

Mrs. Tom Bernard (Elizabeth Joe) - Eskasoni ~~ESKASONI~~ interviewed by LBM.

Lil-I am gathering these interviews to serve as documentation for our brief that we will be presenting to the government. The kind of questions I will be asking you concern how the Indians of your time used the land and its resources. My boss is going to write a brief. He will ask the government to pay back the Indians for the loss and use of his land. Indians were independent before the government came into existence. However, after the settlers and their government we lost our independent way of life.

-It would be better if they let go of the Indians and let him return to his old way of life.

Lil-Yes, Indians got along well.

-My grandfather raised a piglet and he slaughtered a cow. This is what I remember. He had a cellar full of potatoes, turnips, carrots, and other vegetables. He also had apples. He stocked up on flour, corn meal and rolled oats for the winter. So he didn't run around in the winter. He had eels, smelts, trout and codfish.

Lil-Where did he live?

-Wagmatcook. His name was John Joe. He gathered all his winter supplies in the fall and most of the Indians of that time did. And they worked for their livelihood. All the people planted and helped one another for the caring of their gardens. Everyone was helped - for instance if you were planting, people would go over and help you out. When they were finished you all would go to another neighbor's, etc. until the planting was all finished. And these were not ploughed fields they were burnt fields.

Lil-So, they had to use hoes?

-Yes, they had to because they were burnt fields. Some fields were ploughed and some were not. And when the Indian people went in pursuit of food they went to the shore areas - because we are a shore people. This was our lifestyle in the past. Everybody lived along the shore. They say everybody was entitled to the shore areas, it was a common area. They built their wigwams there, they made a livelihood there and cooked their food on the shore. This was our way of life in the past. One time ago a rich American came to study the poor people. He was staying over at a farmer's house in West Bay Road. The American and farmer were debating about the Indian people. The American said "the Indian is poor, he eats our scraps". The other man told him "that isn't true". The other said "it's true" They were arguing. The farmer said "The Indian eats the best kind of food; he eats better than the King. The Indian eats food that is still alive that is how fresh it is". The other one said "it's not true". The other man said "okay, wait and see". I think it was my Uncle Joe, he lived in West Bay Road. He used to go to these white

farmer's house to get his milk. So this is where that rich American was staying. This is the one who thought that the Indians ate scraps. The farmer took my uncle aside and told him to get some eels and he told him that he would be down shortly to take this American down to their village because he wanted to see how the Indians lived. My uncle agreed. It just so happened that it was an ideal day for fishing because the sea was calm. My uncle went out on a boat and he speared for some eels. He got about 7 of them. Before he left he had told his wife, put the pot on the boil, because they would be having company soon. The men arrived and my uncle went ashore to meet them. They chatted and my uncle cleaned his eels. When he finished his wife washed and cut them up. The eels were still moving when she put them in the boiling pot. Then she added some potatoes into it, but before the food was cooked the white men got up to leave. My uncle asked them to stay for dinner and they declined. These two men had a bet going and the farmer won because he proved his point to the American. That Indians didn't eat scraps but their food was so fresh that it was still alive when they cooked it.

Lil-Indians at that time didn't depend on doctors and they had their own medicine. -Yes, they had their own medicine and they could cure themselves. One time ago my uncle and another man were selling and they happened to go into this certain house where a young girl was sick. The parents explained that she had been to many doctors but they had been all unsuccessful. He offered the Indians a lot of money if they could cure her using Indian medicine. So my uncle and the other man deliberated for a while and they decided to give it a try. They got some flag roots, ^{Ki'kwesu'} ground them into fine powder, steeped them, added a little bit of salt peter into the ^{shi} water. Then they filled up 7 quart bottles and told the people to give their daughter 3 glasses of this medicine every day. They left their address with them, that if they ran out of medicine to let them know. Do you know that girl was cured. Flag roots are very good. I've often heard my uncle say that it could cure T.B. You don't warm it up. You wash them out and cut them up, and then you put them in a bottle of water and place them near a stove. Eventually they will get warm. This is what you drink when you have T.B. They say it kills germs.

^{Magmi} Magmik g way ^{kwey} is good too when one is throwing up blood. And roots from a birch sapling is also good for spitting up blood. I've often head my mother mention this, but it must be true. And then there is chegaoobi (bass wood?) I don't know ^{Si'kawapi} medicine myself, I've just heard about it, that's all. Tancys are good for colds and ^{ta'msi'} they are also good for bringing swelling down. Pagosi and bay berry root are good ^{Pa'ko'si} for treating colds. Bayberry roots are also good for headaches and stomach trouble.

You dry the roots and you scrape it until it is like powder then you inhale this through the nostrils. Then when you had a sore stomach you boil this in milk. There's a lot of Indian medicine that our people know about. Then there's cattail-flags. There are two kinds. One kind is for drinking - the others are poisonous. This is what cured a man one time. Two men treated this man. First thing they did was they dug a hole by his bed and placed a pail there. These men resided in a wigwam. Then they boiled these cattail flag and gave him this beverage to drink. This made the man's bowels to move. After his stomach was all cleaned up then the real treatment started. And the man recovered.

Lil-My aunt also told me about ^{Maami Kewey} mug mig go way roots. There are two kinds of them. One has white flowers and the other red flowers. So one kind is for men's diseases and the other women's diseases.

-I've heard of similar plants, I don't know if they are the same kind as the ones that your aunt mentioned but there are two kinds, one kind is poisonous and the one with yellow flowers are good for women's diseases. When a woman has given birth and she has complications afterwards.

Lil-so there were midwives to deliver babies.

-Yes, they would gather at the expectant mother's house and they would pray to our grandmother, St. Anne and mother Mary. They say this is when our grandmother Anne and daughter Mary are present.

Lil-what was the treatment used if there were complications?

-There wasn't any special treatment. All you had to give to the new mother was rolled oats soaked in water and adding some ginger to it. And if she had complications they would give her a drink made from ^{pep wis tek eg eg ik} pep wis tek eg eg ik. These bushes have small leaves that are like velvet on one side. This is what I was given one time.

Lil-I heard that Indian women who were about to give birth were taken to a wigwam designated for this purpose.

-No, I have never heard of this myself. From what I remember the children were taken to stay with neighbors and the midwives moved in until everything was all over. The children were taken home after 2-3 days. This was the custom. And I've never heard old lady Aselik mention that certain wigwam you were talking about. She was very old and she used to tell a lot of stories. I wish I could remember all the stories that she told me. She had three children and they all were born in a wigwam. A lot of children have been born in wigwams. This was our way of life at one time, living in wigwams. A lot of people are sick today with various diseases the reason is that we are not used to living in houses. So our first downfall was the

house. We can't be like the white people. Indians were used to the wigwam - they were much healthier - all the impure air that you breathe out when you are sleeping escapes out of the wigwam. The fresh air gets in - they alternate. This is why the Indians were healthy.

Lil-Indians believed too that spruce was beneficial to their health. This was what they had on the floor of their wigwams. This smell was what they inhaled.

-Spruce and fir is good for medicinal purposes. One time Michael's side was sore. I think this was caused by too much drinking. Andrew made his medicine for him made from spruce bark. This spruce contains gum you know this is what heals the inside of your stomach.

Lil-After a person has recovered I heard that a tonic was made for him.

-Cherry bark, you boil it and add a little water to it. This was the tonic. You could also use semosi. Cherry bark is also good for kidney trouble. You mix another kind of medicine with that though I don't remember what it was. Maggie Paul's father knew a lot of medicine. I've heard him mention another medicine that he used was burdock root. The root that grows lies from an easterly direction. You mix another root with that but I don't remember what it was. He could even cook a meal using leather. He used hide. He could make a pot out of birchbark. He and his wife used to go around with a sports man show. He would demonstrate all the different things that an Indian used to cook his food, etc. You know my husband took a priest on a tour of the islands around Malagawatch. They stopped at a spring for a drink of water but the only container that had been left there by someone had all rusted. So my husband told the priest to wait a few minutes and he pulled off a bark from a birch tree and he made a cup for him. The priest was surprised and he said "I guess an Indian is never stuck for anything while he was in the woods". Old people know a lot of things. They could survive in the woods, but the young people of today would starve if they got lost in the woods.

Lil-I know I would.

-It's easy to cook a partridge.

Lil-how do you cook it? Is it easy?

-It is easy, you just take the feathers off, cut off the head then you barbecue over an open fire on a split stick. I remember when we used to live in New Campbellton one time. My father would go out in the woods and bring back a lot of partridges. He would cook them over a fire. We used to go to New Campbellton to pick blueberries in the summer time.

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Lil-Indians used to go there in August I heard.

—I was young when I used to go there - a lot of people used to go there. They came from all over. There would be many wigwams all along the shore.

Lil—Have they been going there for a long time?

—Yes. We would climb up on the mountain. We didn't do the lugging, my father did. We would pick berries until about 3 or 4 o'clock. We usually went home with 8 to 10 gallons of berries.

Lil—Where did they sell them?

—They took them to Sydney and North Sydney.

Lil—It must have been nice living in wigwams and I suppose they had to cook their bread on the shore.

—Yes, they made bread cooked in gravel and fried bread and some people that had the iron pots were able to make yeast bread and cakes.

Lil—I wanted to ask you if the Indians made maple sugar.

—Yes, they did in March.

Lil—Did they go to a certain area.

—No, but I don't know if they sold it or if they only gathered it for their own use.

Lil—How do you cook tupkanasikewey?

—This is eel and corn soup. You boil hard wood ashes in water then you leave it to set overnight. On the next day all this ashes will have settled in the bottom, you pour this water out than you put it in another pot and you boil your corn in this water until it's soft. Then you take them out wash them thoroughly and then you make your soup. This is the way I heard it.

Lil—Indians tell me that they used to eat a lot of wild vegetables and berries.

—Yes, wild turnips and the berries that we used to pick were wiskesamon (berries), *wis ke's mi's* *Kato'mi* godomi (swamp raspberries), raspberries, all kinds.

Lil—Then they used to preserve a lot of food and they used the drying method.

—Yes, they dry blueberries and also apples.

Lil—they also dry meat.

—Yes, John Marshall was telling me a story about that the other day. He used to live in Newfoundland. He said he went into the woods with some men one time. I don't know how long they stayed in the woods but he said it is a trip he'll never forget.

They shot a moose and the men cut it up and dried it. The meat was much lighter and they split it up among the three of them. He said those men are tough. He said they didn't get tired at all and he was wishing they would stop for a while because he said he was exhausted. The Newfoundland men must be used to that kind of life.

Lil—They were the last ones to hold to the old culture of making canoes and snowshoes.

I heard that they used to make maps out of birchbark too, and torches. How did your husband make a living?

–He trapped for mink, muskrats and foxes. He speared for eels and he fished. He made axe handles. We used to live in Alba. We moved over during centralization but we didn't stay long. I almost froze to death. The house we were given wasn't finished inside. A man came to see us. I told him we weren't staying there because the house was too cold. I told him we were moving back to Alba because the house that we had there was much warmer. I told my husband, let's get the hell back - we won't listen to this man, he's a big liar. We moved back. We made baskets and my husband went peddling them. He also fished for clams. We were very comfortable.

Lil–I suppose that you have been making baskets for a long time.

–Yes, I've been making baskets ever since I've been married, since I was 18.

Lil–Who taught you how to make baskets?

–My husband did.

Lil–Did you make your own dyes?

–No, but I remember my aunt used to make it a long time ago when we used to live in Meccan. She used alder. She boiled this and added soda to it. Then she used to make it out of hemlock to make brown.

Lil–Did they use plants?

–I've never heard of plants being used for dye but I heard a woman talk about a dye that she used. This is made from a tree that had fallen and decayed. It's green. I didn't pay much attention to her so I couldn't tell you how she prepared it.

Lil–I guess Indian people moved around quite a bit at one time.

–Yes, they moved around to make a living and not for pleasure. And people didn't drink as much. They would live in wigwams. I was 13 when I first moved to Eskasoni. About half of the people here at the time lived in shanties.

Lil–You grew up in Wagmatcook? *wagmat kook*

–Yes, I moved to Malagawatch when I got married and I lived there until not too long ago. *malakawegk*

Lil–People tell me that the people from Malagawatch were the last ones to hold on to their culture.

–Yes, we are still holding our culture. We know how to make a living in the old Indian way.

Lil–The Indians of today are not as smart. They rely too much on welfare.

–Yes, but welfare is a recent thing. What ruined the people was the movement to this reserve. The young over here get welfare, but one time ago it was a long wait because in order to qualify for welfare you had to be old. Because only the old got

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welfare. I think the welfare was \$12 a month. My husband and I and our neighbors used to plant. One time ago I never had to buy potatoes, because we used to grow our own. We used to get seed potatoes in March from the government. We received a bag of potatoes, the I got some more from the local white neighbor that I worked for and I also got the fertilizer from them. We had a big field. Besides we had a garden and we grew turnips, beets, carrots, etc, for our winter food.

I know a story whereby a white man was saved by a medal that he wore around his neck. The Indians were going to kill him.

Lil-This must have been after they became Christians. Because I remember a similar story that was told by Father Rankin at the Anniversary Mass that was held at Malagawatch this summer. He told a story about the local Scotch people around Inverness or Victoria area who were captured and they were about to be executed by the Indians. Well, anyway, those poor people got down on their knees and blessed themselves. This is what saved those people when they made the sign of the cross.

-The poor Indians were treated like monkeys. Many have been killed off, it must have been a hard life in those years at the time of the first contact of Europeans.

Lil-I wanted to ask you of a custom that was practiced in Afton. This was that when a young girl became a teenager she was sent to an old lady of the reserve who explained to her the facts of life. This old lady washed your face and combed your hair.

-Yes, I've heard of it. It was practiced here. Your hair was combed and your face was washed by one of the old ladies on the reserve and she explained the role of a woman. Childbirth was explained and she told you how to care for yourself when you were pregnant. They tell you that your marriage bed is a sacred thing. You conceive and bring a life into the world in it. Seven days after the birth of your baby the old lady comes to your house and gives you a blessing. She says a prayer with you and after the prayer she will preach to you. Then you can get up from your bed. Your bed was changed and then when you were ready to go outside the old lady would come to your house again. She would say another prayer with you. After the prayer she combed your hair. Then you stepped out of doors and you drink a cup of cold water. Then your bed was changed again. And then you were able to resume your everyday activities.

Lil-They had nice teachings.

-Yes, the old customs are not followed anymore. Today the women who give birth in hospitals start running around three days after the birth of the baby. I guess the women don't even pray after getting up from their beds. They don't think of our

Blessed Mother. There was an old lady by the name of Doucette who used to pray with me after the birth of the baby.

There is another story I am going to tell you that was told to me. This teaching isn't hard to follow. If you don't remember to do it, I guess it's not harmful. I still remember to do it. You know there is a spirit which is called Our Grandfather. Do you know who that is, that is February. First of February, because sometimes we have hard winter and sometimes it is hard to get supplies. Sometimes we run into food shortages. Because you can't be rich all the time, you have to run out sometimes. On the night of the first of February you go outside and leave crumbs on the ground and you kneel down on the ground and offer a prayer to Our Grandfather. If it's too cold you can say the prayer inside the house. This was what our forefathers did and handed down to us. Ask Our Grandfather to get you through the winter safely, not to have to run with too much difficulties in the acquiring of game. Ask him that these will be easy to get. If you do this, I swear to God, that you won't have any problems in the acquiring of food for that winter.

Lil-My mother still follows that custom.

This is part of the old Indian religion. Indians had their own religion at one time.

-Yes, we had all kinds of entertainment too, dancing, playing cards, etc. We also respected the holy season of Lent. People are not as devoted today. But in my time we fasted all during Lent. We could only have a piece of bread and tea without sugar and milk for breakfast. The dinner consisted of potatoes cooked in the coals and some herring. Supper was the same as breakfast. Then the switches that you receive as penance, they are sacred. They drive the devil away.

Lil-They didn't use sticks for disciplining their children. They used switches. I could very to that.

-Yes,

Lil-People discipline their children one time. And they had religious instructions for the children all during Lent.

-Yes, I used to attend prayer meetings over Hughie Googoo's and then there was one held at the corner, the old man's, grand chief's house; finally it ended.

Lil-Centralization changed a lot of things.

-Yes. We come from places that were rich in resources. People will say that the people from Malagawatch are poor; their clothes are raggedy, they are starving. We didn't starve. We made a good livelihood there. There was a lot of food to be gotten - there was no shortages for provisions, fish, rabbit, eels, and smelt. We bought meat. If one of the neighbors killed an animal we bought our food from there.

Lil—They say Malagawatch is the oldest of the Indian reserves.

—Yes, it's true. There was a church there at one time and French people lived there. Legend says that there is a silver bell in the pond in Malagawatch. Men were digging where the old church was located and they dug up some old shoes, high boots, which belonged to the nuns who used to live there. The late John Bernard did some digging there not too long ago.

Lil—Anyway when that church fell into ruin the priest decided to move to Chapel Island as it was already a meeting place for the Council. Indians have been going there a long time, I guess even before they became Christians..