

***Reanimating Storywork: Indigenous Elders' Reflections
on Leadership by Doreen Sinclair (White Cloud)***

Edited and introduced by Alannah Young-Leon

SFU Indigenous Student Centre, 2011

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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 Elder's 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 Elder's 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 La France 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

White Cloud is an Anishanabe/Métis grandmother who has been involved in numerous Aboriginal health organizations and was a chief counsellor for a BC band. She is involved with the Institute for Aboriginal Health, the UBC sweatlodges and the women's full moon ceremonies. She is a cultural ceremonialist and provides holistic wellness approaches to Aboriginal communities, internationally, nationally, provincially and with local communities.

My name is Doreen Sinclair, born in Selkirk, Manitoba of Anishanabe & Métis parents. My traditional names are Wabskanaquetaquay (White Cloud Woman) Nashobequay (Two Feathers Woman) of the Wolf Clan; I was very honoured and adopted into a Coast Salish Family from a First Nations on Vancouver Island and given the name Hyalocktanaught of the Whale Clan. I am a Traditional Aboriginal woman who shares Traditional teachings, culture and spiritual ceremonies in community. I served for two terms as Chief of a First Nations band in BC.

I taught Native Adult Education at a College in Northern BC. My professional career is in Management of staff and programs as well as program development. I have my Aboriginal Governments Certificate and Business Administration from the University of Victoria. I also served in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corp. (RCAMC) Reserves and am now a member of the National Aboriginal Veterans Association (NAVA) of BC. At present I am an Elder and contractor for Corrections Service Canada (CSC). There I share our Spiritual Traditions, ceremonies, and Culture in the Aboriginal Programs for Aboriginal women offenders. I have participated in the CSC National Aboriginal Programs development for both male and female. In the Vancouver Aboriginal community I serve on the Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services Society, First Nations Theatre Performance Society, and am an Elder for the Vancouver Métis Society.

Reanimating Storywork:

Indigenous Elders' Reflections on Leadership by Doreen Sinclair (White Cloud)

Alannah Young-Leon (AY): *Thank you for agreeing to interview and participate in the study on the role of culture in Indigenous leadership. How would you describe Indigenous leadership?*

Doreen Sinclair (DS): Indigenous leadership is Indigenous people leading Indigenous people (laughs). A leader is a person who is a good listener, strives to understand the issues of a community, listens and learns from the spiritual people, they will be a Traditional person walking the good red road. Ideally one who has and is on their personal healing journey and learning to walk in balance.

AY: *Okay. How would you describe Indigenous culture?*

DS: Well culture is very powerful and Indigenous culture has come back to our people again. Culture is giving us a very strong base of strength to build from giving us a strong sense of identity. We have many people coming to various ceremonies and circles seeking to find out who they are as Indigenous people. We have a different worldview than all the other cultures, some similarities, but our view our culture I think is very unique. I was thinking about the teachings of the four directions and the four races were always with us on Turtle Island long before the Europeans came to our shores. Our people knew that the Europeans were coming our people knew that there were other races on Mother Earth. That is part of culture that is part of the teachings that have been handed down.

AY: *How would you describe the relationship between culture and leadership?*

DS: The best way to describe this is "Walk the Talk": respecting where we come from as Aboriginal people, being proud of who we are. A Traditional leader will know their strength stems from practising our Spirituality. The seven sacred teachings of love, honesty, wisdom, truth, humility, courage and trust will be the guiding principles in all decision making.

AY: *What cultural values and principles have informed your leadership development?*

DS: I am second generation residential school and so when I came along there was very little culture in our little village and in our community. People were ashamed of being Native or half-breed. That came from a place of pain, generational pain from the residential school and the community that we lived in. It was perpetuated by the church and by the non Native people and the government and also by our own people. I

can recall racist remarks about white people being taught to me by my people and so it went both ways. So it was out of my own pain in my early thirties when I started doing my own personal healing. I really started to look at and embrace our people's cultural ways. I found I had to try it on. It was like sticking big toe in the water and trying to decide whether you want to plunge in all the way.

And that is exactly what I did. I studied other spiritual ways before I came home to my own people. And I came home to my own people. I remember going into my first sweatlodge experience with Albert (Cree). When I heard the water hitting the grandfather rocks and the smell of the sweetgrass I remember I burst out crying. I cried through that whole sweat because I felt in my heart I has come home. I found what I was looking for and from there I never looked back. And so from there every chance I got I went and I sat and I listened or I absorbed myself in culture whichever way I could, even if it wasn't with my own tribal people, the Anishanabe or the Métis or the Cree.

I sat and I listened. I was like a sponge I couldn't get enough. And while that was happening I found what it did for me was to give me a sense of strength and of accepting myself as an Aboriginal woman. That further gave me a sense of strengthening within myself, a sense of pride and a sense of belonging. It opened many doors for me in the spiritual world, when I was given the pipes that I carry and being trained in how to do the sweatlodge and the beauty of it all. You know I can never say enough about how beautiful our ceremonies are and how lucky we are to have those ceremonies. I always say one good sweat is worth ten counselling sessions.

AY: *Did you want to take this opportunity to introduce yourself?*

DS: My Traditional names are Waubskanaquetaquay, Nashobequay, Hyalocktanaught, nideshnikaush mihegan nidodem, translated: White Cloud Woman and Two Feathers of the Anishanabe and the Wolf Clan. Hyalocktanaught is a Salish name I was given, I was adopted into a Salish family on Vancouver Island and of the Whale Clan. I started my traditional journey in the mid seventies in the Cariboo. There I met a medicine person who was conducting a sweatlodge ceremony. My first sweat, I knew that was what I was searching for in my life. I was learning to meditate, do healing, etc with a group at the time. I was led to the sweatlodge ceremony.

I would travel to Alberta for healing and ceremonies. That medicine person was involved with the Alkali Lake film "The Honour of All". I used to go to Alkali Lake to participate in the ceremonies there. We built a sweatlodge on our property in the Cariboo; he would come and stay to do ceremonies and doctoring for people from all over that area. Then I wanted my Indian name. For that I travelled to back to my great-grandmother's reserve, Sagkeeng First Nations in Manitoba. It was only fitting that I was lead there because my great grandmother was the midwife and she worked with medicines and healing in St. Peters. Use to be back in the early days it was St Peters reserve and our people were relocated to the Peguis reserve.

So great-granny was originally from Sagkeeng she was given in marriage to great grandfather of St Peters. So there came the blending of the Cree and the Anishanabe. And so it was only fitting and right that I was lead back to my great grandmothers' reserve to be given my names and my pipe there. I started out as a helper at the Sundance and the next thing you knew I was doing the Sundance. I met Lightning Comes Down Man (Anishanabe), from Sagkeeng. I did my Sundance at his site. He was the one who gave me my Traditional names and ceremonies; the sweatlodge & pipe ceremonies. After he passed on, I started to study with an Elder from Long Plains and he is the one I go to when I want to receive directions from the Grandfathers and Grandmothers. Today my relatives sponsor the Sundance and Teaching Lodge. I go home every year to attend the ceremonies.

I'll share a story about my role as a chief when I lived in the Cariboo of BC. I was hired to teach adult education at the local college. The Native education class was not successful in that the students would drop out within two months. The Director felt hiring an Aboriginal instructor would make a difference in attendance. There were seventeen Aboriginal students selected from ages 18 years to 35 years old. I looked at the curriculum they had given us to follow it was old and outdated. I asked the students what they wanted to study. The social studies curriculum was from the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College and it was all about the history of the prairies. The students said they would like to learn about their local history.

The students were Carrier and Chilcotin and Cree. With the support of the Director we worked at developing the curriculum. I started bringing local Aboriginal community people to share their knowledge and the history of the area. The Friendship Center, local chiefs from the surrounding bands, the Department of Indian Affairs, the Cariboo Tribal Council staff, Legal aid, Probation, anyone connected with Aboriginal governance. The Staff from the Tribal Council taught us about the Indian Act. The next year one of the band elections came due. The students from that band asked if they could be involved as a class with the elections. We took it on as a pilot project. I brought people in to teach us how to set up elections and even how to run a campaign. I would ask questions like what kind of people you want in office. What kind of people do you want to see as your leader? The first thing the students stated is they wanted someone who would work for all band members and keep their band operating on a regular basis. They wanted to bring back the programs and a council that was open and honest.

The students developed their strategies and set to scan their community for good band members to run for council. They met with Elders and had the support from them. The elections were successful in that a respected chief was voted in and two of the students ended up on the council. They were very pleased with all of the hard work and the knowledge and support from the community. Soon the band office was re-opened with operating programs and training for the band members.

Next year another band council's term was up for election. The students from that band asked me if they could do the same thing as we did for other band. I stated that they now know how to run a successful election campaign and encouraged them to do it on their own. One late afternoon I was in the class room by myself working on papers and in walked the students from the band with a couple of Elders. They said they wanted to talk to me. I asked how was the election plans going. They outlined their campaign plan and what they had done so far. I inquired on whom they had asked to run for chief. They said we want you to run for chief. I said no I can't do that and they said why not? I said because I am a woman. They said that doesn't matter you can still run for chief. I said I don't belong to your tribe. I am not of the tribe. I don't live on reserve, besides that I am not status I don't have a treaty card.

So they sat there and listened to all of that and then one of the students went to my filing cabinet, opened it, pulled out the Indian Act, came up to me and said see right here. They had circled a paragraph in the *Indian Act* on who can run for chief. I read it and it said that anyone could run for chief, they did not have to be a band member. They said yes you can run for chief. Again I said no, I really can't do that. So away they went. So unbeknownst to me they went to the other Elders and the leaders in the community and one day I was at the Friendship Center for lunch and the newly elected chief of the other band who was a good friend of mine, said lets go for a walk along the Fraser River. He said you know the people and the Elders really want you to run for their chief. And again I quoted all the reasons why I couldn't run for chief.

He said you know anyone can run for chief and they want you. He said, you really think it over. They started sending people to talk to me about running for chief, in the business community, the non Native community, lawyers and probation. I didn't make up my mind until they asked me to go to the nomination meeting at the friendship centre. The Department of Indian Affairs was there conducting the proceedings. When I realized who was being nominated it was people who were using drugs and alcohol.

The students were sitting beside me when I consented to be nominated for chief. I did not believe that I would ever win the nomination because I was not of that tribe. One band member objected to my nomination quite loudly. There was another non band member that was nominated and no one objected to her name being put forth. That band member stated this is illegal you can't be nominated. The DIA conducting the proceedings also managed the band membership. He brought out the *Indian Act* read that anybody can run for chief and that my nomination is valid. The elections were two weeks away. The students and band members went on their campaign trail. Two weeks later I was elected chief by a landslide vote. The DIA representative stated that I had created history in that I was the first Non-status woman elected as chief of a band. Later I learned that a lot of the band members had to vote secretly because they were afraid of the anger of certain people on the reserve. Two students were elected on council.

We opened the band office with the help of the tribal council staff and the other chiefs who supported our council. As chief I served on many committees: housing, education, training, etc. I found out it was similar to running a municipal organization, a small town. Manpower funded training programs for the four area bands. The training was in our band office; office administration training was the first one. Band members were learning how to be administrators and to manage their own affairs.

We were threatened by a small group of angry band members they said the band office was going to be blown up and houses set on fire. Angry people started phoning and threatening us. I had the RCMP patrolling the reserve on a regular basis. My little family had police protection and dogs protecting our property because we lived a way out of town in an isolated area. We built a sweatlodge behind the band office. Our friends from Alkali Lake and Williams Lake would come and conduct the sweatlodges and pipe ceremonies for our protection.

I had a sweatlodge on my property and we would have regular ceremonies with all of the students, at my place or the band office. Spiritual people came to teach us and share the aspects of the Medicine Wheel Teachings. We had regular spiritual clearings for the band office. And so every time a threat came along that is how we would handle it. The Elders started remembering their ceremonies of times past.

This one Elder remembered the pipe ceremonies and sweatlodges. They started remembering how to do Traditional burials. I believe the direct cause of the memories surfacing was because we were in the sweat so much allowing the grandfathers and grandmothers to come in and work with and through us. So the grandfathers and grandmothers were working through the Elders in bringing back the memories of their own culture and spiritual ceremonies. I served two terms as chief. The band members asked if I would run again as their chief, I declined. I assured them they were capable of choosing a strong band member for their leader. We had learned a lot together as a council. We worked as a team, asked for help often from others far more knowledgeable than us.

I was going through a lot of personal challenges at that time. A few years ago at the annual Elders Conference in Chilliwack one of my former students came over to me. She brought me over to the Elders from the Cariboo; they had sent the former student to bring me to them. I sat with them and we were so happy to be together once again. I spent all afternoon and evening with them sitting with them. They asked me if I would run for their chief again. I shared that I could not be their chief and that I was so pleased that they had asked me. Over the years they would find me to ask me to run for council.

One of the council members was also one of my students. She attended meetings with me as chief. She was taught by the Tribal Council staff who trained her how to manage the finances. She became the next chief.

AY: *So what do you think the values or the operating principles were that made it possible what you all accomplished there?*

DS: We had the sweatlodge and pipe ceremonies on a regular basis. Spiritual people would come and share their teachings, ceremonies and support. For the first time there was a pow-wow on the sacred grounds of the people. Culture brought positive feelings, the people were proud of who they were. I believe that gave us the strength and a good foundation to work from. The young people still remember, they still follow a lot of the teachings of the spiritual people that we brought in

We agreed to work together as a team because I couldn't have done that all by myself. I was their leader in that I could be strong and I didn't take any threats. If somebody would threaten bad medicine we called on our spiritual people to conduct ceremonies. They threatened to burn the houses and blow up the band office, the RCMP patrolled the reserve. I had made friends with the RCMP and the towns business people and so we were supported. I created a support system in the municipal government and even at the hospital. It was easy for me to do that.

We were supported by the people in the band but also on various levels of government that has direct service with us in one way or another. And I consulted with the Elders. Once a month we would have council meetings where all the band members would attend. Some band members would cook so there was always a feast. Everybody enthusiastically pitched in, they would plan menu. We sure had wonderful feasts at the meetings. The council would make sure the band members had a ride to the meetings. All of the band members were involved in making decisions. They would take an active part in helping the council to make decisions on issues that affected all of them.

AY: *So standing up to the old guard or threats if we were to put that into a value or principle into action like no harm ...*

DS: Yeah a value or principle... standing firm and not letting threatening presence intimidate me. I remember what happened one time we were well into a meeting and all of a sudden the door flew open and in stomped two old guards and they started yelling and screaming and swearing at me, calling me vile names and a lot of the people were afraid of them and wondered what I was going to do. I wondered what I was going to do.

And what I found myself saying was come and join us we need your help and expertise. You were in this place for many years. You thoroughly know the system, come and join us and work along side with us. And he kept on yelling and screaming and I said would you like something to eat first? And that's how my conversation in this voice like when you are talking to a crowd, you know not threatening, not either up nor down.

I invited them to come and join us. I asked if they would like to have a cup of coffee first and they kept on yelling and screaming. I said I understand you are upset with the way things happened but you know we can work together here. They couldn't beat me down, I wasn't scared of them. They turned around, walked out and slammed the door.

And everybody went sigh... I asked the band members do you want to continue and they said yes. Later one of the band members said boy you were good. You didn't let them intimidate you or scare you. You kept your cool. You know what that's going to do, that's probably make him more angry, don't worry about that. But in my eyes I have more respect for you than I ever had. You have got guts. You have my support and my respect. And then after that different people came up to me and expressed similar things.

AY: *So facilitating and participating in a spiritual process helped you to be ready to do the leadership work, to be respectful and to be committed even in the face of adversity.*

DS: FNHL also has a strong cultural base for the students to draw upon. The availability of Spiritual ceremonies and the diverse teachings from the different Spiritual people that are brought in to share their Traditional knowledge gives the students a good foundation.

There is one thing that keeps coming up that nobody... you never see written down... I have taken the Aboriginal Governance Program at the University of Victoria and it was a good program. What I never ever see addressed is how do we handle bad medicine, nobody talks about it, do you ever notice that? You know you heard me talk about how we handled bad medicine in the Cariboo. We didn't give in to it. We didn't allow it to strike fear in us. What we did was we went the other way. We went even stronger into spiritual activities with Pipe ceremonies and the sweatlodges.

I forgot to mention even when I was there I brought to them the Women's Full Moon ceremony from back home. The Elder that took it over, she started remembering how her people did the ceremony when she was a young woman. Anyway getting back what I would like to see get addressed in leadership is how do you and how can you handle anger in a community, especially if the anger is directed as bad medicine and used as threats for manipulation and control. It is never talked about.

AY: *So sounds like demystifying bad medicine to make it more understandable so that people can engage with it more effectively, so that's one aspect of leadership training that can be addressed. What helped you was to work with the situations through ceremony as a foundation that then informed how you interacted and demonstrated a conflict resolution intervention. By addressing the spiritual aspects in a collective leadership process helped the community to engage with and demystified the ceremonies.*

DS: We have the opportunity to share with our people, how to take control in a positive manner. As spiritual people we can assure that the young people are learning how to do the ceremonies. Teach them how to conduct “clearings” and how to protect themselves and remain strong.

AY: I imagine that some people would be concerned about different protocols around lineages of ceremonies. So leadership can role model how to demystify what ceremony is and help show a person how to take control of their leadership development-to address taking care of the mind, body and spirit. Sometimes it seems people think ceremony is bad medicine. This mindset comes from people who haven't been involved or engaged with ceremony. They don't have a foundation for what that means.

DS: That's because they don't know any better and it's up to people like you and I to share, so they don't have that fear. That fear base usually stems from the church and government and residential school. We are still left with that legacy and I think its going to be there for a few more generations yet. That bad medicine almost seems like a dysfunctional family where it's a secret and everybody knows it goes on but don't talk about it. Communication skills need to be developed in leadership training.

AY: Cultural programming for the Longhouse Leadership Program LLP includes Non-Violent Communication (NVC), cultural teachings such as the sweatlodge and we follow West Coast cultural protocols and traditions where appropriate. We work in conjunction with local Territories and have Elders in residence who assist us in these regards. Other program components include the self-determination governance political stream, respectful research and human rights. So human rights and communication fit together, so those are the four streams we developed so far.

DS: So in your non-violent communication workshop, is that where you address lateral violence?

AY: We don't call it that, the concentric rings of influence on our program outline indicates with the NVC we work with the internal self to start. Its an hour and a half but if you can get to know what's going on with your feelings and needs then you are less likely to be reactive in your language with others, your community etc., you know. So we start there, conflict resolution we have used before and creating a networking community such as working with the equity office on human rights...

DS: Lateral violence is another one that should be addressed, like education around that what is lateral violence... What do you mean when you say that because I know in the urban area a lateral violence is operating a lot in our Aboriginal organizations in the Lower Mainland.

AY: I am wondering what kind of ceremony or cultural component like maybe the shaming feast or something like that might work with lateral violence.

DS: You mean what might diffuse it or turn it around?

AY: *There are workshops out there about lateral violence but what we are investigating is how can we approach leadership development from a cultural approach.*

DS: Well I am thinking of a few people that practice lateral violence and I don't think that any culture would help them. In one situation I worked with, the negative people ended up leaving the organization with a huge mess for others to clean up. We promoted Spiritual ceremonies, bringing different Spiritual people from community. We worked hard at turning the negative residue into a positive model.

AY: *So the ones that get the experience, can teach others, the next generation to know the basics and gain confidence because it's the values and the principles in ceremony that is what is talked about in ceremony. So respect for each other, nations, community, natural world, Creator was part of their leadership training based on cultural values was role modeled.*

DS: Yes, the cultural values and principles need to be foundational to leadership training.

AY: *So anything else about what you might like to see at the First Nations Longhouse? If you think back on the different cultural events that you have been involved with over the years, when you think of your time with the FNHL community are there other things that you would like to see happen? What's working well from your perspective?*

DS: Well I like the sweats. I like them I have been there and I have referred people there. At one time we had started drumming and singing and maybe that needs to be taken up again. Perhaps to take a look at bringing that out to our community because it's hard for people sometimes to get out there, to the Longhouse. So to go mobile with some of the cultural events, I really like the star blanket making and what about making drums.

AY: *We have made sweat dresses and medicine bags and drum workshops.*

DS: We could have fun with that with the teachings of the drum, relate it to leadership. Medicines, organize a medicine run into the local area with a local person and teaching, the picking and the use of medicines and of course languages and that's hard to select the language because there are so many people from so many cultures from across the country.

AY: *They have the hun'q'umin'um' the language classes held now in xwmuthkweyum Musqueam community so all ages can take the course and receive credit.*

DS: Oh that's good, that's the people of this Traditional territory, but then other languages. I can't think of anything else other than the protocols and process on how to access the Elders or a spiritual person. We are getting that down on paper so that people really understand what and why. You know for instance for a prairie person Elder or spiritual person say like David (Cree). We present a package of tobacco and a meter each of the four colours of cloth. That's protocol and we need to teach others, this is how you approach an Elder or a spiritual person. Then the grandfather and grandmothers work through them.

Now the Salish people have a different way and the Lakota may have a different way I am coming from where I come from. It annoys the heck out of me when someone comes up to me and says I have a cigarette question. There needs to be teachings about the sacredness of tobacco and why that tobacco is given in that way. That tobacco and print, the grandmothers and grandfathers they see that and feel the energy of that tobacco and print. The tobacco gets burned in the sacred fire and so it goes up to them and they smell that smoke. This is to convey respect for what that person has gone through to become an Elder or spiritual person because a lot of us, we don't ask to walk this journey, maybe at the soul level, but we are selected when we are children.

We are given direction in dreams and so we come to this stage in life where we know our journey, this is what we are all about the grandparents work through us, but to reach this place you go through years and years of discipline of spending our own time and energy going back home or where ever and going to Sundances and the teaching lodges and the sweatlodges and the fasting and the rigorous purification rites that we go through to start working as an Elder or spiritual person. So it is not an overnight or weekend workshop where you go and then hang your shingle out.

AY: *So the Elder protocols accessing services and some teachings about that perhaps a panel and to have them talk about their cultural training aspect how or what they did or what they got out of it as they feel comfortable sharing so that other people get an idea of the training involves.*

DS: Yes because it is not an overnight thing, the training never stops. I think a lot of our people they don't realize that, you know they don't have that information.

AY: *Even like the giveaway ceremony, the practice of gifting economies takes a decade to understand and inform and apply to your leadership practice on an ongoing basis.*

DS: Yes like what is the concept of a giveaway. Why are we giving away? Or like some people have gotten their names through a Medicine Person and have never done a feast honouring that name, they are suppose to give a feast and a giveaway.

AY: *How you started working with the House of Learning and perhaps share a bit about*

what you did before that.

DS: Okay. I seem to recall I started doing things with the students and the people at the FNHL even before moved here. I was living in Nanaimo at the time. I was invited over to do a couple of workshops at the Longhouse. I think it was for the First Nations Health Careers. Since then I have done quite a few workshops with the First Nations Health Careers Program. Different professors that have invited me over the years, it just seems like I have always been connected. I moved over to Vancouver and I started going over there regularly, attending the sweatlodges and moon ceremonies with you. So there has always been that connection with people from the Longhouse at UBC. As a Spiritual/Traditional person I share the cultural knowledge that I've learned over the many years, the ceremonies, the dream work, and the protocols. I like doing wellness workshops and I have done quite a few of those.

AY: *Yes, the Summer Science Youth Program staff too, the ones that were going to work with youth and addressing the students in health. Non-native and native sharing with them some teachings and protocols. So was there a life-changing event that happened for you in the last say ten years since you have been working with us at FNHL?*

DS: Yes, when I started I was living in Nanaimo and I was in a couple of car accidents in 1997-8. So I was forced to stop and do my own healing and get back to the basics of my life for about a year and half. Then I moved over here and plunged into the Vancouver Aboriginal community and with the House of Learning because I was near by.

AY: *So FNHL student services is based on a holistic model. Could you comment on your experiences on how we address the mind, body, heart and spirit? Has the holistic model assisted you in your leadership development?*

DS: In my leadership development? Oh very much so I remember hearing the medicine wheel teachings when I was living in Northern BC. That was when I first started my spiritual journey in the late 1970's. I started learning about the medicine wheel, the four directions and the teachings. I didn't consider myself a leader back then. I was watching how it affected some Aboriginal leaders in Northern BC. I used to go to this one band when they were making big changes in their community. I certainly learned a lot there. That was where I met my first spiritual mentor; he became my mentor for about twelve years. Yes when I look back I was like an observer, watching and learning before I did anything about it, like before I took the teachings and started using them myself.

AY: *Is there a particular event or story that comes to mind from that time?*

DS: From that time yes I think one thing that really sticks out was my first experience with the sweatlodge ceremony. I had been going to this developing group and they were people from all backgrounds it wasn't just Aboriginal. We practised meditation and

prayer. We were learning how to develop our talents and our abilities. I trained there for about eight years. In the middle of all of that this Cree woman I knew came to me and asked me if I wanted to learn about our peoples' ways and she invited me to a sweat.

I heard about them when I was a kid. I kept hearing about them but never really availed myself or went to seek it out. So I went to this sweat and it was a Cree sweat. I first went into that sweat it was part of my life changing event because I can still hear the water as it hit the grandfather rocks and the smell of the sweetgrass. It was like I came home and I sat there and I cried. I felt inside of me, I am home this is what I have been searching for so that began my journey.

I share this actually quite a bit when I am doing workshops if it is appropriate and it presents itself. And how I use this is I encourage people to look for that. You know when we are searching when we are going out and we are trying this and that. I encourage them to go inside and seek that spirit inside of you. To ask if it is calling and if it is where is it calling you to? If you listen it will lead you to exactly where you need to be. You know, to find that spirit within, the journey, the path that you are here for.

Actually I like using that story and sharing that with people who are searching. I also share that each in our own tribal backgrounds, it doesn't matter what tribe you come from, whether it's from northern BC, the prairies or the West Coast or Africa or Mexico or Europe. We all come from a tribe and all tribes on Mother Earth have our spiritual base. So I encourage people to seek out that spiritual base within themselves within their tribal group, because that comes from the very DNA of our being. I believe that is what I was answering to when I went in to that sweatlodge when I finally found that this is where I belong. This is what I was searching for.

I believe that I was lead there in my dreams and everything that I was doing at the time for my own well-being. That was a cry coming from the very depths of my being and that is what led me on my journey. I had to go deep into pain before I came out of it and brushed the pain off and then started searching for that spirit within me. That spirit from my people and my own Ancestors, it comes from the DNA of our people and so I believe everybody on Mother Earth has that and so if they really searched for that and honour that and worked at finding that place we would be far happier people.

AY: *So to trust yourself and be able to reflect inwards and to be able to know what feels right from the inside.*

DS: Yes, trusting that intuition. At that time I was doing a lot of dream studies and during that era I was given a lot of visions and dreams. I know that listening to my intuition was part of my leadership development.

AY: *So the visions, is there an example of how you applied that to your development as a leader?*

DS: There were quite a few. I remember once I was shown when I first went into the sweat in this vision, when you are given a vision I don't remember if it was through a dream or meditation it doesn't matter it came. I was shown all these different types of sweatlodges old ones ancient ones that were all across turtle island and I can still see that and they weren't made like they are today. They are made as I recall they were covered with bark and some with animal skins because in ancient times, that was what our people had we used everything was natural that was around us. I was taken out and shown these different sweatlodges in different places by running water by little streams and by rivers. I still have that vision and then another one that I had was of the white buffalo, by this time I was lead to my great-grandmother's reserve. I was in touch with Ronald and he helped me with my visions. I took the visions and dreams to him, he worked with the grandfathers and grandmothers and shared that I was destined to be a leader and that I would be working with people from all over the world.

A few years later I used to go to the Midewiwin in Roseau River with my sister. I remember one summer I was listening to the teachings and what I heard from this Elder that shared that at one time in our ancient past there were sweatlodges and pipes all over Turtle Island.

So took that information and I never did anything with that but I kept it in my memory. I was living and working here in the West Coast. A few years later I had this friend the one who had adopted me into her family and she came to me one day and she said there is something happening near where I was brought up, they are doing an archaeological dig. You know a curious thing is that they are finding evidence of ancient sweatlodges and ancient Pipes in this archaeological dig on Vancouver Island. I was delighted with that that went right along with that Elder that I had heard a few years before in the Midewiwin lodge in Manitoba.

Then a few years later this young man came from northern Vancouver Island, and he would phone me to find out when I was doing a ceremony. So finally I asked him because I was curious, as to why he was coming. Because it was quite a ways you know, it would take hours to come to the ceremonies. He said my Elders in our village remember when we used to have sweats and pipes and they sent me out to learn about it. He said I selected you and this other man to learn from.

Every time I hear about you, you know I am here to learn, I need to learn these things because I want to take them back to our Coastal people. So I think I was given all that information at the ceremonies for a purpose.

Because when you fast forward quite a few years and here I am on the Island and these archaeological digs are coming up and this information is coming to me. It is all

connected. I believe there is always a connection to our visions and especially that one when I was given that vision of ancient sweatlodges all over Turtle Island and now the archaeological digs are proving that.

My first mentor was Albert (Cree) and he used to come and stay at our place in Northern BC. I learned many things from him. He was such a beautiful man. He had amazing experiences, one time he shared that he was drawn to travel from home to this northern city. So away he went he said I never question that urge to go the urge was so strong. So he left for the city, got to this hotel and low and behold in the lobby there were medicine men from all over northern Canada! They were surprised to see each other. They wondered why they were all driven to be there at that certain time. So they sat down and started doing ceremonies. In the ceremonies the reasons they were all brought together came from the grandfather and the grandmothers. I believe that happened in ancient times too.

Our spiritual people that were given these gifts to use and to share they didn't need telephones. If they had this intuition and urging from the grandfathers and grandmothers from within, to go to travel they did, they followed their intuition. It was always for a good reason. So I firmly believe that is how information is passed around and teachings were passed around.

I remember stories from my great grandmother from our territory she was the local midwife and local herbalist and they said she would show up on someone's doorstep whenever they needed her whether they were sick or giving birth she knew when to appear. How did she know that in those days they didn't have the luxury of telephones and so I see that as my great grandmothers was practising listening to the grandfathers and grandmothers within. That is what I call it now back then I don't know what they called it, intuition or following your heart, knowing that this is right, this is right where I need to be, where I need to go and when you get there, there is a reason for it.

AY: *So the development of the intuition and the spiritual aspects really helps ones leadership development.*

DS: It does. Yes self-determination, discipline and trust because that is what it takes. Especially the big word trust, we have to trust that urging or the messages that come into our dreams or from just knowing that this is where you are going and this is what you have to do. You have to discipline your mind, body and spirit.

It is like our medicine wheel teachings urging us to walk in balance using the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspect of our beings. The best way for us to start walking that way is work at our own personal healing. A lot of us come with all of these barriers and blocks around us from our dysfunctional background.

These are the results that started from the *Indian Act*, the reserve system, the residential schools that separated us from our spirituality. Then family violence, poverty, abuse, racism and addictions, loss of language are the results we now live with. We've built barriers around ourselves for protection. We don't realize that the grandmothers and grandfathers are trying to get through to us and speak to us because we have all this negative stuff and blocks around us. The best thing for us to do is to work hard on our own personal healing. You know get back to the core of who we are as a person and a spiritual being. It takes work it takes discipline and it takes trust and you can't do it alone.

Get back to basics, to understand why we have this pain emotional, physical or spiritual pain. Understanding why we come with this pain and when you understand the pain, it doesn't control you. When it controls you, that's when we set up all these blocks and we react in a negative way.

AY: *So the pain tells you that there is something wrong and needs attention.*

DS: That is right you can look it at it that way. Pain on all levels physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. I hurt my back really bad when I was a teenager. The doctor told me to find a tight girdle and go back to work, this I did. I grew older, working at different types of jobs lifting, we lived on a farm and eventually the pain in my back got so bad I had to stop working and look after my health.

But what it did teach me is to work on my balance the discipline of mind, body and spirit. You know to work hard at that balance and to look after yourself physically, diet and exercise. I am always doing something where can I to help alleviate or dissolve the pain in my body and my bones. During all of this, I was attending ceremonies to ask for healing and direction in my life. I was led to good people to work with; it may consist of getting "doctored" in a sweatlodge ceremony, going to the "Sacred Tree" at the Sun Dance.

I've tried many alternative healing methods as well. There are a lot of good spiritual people in our community to work with. I learned about pain, to question where does it come from? Is it a core issue, does it stem from family or a cultural pain or maybe it's spiritual. So it sent me on a quest to understand because once I understand even a tiny portion, the pain lessens.

Five years ago there is no way I could talk to you like this I was in such a fog of pain. I couldn't even think clearly because of the car accidents I was in. The last four years I have been working hard on the discipline and trusting that I can understand and help to let go of the pain, walk it out dance it out, sing it out, go to ceremonies, go to healer. I do what ever I need to do to help let it go. In some cases letting go of emotional pain, I don't even have to know what the cause of the pain stems from. I can do a breathing exercise or chi gong or tai chi or running or dancing and it will flow away. What I have

been realising is that it is getting easier. The pain is less and its getting easier to recognise a cycle when it is starting to come and then I know what to do.

AY: *So being able to recognise messages and understand, or do something to respond to them.*

DS: And part of this has been my dream studies. It gets easier as you get older and for the last twenty five years since I started my healing journey my dreams guide me and I trust that. If I am not listening my dream will come back again and again, you are not listening lets give it to her this way and so I use that as a guide as well. Dreams are one part of our being that we can trust. I believe where we are really honest with ourselves is in our dream state.

AY: *So dreams are what you can trust because they come from within.*

DS: They are a part of you and that is the only place where we are totally honest with ourselves. We don't have anything to prove to anyone in our dreams. With my pain thing I have gone to a lot of ceremonies I have completed my Sundancing and I do my helper bit now and go to teaching lodges. The Shake Tent and Yuwipi ceremonies are very healing. I conduct pipe ceremonies and sweatlodges as well as healing sessions. It seems that when I am doing ceremonies I experience healing as well.

I remember quite a few years ago when I first started out in this journey. I enthusiastically jumped in with both feet. I was doing a lot of healing work with people. I went to northern BC and I worked with quite a few people. I over did it. I was burning myself out. Off balance, in my enthusiasm, I didn't really recognize it. I said to myself, oh I can do this and this and this. This one night I was so tired, I said to myself I am not going to do this anymore, just forget it. I have had it because I was so tired. I went to sleep with the thought, that is it, I am off this spiritual thing and healing stuff.

I fell asleep and in this dream this voice came it was neither male nor female. The voice said to me "mudjekeewis" over and over. I said go away and tried to go back to sleep again. I tried to sleep and this voice kept coming at me and finally I said, "alright" then they let me sleep. I got up the next day and I knew right where I needed to go look. I went to this book that was in that house where I was staying.

It was all about the bear spirit and healing. The teaching there was that the healing of the bear is very powerful and I recall it had to do with balance as well. I recognized that I was over doing it. I tried to be everything to everybody and not look after myself. So I happily got back on the path again. In a more subdued way not trying to be out there for everybody.

So that was a good lesson about the spiritual pain that we can bring on ourselves. This is the reality of the grandfathers and grandmothers saying okay you need to pay attention

here. You are not doing things in a right manner, get back to the teachings, get back to the basics you have more to learn here. I did I had a lot more to learn. Humility it a good teacher! I guess that could be termed as a spiritual pain.

Protecting yourself. We were going into ceremony we were going into sweats. I was doing sweats and going to sweat and using different spiritual ceremonies of the West Coast people and bringing in the healers in and having them work with us. So we actively worked with ceremony to help clear out the negative energy and we prayed for that woman and we sent her unconditional love. It was a lot of work it was discipline we learned a lot.

You know it is easy to say learn from our mistakes but sometimes you have to go through this so that it becomes strong in you. To learn to be pure, I was at a circle the other day and we talked about when babies are born they are born pure. Then all of the stuff we choose to learn comes in as we grow you know walk the journey. With young people I would encourage them to learn ceremony, to learn the culture and traditions and how to walk that good road and not to go into that anger place. That black road of destruction we call it and to stay on the good red road and to support one another in doing that.

We work with Aboriginal people from all over Turtle Island and I share this with them when I work with them as a group. I share how we as Aboriginal people come from all over and what we do is look around for like-minded people in the city. So what we look for is extended family and we set that up. We create our own community our own extended family and support system. I know I do that and we all do that as Aboriginal people. I really believe that we as Aboriginal people are so family and community orientated where ever we go we create that. Hope fully we create it in a good way.

Yes everybody has a choice about which path to take. You know when we have bad experiences in our lives we can learn from them it gives us strength. Knowledge can help us to support one another. Sometimes it is hard to watch people when they are going through a painful experience and they have to come to the realization within themselves.

I always share with people that I am working with in groups that the first time we bottom out is the hardest. That is the most painful and all of our pain physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually is what helps us to bottom out- like we can't take it anymore. We don't have any place else to go, any further down, we die. A lot of people get to that place and they decide on some deep level within themselves that they want to live. So then they pick themselves up. Then they start seeking that help from other people that is why I said earlier, you can't do it alone.

AY: *It sounds so much like what happens in a fast. You have to face your own thoughts and pains and yet you know that someone knows you are out there.*

DS: Yes someone knows you are out there. In a fast your fears are so great then you recognize there is a grandfather or grandmother there waiting for you. When you face your fear and you recognize that it is yours. You are responsible for it; it is not anybody else's fear but your own.

It is a big word trust. Trust belief and that belief system. It is almost like all of that is tested. Your belief system the trust and the very core of your being that true spiritual human being you are who wants to come out. That was there all the time and you have to trust that this is who you are this is the way we have to be. You know what I have been also thinking about is a lot of times our pain it may very well be our cultural pain, it may very well be our Ancient from our families pain and suffering they had to endure.

I question that, you know, is this part of the pain that I see some people carrying? Is it family pain? Is it cultural pain? When something like that knowledge comes to me, I believe that it comes to me from the grandmothers and grandfathers. I use that intuition in my healing circles and ceremonies, by bringing that forth. Sometimes you sit in the ceremony you don't remember all the whole ceremony but you will remember some phrase that somebody has said and that is just for you.

I was thinking where does it have to start? I think that this is where we have to start. In all of the problems in school where does the journey the healing have to start? That is such a big job. I see that it has to start with the family systems and encouraging in supporting the families and children to actively seek out their culture and their traditions and their spirituality and use that as a source to develop self-esteem and confidence and self discipline in who they are.

Taking back who they are and all the goodness that comes with our culture and traditions. The Elders you know the Anishnabe prophecies where the Elders are sleeping and so the Elders and the spiritual people have to go back to our traditions and culture and our spirituality and to reclaim that and walk with that and use it as a source of strength. That is a big job. You can not make a person you can lead them gently along and hope that they will take that up and work with it. You know in my everyday work I see a lot of families. They are searching for their identity and some of them still have to work some of their anger and their shame that was handed down generation after generation.

But at least they are reaching out and I even see some of the Elders doing that. They are acknowledging that I don't have the cultural and spiritual knowledge as you and I have. And these are Elders that are older than I. I encourage them to learn, we have to start someplace. I encourage them that we owe it to our people, we owe it to ourselves we owe it to the continuity of our people. The teachings that we were given that we need to think seven generations in to the future and it has to start with us. So we all have to be responsible for that. In the helping world, Aboriginal helping field, we need to

recognise that to support and help to bring our people to that place. To be role models, the educators and leaders to learn and share.

Maybe there is a story that could illustrate that where we can go too far in our bottoming out, because we were so good at sharing our teachings you know we have given everything away. When I see that I think that is so sad. I really don't know to handle it because when I see a person of another race coming in and learning our spiritual ceremonies and culture and all of a sudden they are advertising. I know this one guy a German here in Vancouver he advertises that he does sacred ceremonies and pipe ceremonies and sweatlodges in the paper. I don't know where he learned that but it saddens me and he charges for that. It is exploitation. I call this a cultural and spiritual exploitation.

He is not connected to Aboriginal community at all. I think he caters to the new age groupie people and then you can even look at the web. I was doing some researching there and I came across this piece of information and I thought oh this sounds good and then I read the bio of the guy and he wasn't even Aboriginal. They always claim that they have this Aboriginal spiritual teacher that gave them permission to do this.

I always question it. I don't know what we can do about it. I used to do ceremonies with non Native people I would share them is that if you want to be a strong spiritual person you owe it to yourself to go back to your tribal area and your tribal people, your ancient teaching where ever you are from. Your most powerful way of being in this world is to take up your own tribal background and your own spirituality because that sense of tribal being is in your DNA.

I used to get a lot of non Native people really angry with me. This one woman who said I want to do what you are doing and I said no don't, go follow your own. Don't take up what I am doing. This is my way, Aboriginal way how could you claim it. The stuff that I am doing comes from the very part of who I am. My sense of who I am as an Aboriginal person, my grandfathers and grandmother my Ancestors from time immemorial. They give me these visions and this is what I come with. I would tell them I urge you to follow your own spiritual journey don't come along and think that you can start doing Pipe ceremonies.

And demonstrate respect for the tribal groups. A couple of days ago my nephew emailed me and said he was going to be on CBC they had interviewed him. He is a veteran and is president of Aboriginal veterans association. I turned on the television just as they were interviewing and it was connected to a man that had written a book about Aboriginal veterans. I thought oh this is neat in the way this guy was looking and talking I thought maybe he was Métis. It turned out this guy wasn't even Aboriginal, but he said the story had to be told.

I was so disappointed, I am still feeling that way that disappointment and what do you do with it, how do you address it? Here this guy wrote a book about Aboriginal veterans and of course I don't know the whole thing maybe I shouldn't even say anything. I want to see this book and see what research and what he did, what information he got and who he worked with and all of that how he came to write this book and now he is being interviewed on national television. Then when my nephew came on TV all they showed him doing was lighting a bit of sweetgrass and giving his title and no interview there about Aboriginal veterans and their perspectives or interviewing some of the older veterans. So what does that say to the general public at large who know nothing about us?

AY: *That it is okay to speak for others and exploit them?*

DS: Exploitation and appropriation. I know in our ceremonies here on the West Coast the respectful protocol way to open a ceremony when you are speaking culturally and spiritually is to pay your respects to the people whose lands that you stand upon. Who allowed you to do your ceremonies and walk upon this territory and in your prayers and in your speaking you speak to that. I always do that and I notice when I speak in public I always notice how uncomfortable some people can be because you never hear them doing that. You never hear other people paying respect to the traditional territory that they are on and these people are from all of the other continents around mother earth. That to me is paying the utmost respect that you can pay to another tribal group.

AY: *So on one hand we have cultural exploitation and then excluding perspectives in history had been problematic and has adversely affected self esteem and success rates. You could use the racism paradigm where it limits opportunity or equal access to resources, which people have done, and yet we still want cultural content in the curriculum for our kids.*

DS: So with all of that, why can't there be encouragement and support for the Aboriginal writers, the ones that have been trained? It needs to come from an Aboriginal perspective. It needs to be written and taught by Aboriginal people.

Not somebody who perhaps gained their status by marrying into a band who is non-Native that writes a paper or a book and is taken as gospel truth forever.

AY: *So the advocates advocate for facilitation of Aboriginal voice rather than trying to do Aboriginal voice.*

DS: Yes, to me that would be the utmost respect shown that they can do for our people.

AY: *And to ensure that profits are shared and acknowledged. We need vision, we need to keep our eye on the vision, on the prophesy of the seven generations. We know it is not working and we have to be moving towards something and away from something*

else because a lot of apathy can happen in our communities.

DS: When I hear things about a woman I used to work with she told me in her small community in six weeks there were nine deaths. That is one example and it is happening all over aboriginal community. The sad thing about that was that it was all ages for various reasons. I asked her when do you have time for grieving, your village how are they handling it. They have to carry on and what is that teaching our young people, how are they going to take that and work with it as they grow older and they become in charge? So sometimes if there is not an intervention there to work with the trauma, grief and loss can carry on generation after generation into the seven generations.

What it comes down to if we look at the total picture it can be over whelming. We can't let it do that because from where we sit we are responsible for what we are doing. We bring it back to ourselves. We come back to what we can do in our space and our extended family and community that we have created. And we can, start working with families, with individuals and supporting them. Then we are thinking seven generations into the future.

Our teachings give us that when we make a change in our own consciousness it is felt all over. So if we can help others to make a change in consciousness then gradually it will be felt all over and in our communities. It will help our communities, our people to move out of that negative place and the grief and loss. I am not saying that it is all negative, only that there is a lot of pain we come with today that we are responsible for. We take that responsibility. We also have choices and what are we going to do this and how we are going to work on our healing.

The good parts about that last seven generations there was a lot of our Elder and spiritual people that passed our teachings and ceremonies, kept them alive, went underground you know that is the positive part. Our people are flocking to that like a thirst, so there is lots of positive that we need to balance out but we still have to face reality on what is going on in a small isolated community like that.

Yes, there are a lot of sad things going on. And what are the positives? Maybe there are a lot of people that are working for the good of the whole in that community. You can take that very community and look at our urban community. We don't hear of nine deaths in six weeks, because we are so spread out. But if we looked in our own backyard in Vancouver we would probably hear of more, so it is all relative. So we need to look at reality and reality over here this is the good that we come with, even though some of reality is grief and loss and all of that it gets back to balance.

Sometimes in the morning when I wake up, I write down my dreams. I meditate, pray and send out prayers and healing. I do that in early in the morning. I do my deep thinking then and I am given a lot of information at that time because I am open and am praying. Sometimes when I am in this place I feel this surge of mirth of laughter and like

I have that right now, in the pit of my stomach. This mirth and laughter is part of that trickster. One morning I was sitting there. I was thinking about someone who was in dire need. I was thinking about what I was going through and I wasn't in a very good place at the time. My thoughts were like well why do I have to do this anyway? Why do I have to have this pain? Why do I feel the need to be a helper, to do all of these things that I am doing? I don't want to be a leader. I don't want to be this anymore. I don't want to do this work anymore and that was the kind of space I was in. I let that go and then all of a sudden this laughter started welling up.

And it was like this, eh, it just felt like it was coming out from the very depths of my being and coming up and flooding me and into my mind. I was sitting there laughing and giggling to myself out loud. The thought that came into my mind was what if this was one big joke? What if this was one big joke and we need to start looking at it that way... so I started another dialogue in my mind. I thought am I going crazy or something, maybe I am crazy and it is all a joke you know? That led me on to the trickster, you know who is tricking me here eh? Not to take myself so seriously.

There is a time and a place where we need to be serious and most of the time we don't need to be. What I started doing was using that feeling. My co-worker starting bemoaning about this ticket she got. We were in the closing circle getting ready to say the prayer, to end the meeting. I squeezed her hand very gently and I looked at her and smiled and said did you pay your fine and she said yes I did. I said how are you going to let go? I looked at her and what ever was in my eyes and in my voice she looked at me and she started laughing.

Whatever the ticket came up when I said how are you going to let that go? She started laughing. She said I need to let it go, I did it and its over with. I said yes now lets pray for that and she laughed even more. When I said let's pray to close the meeting but she took it another way but it worked out okay because she recognized what she was doing.

She had to pay this fine and it was over with and there was nothing she could do. She wanted to hang onto a chew it up and keep it and be negative but what ever was in my voice and eyes she started laughing and said okay I will let it go and she started laughing. She recognized she was chewing on it and keeping it and hanging on to it and she immediately let it go. It was the fastest I ever heard her do that because she usually she doesn't do that.

So getting back to that morning when I was chewing on my own stuff and that feeling came up I guess that was the lesson I was given was, not to take things seriously all the time. I used that almost unconsciously in the moment with that young woman. That is the trickster who gives us laughter and helps us to look at things in a different light.

I am reminded of this one Elder, I am getting him to write down stories that have values and principles that are steeped in our story telling. There are two of them that are

really good at story telling. There is one story we are working on and he are going to present it at a conference next week. We as a staff were helping him set it up, all the aspects of the story. It is a story of Mr skunk and Mr crane, what it teaches is teasing and shaming and what happens. So we are using that not only with the children but with the community and parents. We teach our values and principles by using our legends and storytelling. The way we learn from the animal stories and by the trickster and that is an excellent way to learn.

When somebody says I got a story and the whole energy in a group can change, they all say oh good a story and it doesn't matter what age level. You can be animated with the little ones and they are right there with you. You grab their attention and the same with the other age levels that you speak to, even with the Elders. I was at this Elders council meeting this one woman had a story she wants to share and she started laughing and she told us a joke and it was the last thing we expected from her and it was delightful. It had a message but it was funny and as soon as someone said story everyone listened. We need to look into our stories and legends there is so much in that book the Mishomis about the teachings, the values and principles.

Elders in residence, especially Elders from different tribal groups that can come in and share. I think with leadership I firmly believe in all places leaders are born and then they are shaped. Leaders are people that have decided at the soul level that they are going to come into this place at this time as an Aboriginal person. They are going to be a leader and they have their journey laid out for them and however they get there and whatever they have to go through it is what they need.

If we are fortunate in sharing and helping to develop our young leaders that are coming up and supporting them and sharing our culture and getting them onto that from very young age. To appreciate who they are as an Aboriginal person. Who they are as this tribal being and you come from this tribal background and this is what is in your tribal traditions, culture and teachings, the spirituality.

If we could help support and shape them on their journey because our leaders are the ones that people listen to. I have heard some leaders who are not very good leaders, that say things that are being quoted on the television. We have that choice to start supporting our leaders in that manner, culturally and spiritually, that is the biggest key.

Culturally and spiritually to have that base because you know when I go out and do my work when I do ceremonies and even when I get up in the morning before I go to work I always stop and say a prayer for protection and for energy to go through my day. Then I ask the grandfathers and grandmothers and the Creator what do you want me to do today? Please do your work through me, guide me and surround me with your love and protection. Guide my being guide my words and my thoughts that I may do no harm. We need to teach our young ones that.

AY: *Chi Migwetch! Thank you very much.*

DS: You are welcome.