

MRS. ISABEL PAUL - ESKASONI

My mother cured my father when he had cancer. He had a sore on his palate. There was a hole about the size of a nickle in the inside of his mouth. My father went to two doctors and they both told him that the sore in his mouth was cancerous. They gave him some medicine. The hole was getting bigger and it was bleeding a lot. He would put the medicine on a piece of cloth and apply it to the sore but this medicine didn't help him at all. My mother decided to make some Indian medicine for him. She went out in the woods and brought back some willow bark. She got a whole lot of this bark. She put it in a big pot and boiled it all day until the colour was all gone from it and it was pure white. This medicine kept boiling until it started getting thick just like molasses. Indians call this PEG O AK. This is what she made. By the time it was ready, there wasn't too much of it left on the bottom of the pot. She put this in a bottle; she didn't add anything more into it because I was watching her. Then she took a piece of cloth and she cut it round. She put this PEG O AK and spread it out on the cloth. Then she took some lard and spread this over the PEGO AK. Then she put this onto my father's mouth. My father was working at the time. He told us that he took the cloth off when he ate and put it back on again after he had finished eating.

My father kept on working because he had a big family to support. My mother would put a new dressing on his sore every day. About a week went by when my mother checked his mouth and she noticed that the sore was starting to heal. It was a very small part and it was round and black. This medicine was killing the roots of cancer. She continued changing the dressing on his mouth for three or four days and until the black spot was the size of a pin head. She continued for about five more days and by that time the spot was gone. He went back to the same doctors that he had seen before and they asked him what had happened to the sore in his mouth. He told them that his wife cured him and that she was a better doctor than they. He told them that his wife had made some medicine from some kind of a bark from a tree in the woods and it took just three weeks to cure him of the sore. The doctor's were amazed and they told my father that they would like to know what kind of medicine that his wife had used.

Lil - Where were they living at the time?

In New Glasgow. My father was working there. There were a lot of Indians living there at the time. That was a long time ago.

Lil - Your mother was a good Indian doctor?

Yes. She cured Isaac Alex one time. Isaac had a deep sore on his leg and which kept getting deeper. No one was able to cure him. My mother made a salve for him. I remember when she made the salve. She used resin which she grinded into powder. She then used willow bark and boiled it thick until she had made PEG O AK and she used allam; she melted that and then she mixed sheep fat into this solution. This is what I remember she did when making salve. She was a good doctor. She could even cure excema. She cured John Johnson, Noel Johnson's son. The little boy had excema on his head.

Lil - I don't think there is medicine today that could cure excema. Your father used to make rustic furniture, didn't he?

Yes, he used to make picture frames, chairs, flow<sup>er</sup> pots.

Lil - Did your mother make her own dye?

Yes, but mostly she used commercial dye. She knew what colours to mix to make a new shade.

Lil - Your mother used to make baskets, didn't she?

Yes.

Lil - Did she make quill baskets and moccasins?

Your grandmother, Mary used to make quill boxes. I used to love to watch her. Sometimes I would stay at her house all day. She would cut out the birchbark and cut it out for the sides of the boxes and bottoms; she made a round bottom; stitched the sides to it and then she weaved the hoop onto the rim. She didn't use the splints that you usually use for making baskets but she used the roots of a spruce tree. She picks these roots and splits them into thin strips. She used an awl to bore holes in the birchbark. She used to scare me because she kept the quills in her mouth while she was doing her design. Before she started the design, she made a drawing on the birchbark. She would bore a hole into the basket and then she would stick the quill into it. As I said before, she held the quills in the inside of her mouth. My gosh, I was afraid that she might swallow them but I guess the quills are dead because they have to be boiled first. She would work on her design and she never seemed to tire.

Lil - My father used to describe how she used to separate the different size quills. She would put a whole bunch of quills into a woolen sock and shake the sock. The bigger quills would come out first.

I don't think she used the big quills, because I used to hear her when she asked one of her sons to get her some quills. She would say "get me some quills, son but don't bring any big ones". She preferred the smaller ones.

Lil - Do you remember when Indians used to make pottery?

No.

Lil - Andrew Alex and his wife used to make them. They used the clay that could be found in where old John Johnson's used to be located.

Oh, that must be (UP KOW) clay.

Lil - Yes, this is what they called it.

UP KOW is good for mending iron, e.g. we used to use it to mend our stove one time. This clay is red. It stays on a long time. There is some of that clay here; you could find it in the brook by Harriet Denny's house.

Lil - Do you know what kind of tobacco the old Indians smoked?  
These were plants, etc. I think one kind is called MEG-GO-GUM-KA-GEAGE DEL (red willow sticks). These have red leaves or red flowers.

Yes, these sticks are red. They get a whole lot of these sticks and then they scrape them and dry them and this is what they smoked. I've often heard that they used to smoke moss but I've never seen them smoke it myself. They gather this moss from very old stones.

Lil - Another thing that they used to smoke was big leaves that grow around the Oyster Farm in Eskasoni.

I guess they took a lot of chances, but I guess there isn't anything growing in the ground which can't be used for medicine. Just one thing I know that couldn't be eaten is GA-GIP-KOL but it is used for medicine.

Lil - Is it poisonous?

Yes. They are used for medicine, e.g. if one's legs are sore, you boil a whole lot of these GA GIB KOL in a big pot and afterwards you pour this water into a big tub and you soak your feet in it. This is the only kind of medicine that I know is poisonous.

Lil - I guess they could use poisonous plants, etc. but they could neutralize them by combining it with other kind of plants. This is what I think, anyway. For instance, a lot of people tell me that snake roots are poisonous and yet a lot of people tell me that they drink that liquid which has been boiled in the snake roots.

Snake roots are good for eye ailments and if a child's mouth is breaking out on the inside, you make a very weak solution of this medicine. I know one man who uses this same medicine for treating his stomach. I don't know exactly what disease he has but anyway he picks a lot of these roots in the summer time.

Lil - There is another Indian medicine called GI GOESO S GEL. Did you ever hear of it?

You use them for different diseases. I know that they are good for colds. Indians save them. They get them from the swamps. They dry them. Indians used Indian medicine a lot in my time. They didn't depend on the doctors too much. After they are dried, they grind them into powder and you add boiling water to this powder and let it steep for awhile. These are good for diarrhea and other diseases. MELGAMO GEOEI-that plant used to grow outside my house. The leaves are very big and the blossoms are very pretty. It used to grow in the fields of Jimmy Helen Robinson's near Chapel Island Reserve. There are two kinds of that medicine. This is what my father taught me. They grow so big with small leaves. One kind bears white fruit and these are used for women's diseases. The other kind bears red fruit and are used for men's diseases. I don't know if it's kidney disease or what that they are good for. My father thought highly of them.

Lil - What about GINIGOETJITJIG?

Is that what you call low juniper?

Lil - Yes, ground juniper.

These are good for kidney trouble and they are also good for a woman who has just given childbirth and she has complications. This is what the midwives give to new mothers. It cleans the woman's stomach so no impurities stop in the stomach.

Lil - My mother has gathered a lot of PAGOSI. I've seen them drying in the attic.

What does it look like? Do they look like dahlia bulbs?

Lil - No, they look like carrots but they are smaller and are yellowish.

Those are the ones that grow in the ground. There are some growing at the Big Beach. My children gathered that kind of PAGOSI. I dried them and then I steeped them. They are good for stomach trouble. Indians used to use those for preventing the spread of disease. If there was measles or whooping cough, etc. in the neighborhood, Indian people would keep a big pot of them boiling in their houses at all times. Sickness wouldn't be carried into your house from people coming in or vice versa. An old couple, Mr. & Mrs. Marbel from Afton used to think so highly of them. They used to drink them all the time. They are good for all kinds of diseases but especially good for the stomach.

Lil - Did you ever hear of PLUM-WIP-KEL (Labrador Leaves, and GEE-BAK DESK A WHALE? Indians used to steep these and drink them like tea or as a substitute for tea I should say.

Yes. They are good for medicinal purposes too. I guess that they drink them as a substitute for tea when they ran out of tea.

Lil - Yes. These are the kind of stories I like to hear whereby Indians could so readily improvise when they couldn't get to a store nor did they depend on doctors. e.g. I've heard stories that Indians, going out into the woods for a few days journey, didn't take pots and pans or flatware with them and sometimes with very little food but they could get along. They had many uses for birchbark. They could cook a meal with just a piece of birchbark to make a pot.

Yes, and I guess they made their knives and spoons out of wood. I remember the first time I made bread, I was only about 9 years old. This is the time I was staying with Mr. & Mrs. John William Basque. This couple had lost a child and Mrs. Basque was expecting another child. I guess Mr. Basque wanted me to keep his wife company. They asked my parents if I could stay with them for a while. My family lived in Marble Mountain at the time. My parents consented and I left with the couple. When we arrived at their house, Mr. Basque built a big fire on the shore. Meanwhile, Mrs. Basque made the dough for her bread. When the gravel had heated enough, he hollowed out the gravel and Mrs. Basque placed her bread there. She didn't cover it.

She covered it over with the gravel. The bread got all dirty. I was watching the. I told them I wasn't going to eat because the bread got all dirty; they didn't answer me at all, they just laughed. He kept a small fire going on top of the bread. After a while, he told his wife that the bread was ready. He uncovered it. He took a dish cloth and a knife and he scraped off the gravel with the knife and then she brushed off the dirt with the cloth. I told her that if I baked bread in the gravel, my bread would be cleaner than hers. Finally our bread had run out in about 2 days. I had my opportunity to make bread. Mr. Basque made a fire for me on the shore. I made the dough then I covered it with brown paper and I tied it with some twine. I put it in the gravel and I asked Mr. Basque to cover it over with gravel. Then I resumed my playing on the shore. Mr. Basque went spearing for eels near the house. He came home with a lot of eels. By this time, my bread was cooked. Mr. Basque took the bread out for me. I was very proud of it. I uncovered it carefully and there wasn't one piece of dirt or pebble inside. Mr. Basque came over to me and he raised my arm. He said I guess Isabel is the winner. He turned to his wife. I guess they got a big kick out of me. After a while he started cleaning and stripping the skins off the eels. There were some that he didn't skin - the big ones. He cleaned off the slime with sand. He cleaned them out and hung them to dry. In the evening when the eels had dried, he split them and spread them out flat. He put some salt on them and hung them up again. He went eeling some more and he did the same to the big ones. He had a big pail; this is where he put his eels. Eventually he filled up the pail. He used to go eeling at night. His wife and I went with him. I overheard them one night; Mr. Basque told his wife "when Isabel is asleep, we'll leave her". I was half asleep and I got up and told them "I am coming with you because I am not going to stay home by myself." They took me along. I went with Mr. Basque in the woods to peel some birchbark from trees for our torches. Then he got some of those tree roots I was telling you about that you split and you use for weaving quill baskets. This is what we gathered. When we came back to the house, I helped him peel off the bark and splitting the roots. Then he made the torches. He fastened them in two places with the roots. When we started out at night on our fishing trip, Mr. Basque fastened the torch on split stick which was nailed down on one end of the boat.

Lil - Did he dip the torch in the water first? I think one Indian told me that you wet the one side or part of it so it would last longer.

No, he didn't. Those torches give off a lot of light. We used to take a whole lot of them. Anyway, when my visit had ended, they took me back home to Marble Mountain and it took us three days to get there. It wasn't that far but we used to spend the night in different places so that he could go spearing at night and each morning, he would clean his fish. He took his time.

We arrived very early in the morning. The people met us at the shore. They asked him if he had any eels to sell. "Yes," he said, "what kind do you want - salted ones or unsalted or UP KA-SOK (dried & flat ones)? People came down the shore and bought all his fish.

Lil - What were people doing in Marble Mountain?

There was work going on there. I remember an old lady living there; her name was Madeline Joe Geage. She lived with her crippled daughter and I used to take care of her. That old lady used to dress the St. Ann Statue in Chapel Island. She had this job for many years. Finally she was unable to do the job herself but she would just sit there and give directions to the women.

Lil - What kind of work did your father do? Did he move to different places to make a living?

Sometimes he made a winter camp in Mulgrave or Queensport. I don't remember if we ever spent a winter in Canso but I remember we used to spend a lot of time there.

Lil - But he used to make a living somehow?

Yes. He had to. In Canso he used to fish for swordfish. When he came home at night, he used to bring home codfish guts, livers and heads. My parents used to make sausages out of these fish scraps. The halibut heads were very big. We would build a big fire on the shore to keep the pot boiling. When we went back after the Annual Mission, we would pick a lot of blueberries. My mother would spread a blanket on the ground and we poured our berries in the blanket. This is the way we cleaned them. All the dirt would blow away and in a few minutes the berries were clean. Then we would fill up pots and pans and we would put them aboard our boat and head out for the American yachts that were anchored out in the harbour. My father told the sailors that he didn't want money but he preferred to exchange the berries for food. They gave him big chunks of corn beef and pork. Then they gave us some cakes and bread. They also gave my father a lot of chewing tobacco.

Lil - Did you used to take baskets, too?

Yes, sometimes we did. Sometimes my mother made sewing baskets and some small baskets. We never brought any back.

Lil - Did you play games? I've heard of a game called WAB-NAK-KEN. It was an Indian dice game. They used dice that were bigger than the dice that we use for playing waltzes.

I don't remember it but I remember we used to play with pebbles. You flip five stones on your palm to the top of your hand. If you dropped one stone you tried to pick it up while you were still holding the other pebbles in your hand. If you missed, you were out and then it was somebody else's turn.

Lil - The district chiefs of Nova Scotia used to meet every year to have their council meetings. Nova Scotia had at that time divided their territory into four districts. The districts were GESPOGAWAGI, SEGENBENACADIE, ONAMAGI and KESPOGETET. Land allotments were given out to heads of families or men who had married that year. These land grants were big enough so that a man could support his family. You know they could live off the land. A man could hunt, fish and trap. He could get the resources from it like wood for baskets and canoes, etc. They didn't depend on the government at that time because they were self-sufficient. We had this way of life until the white settlers came. Indians didn't believe that land should be sold to anyone but that it should be shared by everybody. This is why they were so generous with their land. They gave permission for the white settlers to settle in certain areas, but as more white settlers arrived, the

Indians started to be driven out of their former lands and eventually territories started getting smaller until they lost this former way of life. They couldn't continue but that they had to adapt and eventually had to earn their living in the white man's way. If they couldn't, then they had to depend on welfare and this is where we are today. So this is why we have the land claim issue today. We want to be paid back for the loss of the use of our land. What we are asking the government is that Aboriginal Title of Nova Scotia be recognized. We were the first settlers and when the white people arrived, they broke up our independence by the taking over of our lands so our former way was lost. We never got any compensation for the loss of our lands, neither did we sign any papers to give away our land. We are trying to beat the government before they could terminate us because that is their goal. In 1969, a policy paper was drawn up and in part quoted the following "the slow termination of the Indians in Canada." When that happens, there won't be any Indian reserves; we won't have anything. So this is why we are pressing this Aboriginal Title Claim. One of the compensations we want is that there be a guarantee by statute in Ottawa that Indians continue to be helped in the ways of education, tax exemption, housing, etc. and that we still have our Indian reserves.

My boss wants me to do these interviews to ask people what they got from the use of the land. As you know, they got their medicine, food. They got the resources from it like wood for making various Indian handicrafts. They made their living from the land. My boss is preparing a brief on the Aboriginal Title Claim and he will take these quotes from some of the interviews. Anyway, these interviews, after they are written out, will serve as documentation for his brief.

What else did your father do to earn a living?

He made fence posts and poles and my mother made baskets. My father also made picture frames, rustic chairs. They had to use wood.

Lil - I guess he didn't depend on welfare too much.

No, he didn't depend on it because it wasn't much anyway. I remember we used to get our ration from the Agent's house, Angus Boyd. I remember we got flour, pork and molasses, enough so that a person won't starve.

Lil - You didn't have a choice in what you wanted to get?

Oh yes, I forgot to tell you how poor we were one time when we first arrived in Mulgrave. My poor father made a tar paper wigwam. We didn't have too much food, just enough for supper. In the morning when we woke up, my father wasn't home; he had left early to get some axe handles. When he came home, he had some breakfast and then he started roughly shaping the axe handles. We were so poor that we didn't even have kerosine for our lamp. Finally my father finished hewing 12 axe handles. Then he started shaping the axe handles. By this time it was getting dark. He had to work by the light of the fire. He would throw the shavings in the fire - this kept the fire going. He would shave off some more shavings by this time the fire was almost gone. This is the way that he worked until three o'clock that morning; he had finished 12 axe handles. I heard him say "Well, I finished 12 axe



handles." It must have been about 3 or 4 o'clock because it wasn't long before the dawn broke. Anyway, in the morning he scraped his axe handles with a piece of glass. My brothers and I did the sanding with sand paper. Finally we were finished and he threw these in a bag and he started out for town. I don't remember if we had food for breakfast but I remember we were anxiously waiting for his return. We stayed inside the wigwam; we kept a small fire going so we were comfortable. My father left about 7 o'clock in the morning. He was back in about three hours. I guess he must have gone a long ways to Pilot's Harbour I think. He came home with a big bag of groceries and some money besides. He brought sugar, bread, flour, tea, pork. My mother cooked our breakfast and in the evening we were able to get kerosine for our lamp. I think about my father and I pity him and think how hard he had to struggle for a living when we were children. We used to have some hard times. We were poor and we used to move from place to place; however, we managed to attend Mass on Sundays wherever we happened to live. I guess no one would live in this way today and if they did, I guess they couldn't manage to make a living so quickly out of these same resources. My father had a big family to support.

Oh yes, I want to tell you about my first husband. He was from Newfoundland. One time ago, he told me this story. He said "I took some white men in the woods." He started preparing the meal. He had potatoes and some caribou meat. He said he didn't have any pots so the white men were wondering how he was going to cook the meat and potatoes. He said "just watch me." He stripped off a big piece of birchbark from a tree; it was very thick. He then sat down and made a pot. He put a wooden handle on this container. It didn't take long as he had his crooked knife with him. Then when he was finished with the basket, he told them that he was going in the woods for awhile to get a certain wood needed for the kind of pot that he was using. He went and got some hardwood and with the men helping him out they had gathered enough wood to make the fire. He put some dry twigs on the bottom and the hardwood sticks over them and got the fire started. Then he took 3 poles and stood them over the fire. I don't remember what he called this thing but he said it was shaped like a wigwam. Then he put an iron hook just under the apex of the stand. He always took his cooking equipment with him when he went in the woods. He then hung up the pot with some water in it and put the caribou meat in it. He kept a small fire going. He said that the birchbark pot burned a little bit in the bottom (charred) but it didn't burn. He said that the white men were watching the whole procedure and were surprised. He said that when the meat started boiling, he threw in some salt and peeled potatoes. After the meal was cooked, the white men commented that they had never seen anybody cook a meal using birchbark before. He told them that pails, cups, etc. could also be made out of birchbark and proceeded to make dishes for their meal. He put the pot in the middle and they all ate their meal using sticks for forks. The men told him that they wouldn't have believed it if they heard it, but they saw it with their own eyes.

I remember one time ago when I went with him in the woods. He had a bean can at that time. He used that to boil our tea in. First he heated up the beans and then he took them out, washed it. Then he said, let us fry some pork; I looked around and noted that we didn't bring a frying pan. He shaped the ends of a forked stick with his knife and then he took it and stuck it on the ground by the fire, then he fastened the pieces of pork onto the sticks. When the pork had turned brown, he turned it over on the other side. I guess he was used to this kind of life.