

***Reanimating Storywork: Indigenous Elders' Reflections
on Leadership by Gerry Oleman***

Edited and introduced by Alannah Young-Leon

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Introduction

By Alannah Young-Leon

Although post-secondary institutions provide training for future leaders, few provide relevant models of Aboriginal leadership training and often do not have relevant resources by Indigenous authors. To address this gap we have, in this project, *Elders' Reflections: Reanimating Storywork*, compiled eight full text interviews on Indigenous leadership with local Elders, to be accessible to the wider community through the SFU Institutional Repository.

While the Elders have embraced the possibilities of wider access through technology, we affirm that they remain the rights of authorship and retain copyright of their stories. In this way we aim to reaffirm and restore Indigenous pedagogical forms and contribute Indigenous knowledge perpetuation from Indigenous perspectives, while honouring Indigenous intellectual property rights/protocols.

These interviews were originally conducted as part of my MA work entitled "Elders Teachings on Indigenous Leadership: Leadership is a gift." I identified nine themes important in Indigenous Leadership that emerged from the Elders' teachings: Aboriginal historical perspectives, positive cultural Indigenous Knowledge (IK), decolonizing and self-determined education, community service, holistic pedagogy, respect, responsibility, relationships and reciprocity. Guided by the teachings of the Elders, I concluded that strong Indigenous leadership is developed by empowering people to reclaim cultural values through the investigation of local living genealogies, oral histories and reflexive praxis, within an environment that supports self-determined changes. It was clear in the Elders' stories that leadership is a gift and a responsibility: we must step forward and demonstrate community responsibilities.

These nine themes delivered within an anti-racism education framework contribute to the understanding about Indigenous leadership and broaden the existing views of leadership and inform Aboriginal programs, pedagogy and retention at post-secondary.

While small word bundles were extracted and published in my MA study of Indigenous leadership, this is the first place where the extended interviews of the eight Indigenous Elders are available. This project reflects an Indigenous storywork process and supports a political self-determined sovereignty initiative that aims to reflect the teachings of the Ancestors in ways that they would recognize.

Location/Place of the Researcher

My name is Alannah Young-Leon. My background is that of a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Treaty #5 and former member of Peguis Anishnabe, Treaty #1, in Manitoba. I am a visitor to British Columbia's unceded traditional territories where I share my life with my Coast Salish partner from Chehalis BC. My perspectives and positions are outlined next.

I acknowledge the leadership of the sacred directions, the earth, air, water and fire and the plant and animal relatives. I come from the Muskeg Ininiwak peoples and acknowledge our place in Creation through my clan systems and the teachings of Treaty inherent in Indigenous wisdom traditions. We acknowledge these relations as extended families and the life-long responsibilities associated with these relations. Our engagement with research confirms that the Ancestral Teachings continue to provide education leadership excellence that benefit of all peoples.

I acknowledge many circumstances that have brought me to this work: while I understand the history and ongoing dispossession of Indigenous lands and access to resources in this place, I also acknowledge that I am a responsible citizen of sovereign nations governed under treaty agreements; I consider my work to address solutions that can repair this on-going violence rooted in the history of dispossession, enforced and founded on racism and violence.

The Indigenous Teachings are gifts and this knowledge demands that leadership aspirants (everyone is a leader) prepare themselves to be ready because they contain lifelong responsibilities. The Elders' life histories and stories tell a narrative that engages the political, the educational and the spiritual dimensions and inspire and animate our own life long leadership explorations.

I understand the serious commitment to reciprocal relationship building that is required for working with and protecting Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and thus I approached the SFU First Nations Study Program's Deanna Reder, the Indigenous Student Centre's Jenna LaFrance and Chelsea Mackay, and the Institutional Repository's Don Taylor. We acknowledged and followed the local Indigenous protocols and involved the Elders in a series of consultations to reflect an appropriate respectful, reciprocal relationship building process, while discussing how to protect the Indigenous Knowledge holders' responsibilities to the collective knowledge characteristic of IK and thus the Elders specify that they remain the holders of the information and stories they share herein.

In briefly referencing my own stories here I intend to convey the braiding together several Elders' life histories, to contribute to Indigenous narratives that engages the political, the educational and the spiritual dimensions of Indigeneity. Indigeneity that invokes a decolonized sense of being in the world, one that sustains other ways of being in a place and space that operates beyond dispirited and displaced patriarchal notions of

nationhood (Grande 2004, 174) and an adamant refusal to dissociate culture, identity and power from the land (Lyons 200, 457).

Context

The Elders were interviewed at the University of British Columbia, as part of the development of the Longhouse Leadership Program (LLP) at the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) –a non-credit student support service. In order to further explore aspects of Indigeneity, I interviewed nine Elders who have worked with the FNHL. The MA was entitled “Elders’ Teachings on Indigenous Leadership: Leadership is a Gift”. We discussed what the role of culture is in leadership development and how cultural aspects and storywork processes were factors in their own leadership development.

Reanimating Archibald’s storywork principles provided a relevant research framework for the work the Elders and we create together. Storywork and storytelling is central to Aboriginal education and incorporating anti-racist education with culturally relevant pedagogy will transform leadership education, theory and practice. Lifelong learning that reflects the teachings of extended family relationship responsibilities are still relevant today and are conveyed herein.

I applied Sto:lo scholar, Jo-ann Archibald’s storywork principles to help guide the research journey. This project is part of the post research engagement relationship responsibilities. Storywork as described by Archibald (2008) brings together Indigenous ways of knowing and leading and teaches how to remain connected to the land and to each other.

Author Biography

Gerry Oleman, Saa Hiil Thut is from the Stl'at'imx nation, he is a practicing culturalist, a consultant and grandfather. He works with many peoples for the health of Aboriginal peoples such as the UBC Institute for Aboriginal Health and UBC Aboriginal Medicine Faculty initiatives. He was a chief band counsellor for Chilaith, Seton Lake and worked for the Indian Residential School Survivor Society (IRSSS). He was an Elder in residence at British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) and continues to run its sweatlodges. He has worked in the field of human services with a traditional focus since 1976. He has worked as an addictions counsellor with the National Alcohol and Drug Awareness Program, with community programs and with treatment centres, and was also a trainer for addictions counsellors. From 1993 until 1997, he worked as a First Nations Spiritual and Cultural Advisor with British Columbia Institute of Technology. Since 1997, he has worked as a Tribal Support Worker for the Indian Residential School Survivors Society, whose mandate is to bring help, hope and healing to residential school survivors and their families. He is also a private consultant.

Gerry Oleman is **not** a XwayXway dancer as indicated in my (Alannah Young-Leon) Master's thesis document because I lacked the cultural nuances to differentiate the cultural titles at that time. I witnessed his initiation as a longhouse Bighouse dancer yet I indicated incorrectly for Gerry Oleman's biography in the MA thesis Indigenous Elders Teachings on Leadership: Leadership is a gift (2006) this inaccuracy and for those working within a similar context I strongly recommend going over the transcript in the follow up meetings, in order to understand the cultural references and nuances.

Reanimating Storywork:

Indigenous Elders' Reflections on Leadership by Gerry Oleman

Alannah Young (AY): *How would you describe Indigenous leadership?*

Gerry Oleman (GO): Well today I would describe Indigenous leadership as when an individual steps forward to go somewhere or do something that people are afraid to do or don't have the skills. To do that, the individual through their experiences with the Indigenous peoples, would step forward and do that work, that's how I would describe Indigenous Leadership.

AY: *Would you like to introduce yourself?*

GO: Okay, my name is Gerry Oleman and I am from a small community called the Seton Lake Indian Band, but its real name is *Chilath*, which means "by the lake". I can remember growing up in my community knowing that there were things happening that I wasn't allowed to go to as a child. There were meetings and gatherings and things happening in the community and I was always curious about it. I knew that there was a chief in the community and in those days it seemed the people looked up to chiefs. It didn't seem too structured from what I can remember looking back. We would have meetings and as I grew up I went to residential schools and after I left there I got into a dubious lifestyle. I got involved in alcohol and drugs and had no interest in working with people and after I became a parent and being in relationship I started to look at community differently and I wanted to be involved.

I remember I was in my twenties, when I was elected on to community council. So it was my first encounter to leadership. I didn't know what I was doing. I can remember thinking -oh I am going to learn now and of course I was thinking traditional teachings. Organization and leadership and planning and that was my fantasy. At first and as I got involved I quickly learned that what they were doing was the very start of the implementation of the *Indian Act*. Not the implementation but the operation of, that it was coming now to the community because before that it was the Indian agent that would come in and tell them when to build houses what to do and they seemed to have a lot of power.

So all of sudden now the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) was starting to talk about core funding and the administration of dollars and then I seen that that was what the chief and council were doing. They actually had a filing cabinet for chiefs and that's where they had their meetings but it wasn't about the community per se, it was dollars for the community. But it was about how to deal with this administrating. And I remember I was disappointed at the time because that's all it was, administrating. It wasn't talking about the community and the needs and what was going on. So I think

back on myself, where did these thoughts come from? Why I am thinking that this is wrong, that this isn't real leadership? There was alcohol in the mix too, the chief and council were involved in that as most people on the reserve were at that time. This is the 70's so we hadn't a band manager or any staff which was going to start soon after that because of the devolution process, the process where Indian Affairs says okay now you're going administer some of these funds. So I got involved in the council many years ago and eventually I became the chief so I became the leader in the community. I remember I would talk to people about leadership. I'd ask "You know what a leader is, what are the rules and responsibilities of leadership?" I started to read books on leadership, Sun-tzu's *Art of War*, and all of a sudden I got a hold of all these books and I started to get an understanding of people and groups of people. I read the rise and fall of the third Reich. I already had some interest in people and the movement of people, because I grew up feeling that we were ripped off.

My brother and I remember, my uncles told us he showed us the mountains and he told us you take of them, it's yours. You know over that mountain and the other side of the mountain, that river that now has become a lake, that's yours too. So we were politicized that way by people who weren't identified as leaders, like the chief and council. People had it in their mind that there was something wrong happened here and that they were taken for a ride by the government. We were given reserves and those early guys would say it was not just the reserve- its all these mountains for a as far as you can see. You know that's were we hunt and gather and our winter homes were over there, they were showing us places. There's a burn over there for harvesting berries, controlled burns and you know the whole forest. So we had that; my brother and I had those words from our uncles. So we listen to that kind of talk and then I would go to the meeting there we were dealing with bureaucrats and Indian agents.

When I became the leader and we started to do something around social planning, economics, I started to be effective in running the meetings. At the time when I got to be chief, already the community had evolved where they were doing Roberts rule of order rather than consensus, so people learned how to manipulate communities and making motions and calling questions and you know. I was seeing this in other communities as well as my own.

In our Nation we have eleven communities, so I got to talk to other chiefs and I remember when I was a council member I started talking to other peers who were at that time being critical of the older chiefs. You know they were saying we need a change. We could see alcoholism was in the mix and stuff but those chiefs were the one who were saying this is ours and they got infected with the addiction disease. But they are the ones that are the strongest saying BC is Indian lands.

The younger ones up after all became administrators. Like myself, I was administrating DIA budget but at the same time I had the wish to do something for the community. By the time I became the chief I had sobered up. I became free from alcohol and drugs

that's why I started looking to reading books, started reading up on leadership, people and management books. I got involved in addictions counselling and there is where I got introduced to some of the First Nations philosophy.

We were talking about the medicine wheel, culture is treatment, medicine wheel and community development. I started working in addictions treatment in 1976 our program was called "Spirit mountain revival" which means we wanted to revive the culture and we felt that culture was going to be effective treatment. At that time there was no AA programs on reserve or addictions programs for and by First Nations in 1976. So we started to promote culture as healing in 1976, we were all into it we were saying this. I feel that is where I started getting my leadership skills, before I became the chief I was working in addictions because we learned, people were saying addictions was a family or community problem. From Neechi Institute they have excellent training and community development. They said if we do this one by one, it is going to take a long time to achieve success. So we need to look at the family and the whole community.

In 1976 we were doing this and learned how to be good facilitator. Facilitating groups was part of the training. It was a good training ground for leadership because culture was involved and we started to smudges and sweats and different ceremonies and look at the ceremonies our people had. It was an exciting time there was hope amongst all these big parties, drinking and a lot of violent deaths and things and all of a sudden there was this group. I started carrying a hand drum and singing songs and decided to start to look for people who liked people and find them and do ceremony and sing. There was a core group of us in our area and we started doing this.

We started to promote sobriety in our band offices and leadership. I remember all the songs and I remember, I would go to band meetings and I would make a motion that there be no more beer gardens at our sporting events, like tournaments different events. For the longest time it seemed like nobody would second me. So my motion would never even get on the floor, so that we could even discuss it. But I would keep going back and making the same motion until somebody second it, and eventually we got it passed. When I was the chief, there was no more beer gardens at our sporting events because I seen it as reflected a lot of problems in our communities. When I look back at it now I seen it as a problem then but I know that there was a much more serious problem with the people than drinking. There was things that had happened to them in residential schools and in our own community.

Because there were guys that came back from residential schools that were abused and became abusers. They all sort of knew it but what we could see was the drunkenness. People passed out by the road and on the trains, going to jail and things. We could all see that the alcohol was a problem. I started to promote treatment centres and I became part of the movement where we went to Round Lake Treatment Centre down the road. Promoting programs for sobriety. We got involved in the whole community right from leadership to staff to treatment. It was the foundation of where part of my

leadership came from. Because you can see there is a mix for compassion for the people and building on culture and providing communication skills and group facilitation. Which is key for leadership.

I feel is to have compassion first off is to be willing to become part of this because it had become so negative. You know people had lost their cultural grounding by then. Gossipers my grandmother would say, *mauum* which means gossip, and it's a dirty word. Don't gossip about people, my grandmother would say. All of a sudden there's people talking about people and spreading stories about each other. Part of it was because of alcoholism and people got mean it seems to me. My grandmother used to tell me that there was never locks on our doors in our community and everybody would help each other. So I had this connection to the old way of life through my grandmother and what we were seeing around us it wasn't that. It was actually depressing, what we were seeing because we knew there was sexual abuse and violence and children being abandoned, and it was chaos. I can remember going to funerals and the brothers had just lost their dad but there was some of the brothers with their friends sitting in the church waiting for the service to start with a gallon of wine under their arm. I remember seeing that and shaking my head saying what is this? At the same time at our work projects, I would see guys there with signs, during their coffee breaks. So I think we were hitting our bottom then.

When I got into the leadership I fired a whole crew for drinking. They either come to work half cut or they didn't show up at all. I remember I walked around and I fired the whole crew and hired a new crew. I remember when I look back now I sort of chuckle because I would hire back ones that I just fired because I ran out of people to hire. I used up the labour force you know on the couple of projects we had going. After I seen a change, all of a sudden now they wanted to hang on to their jobs and they actually became good hard workers.

I remember telling one guy, you know what is going to happen you come to work like that? Cut off your hand or hurt somebody, that's what I am worried about, you know. You are angry at me because I get mad at you guys for drinking. I can remember I rowed them out at coffee time and at coffee time we didn't stop working and went around over by him and he was dripping sweat he was just working so hard. But never had a problem with him after that. He became committed worker.

AY: *Conveying no harm bottom line and show interest in their well being*

GO: Yes, because I would see the impact of alcoholism on children in my career as an addictions counsellor before I became a chief. I worked with teenagers and kids. I actually seen the change in their eyes after they were with me and I would take them home and their mom and dad would be drunk. Its just like their spirits would collapse for just an instant in their body language and their eyes I could see the hurt and I would feel bad about it.

So as part of my program I would take them out on hikes pack a lunch and hot chocolate and we would go up and look at deer herds in the wintertime stuff like that. I would take them home and I witnessed the pain they were feeling from their parents drinking. So that was part of it and the compassion for them and their children's safety, for how the children were feeling. And that's where my compassion was, because compassion is to be a willing participant with another person whether they are suffering or enjoying themselves.

AY: *So by sharing our stories with the next generation and standing up when no one else will is part of leadership, caring for others, especially the young people, the children of the ones who have social problems.*

GO: I learned to stay focused in the moment when I am with the person with the social problem. If I said we are going to get this job on time, on budget and nobody gets hurt. I would talk like that. I made it a policy. After that anybody who works for us is sober. And people argued they would say I am going to take you to court Gerry. I would say go ahead, I am ready. Because they felt and were probably right with human rights and everything. But I made up my mind and I am not going to move on this if there's alcohol. So I was very passionate about sobriety. Sobriety is part of the key to success. After working in addictions for ten years in my community and becoming a chief and different things one day I realised even though a person sobers up it doesn't make them a willing participant in whatever I am going to do.

My discovery of that at the time was sort of like a blow to me because guys would be doing what I thought would be silly or stupid, you know. Doing something even though they were sober and worried their family. And then I said oh, now I am going to work with the real person because the alcohol is not there anymore. The real person is here and they still have got to connect with their problems and their issues and their disagreement with me, if they have any.

At that time I didn't realise the impact of early childhood development. If there's no grounding, positive grounding, with the culture or a way of life in early childhood then we are dealing with deficits or parts of a damaged person that really became obvious to me. All this time I am learning, I am reading. I probably read, I don't know how many books a month. I read, I am an avid reader for most my adult life.

Plus attend a lot of ceremonies. I used to sweat three times a week. Yeah I remember one time I was at a sweatlodge and I had some young guys involved with me and I said geez I would just love to do this every day. This is a young guy, said, Gerry maybe when you're an Elder you'll get to sweat every day, because I had other responsibilities that I had to do. But I just fell in love with the sweatlodge ceremonies and I learned a lot from meditation and introspection to look at what's going on with me and the community. I

started thinking in terms of me and my family and the community because that was my grounding of being an effective leader.

I started thinking about me in the sense of my mind and my body and spirit and everyone would say emotions and that's what I would think about when it comes to me. And my family, then I could see that at that time I really hungered for healthy family structures. But I know that it wasn't there, we were fragmented beyond belief at that time. I can attribute that to the residential school experience.

How I would describe Indigenous culture today, is that we have gotten away from family, you know. Where every individual member is educated on their family tree. Like my grandmother is an example of someone living, that is grounded in Indigenous culture because she knew all of her relatives. She knew her family tree. I can remember seeing my granny, she knew all her relatives from Mount Currie which is two communities away from us. They barely see each other but when she would see them there would be laughing and crying and hugging each other and talking in their language, you know. I can remember seeing that because you know it was foreign to me then because I had already been to residential school and to see that and at the time I felt that I didn't have a real feeling about family. I didn't have what my grandmother had.

To say cousin you know and really *snookwa*, you know that's what you would say in our language, you know you are my relative. And to be actually hugging them and crying and so happy to see each other. It was foreign to me that feeling but I could see what it was to my grandmother because her eyes came alive. So she knew family trees and I started to see family relatives living with relatives you know as a chief and an addictions worker in the community.

My grand auntie she would call me upset and angry and shocked, she said, I want you guys to go talk to . . . She mentioned the names, they are living together and it's wrong because they are cousins, they are relatives and close too, she said. So I remember going up to this house with the social worker and talking to the couple and said auntie sent us to talk to you and they had children eventually but my grand auntie was just so shocked by it. I heard other aunties and my grannies talk – don't you ever go with your relatives – but without telling me why. But all of a sudden now, today I see in Indigenous culture the loss of ground or attachment to their way of life. It's called their original way of life.

Original way of life, where there's knowledge of who your family is because they are living in a community rather than in family clans. There's a change now where there is a community leader rather than clan leaders. So when I see Indigenous culture today that's what I see where the *Indian Act* says you have a counsellor for every so many people and you elect one chief. I remember, I was talking to one of my Elders in my community and I said I don't know why we have so much problems. We had a hard time working together, getting anything done; the person said, well the problem is that we

have one chief, he said. In this valley there used to be five chiefs, so it means to me there was five clans. And she said every clan or chief would listen or they would give guidance to their chief, so all of a sudden now we have one chief. There are five major groups, so four of the groups aren't going to listen to that chief or they are going to complain to the chief. They are going to say favouritism towards his clan which is traditional. It's traditional to look after your family. But in the *Indian Act* style or white style, it's nepotism and you don't do that so there's a clash of cultures.

We have never ever gotten over that. We haven't recovered from that or learned how to deal with it. Because I have been to reserves right across Canada right from Vancouver Island to Labrador, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and I have listened. I have been in homes and communities; it's like a cookie cutter, you know, all the complaints and frustrations are the same. The anger is the same; they complain about leadership and mismanagement, favouritism. They are all identical and that's when I really started to see the impacts of the state imposed *Indian Act* in communities because you are expecting one leader, one person to take care of all those clans, how many ever are in that community. Right away we are asking for trouble when we do that.

Now when I see people they hired their brother, I say it's a cultural or traditional person, because you look after their family. Someone else will come in and say that's nepotism, you can't do that. So even though the brother is the best person for the job a lot of times they don't get the job. But at the same time, I see it where the family is so huge, they put people there that are incompetent. But because they are looking after their family they put their family or their friends and that's being traditional.

Indigenous culture today is not one description. We have lost some ground in family area because of the state imposed policies like the Indian Act and the residential school system where children were separated from their families and many crimes were committed against them. We have a culture today, because culture is a way of life and it's an *Indian Act* culture where there's a mix of Traditionalists in there and some are totally *Indian Act*.

AY: *Traditionalists, how would you define them?*

GO: Okay, a Traditionalist is someone that has teachings on how to behave as a First Nations person, what's right and what's wrong. How to treat food, knows some language and has an interest in it. Has an idea of family, has a relationship with the land and its inhabitants, the fish, birds and plants. Traditionalists start to get less and less as time goes on. But I believe there's a revival going on now. There are some missing elements because of the history of dispossession, but when I look at tradition now I feel that they were indeed looking after the mind, the body, and the spirit, and the person's healthy emotions would emit from them.

Emotions mean feelings right now, in this second and we had healthy sound mind, body and spirit. I can see my granny with her relatives and her emotions weren't hidden. Crying and hugging and saying I love you and stuff like that, hugging and talking and using the language that was healthy. I was told that when we became disconnected from the Earth we become unhealthy. When we are connected to the Earth, we become healthy.

The Earth is seen as the Mother of course, the constant provider, constant one that you can take comfort from. You know all those analogies or comparisons of the Earth and that's why we have the birth rights and the baby's bonds – what you do with the umbilical cord and the after birth – they were ensuring that the baby was connected to the Earth. With the *tumuth*, the red ochre, that was how they baptize the baby. They rub the ochre on them and that's how they connect the baby to the Earth, where they are at. Because the Earth represents love, unending cycles of love from the Earth. When you are connected to that, you take of it.

See then that when I talk about the power of love that they have for all systems of existence, whether it be rock, water, plant life, or animals, there is a respect for that and a love for it. I remember my granny's love for salmon. I would bring her salmon and her eyes would light up and she was just happy as can be, you know, total appreciation. I believe because she was connected to the Earth because she was raised traditionally, you know in her culture.

When I talk about it today, it's a crazy new way of life, that the way I describe it because it is crazy at times. Craziness that happens when we are not connected to the earth anymore. You know I was told when you get disconnected to the Earth, you go crazy. Now that's when I was told you don't have the power of love anymore.

You are in love with power, that is how we get when we are disconnected with the Earth. And I see that today, people fall in love with power, leaders in the community or institution, they are not connected to the Earth, they hurt people rather than help people. Yeah, because the teachings from their culture are that it's far better to help someone than to hurt them. There is much more benefits from helping someone than by hurting them.

AY: *What I understand is that the expressions of connection to the Earth, is in the ceremonies. Indigenous leadership programs at universities or in urban contexts where there are so many different Nations represented, what can be done for those folks?*

GO: Well my view on any organization is there needs to be an initiation process. What I would like to add before I talk about that is that in the communities there were a lot of leaders at one time. There were people that, say for instance, looked after the dead. That was their job because there never used to be funeral homes and things like that, so you would go hire that family to come and take care of your uncle when he died.

So they were leaders, because remember I was saying that a leader does something that other people are not going to want to do. So there are leaders looking after dead bodies. There are leaders in canoe making, you know if you wanted the best canoe you would know where to go. Then there are leaders in ceremonies, you know that one family knows all the medicine, they know how to look after your spirit. They go to *sna:m* they got someone who can connect to the power that you can't see, so there was specialists in every area. So those were the leaders, people who trained and rather than having one person do it all, that makes sense. Now you got someone giving the impression that now you are responsible for us, take care of us, which is a very co-dependant way of thinking. Now affecting Indigenous culture, are the government and the chief and religion. Religion, so you're the only one, stuff like that. You are the only one that can save me, you're the only one that can make me happy. The manipulation of other people to make you happy, is what co-dependence is.

AY: *External validation rather than acknowledgement of the gift; and sounds like the gift might run in families, part of it, the way that you described it, in a context.*

GO: Yes, parts of it. You know like everybody knew that person. If you wanted the stuff that's where you go and they will assist you. It's not giving it all to them. They will just give you proper guidance. You know, if you are confused or something. So when we were talking about what is needed today. Like for instance at the Longhouse or in any organization there needs to be an initiation process to initiate someone into a position, because we are faced with different qualifications and guidelines about what is effective. I see that as a problem today in our communities, because I see people get in that are not believable in the sense that they have skills for major society but not for First Nations communities. I see that as an indicator of the assimilation process still at work here.

AY: *Cultures are always changing and what makes this a different situation?*

GO: Okay I agree with you that cultures are changing and I will state it in a different way. Cultures grow, there is a growth pattern and sometimes they become stagnant and they don't grow at all and all of a sudden they will grow again. They will get new tools and they will go with that. But to have an Indigenous culture means that the principles don't change to me.

Principles of family, you know, principles of how you treat the Earth, those principles don't change, you know, how to conduct yourself in public. You don't ever bring shame to your family, you know all this resonates and that can include many ways of doing it. They are going to say *ha'chute*, you don't put yourself above people; you are shaming us when you do that. There is a really big taboo about showing off and thinking you are better than other peoples. There is lessons about being good and what you do; it's

about getting that attitude. I am better than you, it was real taboo. It was always about helping people not hurting people.

When the culture becomes stagnant, when you look at the indicators about what is important, you know like generosity. That means you don't hoard when someone comes and asks you for help. You help them; if you got lots you give away. Not indiscriminately. You return something to someone that helped you before or someone in real need. Like a widow or something. That's generosity. If people don't show generosity, especially in leadership, they may not be showing strength, compassion, and love. I see that in organizations. Like say now in our organization there is an executive director and they don't practise the culture, which means to feed the people once and a while because they are in a different status. They are opened up to receiving more because of their positions because they have been elevated. But in traditional Indigenous sense, every once and while they share that because they believe that will come back again. So if they don't do that they are not fostering that feeling, because someone has to foster that feeling so everyone else will do it. Follow the leader.

You feed five clans, you can, it's been done but it loses some of its feeling. It can almost feel like a burden after unless people help you. But if you are a clan and you feed your whole clan and a clan can be anywhere from fifty to three or four hundred in a Nation, you feed them and you get people to talk to them and get people to witness what's going on and you do all of that and all of a sudden that feeling grows. There is a feeling of pride involved because we have done this or we are doing this and all of sudden you do it for another clan. Or do a shame feast or a marriage. A shame feast is where someone has done something wrong and they are going to make up for it. Make it right and say I hurt your clan and I am going to fix it. Otherwise it's going to keep going and that's what's going on today because we don't always do that.

See so an initiation for now, when we talk about today, what does initiation mean? Does it mean you are bringing someone into something that they haven't done before? Does that mean there is training involved now? And does the training involve the mind, the body and the spirit as all training does? If you don't have that training your emotions are going to go crazy for awhile. You know, you let anger get away and you let greed come in, self-pity and different things.

AY: *So the emotions are the indicators of what's going on for the person.*

GO: Yes, right now, like for myself as a person for instance, I am a reflection of my home. I am a reflection of my Nation. You know I reflect those things. It's true because there are times when I look up to my Nation and there are times when I am ashamed. I feel shame because my Nation is not a Nation. You know there are eleven communities that speak the same language and we don't work together and I reflect that sometimes when I go into my own communities. I will be cynical or have that give up kind of feeling.

Or it's not going to happen, kind of thing, I get like that sometimes. We reflect our relationships through our eyes and through our body language and through our actions.

So there's a process when you get initiated. There is a process before the initiation and at the initiation. Nowadays I can see how it's difficult because we don't have a large amount of people thinking and believing with all of their hearts and all of their might. They believe that this is the proper way to do it, and this is the way to do it. So that the person now initiated knows now they cannot bring shame to that group initiated them. We don't have a leadership initiation process where all of a sudden someone is telling you, you know what, you never bring shame to this name. In my area we call chiefs *Kokbe*. You never bring shame to the term *Kokbe*. Be clear on what that means. Alcoholic, spouse beater, thief, liar, all of those negatives, you don't do that. Don't become greedy because you are going to infect the rest of the people. It's the same in the house, in the home.

AY: *For the Longhouse Leadership Program, how could we negotiate an initiation process that would be culturally inclusive for the context?*

GO: I feel that first anything that is good takes time to develop, to build. To do that, you already have program principles of respect, relationship, reverence, and responsibility, you know. How to make words come alive is what the problem is. That's why today I wish to make things as simple as possible. Say okay now this is how we are going to act because it's all about our actions. And this is how we are not to act.

I keep going back to that one phrase *Ha'chute*: you don't put yourself above people. That teaching because you are removing yourself from the circle when you do that. That alone when you initiate someone into something this is what it is. I read some of the Confederacy the Great Binding Law of Peace, oh it's a beautiful document.

AY: *The Haundenaushee's The Great Law of Peace.*

GO: It talks about Indigenous culture, in the sense of leadership. It's so clear and I say, yes, this is it. For instance when I say you make words come alive in that system, you are given three chances, they warn you three times and if you don't change after three times they say we are going to bury you, take away your antlers. The antlers, they show that you are leader; everybody knows you are a leader because you have these antlers. Some people its headdresses, so you take that away and never again are you going to be a leader or anybody from your family.

Because we don't know your mind. We can't trust your mind. So it's serious business, that's where we lose out today. It's day after day, it's serious stuff, leadership. We are affecting the Earth, we are affecting each other, it is so serious. Like when you know what you are being initiated and you really take that to your core, what this means, then you take it seriously. When you figure out how to do that, that's a life change and

affects how you are in relationships – as a parent, spouse, co-worker or ceremonial person.

AY: *So do you get a sense of when you are ready for initiation?*

GO: When you are worthy. See that's where we fall or fail today is we don't have moral or compassionate guidelines for the people. Now you get a degree and often in our communities those people are put into leadership positions. There's no more initiation process you know, it's elections, like a popularity vote. Whereas if you initiate someone into a traditional system you become where you are being appointed because of your values and skills. People see you as a leader in whatever it is you are going to do and appreciate you and are going to keep you there.

AY: *What are your thoughts on both traditional and contemporary cultures as being mutually inclusive?*

GO: I feel that we can't have both. There is a teaching I heard back east that when you come into my canoe you come in bare naked. If I go into your canoe I'm going to go in bare naked. That means you are not bringing in anything from my culture to your culture. Because if you start to mix it the canoe is going to start to tip over. Something is going to go wrong and I really see the sense of that. That's why at times it has been a struggle for me. That's probably why I am not an elected leader today because I can see people wanting to bring in parts of our culture saying that's okay. I say no and people would see me as someone, Gerry you are living like someone three hundred years ago you want to live in an underground house, and that wasn't my point. But it's the thought processes that I was interested in.

I am going to drive a car and wear clothes I am not going to wear buckskin although I will sometimes and be proud to do it and I am going to use electricity. I am going to use all that stuff that's just a small part of culture. Part of the culture I am talking about is the spirit of the culture or the way of life and the principles the philosophy of our cultures. I look at mainstream culture I see it as being very unhealthy. There's no family it seemed like to me, indiscriminate acts against the Earth. People just don't seem to care about culture, it seems to me. So why take something in that's unhealthy, because I see our principles as being healthy. In presentations, I tell people we never had dangers of extinctions or levels of abuse as we see today against ourselves and each other, it's epidemic now.

AY: *So no harm.*

GO: Yes it is better to help than to hurt people. You get more benefits from that and that's cultural ways. If you see people hoarding they are not healthy, things are not going to get better, they are going to get worse. You see, so the main principles about the way our people thought how we need to maintain it.

I listened to this one man talk about indicators. He had a passion for indicators. You know my big concern is when we send people to universities and colleges is when they come home are they going to be able to sit up all night in ceremonies? Are they going to give a feast, save for years and give it away? Are they still going to have those core beliefs? If not, we are losing them and we have a serious problem. He says losing our identities, so that's what I see.

AY: *So indicators of cultural*

GO: Indicators of cultural loss, it is like it's not real. Like we have the trappings of First Nations programming but they are still following mainstream. It's the mainstream that is greedy to me.

AY: *So that's reflected in the state of many communities and when I think of why are people coming to the city.*

GO: Yeah I hear people say, I want to get away from this reserve and there's people who are here who say, I want to get out of the city. And can we be happy where we are and in terms of individuals we can, I can exist anywhere and still have peace and contentment.

AY: *Because we are not outlawed like in the 1970's when culture was outlawed.*

GO: Yeah when potlatch was outlawed there were heavy racist principles happening on our BC peoples. When I started to hear these old guys talking about not being able to talk, about not being able to ride above deck in a ferry or being arrested for being in possession of a bottle of beer, not being able to vote and do this and that, I can see the impact of all of that and that's why I say to myself, why do you want to bring this into our culture, this beautiful culture that we have? Why do you want to say we want to live half and half? Is it because of the way we think? Yes, the clothing part I accept that, the material things I accept. Luckily I reject the toxic, I go to ceremony now and there's styrofoam cups and that's part of bringing that stuff into our culture that's plastic.

I can remember at home people would bring all their cutlery and wash it after themselves. It's like we have become morally lazy, taking the softer easier way at the expense of growth of the children, of the future, and the Earth. That's why I strongly reject taking the thinking part of that culture into our culture, the toxic attitude about the Earth and about each other.

I really enjoyed the talk about leadership because I feel that's where there needs a lot of development. There's a lot of people suffering unnecessarily. Suffering in life is a given; we are going to lose people through death, accidents sometimes different things, we are going to be hungry. But unnecessary suffering, where there's cruelty toward each

other and people are dying and they don't have to die and that kind of stuff. We need leadership, we need inspiration, we need confidence, because if I trust your mind I am going to follow you. Because I know you are not going to trick me. I know that you are going to go right to the end with me. That's when there is leadership. I feel that it is sorely lacking today and so this is a valuable project. I am very interested in it and would like to see the results of it.

In order to work towards change I had to look at myself and heal myself so some cultural events that helped me were the initiation ceremony to the smoke house here (Musqueam) and my first vision quest had profound effects on me. I had to face myself, my thinking . . . I had to become responsible for my thinking and my choices. I owned my life. I took ownership of my life. That realization came to me on deeper levels of my awareness. I wanted to heal myself so I asked a person who knew how to take people out to fast on the mountain so he took me there and I was glad they took my clothes away because I may have left the fasting area as soon as I had to confront my thinking because I was by myself with my mind. I had to start taking responsibility for my thoughts and their effects on my being so I had to confront myself, my thinking. The people came to get me and I was changed I really understood at a deeper level what they mean about balancing the mind, body spirit . . . I learned how to discipline myself, and I began to develop my own standards, from within. Another thing I did as training was to look after a stick for a week. I had to take care of it and take it wherever I went, if I forgot it somewhere I had to go back and get it. I wanted to heal; I followed the direction of my teacher, those who know how to do ceremonies. The stick was the symbol for life and I learned how to take care of it. It was a way to develop or train my self-discipline.

I remember this story about a boy who was looking for the meaning of life. He asked this old man and the man took him to the river and dunked him in. When the boy came up for air he was smug and acting tough. So the man dunked him in again for a longer time, and the boy started fighting and flailing the underwater. When he came up for air the man asked him, what did you learn? The boy called the man crazy, so the man dunked him again. When he came up for air the boy said he was afraid. So the man dunked him again and when the boy came up, the final time he said, I want to live. So I learned from this story about how to respect life and the river represents the river of life.

Cultural symbols are important because they assist in positive identity formation and provide protection from racism. I am ready to defend my culture because I have some awareness and experiences that tell me that my culture is positive. Culture and symbols can help others to understand racism in Canadian history.

Positive culture in the curriculum and the learning environment will help students be successful. All people need to be educated and involved with overcoming racism so that all the people will be successful and live a good life. Colonization and Canadian history

are examples of racism so we can start by discussing the effects of racism and provide teachings on how to appropriately read the cultural symbols.

Like the teaching about the sweetgrass braid. That the braid is stronger when braided than the individuals strands on their own. The symbol is the braid and the medicine is the sweetgrass spirit of kindness that offers its physicality to help the people. It took me a long time to really understand that teaching. I heard it over and over again. Each time I understood it a little more. Stories about the trickster transformer and coyote are some of the other teaching stories that teach about making mistakes. I remember, and the story about the old basket lady who would collect the children after dark. She taught us to be careful when the night was out because she would fatten you up with food and then eat you. Kind of like colonialism.

I have seen the value of appointed leadership because that means that they are trained now because once you receive an appointment usually you deserve it. You have a right to be that leader because it's appointed. When I think of the election process that's happening now in our communities it is an election the people get in and a lot of people feel they don't deserve that. It's the best of the worst, it's got that kind of a feel to it. I think it is the same too as Canadian politics, there seems to be negative feeling and they vote for the best of the worst. I think it's a feeling about the whole system I know we are a carbon copy of the general system.

So when I thought about the leadership at the House of Learning (FNHL) I started to think of the value of tradition, of teaching cultural traditions; that they are designed to promote harmony and wellness in households and in our communities. With the language and with the learning and I started to see the value of that as whole education, as an insurance policy for the future.

As contributors for the children and the grandchildren and that there is something going to be there for them even after we are long gone. That was ingrained in the leadership. I see that missing today. You know the membership is not thinking about future generations, seven generations down the road. They tend to look at today and make decisions around today instead of about the future generations. And the lack of training, so that is what I have been thinking about since we last met. The questions you went through the last time, the discussion got me to that place, the importance of training individuals to be leaders. Specific training for individuals and that is what is missing.

I refer to a return to a formal leadership where there is an appointment of a leader. So what I am talking about is a turn around from where we are today. You know leadership in the sense that there is a public appointment and they go through the process, you know, like when they hire for the House of Learning or wherever. That is a public event. I think that the recognition comes first. I am not talking about the honouring or recognition of ones skills, that kind of recognition. One's skills and one's mindset,

people know you got a good mind and they trust you, which means that they are going to follow. If they don't then that means they are going to be critical and sit back and do everything to subvert you or to just make trouble.

At first I started thinking okay, so how do we train leaders? And I was refining all the things that I referred to last time and all that I read and that influenced me was that the clan mothers would choose the leaders. And the clan mothers were also appointed. You know, because they had to have a trust worthy mind too. That they are not going to say you know I want my son to be chosen but that everybody knew that their mind was for their people and for the land. Because that was one of the laws was to have a good mind. And so when they would see someone with a good mind they would start to train them to be a leader. You know because when you don't have a good mind that means they don't know how you think or how you are going to react, what you are going to do, conflict are you going to deal with it properly or are you going to look for the softer easier way out of the situation.

I listen to some of the members of the Iroquois Confederacy about the Great Law of Peace and how they appointed the chiefs and how when the chiefs started to do things that were wrong and they were warned four times and the fourth time their antlers or leadership was taken away. They said we are going to bury you and not just you but your whole family. No longer are you ever going to be a chief in this Nation again or any of your family. I thought that was a powerful deterrent against nepotism, people doing criminal acts, to leaders that's a powerful deterrent, and everyone had to think that way. That was why it worked so well because everyone believed in it.

Now we have so many conflicting ideologies. That is why we are struggling so much. People are not looking at an ideology that we can all follow. Some are saying, well we are going to be a dictatorship, and by the time they arrive there they entrench themselves in that tradition and they take over. The manipulations in organizations as well as communities that this is happening. They say we are going to be like a democracy you know, everyone has a voice.

So our people do not think that way now. What are going to do? We follow the person who is in charge. It is happening in urban centres, friendship centres different organizations because of that lack of a common belief, a common way of life. I think there is an occupation going on right now in the interior BC by Elders in the band office. You know they occupy and making things happen. That means that they are demonstrating against their leadership and I have heard this in other communities across Canada. That means we have serious problems with our leadership, very serious.

AY: *I can't help but think that in urban societies there are similar situations It reminds me of the stereotype about First Nations alcoholism rates and yet we would find that it isn't so. So surveys indicate alcoholism rates are much higher in the whole population.*

GO: When you raise that and I think about the criticism about First Nations leadership and community that there needs to be accountability because of misspent funds things like that. And I laugh because before this I used to say don't point fingers at us. I used to say to general society criticism, like we are like banana republic, where someone just takes over and in some ways it is true. But Canada misspent funds to the tune of billions of dollars.

AY: *And that is not even with our agenda.*

GO: Yes, it's their own. And I think about this recent thing with the Liberals coming out in the papers that there is corruption and that there is favouritism. So it gets acted out around us and remember I said the last time that everything is relative in terms of those things that get past down and that everything in life is relative. I understand that more and more as time goes on, as I get older. You when I think of our situation in comparison to Canada, you know the same things are happening there, as it is in our communities.

AY: *Yes So maybe you can talk a bit about your history with the House of Learning (FNHL).*

GO: Okay. It is very interesting because as I looked over your questions and comments I thought about my association with the House of Learning. I can't remember the first time but I know I have been profoundly affected by the teachings that I received through the House of Learning. Through the programs and events that are hosted by the House of Learning plus my opportunities to share. I will give some examples of some of the teachings I received from the House of Learning.

The one that pops out immediately was the event I was invited to, the Crimes Against Humanity Conference (2003). I went and I was listening and doing my presentation on residential schools and I was listening to the Japanese, Chinese, Koreans that were hurt by each other in terrible ways. I was listening and I was starting to get depressed. I said this is too much, all this evilness and pain by people against people. I remember I said I need to hear something to get me out of this before I go home because I was in a spiral going down.

I heard it when a Chinese man got up and was speaking through an interpreter about how he was anthraxed by the Japanese in their war. This is what saved me, he said that the devil met me and I blame him for the chemical warfare. So the teaching there was not to generalize because I tended to generalize. I would say you know the Catholics done this or the white people done this. So now I say the evil Catholics or the evil white man had done this. That has changed my life because when I generalize I am creating bad karma for myself by saying everyone was like that and that was not true. So I started to see that every organization whether it was religious sect, spiritual sect or

government or whatever, there is going to be evilness. No one is immune to it, there are 1.4 billion Catholics and there is going to be evilness.

AY: *How would you describe evil?*

GO: People hurting people or the environment with greed. A sexual abuser is greed, a pedophile is greedy, they fill themselves with a sense of power and fulfillment, physically and not just in their mind. Yeah and the ones that indiscriminately clear cut forests and kill fish and pollute the water. They are evil. Someone that hurts others to further themselves has evil behaviour. Especially when they are not, say someone who takes 100 salmon but they are feeding 300 Elders. I don't see that as evil. The government is seen as evil especially when the salmon stocks are loaded. Some don't see it as evil but I do.

We need leadership that demonstrates that we have rights. So after that conference I went through this change, you know it affected me that much. Where I started to look at people differently. And that is a powerful teaching that came all the way from China.

And then of course listening about the house posts [at FNHL] that always gets me when I go there and I look at them. I see them as protectors against negativity and I started to see the value of symbolism. It is powerful and I started to see it that way. You know that this symbolism represents caring for family or protection from evil or whatever you know, our pride and enhances our dignity because there is so much work put into them so much care and attention put into those poles in the Sty-Wet-Tan room and I started to see that so you know I been there I don't know how many times and it seems to bring the best out in me, in thought in my singing or whatever when I am there in that House of Learning.

AY: *How would you describe your work at FNHL?*

GO: My work at the House of Learning started through various co-ordinators there asked me to come to talk to health practitioners, doctors. I go there to say what I have seen and heard and that is my work. And share the role of Traditional education and healing that is my work there, that is what I think about when I go there.

Because you know I don't have a degree, I don't have a college degree, I have a high school degree. I thought about what am I doing here and I then I realised that am sharing cultural knowledge which is Aboriginal or Indigenous way of life, our approach to living is what I am sharing there.

Someone told me years ago that we have a lot to contribute to society and the first time I realised that was when I went to work at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). Because I worked at BCIT and started coming to UBC and I asked myself, what am

I doing here? You know the Institutes where mostly white or people who are not First Nations are. So I asked myself that question, what am I doing here?

That was the very first time I worked for a non First Nations organization, in the sense that I was working for the Aboriginal arm of BCIT Board of Governors and things like that. And I say I am here to teach our values and our philosophies, the way we think in regards to our connection to the Earth. Because in technology they are talking about forestry. About technology I know used wrongly hurts the Earth. So that is what I am here for. So maybe in one of my presentations there may a young student in here that will eventually be the Minister of Forests and will say, I listened to this guy who talked about respect for the Earth and how we can connect respect and the Earth. So that is how I see my role when I work in institutions. Now in higher learning, I am there to teach what happened and educate students what we have to offer.

AY: *Yes, because I know in the Longhouse Leadership Program we teach about the cultural values of respect reverence responsibility and relationships-and in your presentation you talked about different R's.*

GO: Yes because my R's are not teachings per say they are about what lead us to where we are today. I'll talk about teachings, respect definitely would be there and responsibility. The will to live would be number one. If I want to live then I am going to be respectful and be responsible you know those R's that you mention.

But first I need a level of self worth, confidence and self esteem and I want to live and succeed. It is just like when I realized when I realized my changes that were happening in my thoughts and I think part of it has to do with the House of Learning and the people I have met through the House of Learning or the people I have listened to.

As well as people like Tsleil Waututh Elder Bob George who is one of the traditional teachers, I started to connect teachings to the very first teaching I heard which was everything that you will learn comes through the air. That was one of the first ones and that was such a powerful teaching.

And another teaching would come along like be careful and sincere with your words because you can't take them back. And that connected with everything comes through the air. Words come through the air in the same way with speaking. Be sincere with people when you are talking to people.

That means don't go It's like that guy yesterday at the House of Learning, he killed himself symbolically so he could perform the ceremony for us. That is being very sincere, that is being very careful because he didn't want to have an ego. So when we are saying be careful we are saying don't go up there and stand up and show off or humiliate people, be careful.

So those teachings hooked on to each other and they were years apart when I first caught them. It wasn't until 1996-7 that I heard, be careful and sincere with your words. It was in 1980 that I heard that all my teachings and learnings are coming through the air and to listen.

So I matured over time, the word mature means to ripen. Over time I have heard many teachings. They are always there you just have to be ready to get them. To catch them. Anyways, so I caught them. So that's what I bring to the House of Learning, the things that I hear and see that are profound for me and I feel they make a difference. So that is what I bring there.

AY: *So I was thinking about your R's you use when you provide training in communities. So we need a different kind of leadership training that is not yet provided. Some of the academic language addresses decolonizing education for self-sovereign governance to make space for education that is from this place prior to colonization. To review your R's they are RCMP. . . .*

GO: Yeah it starts out with racism, religion, reservations, residential schools and RCMP. The reason why I started to talk about these five R's was so that people would understand why we have crimes against humanity in our own community.

I started to see that people were totally beating themselves up. And when you do that the likelihood for change is very low. That means they have given in and said, I am evil, I am bad, so I am going to do this. No hope and I witnessed that. I am just a total loser, oh what the heck, I might as well be drinking. Even though my kids are starving, my wife is pregnant and she is drinking. I know there is fetal alcohol syndrome, but I don't care. So what would lead a person to that stage? That is when I started thinking about the five R's. This is where it comes from so that they wouldn't beat themselves up so much.

AY: *So the history gives us information about the state of affairs today. . . .*

GO: Yes they would have understanding and would have energy to create the change in themselves. We work with understanding because if you don't have that you totally blame yourself and your abusers. That is a small circle to go around and it is easy to recycle, go round and round. So to break that cycle. That is why I started talking about the five R's and how important the teachings are. About how to live and where we come from and *how to change* today.

We lasted through five hundred years of oppression and oppressive communication. This is how we got here. This is how I described it was the five R's because I see them as the core reasons or indicators about why we are the way we are today. Now if I was going to about the teachings that you are talking about because the five R's bring about awareness and have people look at themselves.

In our language to say sweatlodge, we say *N'ul'kzak*, it means to look at yourself and so when you go to the sweatlodge you are actually going there to look at yourself and if you see something wrong then work towards changing it. So that would probably be one of the first steps I would do if I was going to train leaders, have a way for them to look at themselves.

You were showing me a diagram before and that's a good way of doing it. Physically and the importance of having a spiritual way of life. People don't even think of that today. The way I look at it when I look at people they don't seem to look at that. That means to me they are disconnected from the spiritual realms. If I can't see it, has no meaning, that is a scientific attitude and if it doesn't make the right splash or ask a hundred people and ninety-nine makes a scientific fact.

So on the spiritual realm when we use medicine like sweetgrass when we breathe it in there is chemical reactions and ask to be kind and gentle with others and ourselves. And that's the way I look at that medicine and that is what it does. When I look at sage as a spiritual healer, I look at it more as a physical healer and it helps my body to release toxins; that is how I look at sage. Now when I look at cedar it is a medicine that strengthens my spirit. And my spirit the way I explain it is like a candle flame. So if it is burning brightly that spirit is going good. But if it is dim it is releasing its vitality so it means it is getting weak. So how do we strengthen that? Well one of the medicines is cedar, you burn cedar or you brush with cedar and it helps your spirit. When I look at my existence I see I have a mind, body and spirit. So they all need nourishing.

If I don't have nourishment for my mind I am not going to have health. If I sit down and someone is teaching me all this stuff, of course I am going to grow. Our mind is going to start clicking in. But if I just sit and watch soap operas on TV all day I going to worry about cheating and all the stuff they do on soaps, you know.

So that is how I started to look at, you know when training say the physical for instance we teach people how to take care of their body that means that exercise is part of that just doing a ritual everyday of walking, running or yoga or something or anything like that, overall it has an effect.

So for leadership to me we have to have all these areas covered. I remember I was listening to an Elder in Alberta and he was talking about sweetgrass and he was talking about the braid. He said that is the mind, body and spirit; that is a symbolic representation. When you braid it together it is strong. If you let one go, it starts to unravel, it weakens. It makes sense and we believe what makes sense then we can reason and when I heard about that...that we need balance in our mind body and spirit. That was 1979, when I heard about that and it didn't really kick in until the 1990's and I started to say to people you know we need to work on healing on our mind, our body and our spirit, on all three.

And people would say well what about emotions Gerry? I said well emotion in its purist form, it happens ... allow it and it happens you know like where you are with somebody that you get this feeling with and it's there. So its like love, it happens. Anger, depression but they emerge as a result of what happens to the mind the body or the spirit or all three. So if someone is beating me constantly, physically assaulting me hitting me and punching me doing all that stuff you know of course I am going to go through a healing after that because I am hurt. If I don't I am going to walk around timid or a bully either or because I am carrying that experience with me and it gets confusing. That's why I stopped talking about emotions. When I would say what gets me mad and I would go on and on. Then I would realise the danger is that you could get stuck on it. Go round and round like a never ending cycle.

AY: *So take care of the mind, body, spirit as they are the foundation.*

GO: Yeah, see I don't deny emotions. I say the first medicines have those four elements and the mind, body and spirit; what does the heart mean? So I heard that old man talk about that sweetgrass braid, he said mind, body, spirit.

So a leader begins at five years old; you will see how they are and start to teach them. I think their chances for being a successful leader are better.

My spiritual development happened because I was raised a Catholic, when they marked me with the holy water, with the oil and with the ashes. And when I start to reason, I didn't believe them and when I start to question them, those that were preparing me for the faith, the priests and the nuns and the Catholic religion, and their answers were, Gerry you have to have faith, and it wasn't good enough for me, it wasn't a good enough answer.

Otherwise if it was I would still be a Catholic today. So being a Catholic was a beginning. In Kamloops there is a little conference centre I had gone over to do a presentation to the Friendship Centre board. I was working in addiction counselling and at the time. One of the Elders had said that *himelch* is what brings everything together, like that between a man and a woman. It is important for identity and that had a huge influence on my spiritual development. I believe.

And I started to think about what holds me together and when I started to think in those terms, I remember I was in the sweat by myself and I didn't know how to pray or anything. I would sit in there and I was thinking about God as a he, because I was conditioned as hell, and I thought, what is this?

I was looking at the rocks, I call them grandparents, people call them grandfathers, I call them grandparents. I looked down and saw my male chauvinism in my spiritual practice. No, they are grandparents. When I would call them rocks, people would get upset and say they are grandfathers. It was like saying dad would get upset with me. I would say

they are grandparents and I was with them and I was looking and they are red hot. I would say to myself there is space in the volcanic rocks and I thought about what holds everything together at that time.

I heard myself praying to he and I thought, this is ridiculous. I mean to pray to a he, what is he going to do for me? Asking him for forgiveness and strength. I went through a confused and overwhelmed state and the songs and the water and everything, and I was having a mind blowing experience.

And then I thought about my body and I started looking at my hand and there is space in my hand because I am made up of molecules and atoms and there is space in the atoms and I said welcome back inside and I thought about that after. There is something in my body and it is the spirit because it leaves my body all the time. Did that ever have a big influence on me.

And I started to think, okay well, what can I feed my spirit, to keep my spirit strong? I started looking at the medicines and I started to remember what people were saying. They said kindness is for my mind; to strengthen and nourish my mind. Sweetgrass is used for kindness. And then I started looking for different things that we were eating and drinking because before this my thoughts were thinking that this about Creator.

So you can see that I started to believe that. When I was thinking about Creator I was thinking about God and when I started to move away from that, to the something that holds everything together. So it's not an object in a sense if you wanted to think that way. But it is all over the place. It not male or female but it is there, it is a force. And when you make a connection to that force then you are going to be okay. That is where the power of love comes from and the respect. When you connect with it you are okay. When you are disconnected from it that is where you fall in love with power because we think that we are it. We have this belief that we have power over others and with nature.

So for me at that time I gave up on my own belief system and started connecting with what I heard other people say like the Elder in Alberta. With the three strands: the mind, body, and spirit. You know this is over years and years of practise. There was one time in my life I used to sweatlodge three or four times a week every week all year long.

I was initiated into the sweatlodge and then there is the practise phase. Practising for years, you also learn the medicines for many seasons you have to heal. I knew I was damaged by the dope that I smoked, from the chemicals and booze I drank. I knew something happened to me, so I fell asleep and the sweatlodge purified me from the inside out. From the drugs and alcohol, that was my death and I knew in my mind I wanted to change that. I had to heal from all that. So my understanding about God and what people would tell God and the spirit and I started to change and it is still going on.

Chi Migwetch for sharing. All My Relations. Hyska Oseim.