

HARRIET DENNY - ESKASONI

Lil - My boss told me to ask people how they used the land to maintain a livelihood. You know our forefathers were self-sufficient before the white man came to America and our people maintained this way of life to a certain point even in your father's time. I have interviewed a lot of people and most of them have told me that the Indians were able to grow their own vegetables, they made things out of the resources, like baskets, axe handles, etc. Indians were never stuck for anything when they went out in the woods. They had farm animals; they shared game, you know, they took care of each other.

Indians were very poor one time ago.

Lil - Yes, but they were more ambitious and prouder in a way because they were able to support themselves.

My father was very smart.

Lil - How did he make a living?

He cut props and he made butter tubs. But food was inexpensive back then. At that time you didn't get housing from the government. He made his own house. And in those time, when you moved into a new house, you didn't have such things as furniture. When he bought another house, he took a bag of potatoes over there and he moved us in. When he had settled us in, he started out on maintaining our livelihood by cutting props, working as a cooper. He fished for eels. In the spring, he planted potatoes, he grew a lot of potatoes. He had many cows and he bought a piglet. We had a big barn. In the winter, he butchered a cow. Besides the abundance of meat, we had all kinds of food. There were many of us in the household. Besides his family, he also took care of two poor people. The only thing that the government contributed towards those people was one bag of flour a month. A bag of flour was \$3.00. The people that he took in were totally helpless, they couldn't get around and could hardly talk. There were about three families living in the house in all that he had to support. He took care of his mother. My father bought this land that I am living in now plus the house which he bought from old man Bernard for \$150. We didn't have a stove when we moved in so he went to North Sydney to buy the stove. My mother didn't start making baskets until we were almost all grown up. By then we were able to help her out.

Lil - Did you move around?

No, the only time we used to move was in the summertime after the St. Ann's Mission when we moved to New Campbellton to pick blueberries. We stayed here until October, then on the way home, we stopped in North Sydney. There was another Indian village there. My father worked there for a while until Christmas, then we moved back home. He still kept his cows - the neighbours took care of them.

Before St. Ann's Mission, he was very busy, because we stayed there for 10 days. Men didn't hunt as much deer as they do now but in the winter-

time they hunted seals. They saved the seal oil and put it in big bottles. The seal oil looks like cod liver oil. We used this in the wintertime to fry bread and pan cakes. It is very delicious and then we also ate the meat.

Lil - There were a lot of eels back then.

Yes, in the wintertime they speared eels and fished for codfish, salmon, and smelts.

Lil - Did he sell the eels?

They started selling them just recently; before people didn't buy them.

Lil - Were there stores around here?

There was a store by Tommy Moore's house in Northside East Bay. He used to buy props. There was another store in Castle Bay owned by Cameron. He also bought the props, pulp, and boats used to pick up the props over at John Paul's Point. (Kes Kos-Kom-pi-ak). This is the way they made a livelihood, and then they used to hunt rabbits and in the Fall, my uncle trapped for foxes, mink and muskrats. We ate muskrats.

Lil - A lot of people have told me that they used to eat muskrats.  
Also, Indians had a lot of ways in which to keep food fresh.

Yes, they salted eels and they dried apples. They sliced them and strung them up until they were dry. You also ate these in the wintertime.

Lil - They also were able to dry blueberries.

That must have been done recently because we never had any blueberries back then.

Lil - I mean they must have saved some for their own use in the the blueberry season at New Campbellton.

They sold all the berries that they picked in New Campbellton.

Lil - Some people have told me that they saved some for their own use for the winter's food.

We couldn't save them because the purpose of our trip was to make some money. We sold the berries for 50¢ a gallon. Some people made good and some didn't fare out so well.

Lil - It must have been hard to pick berries on the side of the mountain.

We picked berries on flat land; the only thing we had to do was to climb the top of the mountain. The descent was hard because you had to lug the heavy pails down. In the spring, people gathered maple syrup. They go up the hill here and they got a lot of syrup and maple sugar.

Lil - They made sugar.

Yes, we often helped my grandmother out when she was making maple sugar.

My grandmother would boil this syrup in the big iron pot and when it was ready, she poured it in wooden containers which held 5 cakes of maple sugar. She usually made 10 cakes a day. She kept these in the boxes for about a week. After they have dried, she put them in birchbark containers and sold them. She sold them for 50¢ a cake. She also raffled them; people would come to our house in the evening to play 45. It cost 2¢ to get in the game. My grandmother used to make a lot of maple sugar. Then my mother used to bake bread, mixing the dough with that syrup.

Lil - I guess Indians of that time didn't have to buy too much in the way of food.

No, I guess the only thing that they used to buy was flour, tea, sugar and tobacco.

Lil - What <sup>about</sup>/corn meal?

And Corn meal and rolled oats. One time ago when we had the small pox epidemic, we had a lot of food because we were the ones to distribute it. This food was supplied by the government. My father was the Agent and he had to transport and distribute the relief because <sup>we</sup>were under quarantine.

Lil - When was this?

In 1910. You know how it started. A priest came to the reserve that fall. I think it was around October and people from Afton walked over here to attend the Mission. The Grand Chief didn't want those people because he knew that the Afton people might have been exposed to small pox. They lived about 26 miles from a smallpox epidemic. Anyway, the Grand Chief told them that they couldn't stay. My father stopped the men when they were on their way home. He offered them a meal. It just so happened that my mother wasn't feeling well at the time and one of the men gave her some Indian medicine called WA-GON AMENAKSI. He hung it on the door and he told my mother that she wouldn't get the dreaded disease. After the meal, the men departed. Then a funny coincidence occurred. Old man Gould and his son Doug went on a boat trip to Whycocomagh and they happened to stop at a certain place on the shore. The little boy found a handkerchief on the shore and he picked it up and put it in his pocket, and in nine days he started to get sick. The doctor was called and he said that he had the smallpox. This doctor's name was MacIntyre. Then another doctor came, Dr. Kendell and he too confirmed that the little boy had smallpox and this is when we were quarantined. All the people that lived on the other side of the brook came down with it.

Lil - Did a lot of people die from it?

No, the doctor's were too good. A lot of people had complications from it. One little girl lost ~~any~~ eye and one man later died from it. The doctor gave us shots to prevent us from catching the disease. Then my mother grew some stalks (I don't know what she called these) but anyway after they were harvested my father took them to be grinded for flour. We got three kinds of flour. One was the regular flour and the others were rougher.

Lil - It must have been wheat. Did she cook bread in gravel?

Yes. She would heat the gravel on the shore until it was very hot and she would place her big iron covered pot and bury it in the sand. She would keep the fire going on top. Oh, and another thing that she used to make were brooms made from wood.

Lil - I wanted to ask you about the time that you people were raided by the RCMP for playing Waltes. This was during the centralization period. You know a lot of people have commented on that. I was doing interviews before on the study of centralization. We believe that as a result of centralization, we suffered what we call cultural genocide. I have talked with a lot of people and they have told me all the traditions that we used to practise one time ago. I asked them when they ended. Most of them said "during the centralization period."

You know, I was telling some people the very same thing the other day. We were raided by the RCMP for playing Waltes. The dice were confiscated by them and we had to pay fines.

Lil - This was during the centralization?

Yes.

I've heard about it, I think my poor aunt was one of them.

Lil - Another thing I wanted to ask you was if you heard stories concerning the welcoming ceremony that the Micmacs used to give to some Indian visitors on Chapel Island. I believe that these visitors were Mohawks after we had signed the Peace Treaty with them.

Yes, I've heard stories from my father and he said these men were Mohawks. The men meeting the canoes would wade out into the water to meet them.

Lil - And Indians around here have told me that people used to help each other more at one time.

Oh yes, they helped each other out making and mending fences, during the planting and harvesting time and getting winter supply of firewood. They had what they called frolics. They had a big meal and dancing afterwards.

Lil - Did people have festivities here at Christmas time and other Holy Days?

Yes, the celebrations lasted all night. This was when we celebrated the saint's feast days. People who had names, like Stephen, John, etc. I often wondered about their enormous appetites because they used to eat at almost every house. Besides they loved to dance. After the meal there was a lot of Indian dancing.

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