradition. Language captures our perception of the world around us and how we relate to this world. Aboriginal languages pass on what it means to be Odawa, Métis or Innu by embracing the knowledge and developing the systems of interpretation transmitted therein. Language provides meaning. But meaning is derived

not simply from words; it also comes from the structure of the language, the way words are put together. (A more comprehensive discussion about Aboriginal languages is found in Volume 3, Chapters 5 and 6. Here we touch on the importance of language specifically from the Elders' perspective.)

Michif, the language of the historical Métis Nation, reflects the Métis culture, embodying aspects of both European and Aboriginal cultures. In Michif, nouns are drawn from the French language while verbs are from the Cree. This makes for a language consisting of two completely different components with separate sound systems and rules governing syntax. The blending of the cultures has created a language unique in the world.<sup>11</sup>

Aboriginal languages also embody cultural understandings of the relationship between things and of life as dynamic, in a state of flux, with cycles of birth, growth, death and renewal. Cycles recur but are never completely predictable. As Blackfoot scholar Leroy Little Bear notes:

Constant motion is inherent in the Native thought process, and consequently many Native languages, such as Blackfoot, are very action- or verb-oriented. We've always thought in terms of energy, energy fields and constant motion.<sup>12</sup>

Marie Battiste describes how her language, Mi'kmaq (which is also verb-based), embraces the Mi'kmaq way of seeing the world:

[Mi'kmaq] is built around relationships, and the relationships of people to each other are more important than anything else....

In Mi'kmaq, everything operates from the basis of verbs, and verbs are complicated by all of the other elements around them which show relationships. So the most important element of the language is the verb because everything is connected to it and all the other words can be shifted around because of that.

There is an animate and an inanimate relationship and this inanimate relationship relates to how close we have [felt] to some things. The relationship of objects around us, those that have had an intimate

relationship have an animate relationship, and those things that haven't have an inanimate relationship. But they have nothing to do with 'living' and 'dead'.

Marie Battiste  
Mi'kmaq Cultural Curriculum Co-ordinator,  
Eskasoni School Board  
Eskasoni, Nova Scotia, 7 May 1992

Conversely, the dominant non-Aboriginal languages in Canada — French and English — are noun-based. The emphasis is on things. While appropriate for communicating the western perspective, these languages, in the eyes of Aboriginal people, fail to capture the essence of the Aboriginal way of seeing the world:

To call something a tree is, as I perceive what has been shared with me, to impose a man-invented label on a man-invented stage in the transformation process from seed, to shoot, to sapling and then on to the bark-losing, root-withering, core-rotting and falling-to-earth-to-become-part-of-the-soil stages that follow. In fact, words like "seed", "shoot" and "sapling" are the same, just words, arbitrarily fastened by English-speakers onto artificially "frozen" moments of continuous change. In reality, according to the Algonkin speaker, the only thing that has "died" is what we created in the first place: the tree-concept which we imposed upon that one 'segment' of the spiritual continuum. Put another way, we disconnected a segment of the transformation process, froze it with the label "tree", then lamented its passing.<sup>13</sup>

In Inuktitut, the language spoken by Inuit, there are no separate terms to denote the sex of a person or animal. In addition, the language embraces a way of seeing the world in which each thing, animal and human being is accorded an equal status.

These subtle distinctions are often lost when Aboriginal languages are translated into English or French. Aboriginal languages are essential tools for describing, teaching and passing on traditional wisdom:

We cannot protect our culture and our ceremonies unless we have our language....There are many things that I cannot find the words for in

English. In the language, it has a real essence that can't be expressed in English.<sup>14</sup>

The difficulty of translating Aboriginal languages is not limited to specific words. It extends to the concepts embedded in the words, concepts that may not be consistent between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal speakers. Words like 'justice' carry with them a great deal of conceptual, moral and philosophical weight. The concept of justice varies with a society's ideas of what is just and fair. We may be able to find an Aboriginal equivalent for the word justice, but the underlying meaning may be quite different.

Elders play a critical role in the retention, renewal and celebration of Aboriginal languages. They know the precision of usage. They are, in western terms, the linguistic professors of their culture. The Elders addressing the Commission were passionate about their language. They stressed the use of Aboriginal languages as the only way to ensure accuracy in transmitting the North American intellectual tradition. They spoke of the failure of the schools to teach Aboriginal languages. They decried the loss of language as a threat to Aboriginal culture:

Right now, we are beginning to face a problem within our culture. Our language gradually is being pushed back to the point where our children regard the English language as their first language. Years ago, our Elders had one language which is the Inuit Inuktitut language.

Then my generation was sent to school and we were taught to speak English to the point where we weren't allowed to speak our mother tongue. If we did, a punishment was in order. Some of us were fortunate to keep our language and adapt to the English language as well.

Today, our children have one language just as our Elders have one language. But our children's language is the English language. I think that is the most significant problem we are facing today. It is the lack of communication between our Elders and children.

Presently, we don't have a written form of literature in our Inuit Inuktitut dialect to maintain our language. The present school system does not have the proper criteria to develop and maintain our language. The school system provides language, but the language that is being taught is in the

eastern dialect. Parents are not maintaining the language at home as much as they used to.

Elder James Panioyak  
Cambridge Bay, Northwest Territories  
17 November 1992

Elders entreated young people to learn the languages, not simply to preserve them but to learn as well the social and psychological aspects of the culture that speaks the language. One learns when, to whom and about what it is appropriate to talk. These patterns of discourse become so natural that it is easy to forget they are culturally specific. Thinking in the language is the sign of a mature language speaker. Dreaming in the language is another sign of a fluent speaker. Thinking and dreaming in a language mean that the speaker has internalized the principles for organizing the world that underpin that language.

Many Aboriginal languages are in danger of being lost forever. (In Volume 3, Chapter 6 we provide more detail on the current state of Aboriginal languages and recommendations for retaining and increasing Aboriginal language use.) Ways must be found to ensure that the Elders' words are heard by the coming generations. Otherwise, the words — and everything that the words convey — will be lost. This recognition of the interrelatedness of culture, language and values speaks loudly for the inclusion of Elders in the consideration of these matters. More and more Aboriginal people are expressing a desire to learn about their culture and history. Traditions can be learned without knowing an Aboriginal language. But it is the Elders' dream that those who wish to understand the Aboriginal world view will not only learn the traditions and teachings but also learn to speak, think and dream as Aboriginal people.

## **5.4 Elders in Education**

Traditionally, education was not schooling. Learning for survival happened during all the waking hours, each and every day, and all life long. Learning occurred through life experience — not in abstraction or set apart from on-going activities.<sup>15</sup>

Education was the topic most talked about by the Elders appearing before



the Commission. Education is what shapes young minds, and Elders have a passionate concern for the future of Aboriginal children and the Aboriginal way of life. Many spoke of the traditional education they had experienced and of their vision for the future. They want education to respect their skills, knowledge and traditions. They want the children of tomorrow to know themselves as Aboriginal people.

Unfortunately, this view often collides with the western approach to education and its assumptions about what skills, knowledge and values constitute a good education. In the western tradition, Aboriginal knowledge is often slighted as inferior or irrelevant.

Slowly, some are beginning to recognize the important contributions Elders can make in the school system. Lakota scholar Beatrice Medicine notes: "All individuals involved with Native education will benefit effectively using Elders metaphorically as bridges between two cultural domains."<sup>16</sup> Winnipeg's community and race relations co-ordinator offered this idea:

Elders are considered guardians of Aboriginal cultures, and their role in cultural and language development in all school systems, at all academic levels, must be acknowledged. They must be accorded the professional status and appropriate compensation.

Elders, by their wisdom and experience, can teach about tradition, history, culture, values, customs, role models and symbols of respect. They can fill the need for closer interaction between youth and Elders and act as resource persons in the areas of language and cultural programs. They could give support, advice and guidance to education staff and students by sharing their wisdom, philosophy, knowledge and experience. They could provide tutoring, story telling and language instruction. They can provide teachings about positive contributions made by Aboriginal people in history.

Harold Rampersad  
Co-ordinator, Community and Race Relations Committee  
City of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, 3 June 1993

In Volume 3, Chapter 5 we recommended that Elders be reinstated to an active role in educating Aboriginal children and youth and that they be

compensated in a manner that shows respect for their unique knowledge and skills. But we acknowledge that tensions remain between what people want Elders to do, what Elders want to do, and what existing school structures will allow. Some Elders spoke of being angry and frustrated in their attempts to teach their knowledge in a school setting. Traditionally, Elders taught by doing, and young people learned from them by doing. The world around them was the classroom. Elders would rather offer their teachings in culture camps, on the trapline, or in their own facilities.

More than once I have approached younger people and I have gone out hunting with younger people by teaching them — sometimes they really don't know how to go out hunting. But I've gone out hunting with them. That way they learn the language and the culture more, by going out hunting with them. I feel that they should go out in the land in order to teach them both worlds. [translation]

Elder Lucassie Nutaraluk  
Chairman, Kalugiak Elders Group  
Iqaluit, Northwest Territories, 25 May 1992

Many Elders are ready and willing to teach the traditional skills of living on the land. These skills — hunting, trapping, fishing, harvesting and gathering food, herbs and medicines, shelter and fire building — need not be learned in the classroom and, in fact, are best learned out on the land. This is practical knowledge that not only promotes understanding of the land but also helps to ensure survival.

Elders' roles in education are not limited to teaching language and traditional skills. Modern science is beginning to recognize and validate the Aboriginal conception of the universe. This ancient philosophy of the nature of the cosmos is consistent with many of the fundamental principles set forth in modern science, particularly quantum physics and its offshoot, chaos theory:

It turns out that those concepts in quantum physics are very similar to concepts that North American Indians have always had — Native Science, for lack of a better name....

[The] notion of constant motion, which the quantum physicists sometimes

talk about in terms of chaos theory, we've always talked about in terms of the trickster. In other words, the whole notion of chaos is not new to us at all. We've always known the trickster....

The notion of observer-created reality is also incorporated into Native thinking. The notion of relationships, relational networks, is very important, too. This discovery of time and space being the same is old hat in Blackfoot. We've always thought about it that way. If I were talking about somebody I see in the distance over there or somebody I saw several days ago, I'd talk about them in the same way. Time and space have always been the same thing in Blackfoot, in Cree and in many other Native languages.<sup>17</sup>

"Native science" can offer valuable insights and teachings in areas such as astronomy, medicine, pharmacology, biology, mathematics, and environmental studies, to name but a few.

Disagreements remain between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about what needs to be taught and how best to teach it. In the short term, deliberate efforts will have to be made to help Elders and school personnel bridge this cultural gap. An example can be found in the work of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College:

Over the years, we have had the Elders of the Indian communities play a very important role in terms of advising us about the way in which we should lay the foundation of our programs. They pointed out to us very strongly the importance of our values and the importance of our keeping our values and incorporating our values in the curriculum. We've had a lot of opportunity to discuss our curriculum developments with the Indian communities and so we are very convinced that the curriculum is very responsive to the communities.

Blair Stonechild  
Dean, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College  
Regina, Saskatchewan, 10 May 1993

The role of Elders in education is not limited to direct instruction and curriculum development. Elders in the modern context are happy to be involved even peripherally in the education of young people in their

community. They see education as important and necessary. In some northern and remote communities, Elders are known to walk through the streets in the early hours of the morning, watching for bear or wolf tracks, ensuring the roads and paths are safe for school children. Elders are not asked to take on this responsibility. They simply do it.

New models of education are necessary for Aboriginal students if they are to learn about their culture and to take their place as Aboriginal people in contemporary Canada. Elders have a role in developing these new models and in implementing the teaching of the subject matter. The nature of the North American intellectual tradition, the way traditional knowledge is taught and learned, and the complexities of Aboriginal languages are all pertinent to the development of new models. Elders can make important contributions in all these areas.

## **5.5 Elders in Justice**

Traditional knowledge, with its holistic view of the individual, the world and the individual's place in the world, contains precepts of order, of what is right and appropriate behaviour. The world view of a given Aboriginal people sets limits on what is allowed and not allowed. The world view frames the relationship between human beings and the Creator, between human beings and the physical world, the plant world and the animal world. Some nations codify the rules of conduct, as in the Iroquois Great Law of Peace. Others imbue children with the moral code through legends, stories and examples. Language further describes the values and ethical positions expected. In this way, Elders are teachers of ethics. These ethics were the foundation of traditional justice.

Justice in traditional societies focused not on punishment but on restoring harmony to the community. Rules and well-established social mores were in place to keep conflict to a minimum. An Elder provides an example common to Inuit societies in Labrador:

The Elders had rules related to hunting parties; for instance, if there was only one animal killed, they had clear-cut guidelines indicating who owned the kill. The hunter who killed the seal did not necessarily own it; another may have first harpooned it without killing [it], or it may have been killed at [another hunter's] seal breathing hole, in which case the kill belonged to the

former. The animal was cut and divided among the hunting party with precise rules/knowledge as to who got how much and exactly what part of the animal in accordance to what role each hunter had partaken in the kill.<sup>18</sup>

When conflict arose, Elders often acted as mediators. They would listen to all who wanted to speak on the matter at hand before determining what must be done. The prescribed action was always aimed at restoring balance and harmony to relationships within the community. The first priority was to keep the circle — the community — strong. This is why in many Aboriginal societies, the worst form of punishment was banishment, used only as a last resort:

Every one might act different from what was considered right [if they chose] to do so, but such acts would bring...the censure of the nation, which [was] dreaded more than any corporal punishment that could be inflicted....

This fear of the nation's censure acted as a mighty band, binding all in one social, honourable compact. They would not as brutes be whipped into duty. They would as men be persuaded to the right.<sup>19</sup>

Recent studies show that traditional Aboriginal concepts about justice and truth collide and conflict with those underpinning the non-Aboriginal justice system.<sup>20</sup> In many Aboriginal languages, there is no word for or concept of guilt as understood in European law. In Inuktitut, for example, the word 'guilt' connotes 'blame'.<sup>21</sup> Even when Aboriginal people use the English or French words, the meaning is not consistent.

Two approaches have emerged in efforts to adapt the justice system to the needs of Aboriginal people: modifying the existing system to make it culturally more appropriate for Aboriginal people, and instituting distinct Aboriginal systems. The role of Elders is critical to both approaches. The justice system is an area where Elders have found the most opportunity in recent years to effect change — they work in prisons and with a broad range of community programs, participate in community sentencing and act as justices of the peace. Successes and lessons learned in these areas can direct policy makers to other suitable avenues for Elders' participation and collaboration.<sup>22</sup>

## 5.6 Elders in Governance

What is sovereignty? Sovereignty is difficult to define because it is intangible, it cannot be seen or touched. It is very much inherent, an awesome power, a strong feeling or the belief of a people. What can be seen, however, is the exercise of Aboriginal powers. For our purposes, a working definition of sovereignty is the ultimate power from which all specific political powers are derived. Sovereignty is inherent. It comes from within a people or nation. It cannot be given to one group from another. Ideally, sovereignty is the unrestricted right of a people to organize themselves in social, cultural, economic and political patterns that meet our needs. It is the inherent right of our people to define ways and means in which to utilize our lands, sovereign and traditional territories, held and set aside for our own use and benefit.

Elder Roger Jones  
Councillor, Shawanaga First Nation  
Sudbury, Ontario, 1 June 1993

No matter what is said about the issue of self-government, when we marry our own children and we bury our own dead, then we are self-governing. Until then, we are not.

Elder Michael Thrasher  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
21 April 1992

Elders look at their people as self-governing from time immemorial, as people who never surrendered their autonomy. Elders believe that

Sovereignty comes from the Creator. The Creator placed us on this land and gave us laws to live a good life and to live in peace and harmony with one another and with all creation.

Elder Vernon Roote  
Deputy Grand Chief, Union of Ontario Indians  
North Bay, Ontario, 10 May 1993

In the past, as we have seen, Aboriginal societies were self-governing

nations and conducted themselves as such. Confederacies, leagues and alliances were formed, trading networks were developed and maintained, and rules of law governed within the nations. For Elders, sovereignty in the modern context means exercising self-government. This means returning to the laws of Creation and exercising Aboriginal law:

But we must recognize that and respect it. And we must bring back these tools that we were given by the Creator. That is our strength. This is inherent. This is our inherent right. Those drums that are in your community are the heartbeat of the people. Those pipes, those sweat lodges, those teaching lodges.

Elder Roger Jones  
Councillor, Shawanaga First Nation  
Sudbury, Ontario, 1 June 1993

Let us develop self-government along traditional lines with a place for the hereditary Chiefs and Councils. Let us provide our Elders with the respect they deserve. Let us listen to the wisdom of their voices and share in respect for our territories. Let us govern ourselves along the holistic principles that have traditionally provided balance in our lives and spirits. Let us be guided by the words healing, trust and protection.

Ray Prince  
General Director, Northern Region  
National Aboriginal Veterans Association, B.C. Chapter  
Prince George, British Columbia, 31 May 1993

Elders, grounded in traditional knowledge, can lead the struggle to re-establish culturally appropriate models of governance. They are explicit about their desire to play a role, as stated by an Innu Elder:

We would like to be given a chance to control our own lives, to do things that are necessary to our way of life. [translation]

Elder Simeo Rich  
Sheshatshiu, Newfoundland and Labrador  
17 June 1992

## **5.7 Elders in Traditional Health and Healing**

Elders tell us that healing is a spiritual process not confined solely to medicine and biology. The view is holistic. Like the three strands that form a braid of sweetgrass, the mind, body and spirit are intertwined, and each must be healthy and in balance. If one strand is weak, the braid is undone. As one Elder told us:

Healing means mending bodies and souls. It also means rekindling the flames that strengthen our Native spirituality. It means physical, mental, psychological and emotional well-being. This is known in Native healing circles as the holistic approach to healing.

Elder Byron Stiles  
Orillia, Ontario  
13 May 1993

Elders are sought-after to treat unhealthy individuals, those whose spirits seem to be out of balance. They listen to the individual and consult with those close to him or her. They consider the mind, the body, and the spirit. Sometimes an Elder will conduct an appropriate ceremony before prescribing treatment. Treatment itself might consist of administering traditional medicine, conducting a ceremony for the individual and some or all members of the community, or both.

The underlying philosophy is that health is maintained by following the Creator's instructions for living a good life. Ceremonies — the sweat lodge, fasting — are ways of maintaining a connection with the Creator. Traditional medicines are used when necessary and are seen as gifts from the Creator:

There is not a flower that buds, however small, that is not for some wise purpose.

There is not a blade of grass, however insignificant, that the Indian does not require. Learning this, and acting in accordance with these truths, will work out your own good, and will please the Great Spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Examples abound of the success of traditional healers providing treatment through all stages of life:



I never saw a doctor while I was delivering all these children. I had to use a midwife while I was delivering these children....We had our own traditional doctors. I guess they were termed medicine men back then, but they assisted, they helped us, they healed us using traditional herbs and medicines. We never encountered any problems when we, as women, were delivering our own children because we had experienced people who deliver children who had a lot of experience being midwives. [translation]

Elder Juliette Duncan  
Muskrat Dam First Nation  
Big Trout Lake, Ontario, 3 December 1992

My First Nations believe in our medicine. I take this birch sap for arthritis and I don't have it. I brought this birch sap three years ago and I drank it. I have got to be away, so I am teaching my son to get it, because it is just a few days that it is in, and then there will be no more sap.

Elder Pearl Keenan  
Commissioner for the Day  
Teslin, Yukon, 27 May 1992

Traditional healers have always been trusted in Aboriginal communities. For some Elders, it is western medicine that is suspect. They have seen people become addicted to western medicines or be subjected to uncomfortable or painful treatments with little or no positive result. Carl Hammerschlag, a physician who has worked with the Hopi people in Arizona, explains the difference between western-trained medical doctors and traditional healers in the following way:

Contemporary medical training arms us factually but numbs us emotionally. This leads to people's distrust of doctors, which is reflected in the rise of malpractice suits. People are angry at the sad truth that you can be a doctor and not a healer. A good doctor can make the right diagnosis and treat the patient and if she's a great doctor, then she will also add a preventive component so the patient learns to minimize future exposure. But a healer can do all that and, in addition, help patients understand something about why they get sick, about their place in the world, and about their relationships with others, even the universe.<sup>24</sup>

Elders feel their traditional healing practices are being threatened on a number of fronts. The greatest concern for Elders is the encroachment of governments upon this sacred domain. An Ojibwa Elder stated:

On 19 December 1992, there was an introduction of a paper at the federal level to ban 64 therapeutic herbs from stores. When I read that I said, 'Well, they are going to have to have one police on me all the time because whenever I leave the house to go and pick medicines they are going to have to watch what I pick and they are going to have to teach that cop or person how to identify those medicines I am going to pick, because I am going to continue to use those medicines, regardless of what the government does....[H]ow do they know it is harmful? We, as Native people, have been using these remedies for thousands of years and some of us extend our life with that. It does not harm us.

Elder Dominic Eshkawkogan  
Sudbury, Ontario  
31 May 1993

Elders told us that these regulations, coupled with regulations that restrict their access to parks and sacred places where healing ceremonies are performed and medicines gathered, strike at the core of their beliefs and violate their spiritual essence. Policies must be developed through close consultation with representative Elders and Elders' organizations.

## **Recommendation**

The Commission recommends that

### **4.3.3**

Federal, provincial and territorial governments

(a) recognize Aboriginal people's right of access to public lands for the purpose of gathering traditional herbs, plants and other traditional medicines where the exercise of the right is not incompatible with existing use; and

(b) consult with Aboriginal governments on guidelines to govern the implementation of this right.

Elders have expressed concern about the current interest in Aboriginal spirituality, sparked to some degree by advocates of new age spirituality. Elders believe that traditional healing practices are being eroded by self-proclaimed 'Elders' who are not grounded in the traditions. Some Elders expressed alarm at the careless use of healing circles.

The problem with the healing circles, as the Elders perceive it, is that you have people who give a smidgen of tradition, of teaching, under the guise of traditional healing.

Elder Hugh Dicky  
London, Ontario  
12 May 1993

This raises questions. How is it decided who can perform certain ceremonies, practise certain rituals, sing certain songs, or organize and conduct healing circles? Who determines the qualifications of those calling themselves medicine people, traditional healers or Elders? The issue of self-regulation among traditional healers is something Elders themselves should address within the larger Aboriginal community. There are Elders' societies and organizations, both formal and informal, at the local, regional and national levels. For example, the Nak'azdli Elders' Society is active in British Columbia; internationally, the Three Fires Society is a large North American spiritual organization based on the teachings of the Midewewin Grand Medicine Society. These and other groups might wish to discuss criteria or procedures for recognition of traditional Elders. Ultimately, it is Aboriginal people who will determine who their Elders are. For Aboriginal people and their Elders, community recognition is the most reliable determining factor. Aboriginal health and healing issues, including ways to strengthen and enhance traditional approaches to healing and incorporate traditional healing into the mainstream health care system, as well as the Commission's recommendations in this area, are examined in detail in Volume 3, Chapter 3.

## **5.8 Elders in Social Issues**

Traditional societies were founded on reciprocal relationships. Respect and responsibility — to one's self, the community and the Creator — were

fundamental values that held society together. They were the bond that transformed a collection of people into a community. People cared for each other. Everyone had a role:

The Elders were there as a man or woman to guide the society using the accumulated wisdom from a long life. The youth presented the hope and aspirations of a culture who learned by sense and imitation. The woman held the central and most honoured role as the bearer of life and man held the envious role of the protector, to preserve and maintain the continuity of the family unit.

Chief Edmund Metatawabin  
Fort Albany First Nation  
Timmins, Ontario, 5 November 1992

Daily activities, ceremonies and rituals helped strengthen these roles and foster a sense of community. There were formal and informal rules guiding community life that worked to prevent disputes while strengthening the social bond among community members. Each Inuit community had its chief Elder:

There were established trapping and fishing camps outside of the community with each camp having its own leader, sub-leaders and territory. People using nets or traps for cod, salmon or seals had rights to certain berths...[O]ther fur trappers had rights to certain areas. All other areas, excluding established camps, were used as general hunting grounds for seal, fish, caribou, fox, etc.<sup>25</sup>

Métis communities were organized with equally specific roles and responsibilities:

Métis social organization was communal and democratic. During the buffalo hunt, for example, they would get together and, for that specific purpose, would organize a provisional government with a president, captains and soldiers. In 1840 a massive hunt was recorded where there were 1,630 people using 1,210 Red River carts. A hunt of that size had to be highly organized and very disciplined. Everything had to be very precise.<sup>26</sup>

When Elders look at their communities today, they no longer see a place where everyone has a role. Traditions have been eroded, and the values that once bound society together have been lost or abandoned. There is no harmony; the circle has been broken. Instead, they see alcoholism, substance abuse, violence within families, unemployment, welfare, economic instability, and suicide. They also see the causes of these ills:

There is no mystery on the phenomenon of high suicide rates among our youth. Despair and hopelessness are intolerable in the lives of any human being. This situation is especially critical when the loss of individual self-worth occurs simultaneously with the rapid disintegration of our supporting culture.

Elder Jack Brightnose  
Lac Seul First Nation  
Big Trout Lake, Ontario, 3 December 1992

Elders believe firmly that the solution is a return to cultural teachings. Instead of feeling shame as Aboriginal people, youth and others would find in their Aboriginal identity a source of pride and strength.<sup>27</sup>

Elders act when they can to address pressing social needs at the community level. They are limited by inadequate facilities and resources, but they do what they can. An Ojibwa Elder told the Commission of his own efforts:

We should work together and get along with one another. Help each other. When somebody's down, pull him up. That's what happened when I was working the street patrol. I found a lot of my brothers lying in the gutter. I pull them up, stand him up, take him to detox. Maybe he'll fall again. Get him up again. That's the way we do it and then that's the way they should live. Help one another, work together, so we have a good country.

Elder Alex Skead  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
22 April 1992

Respect, responsibility, caring and sharing are the solutions Elders bring to the social problems of Aboriginal people. They believe that the breakdown

of Aboriginal societies and the consequent loss of cultural values are at the root of these problems. Restoring, renewing and strengthening cultural values is the solution they put forward. It is one in which they will have an active role as the carriers and teachers of those values.

## **5.9 Elders, Lands and Resources**

My grandfather tried hard to keep his visions and dreams going in the family. When he was seven, the family left him at the summer camp to explore and know the ways of nature. All his peers were doing the same. He told me during this time he ate berries and squirrels. His communion with the trees started. The spruce provided him with comfort and warmth.

The rocks spoke to him of their resilience and power. The water spoke to him of its reflectivity, purity and power. This was my grandfather's vision. During the summer my grandfather met a bear cub without its mother and they became friends.

For 16 years, my grandfather's brother the bear came to live and play with him. My grandfather's hand was paralyzed because the bear bit him when they were wrestling. Pete, my grandfather, never hurt this bear till then. Grandfather gave the bear a bleeding nose. They never hurt each other till the bear died. My grandfather was sad.

Ron Momogeeshick Peters  
Toronto, Ontario 2 November 1992

Elders tell us that Aboriginal people have a special relationship to the land, that they belong to the land, which the Creator provided for them and their children. The Creator placed on the land all that Aboriginal people would need to survive in harmony and balance with nature. For Aboriginal people, land is deeply intertwined with identity:

The concepts of territory, traditions and customs are not divisible in our minds. In our language we say: THO ION nDEH SHU! TEN!....That is, 'Our territory, our customs, and our traditions'....The question of the fundamental principles of the Long House is that, when we talk about the land, we say: ONGwAnDUwEN ONwENTSA. That is, 'Our Mother Earth'. It cannot be bought, it cannot be sold, it cannot be cashed in, because it is

our mother — and you don't sell your mother. [translation]

Michel Gros-Louis (Taré Dan Dèh)  
Akiawenrak Long House  
Wendake, Quebec, 17 November 1992

There is not a lake or mountain that [does not have] connected with it some story of delight or wonder, and nearly every beast and bird is the subject of the story-teller, being said to have transformed itself at some prior time into some mysterious formation — of men going to live in the stars, and of imaginary beings in the air, whose rushing passage roars in the distant whirlwinds.<sup>28</sup>

The concept of territory has a special meaning to the Algonquin people:

It is the foundation of everything. Without territory, there is no autonomy. Without territory, there is no home. The reserve is not our home. I am territory. Language is territory. Belief is territory. It is where I come from. Territory can also vanish in an instant. Before the colonization of the Abitibi our ancestors always lived on the territory. My grandfather, my grandparents and my father lived there. This is the territory that I am talking about....

I live on the territory there, but it is not a reserve. I stay on the reserve from time to time, but I live on the ancestral hunting and fishing grounds where my father lived and died. [translation]

Oscar Kistabish  
Val d'Or, Quebec 30 November 1992

The Elders tell us that the Creator made Aboriginal people the caretakers and stewards of the land. The people were told by the Creator to respect the gifts of the world around them.

I have the responsibility to use the Creator's gifts in a respectful way. That is why I will take only what I truly need and I will use all of what I take. I will not waste. When I pick medicine plants, I leave two for every one I pick. This way, I make sure the next person has medicine to pick, and I also ensure the sacred medicines will not disappear.

When I pick medicine, cut wood or take an animal or fish — indeed, whenever I take from Creation — I give thanks. I'm not sure if what I take has feelings as I do, or if it has the capacity to understand or communicate as I can. But, it is certainly alive. It grows and perpetuates itself. It plays a vital role in the Circle of Life and, eventually, it dies. When it gives of itself, I perform a ceremony to honour the gift of its power. In order to properly honour this relationship, I kindle a fire and offer Oienkwenonwe (Sacred Tobacco) so that the spirit of that which I have taken may hear my words and thoughts. The relationship between us is an intimate and personal one.<sup>29</sup>

Traditional knowledge of the ways of the land was rooted in an understanding of the holistic, interrelated nature of the earth's ecosystems, of the Circle of Life.

Their philosophy is that all things are connected, that you cannot isolate one part of water, for instance, sport fishing. They don't see it that way. When they talk about water, they talk about everything that is connected to water. It starts with the smallest living thing right on up to the largest.

They talk about water as being a big chain in a big circle, and we are part of that circle. We have to look after everything that is within that circle. If we destroy anything within that circle, we destroy ourselves.

Albert Saddleman  
Kelowna, British Columbia  
16 June 1993

Some Elders say that the only people who truly own the land are the generations yet unborn. Once born, you no longer own the land. Instead, it becomes your responsibility to take care of the land for its rightful owners: the coming generations.

Elders tell us that currently fashionable terms such as 'environmentally friendly' and 'sustainable development' are ancient concepts inherent in Aboriginal societies. The Iroquois people, for example, used to plant corn, beans and squash together. In this way, the 'Three Sisters', as they were known, were much less susceptible to the ravages of disease and insects.



The special relationship between Aboriginal peoples and land has been written about in considerable detail in recent years. Traditional ecological knowledge is being acknowledged and given recognition by scientists worldwide. Yet collaboration with people who have this traditional knowledge is only starting to happen now. A 1990 environmental impact study prepared for the Canadian Environmental Assessment Research Council noted the relevance of the Inuit system of classifying animals according to their relationships within the ecosystem as a whole:

Although ecological classification is a relatively recent development in the Western scientific tradition, it has long been a fundamental organizing principle for the traditional Inuit taxonomy....The Inuit system of classification reveals a strong ecological logic and reflects a dichotomy of land and sea which is a central theme in traditional Inuit mythology and world-view.<sup>30</sup>

Inuit in the southeastern Hudson Bay region divide animals — umajuit — into six main subdivisions. Puijiit are 'those that rise to the surface' (such as seals, whales and walrus); pisutiit, or 'those that walk', include polar bear, caribou and foxes; timmiaq are the large birds, including loons, swans, hawks and ptarmigans; qupauak are the songbirds, shorebirds and other small birds; iqaluit includes large motile fish such as Arctic char, brook char, lake char and whitefish; and irqamiutait, a diverse group of bottom-dwelling marine organisms, that includes fish, clams, sea urchins and seaweeds.

The report notes the 'ecological logic' of this system, a system that directly reflects the Inuit world view. Mammals are grouped into those of the sea and those of the land. Large birds are distinguished as water-seekers or land-seekers, and free-swimming fish are separated from bottom dwellers. The author states:

The development of a classification system based upon ecological principles is a product of viewing the natural world from an ecological perspective. Recognition of traditional knowledge on the basis of scientific value rather than expediency will advance our understanding of arctic ecosystems and improve our ability to protect them, as well as helping sustain a culture with deep roots in the northern ecosystem.<sup>31</sup>

Elders are alarmed by the short-sighted approach to development now so prevalent. They foresee dire consequences if the approach does not change dramatically. Simply put, Elders believe we are destroying ourselves:

As we see things now, our earth is dying. It is gradually being destroyed. Every second the human race is producing poisons, with many of the emissions destroying the vegetation which directly affects the wildlife that our people rely on for survival.

Much of the development that is going on is considered by modern economists and politicians to be economic growth. The way our Elders see it, it is the destruction of our Mother Earth. And without Mother Earth we have nothing. We must consider the environment over economy, and at the same time realizing that there must be a balance.

Elder Clarence Apsassin  
Elders' Program Co-ordinator, Treaty 8 Tribal Association  
Blueberry River Reserve  
Fort St. John, British Columbia, 20 November 1992

Elders believe there is only one solution: living life according to the Creator's instructions. The Creator's guidance ensured that the land, sea and sky, and all creatures dwelling there, would remain for future generations. The Creator's instructions provided for maintenance and care of the earth. Long before government imposed its rules and regulations, Aboriginal peoples had their own systems of territorial use and maintenance:

Each family had its own district where they belonged and owned the game. That was each one's stock, for food and clothes.

If another Indian hunted on our territory we, the owners, could shoot him. This division of the land started in the beginning of time, and always remained unchanged. I remember about twenty years ago some Nipissing Indians came north to hunt on my father's land. He told them not to hunt beaver. 'This is our land,' he told them; 'you can fish but must not touch the fur, as that is all we have to live on.' Sometimes an owner would give permission for strangers to hunt for a certain time or on a certain tract. This

was often done for friends or when neighbours had a poor season. Later the favour might be returned.<sup>32</sup>

Systems for managing lands and resources were based on spiritual as well as ecological principles:

Included in the spiritual laws were the laws of the land. These were developed through the sacred traditions of each tribe of red nations by the guidance of the spirit world. We each had our sacred traditions of how to look after and use medicines from the plant, winged and animal kingdoms. The law of use is sacred to traditional people today.

Dennis Thorne (Tungán Cikala)  
Edmonton, Alberta  
11 June 1992

Most Elders want to see co-management of natural resources such as wildlife, oil and gas, forests, water and minerals. Aboriginal people with traditional knowledge must also have more control over laws regarding jurisdiction of their traditional territories. An Innu Elder told us:

[W]e're saddened by the government regulations, what we have to put up with. In the early days we didn't have to put up with any of this. There was no such thing as rules and regulations, government regulations, in the bush because of hunting and living the way we used to live.

The Innu didn't change the way they live, or haven't changed. It is the government that is changing us, that wants us to live the way they live. But we can't do that. We have to maintain our way of living as well. If they hadn't bothered with the people in our communities in the early days, we would still have what we had in the past.

Elder Elizabeth Penashue  
Sheshatshiu, Newfoundland and Labrador  
17 June 1992

## **6. A Call to Action**

We can never lose our way of life. We cannot let it go. We have to stand up

for our way of life. All of us.

Elder Madeline Davis  
Fort St. John, British Columbia  
19 November 1992

The voices of the Elders who appeared before the Commission amounted to a collective call to action. They are calling for a revolution in the thinking of non-Aboriginal people. Elders, as the visionaries of Aboriginal society, bring a compassionate approach to the future. The future is tied to the past and present. The future is now. An Ojibwa Elder explains:

The Grandfathers and the Grandmothers are in the children — whose faces are coming from beneath the ground.<sup>33</sup>

Although the Elders who spoke to us were from many different traditions, nations and peoples, they had amazingly similar things to say. The intellectual traditions reinforced each other. First Nations, Métis and Inuit Elders spoke as one, looking to the future through the prism of traditional knowledge. They have much to teach us:

Each time one of these people passes on, a book closes. We don't have a record of it any more.

Elder Michael Thrasher  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
21 April 1992

While most Elders were hopeful for the future, there was urgency in their message. The time has come to think about the future we are making for ourselves and our children. Will this be the last generation to live off the land, to speak the ancestral languages? Or will we see cultural rebirth in Aboriginal nations? What is to become of the North American intellectual tradition? If present trends continue, the situation looks bleak. Elders fear there will be no Aboriginal languages written or read, or even spoken, within the next quarter-century. A majority of Aboriginal people will be living in urban centres, away from their traditional homelands. In the name of resource development, bulldozers will continue to encroach on traditional territory, rending the land, leaving special cultural places unrecognizable.

Canadians must acknowledge the urgency of the situation and begin to act now. In some communities, it is already starting:

There was a time in the history of the Anishnabe people we nearly lost all of these things that we once had as a people, and that road narrowed. We could cite many reasons why that road narrowed, and we almost lost all of our culture. But today we strive to remind our people of those stories once again, to pick up that work that we as Anishnabe people know. It is our work and we ask no one to do that work, for it is our responsibility to maintain those teachings for our people.

Charlie Nelson

Mejakunigijique Aneebedaygunib [phonetic]

Roseau River, Manitoba, 8 December 1992

It is a time for Aboriginal people to make decisions. If the language is important, it must be spoken. If the ceremonies are important, they must be practised. If the knowledge is important, it must be retrieved, passed on and applied. If the sacred places are important, they must be saved. If Elders are important, they must be involved fully and centrally in matters of education, health, justice, self-government — in all institutions and decisions affecting the present and the future of Aboriginal peoples.

The Commission concludes that traditional culture is an important and defining characteristic of Canadian society and that Canadians must support Aboriginal peoples in their efforts to maintain their culture. Elders are the source and the teachers of the North American intellectual tradition. If they are lost or ignored, it is lost:

We are grateful to our Elders, our grandmothers and grandfathers for their generosity and kindness in sharing with us their wisdom and knowledge. We are grateful for the example they set for us as keepers of the culture and traditions and values of our people. The strength, courage and dignity that they exemplify are a constant source of inspiration. Their continued commitment to the survival of our languages, their concerns about the environment and the healing of our people is important to the future of our people. Our leaders, our young people and those yet unborn must have access to this knowledge and wisdom if we are to survive as strong and healthy communities.

Their accumulated reservoir of knowledge and wisdom is freely offered to the living generations of the people in an effort to help us communicate harmoniously with our past, present and future. Besides the accumulated reservoir of knowledge that the Elders share with us, we too have a responsibility to assure the Elders of our support and to provide a process of binding with us and with the youth. We need to be connected. We need to assist them in their journey as they get older. Our Elders need to be and want to be in touch with what is happening.<sup>34</sup>

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## **Notes:**

\* Transcripts of the Commission's hearings are cited with the speaker's name and affiliation, if any, and the location and date of the hearings. See A Note About Sources at the beginning of this volume for information about transcripts and other Commission publications.

**1** Sam Metcalfe, personal communication with staff of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 2 February 1995.

**2** Terry Lusty, "Defining a 'True' Native Elder", *Native Journal* 2/4 (May/June 1993), pp. 1 and 3.

**3** Harvey Arden and Steve Wall, *Wisdom Keepers: Meetings with Native American Spiritual Elders*, ed. White Deer of Autumn (Hillsboro, Oregon: Beyond Words, 1990).

**4** Ollie Ittinuar, Chairman, Inuit Cultural Institute, RCAP transcripts, Rankin Inlet, Northwest Territories, 19 November 1992.

**5** Metcalfe (cited in note 1).

**6** James Dumont, "Journey to Daylight-Land: Through Ojibwa Eyes", *Laurentian University Review* 8/2 (February 1976), pp. 31-32.

**7** Milton M.R. Freeman, "The Nature and Utility of Traditional Ecological

Knowledge", *Northern Perspectives* 20/1 (Summer 1992), pp. 9-10.

**8** Esther Jacko, "Traditional Ojibwa Storytelling", in *Voices: Being Native in Canada*, ed. Linda Jaine and Drew Hayden Taylor (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, Extension Division, 1992), p. 66.

**9** Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (Toronto: Random House, 1967), pp. 44-45. Lest some readers think this citation contains a typographical error (and a humorous one at that), note that McLuhan coined the phrase "The medium is the message" in his 1964 book, *Understanding Media*. Never one to overlook a good pun, McLuhan titled a 1967 recording *The Medium is the Massage* and used this title again for the work cited here.

**10** Elder Peter O'Chiese, speaking at the Eleventh Annual Traditional Peoples' Gathering, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, 18-20 February 1994.

**11** Pieter Jan Bakker, "'A Language of Our Own': The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis", PH.D. dissertation, Drukkerij Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1992, pp. 1-2.

**12** Leroy Little Bear, "What's Einstein Got to Do with It?", in *Continuing Poundmaker and Riel's Quest: Presentations Made at a Conference on Aboriginal Peoples and Justice*, comp. Richard Gosse, James Youngblood Henderson and Roger Carter (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 1994), p. 70.

**13** Rupert Ross, "Surfing the Flux: Exploring the Roots of the Aboriginal Healing Process" (unpublished draft, September 1994), p. 21.

**14** Rose Auger, "Native Spirituality, Healing and Languages", in *Wisdom and Vision: The Teaching of Our Elders, Report of the National First Nations Elders Language Gathering, Manitoulin Island, Ontario, 21-25 June 1993*, p. 43.

**15** Dene Kede — *Education: A Dene Perspective*, Dene Kede Curriculum Guide (Yellowknife: Northwest Territories Education Development Branch, 1993), p. xxvi.

**16** Beatrice Medicine, "My Elders Tell Me", in *Indian Education in Canada, Volume 2: The Challenge*, ed. Jean Barman, Yvonne Hébert and Don McCaskill (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), p. 151.

**17** Little Bear, "What's Einstein Got to Do With It?" (cited in note 12), p. 70.

**18** Metcalfe (cited in note 1).

**19** G. Copway (Kah-Ge-Ga-Gah-Bowh, Chief of the Ojibwa Nation), *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation*, facsimile edition (Toronto: Coles, 1972), p. 144. Originally published London, England: Charles Gilpin, 5 Bishopsgate Without, 1850.

**20** Fred Ahenakew, Cecil King and Catherine Littlejohn, "Indigenous Languages in the Delivery of Justice in Manitoba", a paper prepared for the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba, 9 March 1990, p. 25.

**21** Metcalfe (cited in note 1).

**22** For a more detailed discussion of existing initiatives and programs designed to make the justice system culturally more appropriate for Aboriginal people - including the role of Elders in the justice system - see the Commission's report *Bridging the Cultural Divide: A Report on Aboriginal People and Criminal Justice in Canada* (Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1996). The report also includes the Commission's recommendations regarding Canada's criminal justice system and Aboriginal people.

**23** Copway, *The Traditional History* (cited in note 19), p. 175. Here, Copway is relating oral history on the origins of traditional medicine and healing in Ojibwa society.

**24** Carl A. Hammerschlag, *The Theft of the Spirit: A Journey to Spiritual Healing with Native Americans* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

**25** Metcalfe (cited in note 1).

**26** Clem Chartier, "Métis Perspective on Self-Government", in *Continuing*



Poundmaker and Riel's Quest (cited in note 12), p. 84.

**27** The Commission examined the issue of suicide among Aboriginal people in a special report, *Choosing Life: Special Report on Suicide Among Aboriginal People* (Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1995).

**28** Copway, *The Traditional History* (cited in note 19), p. 95.

**29** Kanatiio (Allen Gabriel), brief submitted to RCAP (1995), p. 8.

**30** Douglas J. Nakashima, *Application of Native Knowledge in EIA: Inuit, Eiders and Hudson Bay Oil* (Montreal: Canadian Environmental Assessment Research Council, 1990), p. 5.

**31** Nakashima, *Application of Native Knowledge*, p. 5.

**32** Aleck Paul, quoted in Peter Nabakov, ed., *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492-1992* (New York: Viking, 1991), p. 87.

**33** Ojibwa Elder Eddie Benton-Banai, quoted in Arden and Wall, *Wisdom Keepers* (cited in note 3), p. 10.

**34** Mary Lou Fox, Director, Ojibwa Cultural Foundation, West Bay First Nation, "Proposed Programs/Activities", April 1994-March 1995, pp. 2-3; see also RCAP transcripts, Sudbury, Ontario, 31 May 1993.