

UASHTEU

Light and faith in the heart of First peoples of Quebec



Les Éditions Jaspe





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Revision: Jason Brunwald, Elsa Dykema Moreau, Dale Puckrin, Elizabeth West

Graphics and layout: Richard Ouellette – www.roseauinfographie.com

Translation into English: Daniel Bégin – traductiondb@yahoo.ca

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SUMMARY

Foreword	7
Sa'qaweiei ne'tata'suqan / <i>Wisdom of Old</i> — Gopitji'j, Robert Brisk	9
Wendat yahaha' / <i>Wendat Trail</i> — Martin M. Picard	15
Tshishe-Manitu-mashinaikan / <i>God's Book</i> — Guy Bellefleur	25
Kagi madjiwotc kinendagozo kikinohamadimigwamina / <i>Rescued from Residential School</i> — Rose-Anna Mc Dougall	33
Mikana / <i>The Way</i> — Anne Tremblay	39
Ki nagozi Cecoc kidji wabmak / <i>Jesus Appeared to Me</i> — James Cananasso	44
Nijo odotem, nigo ote / <i>Two Cultures, One People</i> — Manon Tremblay	48
Kibawagani migwam kak wakwik inekena / <i>From Prison to Paradise</i> — Alain Tremblay	53
Ki natokohew nitcanica / <i>He has Healed my Child</i> — H��l��ne Petiquay	62
Kchai ta wski alnoba / <i>Father and Son</i> — Daniel Goddard	68
Tshitshue shatshitun / <i>True Love</i> — Clermont Picard	73
Onkweh��n :we tsi nihontierha ne oriwahsonha' / <i>Indian Affairs</i> — Frances Rice	81
���� �� ���������� ���� ���������� / <i>The Aboriginal Church</i> — Allan Etapp	89
����������� ��� ������� ���� ���� / <i>Hope for the Naskapis</i> — David Swappie	93
Piley lintuwakon / <i>A New Song</i> — Richard Paul	97
�������������� ��� �� ������������ / <i>Forgiveness and Freedom</i> — Kenny et Louise Blacksmith	106
Guuti Mittimatalikmiituq / <i>God in Mittimatalik</i> — Joshua Arreak	115
Legal Notice	125

Foreword

When I was a little boy, I loved stories about cowboys and Indians. While seated in front of the TV set, there was not a motion picture or a show that I would miss if it could transport me into the world of these fabulous heroes of the forests and of the Far West. I personally owned a whole stack of comic books starring Kit Carson and Buffalo Bill which I was happy to exchange for those of my friends. These stories intrigued me and captivated me. Being only a kid, though, I was too young to realize that moviemakers and book publishers always cast white men as victorious good guys, and Indians as bad guys.

I was brought into this world by a single mom. At the age of four months, I was taken in by a loving family of the Lac Saint-Jean region. In my adult years, I went on a search for my biological parents and I found them. I was told that the family tree of my now deceased father had an aboriginal branch. However, further research of mine proved unsuccessful. I may never know the true story about that. Nonetheless, when my First Nations friends look at a picture of my dad, they are unanimous: all of them recognize some of the typical features of their peoples. That makes me proud!

It is through their mother's genealogy that we know Indian blood flows in my four children's veins. There is little doubt that they go back to ancestors of the Choctaw people who dwell in the southern parts of the United States.

Many years ago, while seated at a table with my Anishinabe friends, we contemplated the idea of working on a common project. In fact, we sensed an affinity, a synergy, a desire to create. Seasons went by, yet the seeds sown by the Divine Creator lasted, sprouted and bore fruit.

Today, it is with great pleasure that I publish this collection of testimonies written by members of the ten Aboriginal nations and of the Inuit nation of the province of Quebec. It has been an honour for me to get to know each one of these eighteen contributors, to listen and to gather that which they expressed with much passion and conviction. The loving welcome I perceived in the eyes and souls of my brothers and sisters of the First peoples has raised the esteem I already had for them.

Another reason for presenting this collective work grows out of my heartfelt compassion for these communities which suffer a much higher suicide rate than the North American average. I, myself, went through this horrible ordeal a few years ago when my nineteen-year-old son took his own life. I earnestly pray that the content of this book will bring back hope to all those who are downhearted.

A tour of Canada which allowed me to visit some 300 cities, 450 villages of Quebec and many Aboriginal communities has taught me that the best way to prevent suicide and remedy the many social problems we encounter today is to turn to Christ and to put his teachings into practice.

In this day and age, when one might wonder if the word “freedom” still means anything in our society, and if the option to believe is not soon to be crushed by the weight of unyielding authority, this unexpected source of light suddenly dawns and is pleased to reveal, to illuminate and to warm the hearts of simple people.

Claude Tremblay
Les Éditions Jaspe



Sa'qaweiei ne'tata'suqan **Wisdom of Old**

My name is Gopitji', which means «Little Beaver» in the mi'gmaq language. I live in the community of Listuguj located in eastern Quebec not too far from Chaleur Bay. I am eighty-two years old and I have served for quite a number of years on our band council.

Before the arrival of the white men, my ancestors lived here. We owned a vast territory and we were numerous, very numerous. Other nations came; they took our land and treated us shamefully. We have been abused and betrayed by the white man. My people as well as all the other Aboriginal peoples suffered greatly because of it. I have never been able to understand how human beings could behave in such an unloving and inconsiderate way toward other peoples.

Love is a very important thing, you know! Without love, all that is left is selfishness and lies. If there is no love to be found in our soul, it will be full of hatred and vengeance. The path of hatred is easy, but the path of love requires strength and a lot of patience.

Fortunately, my parents taught me a very important thing: they taught me how to love. They made me realize that when a very tall and very strong person strikes someone shorter and weaker, it becomes obvious that this tall person has not experienced love. If the smaller person tries to strike back in anger, there will be a lot of bloodshed. However, if the smaller person shows love to his attacker, he will be victorious... and perhaps, in so doing, he will have taught him how to love. In keeping with this and in light of the unjust treatment of my people, I can frankly say that I hold no bitterness toward the white for the way they treated us. I simply think that their behaviour reveals that they have never known true love.

When I was a child, my father taught me how to weave beautiful baskets. We made them in different shapes and colours to hold a variety of objects or even berries. There are many steps involved in making a basket. First, you need to go out to the forest and find the right species of tree in order to harvest the thin strips that are required. One needs to be skilled to prepare these thin ribs that will be woven together. Sometimes, they dry out and need to be moistened to regain their flexibility. When everything is ready, a patient hand skillfully weaves the basket. It is a work of art!

I have many beautiful baskets at home. One of them was braided over fifty years ago, and it is still intact and usable. I also own a very large basket that my father weaved for the birth of our first child and was used for his crib. It is very precious to me.

My wife, May, and I just celebrated our 52nd wedding anniversary. We have four beautiful children and many grandchildren. In our house, we have pictures of our family on display. We also have pictures of our younger years and our wedding. When a stranger comes to visit, we proudly show all these nice pictures. They represent our true wealth and the fruit of our love.

We were created to love. A very long time ago, all human beings formed one people. They all spoke the same language. They all came from the same parents and they all had the same blood in their veins. Over time, their love grew cold and they became arrogant. Out of pride, they wanted to build a great tower that would reach the heavens. They thought they were as wise as their Creator. Therefore, God had to intervene. He confused their language so that neither they, nor their offspring, could communicate with each other. He destroyed their ambitious project and scattered them all over the earth. And so it was that the different nations were born.

The peoples did not totally forget about the presence of the Great Spirit who is the Author of all things. As time went by, my ancestors as well as the ancestors of other peoples have sought to know him better.

A very long time ago, in a far away land, the Great Spirit made himself known and revealed his will to the elders of another people, similar to ours. These elders were nomads, their skin was amber and they lived in tents. They were called Hebrews. They wrote the law of Creator God on stones and animal skins to preserve it for the generations to come and to share it with all peoples.

Many centuries later, the Creator decided he would come and live on earth among us human beings. As he had promised the Hebrews, he came and dwelt with them. They were then called Jews and they were ruled by the Romans. Just like when they built the Tower of Babel, the humans wanted to show they were stronger than the Creator, so they struck him and nailed him to a cross. It would have been easy for him to destroy them completely, but he chose to love them and forgive them instead. Once again, the elders wrote his story on animal skins so that all peoples would learn to know him and to love him.

One day, a white man came to our community. He had a book with him. He claimed that this book was the Book of God. Some members of my people were saying we should not listen to him. For them, the book he brought was the book of the Whites. Nevertheless, my wife and I, along with other members of our community, still went to meet the white man. Nobody forced us; we wanted to meet him. We went by ourselves because we had many questions to ask about his book.

Week after week, we would speak with him to find out what this book was all about. Gradually, we came to realize that this book was not the book of the Whites, but that it was, indeed, the Book of God... the God of all peoples. Then, we believed!

Shortly after that, my wife and I, our four children and other members of our community went down to the river to be baptized in the water, as it is written in the book, and as Jesus did. Subsequently, we faithfully attended the meetings of this small church.

The white man who came to teach us about the book stayed with us for a long time. He learned our language and translated the book. A few from my nation and I helped with the translation. When the group was not sure of the meaning of a word, they would come to me and I would help them. I would ask them to pronounce the word very slowly and then I would give them the meaning. After many long years of patient effort, all the translated texts were submitted to expert linguists. Today, the mi'gmaq people can read the Book of God in their own language.

Watson Williams was the name of the pastor who came to live among us. Alongside his wife, Marilyn, he spent twenty-eight years translating the book. It is a great token of love, isn't it? Every morning, I read a passage from the book; afterwards, I sing praises to God. I also have a copy of the book in my truck, and I never miss an opportunity to share its contents with those whom the Lord puts in my path. I speak to people with love, and they listen to me.

All human beings need love. The people of the First Nations also need to know the love of God and be transformed by it. Jesus did not come just for the Hebrews; he came for the Whites, the Blacks, the Aboriginal people, and for all peoples of the earth. He came out of love to save all humanity.

You and I are incapable of saving ourselves by our own strength. No human being is capable of saving himself or herself. Sin is like a strong man who lords it over us. As all peoples have come from the same blood, so have they all been affected by sin. It was thus necessary for one stronger than us to come to defend us. Only a perfect being, without sin, could qualify to save us. In other words, it had to be God himself. And so, Jesus suffered and died on the cross in order to redeem us. He took upon himself all the consequences of our sin. This is what is written in the Book of God! This is the Love of God!

One day, Jesus came to a Samaritan woman and asked her for a drink. Later, he told her all the secrets of her heart. She had had five husbands and was now living with a sixth. Instead of rejecting her, Jesus showed her love and offered his forgiveness. He offered her a new life, one like pure and refreshing water. The woman received the love of God, and her life was changed.

I am now an old man and I see that the world we live in is not improving but getting worse. The love of Jesus must fill our hearts, leaving no room for evil. We must share this love of God with others, just as God has shown his love to us.

I have worked many years as a team leader at logging camp, and I sometimes had to correct workers on their methods for cutting down trees. Some went about it the wrong way and could have seriously injured other workers. Instead of correcting them harshly, I went to them gently and explained a better way. Gentleness has always been more effective than harshness. The men under my leadership have always respected me, even though some have teased me on occasion, calling me "the preacher".

I have never been hard on my men. On the contrary, I tried to do the right thing and to take good care of them. Whenever we had a rainy morning and I sensed that the bad weather would go on for the rest of the day, I would give them permission to go home. I treated them kindly. As time went by, I noticed that some of them who previously misbehaved started to change. Others have talked about God with me. On occasion, I would fetch my Bible in my truck and explain that the love they had seen in me was all coming from Jesus.

I also came across people who wanted to do good things but had neither the right tools nor the right methods. I recall a well-meaning young man who was using a brush cutter to fell trees that were much too big for this kind of tool. He wanted to save time, but in fact his method was ineffective. Moreover, he ran a high risk of damaging his brush cutter. I explained that in order to cut the larger trees he

would be better off using an axe or a more suitable tool. For good results, we need to take time to figure out the best way to go about a task. Then, we need to put our whole heart into it.

When my son was young, he would come to work with me in the forest. He wanted to learn how to do the work the right way so he asked questions relentlessly. My son is a man of character who enjoys leading, but he also knows to take the time required to learn properly. One day, he told me he wanted to leave for the province of Ontario to study the Bible at a Christian college. This decision came about as a result of his personal progress and reflection. So, he went to study for two years. One of my daughters also studied at a Bible college. Both of them learned to know God better, and their faith is now better equipped. Today, my son preaches the Word of God and is a valuable assistant to pastors.

The words of the Book of God are true. We must not take them lightly because one day we will all stand before God. My grandmother died at the age of 107. She was perfectly lucid and healthy. She had her small meal, went to lie down on her bed, and then she flew away. One day, I will leave just as she did and I want to be sure I will be with God. I am not afraid of death for I know that Jesus saved me and that he forgave my sins. My soul is at peace.

I want to end this testimony by sharing an excerpt from the Gospel. It is my favourite passage. I sincerely hope that these few words will guide you to the Lord so that you can receive this new birth from him.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said: Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him. In reply Jesus declared: I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. How can a man be born when he is old? Nicodemus asked. Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!

Jesus answered: I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

How can this be? Nicodemus asked. You are Israel's teacher, said Jesus, and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God. (John 3.1-21)

Robert Brisk (Gopitji')





Do you not know? Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

(Isaiah 40.28-31)

Wendat yahaha'

Wendat Trail

I am not the type of person who readily shares his personal life in public. Being rather shy, I probably would have turned down the invitation to participate in the writing of this book if the Lord had not had something to do with it. Let me tell you how it all happened.

This year we celebrated Christmas with my wife's relatives in the city of Roberval, Lac Saint-Jean. While at my in-laws' home, I picked up a book by Claude Tremblay entitled "Micah" which seemed interesting. As I skimmed through a few pages, I realized it was a Christian book. This is not the type of literature my in-laws usually find interesting. They even had trouble remembering where they had bought it!

Shortly after our return to Quebec City, my friend Dany had a small gift for me on my birthday, January 7th. When I unwrapped it I saw that it was a book entitled "Les petits groupes d'entraide" written by Claude Tremblay. Unknowingly, my friend had just offered me a book by the same author of the book I had discovered at my in-laws.

A few days later, this same friend, who is also a publisher, informed me that he had just received an email from Claude Tremblay who was looking for a member of the Huron Wendat Nation to participate in a book project that had to do with Aboriginal communities. This could not be mere coincidence!

Claude told me later that he had tried time and time again to find someone from the Wendat people for his project, but his unsuccessful attempts had finally led him to give up, resolving that, after all, he already had a sufficient number of authors. So he went ahead and submitted all the chapters to a reviser.

However, while he was praying one morning, the Lord convinced him to give it another try, just one last time. He then received an email from my friend Dany regarding book purchases. Upon completing his reply, and without giving it much thought, he simply asked Dany if he knew anyone from the Huron Wendat community. On that day, we all understood that the Lord had paved the way and that he wanted me to participate in this book project. We were amazed!

I truly believe that this book will have a positive impact on my community.

For those of you who may not be familiar with the history of the First peoples of Canada, allow me to share with you a few significant elements mainly drawn from a publication entitled "Regard sur les Premières Nations et les Inuit au Québec", produced by First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission.

For thousands of years the First Nations have dwelt on the Canadian territory as we know it today. They settled here long before the Europeans. In those days, they were able to meet all their needs by using the natural resources surrounding them. In 2011, a census revealed that there was a total of 1,400,685 Aboriginals living in Canada. The Indians constitute the most important of the three

Aboriginal groups with 851,560 inhabitants, followed by the Métis with 451,795, and then by the Inuit with 59,445. Currently, the Aboriginal population of Canada is not only growing at a faster pace than the general population, but it is also far younger. In 2011, its median age was 27 years, some 13 years less than that of the non-Aboriginal Canadians.

In addition to the Inuit, the province of Quebec is home to ten different First Nations. Incidentally, a Wendat will differ from an Atikamekw just as much as a Canadian differs from a German. The Inuit, as well as every First Nation and every one of the 54 different communities living in Quebec, each one has its own distinctive history and culture. These particularities are seen in their ancestral language, their preservation of traditions, and their respect for environmental and cultural values.

Over the centuries Governments have used strong measures to wipe out part of the identity of the First Nations on the grounds that non-aboriginal culture was best suited for living in society. Today the First Nations and the Inuit want their identity, their rights and their values to be acknowledged.

Even though the Aboriginal peoples live their lives in modern society, they nonetheless have their own identity. At the dawn of the 21st century they still practice traditional activities such as hunting and fishing. And, strengthened by the bond which ties them to the heritage left by their ancestors, they also embrace values such as the respect of nature, communal sharing and mutual assistance.

The term “Métis” means “one whose father and mother are of different races”. The Canadian constitution recognizes the Métis people as one of the three Aboriginal groups. These people consider themselves as Métis, thus distinguishing themselves from the members of the First Nations, the Inuit and the non-Aboriginal people. Although many Canadians have Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestors, all do not identify themselves as Métis. It should be noted that the Canadian Métis Organizations have established some criteria to determine who should be entitled to the Métis status.

I live in the community of Wendake; it is the place where I grew up. My ancestors, my father and I myself belong to the Huron Wendat Nation. The history of the Wendat people is woven into the fields, the lakes and the mountains of the continent, from Georgian Bay to the mouth of the St-Lawrence River. Farmers, hunters, sturdy warriors, astute diplomats, democrats and outstanding traders, the Wendat, also named Huron by the French, have earned the respect of all those who have mingled with them in the east of the country over the past centuries.

The current situation of our community is rather unique. We are more or less incorporated into the city of Quebec, the capital of the province. Consequently, it is more difficult for us to preserve our language and our culture. We also have a rather high rate of mixed marriages.

Today 30% of the Aboriginal people live in urban areas throughout Canada. Although Indian blood flows in our veins, our day to day lives are far removed from the nomadic or traditional living of our ancestors. The same can be said of many communities which are more indigenous and live farther north. A fair number of communities have preserved their language and some traditions, but very few live the way our grandparents did. I know very few Aboriginals who do not own a television set, a computer, a cell phone or household appliances. Although they remain excellent hunters and include wild game in their diet, it seems as though modern culture has affected everyone, one way or another.

I find it unfortunate that the history of the First Nations is so little known and that prejudice still remains within, as well as without our communities. Depending on the degree of interbreeding, certain people will be judged by their appearance or the colour of their skin. I consider this kind of racism totally unacceptable in the 21st century. This attitude brings about no good fruit and destroys self-esteem.

I was very young when my parents enrolled my brother Mathieu and me in a school located outside our reserve. I sometimes felt judged there. As I became a young adult, a yearning for adventure and accomplishment grew within me. So I went to Kentucky to study; I also worked in Vancouver and Toronto. Being away from home, I didn't have to explain my aboriginal origins; I simply said I was a Quebecer. As it turned out, I didn't want to return to the reserve anymore. Subconsciously, I was trying to forget my origins. When I moved back to Quebec, I chose to settle outside the Wendake community.

Coming back «home» was for me a step by step process as God gradually moved into my life. It was God who orchestrated everything: he healed my heart and my bruised emotions, and the shame I had of being a Native Indian was transformed into acceptance and eventually into pride.

God should not be equated with religion. Rather, he is a Person... the most loving, most wonderful Being of all. It is quite natural for every human being to have an interest in him. I remember the feelings I had for God as a child, the desire I had to know him better and all the questions that lived in my young heart.

I must have been nine years old when, out of my passion for sports and mostly for hockey, I asked my father if there were rinks in heaven and if I could play hockey there. Dad wisely replied that God would answer that question for me in due time. Careful not to affect my innocence or my faith, he said the words I needed to hear, for he knew that I would gain maturity with age.

I remember another conversation I had with my father as a young adult. I was under a lot of stress related to an important position I was about to accept at work. On that occasion, he referred to the story of Abraham which is found in the book of Genesis. God had told Abraham that he and his descendants would be blessed. My father was convinced that the situation I was experiencing was part of God's plan to prepare me for something much bigger. This new perspective on things challenged me to look beyond my circumstances and to trust God.

Following this, I wanted to read this passage in the Bible. So I planned to look it up as soon as I would get home. During lunch hour I was in the office and, as I often did, I visited a familiar website on the Internet. It so happened that the thought of the day posted on the homepage of that website was directly linked to the story my father had told me about Abraham in Genesis. All my doubts suddenly vanished. Now I was positive. God had a promising future in store for me.

One must admit: God's ways are often beyond our comprehension. As it was for Abraham, the will of God for us could also be to reach startling heights beyond our imagination. His plans are much greater than ours. I do not yet know all that he desires for my life, but I do know that he asks me to trust him.

Trusting God... this is the real challenge we face! But how can we trust someone we do not see? Of course I attended church with my parents when I was young, I heard the pastors teach the Bible with conviction and I witnessed my parents' genuine faith and their authentic relationship with the risen Christ... but how could I trust a God who seemed so far away and who was so much more in my mind than in my heart?

Such was my condition as a young adult. I was never drawn to alcohol or drugs, and my personal life plan was certainly commendable. Passionate about sports, I was slowly but surely progressing in this milieu of influence. And since I was successful, sports also became a way for me to gain self-confidence and to earn respect.

I am not the intellectual type but I like to analyze and to reflect on things. Perhaps I get these traits from my father who is a chartered accountant. I graduated from university with a Bachelor of Administration and a Certificate in Computer Science. I proudly completed my studies with the clear ambition to succeed in life and to earn a lot of money.

At that time, I was not really concerned with God. I had everything to succeed and I was determined to take control over my life. I traveled to the United States and then settled in Toronto convinced that I would soon own a condo in one of those huge towers that overlook the city. I was the only captain on board, the master of my destiny.

Back in Wendake, my parents were praying for me. It is strange to realize how much the prayers of a man and a woman who loved God could influence a young adult who perceived himself as the centre of the universe. God has a unique way of intervening in the lives of people, and today I revisit those memories with a smile of approval.

As it turned out, not only could I not buy the luxurious condo of my dreams but I found myself living in a small basement apartment infested with mice. Neither did I succeed in getting a job in one of the prestigious firms of the Queen City; instead, I ended up working in a Call Centre. I was at the end of my rope, in the depths of despair.

I can tell you one thing: that kind of job can really teach you humility. I met several people there who also had university degrees but had never been able to land a meaningful job. This episode of my life proved to be a good antidote to my arrogance, and it drove me to what had now become a much needed introspection. I suddenly understood that I could never take anything for granted.

I believe that it is sometimes necessary for God to vigorously shake our pedestals to make us realize our human frailty. More often than not, it is when we humble ourselves before God that he enables us to listen to him and to trust him.

Another reason for deciding to take control over my life was that, like any young man my age, I wanted to find my soul mate. Although I was way too busy with my career to even consider having a family and children, I was, nevertheless, on the look-out for the princess who would bring me happiness. Letting God handle this matter, however, was out of the question. I reasoned to myself that if he were to select my spouse, she would no doubt have an awesome personality but it was not likely that I would find her very physically attractive!

It's not that those inner qualities were unimportant, but I was hoping to be blessed with both physical and inner beauty. So, clearly, I was in a better position than God to fulfill this need in my life!

At any rate, the situation I was going through at that time was forcing me to review my goals in life and to question my ability to attain them. I believe that this period of my life was very instrumental in helping me reconsider the faith in which I was brought up. Moreover, even though my parents had been a model to me of love and commitment to Christ, I needed to come to grips with the fact that faith in God is something very intimate and personal. In order to get to God, sailing someone else's ship won't cut it; you need to sail your own. At this time in my life, God began to work with me.

Have you ever come across total strangers on the street who initiated conversation with you, speaking about God and inviting you to go back to church? Well, within a very short period of time, it happened to me, not only once, but two or three times. I knew this was not happening by accident; I knew it was God addressing my heart.

Shortly after that, a colleague of mine (who was an unbeliever) told me that his wife had become a Christian, and he gave me the civic address of the church she was attending. It was a Protestant Pentecostal church. I attended and I appreciated the quality of the biblical teaching given there. During a midweek special meeting, I felt God was calling out to me. The lady who was preaching delivered a great message and concluded with a call to prayer. I went forward and made the decision to commit my life to God.

I'm not a very emotional person, so I didn't feel any chills going up and down my spine, nor did I even shed a tear. But I sincerely chose to follow Jesus and to give him access to all aspects of my life. I knew this required a commitment on my part. I'm very clear about the fact that spirituality is not only a matter of emotions, but also a matter of willful decisions that lead us into action.

I find it a pity that it took all this time and such an intervention of God for me to take this step. I was familiar with the Bible since childhood. I knew I was a lost sinner, yet I continued in my rebellion and unbelief. I can only thank my father, my mother and all those who prayed that God would open my eyes.

My parents were not aware of all that was going on in my life at that time. One day while he was praying, my father was convinced by the Lord that I would soon come to Quebec City and that I would attend the celebration in honour of my grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary.

For me, I had just mailed several résumés in hope of finding a better job. My efforts finally paid off when an employer from Quebec City contacted me for an interview. I told him that my current work schedule was not flexible and that the only time we could meet was over the weekend. Fortunately, he accepted. The interview went well and I was given the job. Now, noteworthy "coincidence", my grandparents' wedding anniversary celebration was scheduled for the very same weekend! It was a pleasure for me to attend. Ultimately, all was wonderfully orchestrated by God.

Back in la Belle Province, I decided to share an apartment with my friend Dany – who also had become a follower of Christ – and I also decided to join his church. After a meeting one Sunday, one of his girlfriends invited us over for lunch. We joyfully accepted the invitation. During the afternoon, another girlfriend came over to join us. Honestly, I must say, this girl made a definite impression on me. Not only did she possess great inner qualities, she was also right up there on my scale of criteria for physical appearance!

On our first date she asked me very candidly and bluntly: “Do you want to have children?” At that moment, she took me a bit by surprise. As any politician would do, I mumbled something while still trying to answer her question correctly: “Yes... yes, yes, of course! Yes, I think I'm there now in my life.” I hardly knew what I was saying!

The fantastic thing is that I am now the husband of this wonderful young lady, and we are the happy parents of three children: my little Charles-Alexis who is five years old; my daughter Marilie who is four now; and Évelyne who is two years old. Plus, Julie perfectly meets the long list of criteria I had made up defining the character of the person with whom I wanted to spend the rest of my life. I have been blessed beyond all my expectations.

I now realize that God had also begun to change my heart concerning children. At my grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary, watching all the children and grandchildren of our extended family, I realized how precious a legacy children are. I am so proud to be a Dad!

Landing a new job, returning to Quebec, and meeting my wife-to-be are events which all took place in a relatively short period of time following my conversion to Jesus Christ. This leads me to say that, persisting in living our life away from God may unfortunately close the door to all kinds of blessings and good plans God has for our life.

As you can see through my personal experience, the Lord is able to intervene in our lives in a very real and effective way. Can you imagine what would happen if an entire community... if an entire people would choose to turn to him?

Over the last decades, the Aboriginal peoples have been confronted by great difficulties and harsh realities. However, one thing is very clear to me: God has not forsaken us. I am persuaded that the Lord has a special destiny for the First Nations and that he has an important role for us to play in the establishment of his kingdom in our country. What I experienced with God as an individual we can all live collectively if we would only turn to Christ. God's plans are greater than we can imagine.

It is important to remember, though, that the Lord is not necessarily interested in promoting our own projects. He is, however, decidedly enthusiastic about carrying out projects that originate in his divine wisdom. His ways are, without question, superior to anything you or I could imagine or accomplish while relying on our own strength and skills.

God's plans are never to harm us but to bring about our happiness. For this reason we can trust him completely. However, in this process of faith, choosing God's priorities and plans will certainly cause us to experience our own insignificance and inadequacy.

This is often what happens when we begin to realize the greatness and majesty of God. It is also this feeling of inadequacy that leads us to choose the best option, which is to trust God. Along the way, our whole being is transformed and, like Abraham, we become “friends of God”.

Obedience to God should not be carried out under any form of coercion. At least this is not the will of God. There is a difference between the relationship with a son and the relationship with a slave. God wants to treat us as sons. The way he acted on my behalf made it clear to me that he loves me as a son. It should be said here that, even for a son, there are various stages of growth.

First, in their early years, children have a blind faith in their parents. They never doubt their word. If they have to be punished for misbehaving, they will temporarily live out their frustration and quickly return to being tender and loving little ones. It is during the teen years that obedience becomes more of a chore. The thirst for affirmation intensifies, and the same children who have now grown into teenagers, are often opposed to the will of their parents. They see themselves as independent and all-powerful. When they accept to obey, it is only on their own terms.

Throughout my childhood, I was taught the goodness of God. Over the years I found that this intellectual knowledge would be useless to me unless it was rooted in my heart. Without this happening, I would have neither an interest in God nor any desire to obey him.

At my conversion, the Holy Spirit, who is in perfect loving harmony with the Father and the Son, came to dwell in me. As I remain sensitive to his presence, obeying God will never be a burden but an act of love and gratefulness.

As I have already mentioned, there was a time in my life when I perceived myself as being the centre of the universe. My future plans and personal goals were my sole purpose in life. After meeting Julie though, my perspective on life changed: I now had the desire to start a family. This all remained an abstract concept for me however, until my heart was transformed at the birth of my children. I then found myself invaded by a love so intense... I can't begin to describe it.

Before the birth of my son, I was not in favor of having my spouse stay at home as a housewife. I personally thought that it was essential in today's society that both spouses have their own job. When our first little guy came along though, my convictions were shaken. Julie and I mutually agreed that it was not mandatory for her to go to work. Looking back now, we see that the Lord has richly provided for all our needs without the input of a second source of income.

Today I feel as though it would be impossible for me to spend even one day without being with my three little treasures. When I leave home to go to work, I cannot wait to get back at dinner time to hug them. I do not need to coerce myself into loving them or being a father to them, as if I had to convince myself that it is my responsibility. It is the love within me that fuels my actions and causes me to desire the best for my children. In the very same way, God loves me profoundly and desires the best for me.

Nevertheless, over time, I realized that this very legitimate feeling of love towards my children could subtly affect my relationship with God. It was my belief that the more I would invest time in their lives, the more they were likely to become good persons and enjoy a bright future. However, this way of thinking was slowly becoming an excuse to neglect my commitment to the Lord and my participation in church. I finally realized I was on the wrong track.

The danger, then, was for me to return to square one, that is, to the attitude I had when I lived in Toronto. You will recall that I was convinced that I had my destiny in my own hands and that I was very capable of making the best decisions. It was as if this new fatherhood reality was leading me to doubt once again God's power to intervene in a very real and positive way in the lives of Charles-Alexis, Marilie and Évelyne. That is a dreadful trap we need to avoid. If I really want the best for my children, God must remain my priority.

There is a verse in the Bible which teaches that whatever you can gain with much labour, God can grant to those who love him, even during their sleep. Take, for instance, a person who goes out to unearth a treasure. Although the person knows exactly where the treasure is located, he decides to dig ten meters away from the spot. No matter how much time and effort he puts into it, he will never find the treasure. He will have worked very hard... but will have dug at the wrong spot.

I could toil all my life to provide a bright future for my children and miss what is most important: being an example of a father who loves God and who trusts him. It is first and foremost through my relationship with God that they will learn how he is able to take good care of us, to make up for our shortcomings, and to grant us even beyond all we could humanly accomplish. God has also taught me to acknowledge my faults, even those I commit toward them. Forgiveness has become a very important moral value in our family.

At the beginning of this year, our church organized a two week intensive prayer spree that went on in the evenings. It would have been easy for Julie and me to reason that we had much to do at home, and that it was best for us to give priority to our children. Yet we chose to take turns and participate alternately in prayer. We have come to the realization that time spent with God is never spent in vain, and that, ultimately, the outcome is always positive for us and for others. We are beginning to realize the magnitude and power of the prayers we express to God. Whether they concern impossible dead-end situations or very small day-to-day issues, we have often witnessed the intervention of God after having prayed.

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that it would be acceptable to neglect our children in order to be more involved in the church. I'm only sharing with you that we should always keep our priorities straight. In this sense, God should be first in everything. If I live in the presence of God on a daily basis, I will be both a better spouse and a better father. Moreover, the Holy Spirit is able to intervene in situations where we cannot.

In this way, we remain responsible as parents. We continue to take good care of our little darlings. We get all the housework done. And all the while, we make God our priority.

I am only a young man but when I look back at my life's journey, I see that God has continually intervened in order to help me get closer to him. I have experienced a host of events completely orchestrated by God, sometimes even to the minute details. I have

come to understand that, instead of applying my intelligence to shape the scenarios of my life and those of my children, I have everything to gain when I admit that God's scenarios are altogether superior to mine. Let me say it loud and clear: God has fully earned my trust!

I am grateful to my mother and father for the example they have set before me as they persevered in their relationship with God. The Christian heritage they have left with me is a priceless gift that I also want to pass on to my children. And so, we are walking down our path together as a team and we are finding along the way that God's blessing is on our family.

Julie and I are happy in Wendake, living among my people. Both of us are committed to the aboriginal cause and pray intensely for the First Nations of Quebec.

Martin M. Picard





You have charged us to keep your commandments carefully.
Oh, that my actions would consistently reflect your decrees!
Then I will not be ashamed when I compare my life with your commands.
As I learn your righteous regulations, I will thank you by living as I should!
I will obey your decrees. Please don't give up on me!
How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word.
I have tried hard to find you – don't let me wander from your commands.

(Psalm 119.4-10)

Tshishe-Manitu-mashinaikan

God's Book

I am from Unamen-Shipu, commonly known as: La Romaine. I currently live in Pessamit. My father's name is Josephis Bellefleur and my mother is Anastasie Bellefleur. They are outstanding parents. Both lived through the days of the residential schools in the city of Sept-Îles. I am the firstborn of the family and at a very young age I learned to speak French.

The Oblates have left their mark on our nation. Very early in their childhood, my parents were forced to leave their community for ten or eleven months every year to go to school where they were forbidden to speak their mother tongue or to wear their traditional clothing. This greatly disrupted our way of life and our customs.

It is only since the beginning of the 1960s that the Innu have become sedentary. Accustomed to living a nomadic life tenting in the forest, our ancestors were very close to nature and abided by rules that everyone followed closely. However, the white men's intrusion brought a disruption that has been difficult to handle. Not only did they fail to respect our customs, but trapping also suffered many abuses, mainly relating to beavers, martens and otters.

For the Oblates, furs had a monetary value. The fur trade allowed them, among other things, to purchase chandeliers and golden cups for their churches. For us, however, hunting was primarily a means of subsistence; the meat provided our food; the skins, our clothing; and the bones, our tools. In the end, we gave great quantities of quality furs to the Roman Catholic Church.

In school, I was taught catechesis by the nuns and the Oblate missionaries. Later, I learned that they were working hand in hand with the Government to settle the Innu communities, in order to seize control over territorial resources. I was a practicing Catholic for many years; I even served as an altar boy. Even as a young boy, I could often wise up to the inherent contradictions of Catholicism. I saw that money took on a disproportionate importance in the life of the missionaries. All the same, I remained silent and showed them respect. I was too young to start criticizing.

On the other hand, my grandfather was quite an articulate man who loved to speak the truth. I often heard him stand up to the Oblates. He disagreed with some of the ways they treated their followers, as well as others outside the Church. For example, we know that when a member of the community passes away, the Roman Catholic religion teaches that family members must pay for Masses to be offered, so that the soul of the deceased may be saved. It goes without saying that the wealthy families were able to give large amounts of money, whereas the poor families could only give little. I remember seeing our Oblate missionary standing high on the pulpit, list at hand, publicly singling out those who gave much and those who gave little. The larger the amount, the louder he spoke. He never missed an occasion to point out when a previous funeral had brought more revenue.

I remember another time when my cousin and I went to the presbytery to offer our services to do minor chores. We did that quite regularly. That day, the Oblate was in a bad mood. He grabbed my cousin, led him into the living room and, without permission from his parents, gave him a hideous hair cut. That's when I ran away! Many people my age were humiliated in the same way.

Forced marriages were another atrocity. The missionaries would decide which two people were to marry. In some cases, young girls, thirteen or fourteen year old, were taken from their homes and families and forced to marry older men living in other far away communities. Needless to say, if someone was to oppose the parish priest, it was as if he were opposing God. We were therefore forbidden to criticize «the priest of God». He wore a large cross around his neck, and we owed him respect and obedience.

If someone dared to complain, an RCMP officer would show up at his home. The officer's role was to protect the missionaries. However, the mounted police had originally been instituted to protect the «Savages». But when the missionaries arrived, the «Savages» became the bad guys. The missionaries were the good guys because they worked in partnership with the Government. And so it was that, when parents refused to send one of their children to a residential school run by the clergy, an officer would pay them a visit and threaten to have the Government cut their subsidies.

Now you can better understand why I previously mentioned that the white man's intrusion brought terrible disruptions in the Aboriginal communities. All these measures were intentional and planned at high levels. They wanted to control and «civilize the Savages» to better take possession of their property. All of it was a planned political decision. We were regarded as foreigners in our own land. The missionaries exploited their state granted protection to abuse our parents.

In the same way, a good number of corporations, including American companies, colluded with government to seize our salmon rivers and turn them into private clubs. They even used the Bible to deceive us and lie to us. It hurts me to think of all these injustices.

I am someone who has always been very dedicated in his work life. It goes without saying that, with respect to economic development, we have a lot of catching up to do. A few years ago, I was the general manager of my community. My job was to manage transfer payments from the Federal Government, Indian Affairs, and Health Canada among others. I also worked as an economic development agent to help create new businesses. One of which I am very proud is currently listed among the ten largest travel agencies in Quebec. I founded this business in partnership with other Aboriginal communities and it currently generates substantial revenues.

In the early 1980s, I was a local negotiator in my community. I chaired a regional negotiating Committee to obtain commercial fishing rights. We purchased boats designed for lobster, crab and scallop fishing. These companies are successful and operate very well.

Always with the aim of helping Aboriginal communities, I negotiated the acquisition of five star outfitting businesses for salmon fishing. I have always loved my work, just as I love my people. One of my goals has been to create employment for youth. Living in a community with nothing to do is not healthy. These circumstances can lead to alcohol and drug abuse, as well as other bad habits. I am pleased to see that we now have young people working for our businesses and earning a very good living.

Over time, I became chief negotiator for the lower North Shore communities. I negotiated an agreement-in-principle of a general nature with the provincial and federal governments. A few years ago, I was elected to the position of band chief at the head of the band council. It is a very demanding task. The mandate of a band council is different from that of a city council in that it is called to manage at once all matters related to administration, housing, infrastructure, recreation, education and health. A band council is, in fact, an independent local government that holds many responsibilities but has few resources.

Contrary to public opinion, all Aboriginal communities are underfunded. Moreover, as is often the case in politics, there is favouritism in the management of funds. Some look to reward their constituents, while others, members of their family. Decisions are sometimes made based on winning the next election, rather than for the future of our communities. Also, there are too many short term goals.

Some also look for power by playing the victim within and outside our communities. I believe that in the areas where we need government assistance, we must learn to make honest proposals. It is not always for the governments to intervene. As Aboriginals, we need to be honest with ourselves in determining where our responsibilities lie. There is a lot of housekeeping to be done within our communities. On the other hand, when we look at the statistics and compare our needs to the amounts we receive from the government, we see a large and ever increasing gap. It is obvious that the health and socio-economic conditions of our communities are deteriorating. Currently, the average age of our communities is 23 years old; however, more than 30% of our population suffers from diabetes.

The same could be said about our schooling. I strongly promote education. But unfortunately, we have a school dropout rate which is much higher than the Quebec average. I believe it is urgent that we resolve the problem of drug abuse, which so often leads to dropping out of school. In one of our communities, the drug dealer was an elected member and, therefore, in a position of authority. Elsewhere, the dealers were well paid employees of the community who sold drugs to increase their income. This is unacceptable.

At one of the meetings I had with a few Quebec ministers, as well as Mr Jean Charest, Premier of Quebec at the time, I made them aware of this issue. I reminded them that citizens are entitled to police force services, specifically, in this case, of the Sûreté du Québec. However, despite our many complaints, there had still not been any investigation or intervention.

In light of this, I spoke with one of the four ministers and said: “You have wanted authority over the Indian reserves for a long time now. Here is my set of keys. You now have all the authority you need to cleanup and solve this drug abuse problem which is destroying our youth.”

I then asked the Premier if this wilful blindness and this refusal to intervene were not simply another strategy to destroy Aboriginal communities. He politely replied that I should calm down, and assured me that the police would investigate. Well, nothing ever happened! It makes me very sad to see that, in a civilized society like ours, we are faced with such inaction. I believe we must continue to fight when we have a just cause.

Furthermore, I have gone to the NATO offices in Brussels on several occasions to defend our rights with regard to the militarization of our territory since NATO wanted to establish a military training base in our vicinity. Combat aircraft were to fly 45,000 flights above our heads annually. These planes were to fly at lightning speed and at the lowest possible altitude in order to escape radar detection. Many pilots had already started their training and each flight went on for 90 minutes on average.

I fought long and hard to put a stop to this. I gave several conferences in Montreal, Quebec, Toronto and Ottawa, as well as in CEGEPs and universities. I met various environmental groups, several ministers and Premiers, and I even participated in some peaceful demonstrations. I went repeatedly to the NATO offices. I went to Paris, Brussels, Germany and England. In short, I went to a dozen or more countries to denounce Canada's militarization of our territory. This has been a tough battle, similar to that of David against Goliath.

We had to fight against National Defence and NATO allies. All the journalists I met at that time expected that the First Nations were going to lose this battle. In the end, we won, and NATO established its bases in Turkey. However, we must remain vigilant as National Defence continues to exert pressure for the establishment of such a base in Nord-du-Québec.

We believe that it is not only a matter of protecting the animals and the environment, but also of protecting the people that live there. Some individuals seem to forget that Aboriginal people live on these territories. National Defence currently has a base in Labrador. They drop bombs on wooden targets. They even built a mock Afghan village so pilots could practice dropping bombs.

For the past fifteen years, I have also been involved with Environment Canada, Environnement Québec and Environment and Conservation Newfoundland. Moreover, I sit on the Board of Directors of the Institute for Environmental Monitoring and Research where we produce various studies and review those that are done by the Department of National Defence. Our purpose is to point out deficiencies in their methodology. Highly skilled and independent scientific experts work with us to deal with these issues. In recent decades, we witnessed much environmental negligence and today we live with the consequences. As Aboriginal peoples, hunting is an important element of our culture and of our survival. We have always respected animals and their environment.

Recently, we have noticed a significant decrease in the herds of migratory George River caribou. Just a few years ago they were estimated at 750,000 heads. Today, they are not more than 20,000. This dramatic decrease is due to a failure to respect the animal's environment, and also to global warming. It seems to me that humans are obsessed by a desire to control nature. I believe that in doing so, they are blindly heading to their own destruction. Furthermore, there is something very important many seem to have forgotten; this planet does not belong to us. It was created by God and it is our duty to respect it.

Some of you may smile as I say this, but I believe that the first thing we need to do is acknowledge our wrongdoings and ask God for forgiveness. As a result, real change will follow. Without repentance and a transformed heart, we remain insensitive and arrogant beings.

We own nothing here on earth; therefore, we should accept the responsibility to take good care of all that God has entrusted to us. This applies to all mankind, including Aboriginal communities. We need to experience a spiritual revival. We need to go back to the Word of God.

For many years, the Roman Catholic Church was the exclusive representative of Christianity in our communities. Its clergy wanted to keep us in ignorance. Today, however, I am a member of a Christian Church where the Word of God is preached rather than the traditions of man. Instead of relying on one individual who claims to have privileged access to divine knowledge, all believers have their own Bibles and read it regularly. When the pastor preaches, all can verify if his teaching is consistent with the Holy Scriptures. At home, I am free to conduct a more thorough study to make sure I have a sound understanding of the text.

I have discovered that the Bible reveals the love of God. In fact, when I read it, it's as if God is seated down with me to talk. The Bible is the one key thing that feeds my intimate relationship with him. Through it, I discover his character and his qualities, and I also learn to understand life and appreciate creation. Without a doubt, the Bible is alive and wonderful. Whenever I am unsure of a particular passage, I discuss it with my friends or with the pastor. Overall, it is not a complicated book. The secret is to read it every day.

The Bible reveals that God loved us so much that he sent Jesus on earth to redeem us and to forgive our sins. It was out of love for us that he was crucified and that his blood was shed. This should not leave anyone indifferent.

Of course, most people know that Jesus was crucified, yet, very few understand what it really means. Many prefer to remain ignorant, while others continue in idolatrous practices, praying to plaster statues or making pilgrimages to "Good Saint Anne". These practices are very common among the Innu, however, the Bible does not endorse them. In fact, we were misled by the Roman Catholic religion and were taught many false beliefs such as the existence of purgatory and the need for indulgences. Yet, Jesus affirms that there are only two possible destinations after death: heaven for true believers and hell for those who persist in rejecting the salvation offered in Christ. True believers are those who manifest their devotion to the Lord and their obedience to the Bible. Most Catholics claim that we will all go to heaven. This is false!

In the Bible, the word "redeemed" is used with a purpose. It takes a lot of humility to acknowledge that we are sinners in need of Jesus Christ. Our life on earth is short and no one knows the time of his death. In the afterlife, I would not want to be a stranger before God. That is why I make sure that God is part of my daily life. I want to stay alert and not lose my path.

Before becoming a Christian, I wasn't a bad person. On the contrary, I always tried to conduct myself properly. I thought that my good deeds would most likely earn me a place in heaven. Upon reading the Bible, however, I quickly understood that I too needed God's forgiveness. I needed to be saved. My message is simple: we need to love God and read our Bibles daily. This is the message I convey to my family, my children, my nation, and to the people of all nations and origins. Some will say that my faith is too intense... but I have not always been like this. Let's just say that I have a lot of catching up to do!

Becoming a Christian has not changed me into a monk or a hermit; I have many friends in different Aboriginal communities and also others who have settled elsewhere. However, with regard to my relationships, I had to make some adjustments. I had to comply with certain guidelines. For instance, some conversations are no longer of interest to me. I no longer want to speak ill of others, to utter profanities or to joke about people with problems. I don't always succeed perfectly at this, but I am making progress. One thing I know is that God is with me, that he is alive, and that if I ask for his help, he will.

I am a happy man, and I want it to stay that way. I have been through difficult years in the past, and I have not always been able to make amends. Sometimes, circumstances and situations are challenging and tough decisions need to be made. Today, however, I am no longer alone. I can talk with God and benefit from his wisdom and his help. I know that Jesus wants my happiness and that he has good plans for my life. In addition to having wonderful children that I love, I now have a spouse I appreciate tremendously. In fact, it was through her that I found the path that leads to God. Together, we read the Bible, we go to church, we pray and we encourage one another to become better Christians.

Respect for nature is one of the positive aspects of our culture, which would have been of great value to the peoples that came to settle in our land. This conviction is one of our most fundamental values. This is what our fathers taught us. As a Christian, the Bible teaches me the same thing.

Isn't it about time for us to start listening to what God has to say and to pay heed to the wisdom of our fathers? I am not saying, however, that all aboriginal beliefs are trustworthy. Some people currently practice customs which advocate a return to the spirituality of our ancestors. They recommend long fasts which lapse into all kinds of hallucinations, while participants injure themselves by slitting their skin. I am strongly opposed to these practices which are nothing more than spiritualism. I think we should not engage in such things.

I believe that many who turn to these spiritual practices are in fact looking for God. They have been let down by religion and they are now seeking to reach God through other ways. As I have already explained, I have been greatly disappointed by the Roman Catholic religion and by the abuse perpetrated by its clergy. When travelling to Rome, I met with Pope John Paul II on two occasions. To be honest with you, I think that he was a good person. However, I disagree with his religion and all that it represents. Vatican is nothing more than a heap of statues that people revere in vain. All that you find and see is permeated by luxury and wealth. It is difficult to imagine Jesus living in such an environment.

The second hearing I got with the Pope lasted twenty-five minutes. The journalists told me that it was the amount of time he would usually put aside for a head of state! Our conversation resulted in his supporting my cause against the militarization of our territory.

Today, when I think back to my trips to Rome, to the days of my youth as an altar boy, to the years when I was a devout Catholic, and to the injustices and abuses suffered by my people in the name of religion I am heavy hearted. I find it very sad that white men misused the words of Christ to establish their religion. They erected a cross in Gaspé and then they used their religion to seize our resources and our lands. They took advantage of our naivety to restrict us within matchboxes they call "Indian reserves". They now own our resources and

our land. My consolation, in spite of all this, is that I have discovered the most precious treasure... one that nobody will ever snatch away, namely the friendship of God, the truth of his Word, and the promise of a homeland in heaven where there is everlasting happiness.

I thank God for his abundant goodness, he who has welcomed me with all my doubts and disillusion. He forgave me; he saved me through his son Jesus Christ, whom I love with all my heart, today and forevermore.

Guy Bellefleur





Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations."

(Isaiah 42.5-6)

Kagi madjiwotc kinendagozo kikinohamadimigwamina

Rescued from Residential School

I come from a family of nine children. My parents were nomads and, like many other families, we lived in the forest ten months of the year. Every summer, we all met at Lake Abitibi where they held a large gathering. Each time, it was a great party and a renewed pleasure for me to visit with my friends and my cousins. At the end of the summer, we would go back into the forest. For me, it was the perfect life, a life of freedom. Our parents and grandparents taught us the rules of life. At a young age, I learned how to do different tasks such as washing the dishes with my sister.

I also remember wonderful moments where we were gathered around my grandmother. She would tell us stories about animals. She would also teach us to respect nature and to live in harmony with it. I really enjoy reminiscing about this part of my childhood. These are the most beautiful moments of my life. At that time, I had never gone to a city or had contact with white people.

The first time I went to town was to visit my grandmother in the hospital. I went with my parents. I met a little boy who had very white skin and red hair. I was so startled; my eyes were suddenly wide open. I didn't know what to think. I asked my parents questions in an effort to understand what had happened to this little boy. I was convinced he was sick. I was frightened so I snuggled close to my mother to make sure she wouldn't abandon me in this strange world. I was eager to return home to the safety of our tent.

Then, one day, representatives of the Government came to our village and persuaded the members of the community that it was vital that the children receive a good education. I was nine years old when, for the first time, I entered a residential school. I have no recollection of the day when they made me climb into a car to take me to that place. All these events are mixed up in my head.

The first image that comes to mind is one of a large room full of crying girls. I was among those girls. My sister and my brothers were somewhere else in the building... we had been separated.

In the evening, they showed us to the dormitory. I had never slept in a bed before. Once I got settled, I pulled the blankets over my head and I stayed put. I was frightened. I was convinced that something was crawling around under my mattress. Every morning, they forced us to make our beds. At the sight of the slightest imperfection, the nuns would pull the blankets off and we had to start all over again.

In order to go to the cafeteria, we had to wait in a long lineup in which we were forbidden to move or to speak. One day, I whispered a few words to the girl next to me, and an angry nun pushed me to the ground. I was humiliated, and had to leave the lineup and go sit at the other end of the room. Speaking our own language was especially forbidden. If we were caught speaking Algonquin, they would call us «Savages» and they would hit us behind the head or in the face. We constantly lived in fear and insecurity.

During class, we were not allowed to go to the bathroom. It was common to see children wet their chair because they were unable to hold it in. When that happened, the child was brought to another room to be beaten. Today, when I close my eyes, I can still hear in my head those little boys and girls crying out in pain. On other occasions, we would be locked up in a closet for hours, sometimes even overnight. That life was nothing but a living hell.

Interestingly enough, in our history class we were taught that it was the «Savages» who were the bad guys. They were the barbaric and sadistic people who killed the missionaries. Slowly but surely, we were made to feel ashamed to be Aboriginal persons.

To top it all off, every day at five o'clock in the morning, we had to attend Mass. On other occasions, we had to recite the rosary on our knees. For me, all these vain rituals and repetitions had no meaning. Also, we were forced to go into the confessional. Sometimes, the priest seated behind the grid would ask us to cross over to his side because he claimed he could not hear what we were saying. He would then sit us on his knee and sexually assault us. During the night, it was common to see adults, priests and nuns, come in the dorm to fetch little girls. We didn't know where they were taken.

For the sake of the Roman Catholic religion, they taught us to respect our teachers and those in authority. Any form of criticism was interpreted as a sin that we ought to confess. As well, we were taught to strike our chests while repeating the Catholic confession: «through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault». We were always the culprits... no matter what! Unfortunately, our parents did not believe us when we told them how these people were treating us. They were convinced that we were safe and well supervised.

This abuse continued throughout the years I attended residential schools. We suffered physical, mental, as well as sexual abuse. We lived under constant surveillance, in a climate of terror. We stayed at these schools ten months of the year, which left us only two months to live with our parents. During my first year at residential school, my parents were forbidden to visit me.

When I returned to my village, I could not speak Algonquin anymore. They had managed to instill in me that my mother tongue was French. Obviously, it became very difficult to communicate with the people and with my family. I was a prisoner in both worlds. My parents would forbid me to speak French, and the nuns forbade me to speak Algonquin. A nine-year-old girl does not have the maturity to deal with such a situation. Deeply wounded, I withdrew into myself.

I remember one afternoon when my cousin and I went to town. Since she was Anishinabe, like me, I started talking to her in our language. She hit me, urging me to stop and to speak only in French. So it was that, even between the two of us, it had become shameful to speak our own language.

I remember another time when a nun asked my cousin and me to darn a pair of socks. Unfortunately, she forgot to give us needles. When she returned later, it was only to discover that the work had not been done, so, she began to shout at us. Since I was a little older,

I decided I was going to stand up to her. I explained that it was her fault, and that we were not to blame. Refusing to listen, she took us to the Principal's office. He demanded that we apologize to the nun.

We decided to stand up to him as well. So, he brought in the priest who took off his belt and gave us a beating much like one would give a stubborn animal. In pain, my cousin was shouting and screaming. It wasn't just her body that was injured; she was wounded to the very depths of her soul. When my turn came, I was so hardened inside that I didn't feel the pain of the blows. That day, my heart locked itself into a thick shell, as it were. Even as a grown-up, the same shell remains...

I spent six years of my life in a residential school. I experienced many injustices and abuses. We had no one to protect us. When I think back to those difficult years of my life, I feel an uncontrollable fear rising up in me. I try to reason with these emotions by reminding myself that I am now a grandmother, even a great-grandmother... but to no avail. This period of my childhood has affected me profoundly.

The management of children in these residential schools is a sad chapter of our history. For more than a century, the schools for Indians have separated more than 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities. One hundred and thirty-two federally-funded schools were established in each province and territory, with the exception of Newfoundland, New-Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Most residential schools were jointly run by the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and United Churches. Many children were fed, clothed and housed inadequately. All were deprived of the care and support of their parents, of their grandparents and of their communities. The heritage left by these Indian residential schools has contributed to social problems that carry on in many communities even today.

There were moments in my life where I felt no sensitivity. Of course, this is a very unhealthy way to handle (or not handle) our emotions. Sooner or later, it turns against you. At times I would injure myself until I bled; and for many years, I carried the after-effects of this which have affected my marriage and also my children.

I was only sixteen years old when I left my family. Communication had become impossible with my parents; we couldn't understand each other anymore. It was as if we lived in two different worlds and two different cultures. Very soon, I became an alcoholic. I was haunted by suicidal thoughts. I experienced one depression after the other. The stigmas from my past prevented me from having a good self-esteem; shame and guilt were constantly crushing me.

One day, a girl spoke with me about God and invited me to attend a Christian meeting. My mind was completely closed to the idea. Religion made me sick. And yet, deep down, many questions were left unanswered. Admittedly, my spiritual quest has led me on some harmful and destructive paths. I fell into spiritualism and other practices related to the world of spirits. I was under the impression that all of this could improve my situation. What's more, I smoked hash every day with my friends.

A young man, who used to do drugs with us, has had a significant impact on my life. One day he came to see me, and my impression was that there was something different about him. Usually incapable of looking someone in the eye, there he

was, standing directly in front of me with a candid look. His countenance had changed. I knew he had experienced something real.

He began to talk to me about Jesus. Yet again, my heart closed off. Nonetheless, he invited me to attend a prayer meeting which was to be held in a house where I had once lived. On that particular Wednesday, out of pure curiosity, I went to the meeting. In fact, I only wanted to have a look at my old house again.

I went in and found myself in the midst of a group of people who were singing praises to God. I thought they were totally ridiculous. After the meeting, the pastor came to me and asked me if I wanted to receive Jesus into my life. I accepted, but only to get rid of him. However, I believe God did a work in me that day. To say the least, he piqued my curiosity.

Shortly after, I went to a Protestant Christian church and I asked the Lord Jesus to come into my heart. This time I was serious. Instantaneously, I felt that Jesus was truly alive. He really came to dwell in me. I felt different. All of a sudden, I was no longer the same person. I fell in love with Jesus Christ and I kept on talking about him to everybody. As it is written in the Bible, it is the Holy Spirit who testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. I couldn't keep this joy to myself. I was talking about the love of Jesus everywhere I went.

At that time, while living in Montreal, the Lord used various circumstances to convince me to return to my community. This was scary at first, but he filled me with his peace. Back amongst my people, I found myself isolated from other believers, as there was no Christian church in Pikogan. Despite this, God was faithful and he never abandoned me.

I shared with everyone what Jesus had done for me. Some people were closed minded and mocked me; yet others listened carefully. At any rate, despite the intimidation, it was impossible for me to stay quiet; Jesus had made me into a new person. I felt completely free. Shame and poor self-esteem had now completely vanished. I had become a happy woman.

The leaders of the community came to see me to offer me work. Being fluent in both Algonquin and French, I acted as an interpreter between the doctors and the Anishinabe elderly who came for medical treatment or to be hospitalized.

It was at the hospital where I met Pastor Rouillard from the Pentecostal church. Together, we teamed up to spread the gospel to the community in Pikogan, and we started meetings in the houses.

This is how the first Christian church came about in our community. Many have chosen to receive Jesus into their lives. Others believed for a while and then gradually went back to their old habits; I continually pray asking God to bring them back on the right path. Still others turn to traditional Aboriginal spirituality hoping to find freedom and healing.

I have learned in the Bible that there is only one path that leads to God, namely, Jesus Christ! It was he who gave his life on the cross to redeem us, to heal us, to save us. The smoke of burning sage cannot purify our souls... it is nothing more than a ritual. Only the blood of Jesus shed at the cross for us has the power to cleanse our souls and make us truly free.

We, communities of the First Nations, are a strong people. Despite the injustices and abuses we experienced, we know what the word «forgive» means. We are no longer slaves to our past. If you come for a visit in our community, you will meet peaceful people who always enjoy a good laugh.

Rose-Anna Mc Dougall





When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.” Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them.

(Mark 10.14-16)

Mikana The Way

I was three years old when we left the Abitibi region for Montreal. My parents separated when I was seven. At that time, I would alternate living with my father one year and with my mother the next. Since one or the other of them would move every year, I had to change schools every time. Stability was not part of my experience during my youth. Also, since my parents came from two different cultures, it was hard for me to find my true identity. My mother is Anishinabe, and my father, a French Canadian. I did not always know how to behave in either of these cultures.

I was nine years old when my mother, Rose-Anna McDougall, became a Christian. I really enjoyed going to church with her. At that young age, it was easy for me to believe in Jesus. I gazed at the beauty of creation and I marvelled at all that God had done. I was also very aware of the major changes the Lord was bringing about in my mother's life. Before her conversion, she was very invested in the world of spirits. As a result, there was a strange ambiance in our house: we heard noises coming out of nowhere, and we saw objects move on their own. These things frightened me a lot. In addition, many people came to our home to do drugs. For a little girl my age, that was not a very good environment.

Later, when I had grown into an adult, my mother and I experienced many healings of the heart together. I was now in a position to understand why her journey had been so difficult. All those years spent in the residential schools had totally crushed her. For obvious reasons, she didn't know how to give to her children the love she had never received. Having been deprived of her family for so many years, my mom never experienced an appropriate parental model. Her whole existence had been dominated by low self-esteem, anger, depression and drugs.

I began to use drugs at a very young age. At ten, I smoked my first joints. At twelve, I started to run away. At thirteen, I visited bars, started using cocaine, and hung out with bikers. At fourteen, I left my parents for good and moved in with a thirty-year-old man who had just completed a ten-year sentence in jail. At seventeen, I was living with another man and got pregnant. My girl was only three months old when we separated. I then came back to live in Abitibi.

I was sexually abused as a young child. Growing up, my relationships with men were very unstable. I also underwent abortions on two occasions; decisions that I infinitely regret. Still, I became pregnant again and gave birth to another beautiful girl. As a single mother, I continued to drink a lot and I also sold drugs. Yet, from time to time, I had thoughts about God.

I knew some people who would stop drinking for a while, go back to church, and then return to the bars and resume drinking all the more. I didn't want to be like that. I told myself that when I gave my life to God, it would be for good. However, this was probably just another excuse to silence my conscience and continue to postpone the right choices I needed to make.

Truth is, I enjoyed the bars and I enjoyed drinking. I knew full well that if I was going to follow the Lord, I would have to give up this way of life... and I was not interested in doing that. Whenever my mother talked to me about Jesus, I would tell her to keep quiet.

At about the age of twenty-four, I made an attempt at giving up drugs. I went to an Aboriginal therapy center where they experimented with native spirituality. There I was taught to say different prayers, accompanied by different rituals; I was also taught that these rituals would purify me. I was not very comfortable in that environment. Deep down in my soul, I always felt the same heavy burden. When we would go to the sweat lodge to communicate with the spirits, I was literally wracked with anxiety.

So, I went back home to my old habits. I resumed selling all kinds of drugs and drinking heavily, sometimes for days or even weeks on end. My children lived in anguish and fear. We often felt the presence of spirits in our house.

At some point, the pleasure I experienced at such dissolute living began to wane. I became aware of how much my negligence was harming my daughters. One year, as Christmas was approaching, just for the sake of clearing my mind, I decided to visit my Christian sister in Sherbrooke.

My sister suggested we go to a small Pentecostal church which was experiencing a season of great revival. I accepted her invitation. And she was right; the presence of God was indeed very tangible there. When I came forward for prayer, I felt something like a burning fire within me. It is then that, with a full heart, I gave my life to Jesus Christ. I decided to change direction and to live for God. The Holy Spirit came to dwell in me and gave me the joy I had lost a long time ago. All the other days of the week, it was I who insisted to my sister that we return to this church.

Back in Abitibi, I found myself in the bars with my friends again. This time, however, there was something different within me. Later, I met James, a handsome young Anishinabe. We got along very well. His mother was a Christian, and he had heard about God quite often. As I was determined not to backslide into my old patterns, I decided to move to Sherbrooke where I lived for two years. I immediately stopped my substance abuse and never relapsed after that. I didn't want to live as I did before, and this involved giving up my old friends. This breakup was painful and difficult. Yet, I knew there was a price to pay in order to live with God. One cannot profess to be a Christian and live in sin; it's either one or the other!

These two years were very helpful to me. At church every week, I was taught how to live with God. Even though my income was very low, all my needs were met. God took care of me beyond all my expectations. The more I walked with him, the more I wanted to know him. The joy and peace he bestowed on me have never left me since.

Commitment to a local Christian church is something I value very much. One cannot profess to be a Christian while living secluded from other believers. Faith is built up as we learn from each other, and fellowship is also essential if we are to share the love of God effectively. Christians are far from perfect, yet Jesus demands that we love each other. Therefore, the church is a school where we learn to love the Word of God and to love people. Though it is not always easy, it is the path toward spiritual maturity.

The Church has played a major role in the reconstruction of my life. The genuine love, the constant prayers and the encouragement of everyone helped me persevere on the right path. In spite of a youth marked by rebellion, I've had no difficulty accepting help from the leaders and the pastors. Our relationships have been very wholesome and constructive. God had a lot of catching up to do with me: I had abused drugs and alcohol my whole life and I basically had no education, having dropped out of high school in second year.

One day, my sister and I came up with the brilliant idea to start an Indian handicraft business. So, we went to register at the learning center. During the interview, the lady asked me to list all the things I had done in my life. That was a moment of enlightenment indeed, as I painfully realized that I had nothing worthwhile to write on this list. For the first time, I came to grips with the fact that my whole life had been wasted. I had accomplished nothing good with my life, and furthermore, I was on a destruction course with the lives of my daughters.

Needless to say, the time spent in that office was difficult for me. As I needed to be by myself, I went to the bathroom. My face was all puffed up and covered with red blemishes. Shortly after, I went back to the office only to confess I had absolutely nothing to write. The lady did not ridicule me; rather, she comforted me in my dismay. I could see in her eyes that she trusted me, that she believed in me. Very quickly, she was able to discern the treasure that laid in me, and she was determined to have me enjoy all of its wealth. It is a wonderful quality to be able to discern in others the potential they themselves fail to see. This lady has helped me tremendously.

After spending a year in Sherbrooke, I went back to Abitibi to attend my uncle's wedding. It so happened that I saw my friend James again. Thereafter, we decided to see each other more seriously. James also had chosen to give up his old way of life and had joined the Church. He came to visit me in Sherbrooke, and we soon realized that we were in love. However, even if at first I didn't want to go back and settle in Abitibi, slowly but surely, God changed my heart and removed my fears. James and I were married and established our home in Abitibi, in our Anishinabe community of Pikogan.

I had been sober for four or five years and was working with my sister in the small Indian handicraft business we had started, when members of my community asked me to become a group leader in a care program for victims of residential schools and I accepted.

In 1998, the Canadian Government acknowledged all the harm that was brought upon the First Nations through the institution of residential schools. The necessary funds were then released so that each community could develop a variety of care programs. Some communities decided to implement a return to traditional native spirituality. Our community opted rather for a program founded on Christian evangelical principles such as listening, sharing and forgiving, a program which offered sessions on parenting, as well as therapy groups and support groups. Some sessions were intended for residential school victims, while others were for the children of these victims. At first, many were very reluctant to participate in these programs; they didn't want to bring back all the sad memories. But we persevered with love and patience.

I was then offered the position of Coordinator. That was a little unsettling for me because, in addition to my involvement as group leader during the sharing sessions, this new position involved dealing with large sums of money, collaborating with different health and social service providers, and preparing strategies and various reports. After praying and thinking about it, I accepted. Everything went well, and I worked there eight years. We have witnessed very positive results in several members of our community. We also received a very good evaluation from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

I believe the leaders of my community have put their trust in me on account of the undeniable change they witnessed in my life. I'm not ashamed to say that it is Christ Jesus who worked this transformation in me. Very often during my intimate moments with God whether at home or in church have I felt the Holy Spirit heal my soul. I have spent a lot of time alone with God letting myself be cradled in his

love. Many times, upon reading the Bible, I have experienced this intimacy with him. It was as if Jesus were sitting before me, talking to me in person.

The Bible is very important to me, for it teaches me the will of God and his wisdom. It is through the Bible that God directs my path and strengthens my faith. What the Lord does, he does well. Today, I have compassion for those who are suffering and struggling with all kinds of addictions. I know that with God there is always hope.

For over six years now, my husband has served as pastor at the Church where we have been involved for several years. I assist him in various pastoral and clerical tasks. The experience I gained as a program Coordinator is proving to be very helpful. The Church is also a place for miracles, healings and restoration. The first great miracle lies in the fact that some of those who have suffered terrible abuse in the name of God have been able to overcome the false prejudice which precluded them from joining a Christian church. Now, they understand that Christ's teaching is not what has caused all the evil done to our people and that there is a clear distinction to be made between the religions of man and the Word of God.

We are an evangelical church and we teach the whole Bible. We teach that God is the Creator of the heavens and of the earth and that he loves the world very much. He proved his love when, being found in human form, he dwelt among us and gave himself up to die on a cross, thus taking our guilt upon himself and atoning for our sins. Jesus is the way, the only way given to us by which we can be saved and forgiven.

It is God's love which has made me into a new person. It is this Jesus who has come to live in me. And it is the Holy Spirit in me who enables me to live an orderly life and to love my neighbour. My faith is displayed in my actions. This is what people notice in my life; it gives them hope and a desire to come closer to God.

Anne Tremblay





Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

(Isaiah 41.10)

Ki nagozi Cecoc kidji wabmak

Jesus Appeared to Me

As I recall, I must have been seven or eight years old when a pastor came to preach at our house. There were a lot of people. Some were drunk, but he was preaching the Gospel

My mother was also drunk. She was very ill. She had been hospitalized in Montreal and had returned home. There was nothing doctors could do for her anymore. She was about to die. The pastor prayed; she recovered and became a Christian.

Being only a little boy, I couldn't grasp everything, but I knew something great had just happened and I knew that God had done it. I noticed how my mother's way of life had changed and how much this was a blessing on the whole family. The natural inclination to believe is something wonderful in a child's heart. Therein is an inclination not only to believe, but also to love. I remember the beautiful emotions that welled up in me when I thought about Jesus. I also remember being offended when I heard people swear and curse.

I have a twin brother who looks nothing like me. I am short with dark brown hair, while he is hefty and redheaded. As it happens in all families, we quarreled with each other during childhood. One day, my brother took hold of my fingers and twisted them to the point where they almost broke. I was furious at him; and I was also angry with God for letting my brother harm me in this way. I was alone, I was crying, and I was talking to God when, suddenly, I saw a luminous Being standing beside me. He laid his hand on my shoulder and said: «I forgive you.» I know this person was Jesus. It is he, the God who forgives!

Some might very well say that such an epiphany is impossible and that it was most likely the figment of a fertile, childish imagination. Yet, this event is as clear in my memory as if it had happened yesterday. I can still picture myself crying in the living room; I can still see this luminous form, and feel the gentle presence of the Lord who came to comfort me and reassure me. This sacred moment is forever etched in my memory and in my soul.

In my teen years, I strayed from God due to bad influences. I did not consume a lot of alcohol or drugs, but my lifestyle was inconsistent with the Gospel. Mercifully, I fell in love with a beautiful young woman named Anne, who had been deeply touched by the Spirit of the Lord. Together, we started attending church again and we became true Christians. We have been married for more than fifteen years now and it's been wonderful!

Many believe there is no point in joining a Christian church; they claim that believers can decide to live out their faith in isolation. The fact of the matter is, being in a relationship with Jesus also involves having relationships with other believers. When I decided to really walk with God, I knew my decision also involved obeying his Word and joining the Church. We sometimes say: «Tell me who your friends are, and I'll tell you who you are.» If I hang out in bars, I won't feel the urge to obey the will of God. However, if I mix with Christians, my priorities and lifestyle will change. A relationship with Jesus will always lead you away from sin. Conversely, living in sin will lead you away from Jesus and from the church. Christians will never lead you astray. Your own darkness will blind you.

What many people don't realize is that the Christian church is not just another religion. Nor is it simply a building where people meet. What Christians seek as they meet together is always to see the Holy Spirit at work. Sometimes we do experience a deep sense of God's presence in our midst. In such moments, we are profoundly touched by the love of Jesus, this same love that transforms us.

I am not a very expressive person, yet I have often experienced this profound intimacy with God, either by myself at home or at church meetings. It is in such moments that God reveals himself as our healer, our father, our provider and as the One who forgives us. Previously, I thought that the church was simply an institution that, at best, offered to care for the weak. Now, I understand that in a true Christian church, God is present and he shows himself.

When I became a pastor, this reality became clearer and clearer to me. Let me say, however, that when I was offered this position, my first reaction was to refuse it. People could discern some pastoral qualities in me, but I didn't feel up to the task mainly because of my lack of education. My mother tongue is Algonquin, and my struggles to learn the French language in school greatly affected my studies. In addition, my mother was deeply rooted in aboriginal culture, and that meant spending a lot of time in the forest. This was not always compatible with the life of a student.

I also didn't want to become a pastor because I didn't want to conform to a pre-established model. There are people who believe a pastor should be like this or like that, or even that he should dress in a certain way. I was not interested in changing my personality to become someone else, someone I was not. I believe in authenticity. In fact, the Bible itself warns pastors that they will be judged more strictly.

The bottom line was that I strongly suggested to God that he find someone with more education and who was more qualified for this pastoral position. But God did not follow my advice. I told him that I was going to accept the position and that I would do my very best. In actual fact, I knew that, with God's help, everything is possible.

Regular church attendance over a period of more than ten years has given me hundreds of hours of teaching, in addition to many hours of personal Bible study. Even if I didn't go through a formal theological training, I do have good knowledge of the Word of God and I'm continually working to hone my skills.

Whenever I feel insecure, I turn to God and I remind him that he is the one who appointed me to be a pastor. I then ask him to help me and strengthen me, and he never lets me down. If ever I come to a point where I feel I no longer need to lean on him, I will have good reason to reconsider my ways.

Healthy churches are the ones where the believers are paying attention to God and are truly committed. We want our church to be a place of fellowship with God. We also want to do a variety of good things in our community. Some people think that in order to come to God you need to sort out all your problems first. This would be like waiting for my excruciating toothache to go away before going to the dentist! On the contrary, we need to come to God just as we are, with all our problems and our difficulties. God's desire is to heal and restore. Jesus came to us with that very intent in mind.

As a pastor, I trust that those who have made the decision to join the church have done it because they expect to see God in action. Still, I am also aware of others who come to church only for a while because they want some relief or they want to catch their breath. They

have not yet chosen to follow Jesus Christ. We are always there to help them and encourage them, but the decision to follow remains up to them. The Lord did not come to earth simply to offer relief, but to heal.

A few years ago, people saw the church as an «elite club» for friends only. Nowadays, they understand that we actually care about the needs of others. I do have many non-Christian friends with whom I enjoy some very good times. On the other hand, there are some individuals who, for different reasons, still reject the Christian faith completely. They say that the Bible is a white people's book and that we are mere victims of assimilation.

I understand full well that some people have developed their beliefs and their conduct in keeping with the negative experiences of the past. However, this pattern can become a prison. This is why I enjoy teaching the Bible so much. It gives us answers and explanations for all our questions; it is a tool to help us move ahead and live a happy life.

There are believers in our church who went through residential schools and who, therefore, would have every reason in the world to reject the Gospel. Thankfully, they were able to distinguish between the Roman Catholic religion and the teaching of Jesus Christ. I admire them tremendously. They are a powerful witness for both Aboriginals and Whites. They are a living testimony to the true meaning of forgiveness.

Recently, I was in the forest working on the lot near the lake where I want to build my cottage. Anne and I spent many hours removing large stumps and unearthing and cutting roots. This is a long, arduous task. Removing just one stump took us half a day. And then I realized there were lots of other stumps to remove and a lot more work ahead of us. It is in such moments that I come to realize how much, on a spiritual level, we need the help and the grace of God. At the end of the day, we were tired and dirty, but we had accomplished a great deal.

Back in my teens, I remember joining a group activity that took us into the forest. At one point we stopped to fish for a while and I caught a big fish. As I tried to unhook it, the hook got stuck in my finger. I needed to go back to the community to have it removed. The members of my group promised to meet me at a precise location in the forest, so I went there and waited, but no one came to get me. Night was already falling and I was feeling abandoned. Somehow, I managed to reach my uncle's cabin to spend the night. I was sad, and I remember asking Jesus if he too would do the same thing and abandon me one day. I was crying. I needed comforting. Then, the Lord answered me inwardly and powerfully. I understood that God was with me and that he would never abandon me. I love him with all my heart.

James Cananasso





In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

(John 1.1-12)

Nijo odotem, nigo ote

Two Cultures, One People

I was born in Val-d'Or, Abitibi. I lived in Malartic a few years, and then my parents decided to move to Montreal. I was about six-years-old when they left me at my grandmother's place, in the Anishinabe community of Pikogan.

Two years later, I went to live with my parents in Montreal. I was fourteen when my mother, Rose-Anna McDougall, returned to Abitibi. At that time, I was in my rebellious years and had no intention of living in that region; so, I went back to Montreal. The following year I was pregnant and I decided to return to Abitibi; I settled in Amos. At the age of twenty-one, I already had three children from three different fathers.

I stayed in Abitibi until the age of twenty-six, with five of those years spent in Pikogan. During that time, I went to Sherbrooke for a one-year therapy in an effort to get rid of my substance abuse problems. The center I attended offered a Christian therapy based on the Bible. Among many other things, the program was instrumental in our discovering the love of God and establishing an intimate relationship with him. For me, this experience was the beginning of a new life.

Shortly after, I decided to settle in Sherbrooke with my three children. During the four years I stayed there, I took a course in entrepreneurship which led to the launching of a small Indian handicraft business. In order to establish the business in the vicinity of all our handcrafters in Pikogan, my kids and I returned, yet again, to Abitibi. Being more of a city girl, I chose to reside in Amos.

I speak perfect Algonquin. It was mainly my grandmother who taught me while, as a child, I spent all my summer vacations at her place in Pikogan. My grandmother could hardly speak any French at all – only a few words. My children also had the privilege to learn Algonquin. They learned it when they attended school in the community and through their contact with my mother.

While we cherish our Anishinabe roots, my children and I are actually Métis. When my children attended school in the village, they were among a minority of students who could not speak the language very well. As with any other school, it is often the minority groups which are brushed aside. Our particular situation was not related to language only, but also to facial features and colour of skin. We have never experienced extreme racism; nonetheless, certain attitudes and unkind words can sometimes wound the soul.

It is a common thing for the Métis to go through an identity crisis. On the one hand, they don't feel quite accepted among the pure Aboriginals, and, on the other hand, when they're in town, they're not always accepted either, because they look Indian. As for me, since I speak the language fluently, I never felt any racism in my community. However, I have experienced it a few times in other Aboriginal communities, probably because my features are more akin to those of a White than they are to those of an Indian girl. In Pikogan, I never suffered from prejudice. On the contrary, every time I would return to my community during the summer months of my youth, all my friends were there, waiting for me, so happy to see me again!

Only those who experience it can truly understand this strange feeling of belonging to two different worlds. Our quest for identity can sometimes be compared to an unceasing swirl. All my life, I have lived partly in the world of Whites and partly in the world of the

Aboriginals. As I would return to my community after spending a long period in the city, I would feel just like a true Quebecer, totally White inside. In recent years, however, I have been closer to the Anishinabe people, and now I feel as a full-fledged Anishinabe.

When I look at this from a different perspective, I see my two cultures as being an asset. There are people I appreciate and love very much, both in the Pikogan community and in the urban area. It makes me smile when, in different contexts, I find myself using words such as «them» and «us», at times associating with one group, and at other times, with the other. At any rate, I finally found my «true identity» when I came to the knowledge of God, my heavenly Father.

In my workplace, I meet Aboriginal people all the time and I feel very much at ease with them. I feel at home . . . as with my own family. While at University, I completed a Certificate in Psychology and another in Social Services. I knew that one day this training would prove useful. Back in Abitibi, I applied for a job at the Val d'Or Native Friendship Center. This is a resource center for Aboriginal people who live in urban areas. There are many such centers across Quebec and Canada. They offer different services related to social, economic and community development, as well as services geared towards counseling, medical transportation and seniors groups, just to name a few.

I have worked for the Odabi project (which means Our Roots) as an employment consultant. The Odabi project aims at developing essential proficiencies and employability, as well as promoting social inclusion among First Nations. It allows participants to develop their skills and basic proficiencies, their self-confidence and their potential, so that they can better adapt to the contingencies of the labor market. During their training, participants are asked to choose between going back to their academic studies and being integrated into a workplace.

I also applied for a job as an employment consultant at the Urban Service Center of Val d'Or in the context of another similar program called: Pikwadin (which means The Mountains). This project also aims at promoting and increasing the employability of those Aboriginal people who have to deal with multiple barriers before they can be integrated in a workplace. This type of job fits perfectly with my personality and my training.

Sometimes project participants are struggling with addictions. Having struggled with the same kind of problem myself, I can definitely empathize with them. I offer them my love and support, always trusting that they can pull through. I'm not the type of person who imposes her faith on others, but I don't hold back from encouraging them to turn to God even when I'm on duty, for Aboriginal people have openness for spiritual matters. I share my experiences with them hoping that they too may discover the joy of having an intimate relationship with God the Father.

Lack of motivation is another common problem among Aboriginal people. It is due to the low self-esteem that some entertain about themselves. To encourage all those who suffer from this and to see them persevere, this is my great challenge. In order to help, I'm never reluctant to take them in my arms and to hug them real tight whenever they get discouraged. It is often in the midst of difficult situations that we develop open and honest relationships. There is nothing to gain from playing a role behind a mask; in so doing, we lie to ourselves first and foremost. All project participants are well received in the different workplaces. Most employers (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike) offer great collaboration. Understandably, there are limits to what can be tolerated and to problems of absenteeism. But this reflects only a tiny minority.

The evaluation sessions, which involve both employers and employees, have very positive results. Their goal is to encourage improvement while moving away from discrimination. All too often I have heard critics say things like: «Ah! Those Indians! They just won't work.» Based on my own experience, however, I can affirm that this is simply not true. In fact, the high success rates of this program prove the critics wrong. Criticism empty of solutions is never profitable.

I'm passionate for my work because I know that my efforts serve the purpose of improving my neighbour's quality of life. I'm not perfect, but I can sincerely say that I truly love these people and that I seek to uphold their interests. I know full well that I was not this kind of person before. In fact, just a few years ago you could not have convinced me to come live in Abitibi. It took the Holy Spirit to work this transformation in my life; and it is the Lord Jesus who fills my heart with his love. Today I consider it a blessing to work for the First Nations, and I take great pride in it.

I have never really known my father and I have suffered from this for many years. When I became a Christian, it was God the Father who healed all the wounds of my heart. He had me experience what true freedom is all about – the freedom to appreciate who I am, as well as to appreciate others. Only on the grounds of a restored life and of a mended heart does it become possible to love people freely without being constantly centered on self. This new freedom allows me to discern every person's particular need and to direct my efforts in a way unique to each one.

God inspires me continually. He gives me constructive thoughts and words. As a result, he leads me to act toward others the same way he worked with me. When people are going through a tough time, far from brushing them off, I welcome them, I give them my love, and I offer them a fresh start, yet again. I know that it is God the Father who has bestowed these qualities upon me, and I also know that he is the one who opened the doors for me to have this job. But first he had to work miracles in my life.

When God freed me from shame and rejection, my eyes were opened to see who I truly was. Without this freedom that comes from God, we are all bound as with chains. If I continually see myself as inferior, I will spend my life trying to convince myself and others that I am a person of value. And if I fail, to the extent that I remain chained, I will become hardened and incapable of loving freely. The good news is: God has broken my chains! Today he can show his love for others, with me and through me. He and I form a wonderful team!

So, having tasted this freedom, I was no longer frightened at the idea of returning to the region where old memories could come and haunt me. I settled in Abitibi, trusting that God was going to guide my steps. And that is what he did. The reason I prefer the city is simply a matter of personal choice. Ever since I was very young, I have spent most of my time in cities. I love the urban areas; this is a part of who I am. I just feel a little crowded when I live in a small village.

My two daughters and my son all live in urban areas also. Samuel is in the Montreal area on account of his artistic career. My two girls work in Pikogan and reside in Abitibi. I am also blessed in having my three beloved grandchildren living close to me... and a fourth one is expected soon! My mother devotes herself to teaching Algonquin words to all these little ones, from a very early age.

I am very proud of my son Samuel, whose stage name is Samian. His hard work has paid off and he has reached the upper levels of the Quebec artistic community; and I am proud, no doubt about it. I have always encouraged my children in whatever they were trying to achieve, but I have also taught them that the pride I feel towards them rests not only on their achievements but – truly and more importantly – on who they are as individuals.

As with all other families, we too have had our difficult times. As a young mother, the lifestyle I had chosen generated its share of consequences in my children's lives. I have greatly regretted having put them through those difficult years. Once I became a Christian, I prayed intently that God would intervene and that he would help me become a responsible mom. As it turned out, I remained single and I really strived to rear them the best I could. It was not always easy, but I sensed that God was with me.

I am blessed by the fact that my children have also chosen the path of reconciliation and of restoration. I am so proud of them. All that they set about doing succeeds. They are good parents. I see that my grandchildren are happy and growing up in good surroundings. We form a close-knit family, and that, for me, is the greatest blessing of all. We attend church instead of bars. There are no drugs or alcohol in our houses; instead, there is laughter and a zest for life.

I will close by sharing with you a spiritual principle I learned through my relationship with God, particularly in times of distress. As I already mentioned, there was a time when I needed to be delivered from all kinds of bondages and from rejection. So, I began to thank God repeatedly for the fact that he is the Author of Deliverance. And, somewhere along the way, that is exactly what I received from God: deliverance from all my bondages.

At another time, as I was feeling trapped in my own life, I began to thank God for the fact that he is the Author of True Freedom. And, once again, God granted me the freedom I was longing for.

Now my prayer to God is to be granted a great respect and a high esteem for his person and his character. This is what the Bible calls «the fear of the Lord», which does not refer to fright or dread, but to a desire for the kind of humility which takes pleasure in obeying him everyday out of love.

Manon Tremblay





Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For, I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.' Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'

(Matthew 25.34-40)

Kibawagani migwam kak wakwik inekena

From Prison to Paradise

The theme I address in this text is not very popular. Some people might even be shocked. Still, I am driven to write about it for I am moved by a sincere and genuine love for the various First Nations communities and for all the readers of this book.

My own personal journey is also something that moves me to write on this topic. For many years, I lived a careless life. Unconcerned by the things that are actually important, I did not live my life in harmony with the will of God. Even if I knew about the teachings of the Bible and the warnings of Jesus, I was seduced by my own reasoning. Like anyone else I was convinced that, after death, everything would go well for me.

I was a teenager when my mother, Rose-Anna McDougall, experienced a genuine conversion to the Christian faith. She began to read the Bible and her life was radically transformed. I knew that Jesus was real; however, rubbing shoulders with someone who is in a true relationship with God does not make you a child of God. It was no different for me.

I lived a very sinful life up until the age of forty. I spent my childhood in the Pikogan community and then I resided in many different cities throughout Canada. I drank a lot and I was a violent man. I was sent to prison many times. I used to fight a lot; once I even crushed the bones of my victim's face. When I think about all of this, I have many regrets.

One day, my sister Manon asked me to listen to a testimony which really affected me. It was the story of a man named Bill Wiese who converted to Jesus thirty-two years ago at the age of sixteen. He served ten years in Costa Mesa, California with Reverend Chuck Smith, a very credible and world-renowned pastor. Bill and his wife Annette are real estate agents. A few years ago, Bill had a vision of hell. Actually, it was more than a vision: for approximately thirty minutes, he experienced the agony of hell convinced, all the while, that there was absolutely no way for him to escape.

Rather than having me give a detailed account of what this man went through, let me share with you the description he himself gave of his experience. The following is a transcript from a conference he gave in Kansas a while ago. Dear reader, please pay attention; this is not science fiction... it is real.



«Annette and I work in the real estate business. We do not speak at these conferences to earn our living or to make money. We simply know that God has asked us to go everywhere and speak to people about his love for mankind. Not for a single moment has it ever been God's desire for his own created beings to end up in hell. This is our motivation for speaking at these conferences.

First of all, I would like to clarify a few points. If I were seated at my own conference, the first question I would ask would be: 'How can you be so sure what you have experienced is not simply a dream or a nightmare?' It was not a dream. I know I left my body; I saw it lying on the ground as I came back. Without a shadow of a doubt, this was an out-of-body experience. Now, some people could say: 'Oh! But a Christian cannot leave his body.' Wrong! In the New Testament (2 Corinthians 12.2), when Paul speaks of having been «caught up to the third heaven», he declares: 'Whether it was in the body or out of the body, I do not know.' The fact he is unsure leaves open the possibility for a true out-of-body experience. Moreover, we read in the first verse that Paul speaks of his experience as being in the realm of visions. Thus, what I have experienced can certainly be classified as a vision.

Job 7.14 reads: 'Then you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions.' This is exactly what happened to me. In a vision, the Lord allowed me to be completely terrified. It took a full year for me to recover from this experience and to return to being a calm and normal person again. I had been completely paralyzed by fear. As a result, I will never again share the Gospel the same way.

I'm now going to ask my wife to come and join me for a moment. She is going to share with you what happened when she saw me in the living room. This is a portion of the event I do not recall, so I would like her to come and tell you her side of the story.»

«It was 3:23 AM when I woke up. I remember it very well because I was looking at our digital alarm clock when I noticed that Bill was not lying next to me. I heard shouts coming from the living room, so I proceeded to go down the hallway. Then, I saw my husband. He was in a state in which I had never seen him before. Those who are familiar with Bill know that he is a very conservative man and, by nature, very calm. Yet, there he was in shock, holding his head between his hands, crying and shouting. I didn't know what to do. I thought he was having a heart attack. I began to pray, and then Bill hollered: 'Pray that the Lord would remove this from my head. The Lord took me to hell; I feel like my body is dying... I cannot handle this.'

So I began to pray over him and, approximately ten to twenty minutes later, he started to calm down. He was literally devastated. It was as if he had just returned from the Vietnam War, or had just come out of a terrible car accident and was reliving the painful events in his mind. He had nothing in common with someone who simply had a bad dream.»

«When I came back from this experience, I wanted to know if someone in the Bible had ever been to hell. My research led me to discover that Jonah had gone through something similar. Here is what Jonah 2.3,7 says: 'Out of the belly of Sheol I cried out... I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit.' Thus, there is at least one person in the Bible who has experienced hell. In addition, I was able to find over four hundred texts of Scripture which depict all that I saw, heard, and felt in my vision. Also, I found out there were fourteen other people who have experienced at least one of the sections of hell I'm about to describe. Most of them were near death experiences; people who wound up in the hospital dying and were brought back to life.

As usual, my wife and I had gone to the prayer meeting that Sunday night along with our pastors. Afterwards, we returned home as we did any other night, and we went to bed. At about three o'clock in the morning, I was taken into hell. I had no idea how I found myself in that place. Only upon my return did the Lord explain everything to me.

I was dropped into a prison cell, similar to any typical cell you can imagine. The walls were made of huge rugged stones, and there were bars on the door. I had no idea where I was. The place was so hot, it was unbearable. I could hardly believe I was still alive; I felt like I was about to disintegrate. For a short moment, there was light in the cell. I believe it was the Lord's presence allowing me to have a better look at my surroundings. One minute later, it was dark again.

Present with me were four creatures; they were demons, but I didn't know that yet. These creatures were huge. They had scales and were distorted, twisted and disproportionate in shape. These strange and hideous creatures were constantly cursing the name of God. I wondered why they were reviling God like this. Suddenly, they turned in my direction and I felt that they had the same hatred toward me. Hell sharpens and arouses your senses and, therefore, I sensed that they detested me in a way I had never experienced before on earth. I knew that they were assigned to torture me.

I was lying on the ground fully conscious, utterly weak and helpless. I could hardly move and I was wondering why, when one of the demons grabbed me and threw me against the wall like he would a piece of glass. I felt every single one of my bones crush; I also felt pain in a very real way. No matter how much I begged and cried out for mercy, none of the demons seemed to hear me. Another one picked me up and began to tear my flesh to shreds, yet not a drop of my blood was shed. It was beyond me how I could still be alive. The demon which was ripping me apart had absolutely no consideration for this body that God so wonderfully had made. All he had for me was utter hatred.

The stench of hell and of demons is atrocious and unspeakable. It compares to that of burning flesh and sulfur. Demons give off a rotting odour that smells like a sewer. It is so toxic it could kill you if you had to breathe it in.

In all of his creation, God has gifted man with the highest form of intelligence. We study and we work hard to get ahead in life and to better ourselves. As for demons, they are the lowest form of life. It is, therefore, a terrible thing to be dominated by such ignorant creatures. Their only motivation derives from their hatred toward God. In hell, these are the creatures that torture and exert their control over you.

I was lying in the cell yet somehow, I managed to crawl over to the door. As I was leaving, I tried to get a last glance, but everything went dark. It was pitch black. I heard shouts. Millions of people were crying out. It was horrible! There was no point covering my ears because their cries were so loud and penetrating. In that place, fear is everywhere; it engulfs you, and there is no escaping it. There is not even a glimmer of the presence of God.

I managed to exit the cell and I looked in another direction. Off in the distance, I caught sight of some flames. There was also a pit of fire and its flames rose very high. Sure enough, I was able to get a glimpse of a portion of hell. Darkness is so thick there that it somehow swallows the light. Everything is gloomy and dreadful. There is no trace of a green leaf or of anything that breathes life; there are only stones, and a thick fog floating around in a dark and dirty sky. Such desolation!

There is no water in hell; there is no humidity in the air either. It is so dry that you become desperate for just a single drop of water. This supports the teaching of Jesus found in the Gospel of Luke concerning a man who ended up in hell: «His soul went to the place of

the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side. The rich man shouted, 'Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.'

Indeed, the heat there is so intense that it is impossible to describe. This heat should actually kill you, but it doesn't. You have no other choice but to suffer.

I wanted to escape, to get away from the screams and find my peace of mind. It was a bit like wanting to return home after a rough day, when the only one thing you desire is peace and tranquility. But once there, it's impossible to get away from that place of torments; there is no escape!

I stood up beside the pit of fire, beneath the entrance of a cavern which looked like a giant cave with a tunnel going up. From there, I was able to see through the flames. I saw people who were burning; they were screaming and shouting at the top of their lungs. All around the edge of the pit were huge creatures that shoved people back into the fire as soon as they tried to get out. I also realized that in hell, even if totally exhausted, you never get to sleep. As a matter of fact, it is written in the book of Revelation: «The smoke of their torment will rise forever and ever, and they will have no relief day or night.»

Intuitively, I knew that hell is located in the center of the earth. In the epistle to the Ephesians (4.9), we read that Jesus descended «into the lower regions of the earth». This is where hell is. The Bible says that one day, after the last judgment, hell and death will be cast into the «lake of fire», and then it will be cast into «outer darkness». But right now, hell is located in the center of the earth.

Standing by the pit of fire, I could see all the demons lined up against the walls. They were all different shapes and sizes. They are the most hideous creatures you could ever imagine. They seemed to be chained to the walls. I wondered why they were shackled like this; I didn't understand. After my return, I found this text in the book of Jude: «And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling – these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.» Undoubtedly, these are the angels I had seen.

Despite all this, the worst of all the afflictions in hell is to realize that there is absolutely no hope of ever getting out. As soon as I arrived, I realized that there was life above, on the surface of the earth. Yet people are oblivious of this underground world where millions of souls suffer and beg God to give them a second chance. Unfortunately, they will never have another chance. They have already had the opportunity to repent and to receive Jesus. There will be no other opportunity. In Isaiah 38.18 it is written: «Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.»

Yes, I speak the truth: the worst of the suffering is to end up with no hope of ever leaving this place. I understood this, as well as I understood the meaning of the word «eternity». Here, on earth, we are not able to fully grasp this reality. In hell however, I understood that I would be there forever, with no hope of leaving. Thinking of my wife, I realized I would never again have her by my side... I would never see her again.

While in a state of deep anguish, I started walking in the tunnel. Suddenly, Jesus appeared. A bright light illuminated the place; I could only see his outline. His face was so bright, I couldn't make it out. I fell to my knees. I couldn't do anything but worship him. I was so grateful.

Once I had regained my composure, enough at least to start forming thoughts, I considered asking the Lord why he had sent me to this place. Jesus immediately replied: «Because people do not believe that this place exists.» Then he added: «Go and tell them that I hate this place and that it's not my desire for one of my creation to go to this place. I never made this for man. This was made for the devil and his angels. You have to go and explain all of this to them.»

I thought to myself: «Lord, they won't believe me. They'll say that I'm crazy or that I had a really bad dream.» As I was thinking about this, the Lord said: «It is not your duty to convince people, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. You must not fear what people will think; you must only go, recount what you have seen, and let God do the rest.» Finally, I asked the Lord why these creatures hated me so much, and he said: «It is because they hate me, and you have been created in my image.»

At that moment, God immersed me in his presence. He let me touch a part of his heart so that I could understand how much he loves mankind. It was glorious, powerful and absolute! I could not take it all in. The love we have for our spouse and our children cannot compare to the love God has for us; it is infinitely beyond our own ability to love. It is this love which is spoken of in the epistle to the Ephesians (3.19): «this love of God that surpasses knowledge». It is the same love which drove Jesus to come and die on a cross to spare us an eternity in hell. It pains the Lord when he sees the great number of people who reject his love and head straight for hell.

It was at that point that I decided to go to the ends of the earth and to testify to what I saw. Now I would like to use all the time I have left to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.»



Dear reader-friend, you have just read the testimony of Bill Wiese; a man God has used to impact my life and destroy the wall of indifference which precluded me from facing up to the truth. I know that many will not take this warning seriously and that many others will mock it saying it's absurd. For years, I did the very same thing.

Let me just insist on the fact that it is Jesus Christ himself who revealed the existence of hell. Consequently, he is either the greatest liar, or he has told the truth. Jesus declared in the Gospel of John: «I am the way, the truth and the life.» This leaves us with only two options. If Jesus lied, and this entire story about hell is pure fiction, then don't pay attention to it. Continue to live as if nothing had changed, believing that after you die everything will go perfectly well. On the other hand, if Jesus spoke the truth, you will have to make the most important decision of your life.

When I heard the testimony of Bill Wiese, I realized how much I had been blinded by the devil. The fear of the Lord filled my heart and I felt a strong urge to repent. I understood how serious my disobedience was to God, and how much my life of sin deserved God's judgment and hell.

I immediately realized that I had to put my life back on the right track, leaving my sins behind. At that time, I was living with my girlfriend out of wedlock. I explained to her my desire to abandon everything that was contrary to the will of the Lord. In actual fact, the Bible

teaches that sex is something very beautiful that God created to be enjoyed only within the bonds of holy matrimony. We began to sleep in different rooms. My girlfriend attended church with me a few times, but she chose not to obey the Lord. After some time, we separated.

It is sometimes difficult to follow Jesus in a world where morality runs totally counter to his teachings. There is a price to pay when you become a Christian; there are significant changes to make in your lifestyle. That is what repentance is all about.

Various kinds of creatures exist in the spiritual world. Demons, for one, really exist. Bill Wiese affirms having seen demons thirteen feet tall. They are hideous and they curse continually. Demons are spirits endowed with enough power to influence people and to make them believe that hell doesn't exist. They can also affect some people so that they become tools of seduction. One of their strengths is to inspire particular artists so that they become instruments of sin. The immorality and evil seen in movies and music have influenced thousands of people. Moreover, some well-known stars are literally possessed. The singer Beyoncé, for example, has declared that an entity takes control of her body when she goes on stage. Satan's power to seduce is very real.

I had heard Christians talk about hell before. I had also read excerpts of the Bible on that topic and I knew that the information came directly from Jesus Christ. But I was confused. Sin's deceitfulness in my life was greater than my fear of the Lord; it was greater than my need of salvation. I was completely blinded by it. Today, it is crystal clear to me that the devil's purpose — along with his demons — is to do everything in his power to ensure that people commit evil deeds and end up in hell.

Generally speaking, people don't inquire much about the teachings of the Bible on spirits. Many believe they can address the spirits directly or communicate with the dead. The Bible strictly forbids us to do such things. Demons are deceitful lying spirits, masters of illusion. They can have you believe you are in the presence of your grandfather or of another deceased person you knew. The spiritual world holds many strange phenomena. This is why we must cling to the teachings of Jesus and thus avoid giving opportunities to demons.

I also know some people who have heard the Gospel and have responded favorably to the Lord but, regrettably, have not persevered and have since returned to their life of sin. Jesus told a parable about this. You can read it for yourself; it is the parable of the sower. Therein, Jesus explains that every so often the devil comes back and succeeds in seducing people who have already responded positively to the Gospel. This is why we must always be vigilant.

Just as we need to nourish our body everyday to stay healthy, we need to feed our soul daily with the Word of God. It is therefore extremely important to remain faithful to the Bible, to stay in contact with the Lord through prayer, and to join a good Christian church. It is startling how easy it is to grow cold when we neglect to be faithful in our Christian duties.

The devil is relentless in his efforts to lead everyone to damnation. What I'm telling you is very serious; therefore, I'm not ashamed to warn people about the reality of hell. This warning is exactly what brought me to take control of my own life. Inasmuch as this understanding about hell has awakened me, I believe it could also awaken others. Besides, I did not invent anything. It was Jesus who instructed us on what goes on in the afterlife; all I'm doing is repeating his words. If Jesus — who is God and our perfect model — saw fit to warn people about judgment and hell, I think it is reasonable for me to do the same.

When I realized I was headed straight for hell on account of the life I was leading, I came to repentance. For several years now, I have been attending church and reading my Bible everyday. I currently live in Kelowna, British Columbia. Unlike in Quebec, there are many Christian churches in English Canada. Every Sunday, about a thousand people gather at the church I attend. There are many young people at the church and we sing some great songs of praise. There are also several pastors and their wives, who teach the Bible.

All the violence that was inside me has completely vanished. Since my true conversion to Christ, I have never gotten drunk or entered into a fight. God has made me into a new person. He has filled my heart with love and with peace. I have a good job, a nice apartment, a new car, and I tithe in church every week. My relationships with people are interesting and significant.

Ultimately, my main concern is to let everyone know the truth about the afterlife and about our eternal destiny. Some people listen to me. Others mock what I say, but I don't care. It is out of love for them that I have chosen to warn them; it is the Lord who has asked us to do so.

Last week, one of my childhood friends died. He was walking along the road and was hit by a truck. He probably never had time to realize what was happening. I have shared the Gospel with him in the past, but he did not want to become a Christian and he made fun of me. If what Jesus said is true, this man suddenly found himself in the company of demons in a place of suffering such as he would never have imagined. This is the bleak reality!

It is not God who sends people to hell; in fact, every individual chooses whether to accept or to reject the means of salvation God has given us. As much as it would be absurd to say that evil does not exist, God is equally obligated to judge evil and sin; otherwise he would be unfair.

It is impossible for a sinful soul to enter heaven. God and evil cannot cohabit. However, murderers and serious criminal offenders are not the only ones who end up in hell. In fact, the worst crime a person can commit is to reject the forgiveness that God offers. It's not a matter of how big or small our sins are which will determine if we are to be separated from God forever. It is rather our rejection of the solution that God gave, and our belief that we can save ourselves by our own strength. Many people will end up in hell on account of ignorance. Rather than taking the time to open the Bible and hear what God has to say about the afterlife, they plug their ears. They continue to live as if it was business as usual, unconcerned by what God has to say.

In closing, let me give you a short summary of the biblical message. The Bible says that God came to live on earth in a human body. He came out of love to shed his blood on a cross because of the wickedness of man. The only way to pay the costly price of our forgiveness was for him to bear the consequences of evil and sin. God chose to suffer the consequences of our sin so that our souls might be saved. There is no other way; if we reject Jesus Christ we shall be separated from him forever. This is the most important decision of our lives. When death strikes, it will be too late.

Sin leads to hell. But if we humble ourselves and ask Jesus to forgive us, we become white as snow. Only then does the miracle happen in us, and we become lovers of God. It is then that the peace and joy of God settle in our hearts. It is then that the Bible becomes important and that all the transformations begin to take place in our lives. Jesus has said, «He who believes in me has everlasting life. He has passed from death to life.»

I beg you to take seriously all I have shared with you in this text. No one knows the appointed time of his death. Tomorrow may be too late for you. It's not in the afterlife that God will solve the problem of evil; he has already come to us on earth to settle the matter. Consequently, it is not in the afterlife either that we must address the question of evil in our lives; we have to make a decision here on earth. Once on the other side, it will be too late. Those who accept God's forgiveness will find themselves in the afterlife with a completely clean and white soul. Those who reject Christ will find themselves in the afterlife with a sinful soul. This explains why there are many people in hell.

All this is clearly explained in the Bible. It is our responsibility to listen to what God has said. It is Jesus who claimed that, «Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.» We must not take this statement lightly.

Another lie of the devil is to make people believe that, once in the afterlife, God will change his mind and save everyone. If that were the case, then Jesus would be a liar for he taught us the exact opposite. Could Jesus have led us astray?

I would like to say to each person reading my testimony that the most important thing of all is eternity. Jesus said: «The gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.» Imagine how terrible it would be to end up in hell for having neglected to repent and giving heed to the warnings of the Lord. The price that Jesus paid and the suffering he endured for the redemption of our souls are unfathomable. This is the greatest proof of love there is. But God cannot choose the direction you want to take. It is for each of us to decide.

Let me invite you now to sincerely pray this prayer in faith:

«Lord Jesus, hear me I pray. All my life, I have ignored you; I have despised your love and I have not read your teachings in the Bible. I have set my will above your own and I have refused to repent of my sins. I have been seduced by the devil and by my own reasoning. All this I now acknowledge.

I sincerely request your forgiveness, Lord. I ask you to blot out my sins and to enlighten me that I may forsake all that is contrary to your will. I welcome you in my life. Come dwell in me. Save me. Fill me with the presence of the Holy Spirit and make me your child.

Thank you, Lord Jesus.»

Alain Tremblay





And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you.’

(Luke 12.16-20)

Ki natokohew nitcanica

He has Healed ny Child

I live in the Obedjiwan community and I am a member of the Atikamekw nation. My parents were also members of this community. My husband's parents as well as his grandmother are Atikamekw, while his grandfather is Innu from the community of Mashteuiatsh. Our ancestors were nomads who dwelt in the forest and lived off fishing and hunting. Today, very few Atikamekw practice this traditional way of life.

However, we are still excellent hunters. We mainly eat wild meat.

Whenever my son-in-law or my husband kills a moose, it is my task to butcher the animal. It was my mother who actually taught me how to butcher a moose without wasting anything. We consume all the edible parts, even the head and tongue. I know how to make delicious meat spread. I also cook traditional dishes for my children and grandchildren which they appreciate very much. During spring break, the whole family enjoys going in the bush to hunt for Canada geese. These times are very precious to us.

In my community, I am the person in charge of greeting the tourists. They come from all over, even from Europe. We serve them delicious dishes with moose and beaver meat. They are also fond of my pâtés and of my fish soup made with the walleye we catch here.

The people of our Nation are not racist or prejudiced. They enjoy meeting foreigners and are generous and very welcoming. We always have a lot of visitors in our home. They feel at ease with us. We make them feel welcome and comfortable. They even use my appliances when they need to wash and dry their clothes. My husband and I also take in several troubled children who are in need of a foster home.

As is the case in many Aboriginal communities in Quebec, our nation faces serious problems with substance abuse. Many people are slaves to drugs and alcohol and some seek help. I can empathize with them because I too have experienced a similar problem. I have bad memories that I would rather forget. For instance, I remember leaving my children alone at home because I wanted to go out to drink.

When Jesus Christ is not welcomed in an individual's life, in a community, or even in a country, other spiritual powers move in and take his place. For various reasons, many leaders neglect this problem. Some believe that over time, a bit of psychology and some therapy is enough to resolve all our problems. They fail to understand that the source of the problems in the lives of individuals and in communities is primarily spiritual in nature. How many people have been in three or four therapy treatments without ever tasting the freedom they long for? Jesus said, «If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.»

My husband, who was a heavy drinker, and I were struggling with alcohol abuse. When we gave our lives to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit came to dwell in us and we stopped drinking. This was twenty years ago and we have not had a relapse since. Such are the fruits of the Gospel and the power of God!

Let me tell you a little bit about my spiritual journey. Many years ago when I was about nine years old, Christians from the Cree nation came to share the Gospel with us. At that time, there was no road connecting our communities. They had to travel by canoe and by plane. As soon as we saw the plane, we children, would hurry over to greet these missionaries. They held meetings in homes and many people attended. Alcoholics came as well because they wanted to hear them preach and benefit from their prayers.

This is how, at a very young age, the Word of God was sown in my heart. However, several years went by before this seed came to bear fruit. For many decades, the Atikamekw people, myself included, have been significantly influenced by the Roman Catholic Church. I thought that becoming a Christian meant changing religion. For me, leaving Catholicism was out of the question. My religion was more important than the teachings of Jesus Christ.

One day, one of our five children got sick. He was eight years old. We took him to the hospital and after a series of tests the doctors told us that he was suffering from leukemia. This news was devastating to us. In the following years, he was hospitalized in Roberval and then in Quebec City. We did all that was required to make sure that he was treated by the best doctors. In Quebec City, seven doctors were caring for our son. After several months of hospitalization and numerous blood transfusions, they finally announced that they were unable to cure him and that there was nothing else they could do. My husband and I were extremely discouraged.

Some time after his return home, we had to fly back to the hospital in Roberval so that he could receive further blood and platelet transfusions. My son kept telling me that he was tired of being sick and of spending his days in hospitals. In Roberval, we stayed with my aunt. She was a Christian and she attended a prayer meeting every Wednesday night. My little boy had attended one of these meetings before. One day, he told me he wanted to go back because he wanted to be prayed over. I was still prejudiced against Christians and I didn't want to go with him. So he went with my aunt while I stayed home and played bingo.

A pastor, who was present at the prayer meeting, prayed for my son. When he returned, I asked him what had happened. He explained that the pastor had laid hands on him and that he had asked God to heal him. Then my son told me that he had felt a wave of heat pass through his body.

The following week, we returned to the Roberval hospital for the usual blood tests. We went every Wednesday because his health was rapidly deteriorating. This time however, and much to my surprise, the results showed that my son's blood was perfectly normal! The doctor met with me and asked me what had happened. When I explained that my child had gone to a prayer meeting and that a pastor had prayed over him, he simply replied that he too believed in miracles.

Afterwards, we went back for further testing. The results confirmed that my child was completely cured! My son is now thirty-three years old. He was married in the Pentecostal church Église Nouvelle Vie de Chibougamau. He is in perfect health and a father of five healthy children.

For real Christians, who believe in the Bible, divine healing is something quite normal. God is all-powerful and for him, nothing is impossible. After this event, my heart was deeply touched. It was at that point that I decided to give my life to Jesus Christ and to become a Christian. I have never regretted that decision.

At that time, there was no Christian church in my community. For several years, I traveled great distances to attend Christian meetings in the Cree and Algonquin communities. I also spent a lot of time with my grandmother telling her about the Gospel and explaining to her all that Jesus had done in my life. She listened with great interest. I thank the Lord that my grandparents became Christians before their death. I know I will see them again in heaven in the presence of Jesus.

On many occasions, I have also shared my faith with my mother. I persevered and prayed for her often. Finally one day, she understood the love of Jesus and received the Lord in her life. She died in 2001. My father also became a Christian.

As I mentioned earlier, Roman Catholicism has had a strong hold on my people. I experienced a lot of rejection and opposition when I became a Christian. At first, we were only four Protestants among a community of over 3,500 people. The members of the Band Council were very concerned and have even called a public meeting on this subject. Almost all residents attended. I think they were afraid of Jesus!

We were publicly criticized on community radio broadcasts. In fact, one of the community elders announced that when we would pass away, we would not be allowed to be buried in the cemetery. I went to see him and I politely told him that after my death, he could dispose of my body in the trash, if he so desired. What mattered to me was that my soul was with the Lord. He looked down. His wife was very angry at him.

Today my family and I are loved and respected among the people of our community. They have seen the fruits of the Gospel in our lives. Every summer for the past ten years, I organize large Christian gatherings. We call them Camp Meetings. Approximately 500 to 600 people attend each year. We have a large public tent with musicians who come to lead praise and worship and pastors who come to teach the Bible. The people in my community really appreciate these meetings. At first they came out of curiosity. They were not used to seeing people sing and dance for God. When they saw us worshipping God with our hands raised towards heaven, they did not understand why we acted this way. Gradually, however, they were able to sense the presence of God in our meetings.

In recent years, our large public tent has been packed to full capacity. People are starting to be aware of the differences between religion and the Word of God. The Christian life is about loving Jesus with all our heart and loving his teaching. When the month of July approaches, people I meet here and there eagerly ask if there will be another Camp Meeting.

One day, someone filed a complaint about the music being too loud and about other problems occurring during our meetings. In fact, occasionally, people arrive at our meetings intoxicated. They want prayer to help them overcome their problem. Nevertheless, we do not witness fights or anything of the kind. On that particular day, however, a patrol team consisting of young white police officers arrived at the scene. We were praying in tongues and the presence of God was so strong inside the tent that they sat down and remained there for a long time. They were touched by the Holy Spirit and realized that we were doing nothing wrong.

In addition to these large summer gatherings, I also organize evangelistic meetings in a gym on a regular basis. I welcome guests and musicians from elsewhere. Our goal is that as many people as possible will be converted to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not about religion but about the eternal salvation of each individual soul. This is the most important thing in the universe.

When Jesus was on earth, he gave us the commission to preach the Gospel to all people. His death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins is the only means we have to inherit heaven. All who put their faith in Jesus Christ will be saved. This is not something I have made up, but is something Jesus declares himself. All those who seek other means to obtain salvation and do not heed the words of Jesus will not be saved. This is of utmost importance.

The Bible tells us that, unfortunately, the powers of evil also exist. There are evil spirits, demons, who hate the Lord Jesus and their goal is to ensure that as many people as possible turn their back to the Gospel and end up in eternal darkness. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nothing to fear from the forces of evil. Jesus gave us perfect victory over all demons and over all the powers of darkness. However, this spiritual war for our souls is very real.

There is a verse in the Bible which says: «Our fight is not with people. It is against the leaders and the powers and the spirits of darkness in this world. It is against the demon world that works in the heavens.» Let me give you some examples to help you better understand the undeniable existence of both the spiritual world and the world of darkness. On a few occasions my family and I were targeted by demonic attacks. These situations were very difficult and have caused us much concern and sorrow. We prayed a lot and the Lord Jesus gave us victory.

I have told you already about my son who was cured of leukemia and who now is the father of five children. Once, about two years ago, while I was in the process of organizing an evangelism weekend in our community, one of my son's children, a boy of ten, was attacked by the evil one. At that time he was not yet a Christian. In the afternoon, I received a phone call from my daughter-in-law. She was confused, but explained that the school principal had called about her son. The supervisors had noticed he was not well. They had talked with him but were not able to put their finger on anything specific.

After lunch, my grandson had a physical education class. He went to the locker room with his two friends to get changed, but when his friends headed for the gym, he remained behind. After some time, his friends noticed that he had not caught up with them and they decided to return to the locker room. They were stunned to find that he had hung himself.

It was a horrible scene. The teachers hurried over immediately only to realize he was not breathing. They called for assistance to have him brought to the clinic.

When I heard the news, I started to scream and to pray. It was awful. I was crying and asking God to bring my grandson back to life. According to the teachers' testimony, his body leaped and he came back to life.

I went to the clinic and prayed for him constantly. Later, he and his mother left to go to the hospital. Along the way, he regained his sight, and his numbed body returned to normal.

Following these events, we tried to understand why he would have done such a thing, since he was usually a playful, healthy little boy. The school staff watched the surveillance camera videos and contacted us so that we could view them also. They had seen something strange. The video showed my grandson in the school corridor, as if he were fleeing from someone or something. Looking at the screen closely, we discovered that the camera had captured a black shadow in human form following my grandson wherever he went.

We concluded that it was a demonic attack. My sister, who is the Director General of Education, also reviewed the videotape and drew the same conclusion. It was indeed an evil spirit!

Subsequently, my grandson told his aunt that after having hung himself that day, he had left his body and found himself on a mountain. While he was walking along a trail, Jesus appeared to him. The Lord blocked his way and sent him back into his body. Today my grandson is learning to follow the Lord and to pray.

As I mentioned before, the spiritual world is very real. In fact, some of the situations we encounter can only be resolved through prayer. Let me give you a second example.

Just a few weeks ago we experienced another somewhat similar incident. After a series of evangelistic meetings, thirty of us went to a friend's house for a light snack. It was already past midnight, when suddenly, a young man entered the house, completely drunk. Outside there was a Christian couple and a little boy. They saw this young man, but they also noticed a shadowy form behind him. Once inside, the young man fell to the floor screaming. Then, his voice changed and a demonic spirit began to speak through him. All the people present in the house witnessed this. We began to pray for the young man and we continued until he was completely delivered.

At some point, he became completely calm. All signs of intoxication had disappeared. He looked at us and said over and over, «So, you're the Christians!» He was happy and laughing, though he remembered clearly that «a person» had been following him, telling him to go kill his girlfriend and her little girl.

As believers, our main responsibility is to proclaim the Gospel, but we are also called to pray for our families and for our communities. I'm not talking about «religious» prayer or vain repetition. The Bible teaches about authentic prayer and provides guidance through many good examples. Prayer involves waging war for the salvation of souls.

In our community, we see more and more people interested in the Gospel and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hélène Petiquay





The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me. The seventy-two returned with joy, saying: Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name! And he said to them: I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

(Luke 10.16-20)

Kchai ta wski alnoba

Father and Son

I come from a very dysfunctional family. The pain brought about by abuse, rejection, poverty and shame weighed my parents down, and deprived me of the affection and words of affirmation I needed as a young man growing up. Furthermore, my parents carried within them the source of our true identity – a secret they were never to reveal.

I attended an English school for eleven years convinced that I was a native of that culture. I was a racist towards the young Francophones; an attitude that I had learned from my environment and my family. As a teenager, I was made aware of the fact that my paternal lineage was actually Francophone. My father had changed his name to conceal this reality. Little by little, however, I identified with my English roots. Later, in adulthood, I repented from the racism I had entertained towards the French.

As a child, I used to hear conversations among adults who mentioned the fact that our family had «Indian blood». When I questioned my parents about this, they replied that these sayings were only rumors, and quickly they managed to switch to another topic. Still, I was continually drawn towards the Aboriginal people. I spent a lot of time in the woods climbing mountains, hunting, fishing and trapping. Around the age of forty, I felt this strong desire to know the truth about my origins. Following a long series of divine interventions, my parents finally admitted that my paternal grandmother was a pure Abenaki. Suddenly, I had become a Métis... and I was proud of it.

In the spring of 2010, I participated in a five-month Canadian tour in the context of the project Journey to Freedom. I was attending a team meeting when God spoke to me: «Dan, you are an Abenaki!» These words came as lightning bolts. They were constantly echoing in my head to the point where I had difficulty concentrating at the meeting. At that very moment, without knowing what was going on inside of me, our team leader turned to me and said: «Dan, time has come for you to declare publicly that you are an Abenaki.» These words were reverberating in my mind and creating a real struggle in me... an identity crisis. That night I talked a long time with the leaders of the tour. They confessed that they had always considered me as being a First Nations person rather than a Métis, and that it was time for me to accept my true identity.

The next morning, which was the last day of Journey to Freedom, I got up and I declared publicly for the first time in my life that I was an Abenaki, member of the First Nations. When I got home, however, I had another dilemma on my mind. I now felt as if I was betraying the Métis as well as my family and everything I had ever experienced. This inner turmoil lasted four days until I finally turned to God with fervor and asked him to show me how to find peace, and how to have proof that I was truly an Abenaki and not just a phony impostor.

On that occasion, the Holy Spirit simply said, «Call your mother!» Oh, no! This was honestly the last person I wanted to discuss this matter with; all previous attempts had been very difficult. Yet, I obeyed... and a miracle happened. Not only did my mom listen as I let my heart

she confirmed that everything I was feeling inside was authentic. She and my father had experienced a transformation over the last year during which they too had come to accept their identity.

Then she told me everything concerning my ancestors. My great-great-grandfather was Abenaki. Both my paternal grandparents and my maternal grandmother were also Abenaki. My maternal grandfather is the only person in my lineage who was not a member of the First Nations. Finally, my mom said these words: «The best way to honor God and your family is to truly be the person that you are, just as God created you. I've always considered you to be an Aboriginal boy, and I want you to be proud of it even if no other member of the family gives you his approval.» Then we talked and cried together for two hours.

At the age of forty-eight, on this Journey to Freedom, I returned «home» to my true identity. God had also begun a deep work of healing within my family. I cherish in my heart the special affection I have for my brothers and sisters who are Métis; they welcomed me just as I was and were the instruments that God used to lead me to the full acknowledgement of my identity. I have a perpetual gratitude for the members of my First Nations family. They believed in me unswervingly. They had the courage to speak the truth, even if it was going to shake me all the way down to my roots. Their words have allowed me to see things more clearly and they have led me to freedom, in other words, to the First Nations man that I am today.

That being said, let me tell you briefly what I consider to be the most valuable aspect of my identity. Without a doubt, it is my spiritual identity, one that provides eternal peace and freedom.

Since the beginning of time, our Father's desire has always been to enjoy an intimate relationship with sons and daughters who are deeply in love with him. All living beings were created by God; however, becoming his child is a matter which rests upon each individual's choice. Our first parents fell into sin and, consequently, we are born into a world broken by sin and separated from the love of God the Father. We are born into this world with a physical body and a God-given spirit which is eternal. We were all created in the image of God.

To become a son or daughter of God, our own spirit must enter into a relationship with the Spirit of God. This is what the Bible calls «the new birth». It is also the only way to avoid an eternity spent in the darkness of hell separated from God the Father. It is as if God had left the course of our destiny into our hands. On the natural level, when we came into this world, it was not up to us to choose our parents. On the other hand, with respect to our spiritual birth, we personally have to decide whether we want to become a son or daughter of God. We all have this freedom of choice. To reject the fatherhood of God is to accept to remain in bondage to sin under the paternity of Satan.

God calls each one of us to become a mature son or daughter. For that to happen, we must let the Father's love heal and restore that which is broken in our lives. Our parents and the members of our families are not perfect. We must accept to forgive their failures so that the love of our heavenly Father will grow in our hearts. Only his perfect love has the power to make us happy. In turn, and in likeness to God our Father, we will be able to do some good and bring some healing in the lives of people around us.

This Almighty God, who dwells in light unattainable, is the same being that came to live on earth among a broken and destitute people. His character is unchangeable. Today, it is through his sons and daughters that he wants to show his love, his power and his glory. God does not live in a manmade building. Rather, he earnestly desires intimacy with his children, as would any father. Therefore, he comes to dwell in us through the presence of his Holy Spirit. This is the most unique and most intimate relationship of all.

In this heart to heart relationship with God the Father, our life is being renewed. God wants to restore the darkest and most shameful areas of our souls. He wants to change our attitudes as well as all that is not in harmony with his character and his heart. He wants us to become like him. For this to happen we must abandon our pride and selfishness so that the love of God in us would be poured onto others... not only on those we love and who are well, but also on the needy and the brokenhearted.

Much too often, all we ask God in prayer is that he would come to us, manifest himself and meet our needs. Jesus calls us rather to forget about ourselves, to follow him and to go towards other people in a world that does not know the love of the Father. Along the way, he promises to abide with us and to never forsake us.

Let me conclude my chapter with the words of a poem I wrote to express the love and gratefulness I have for my heavenly Father. It is my prayer that each and every one of you might be given the opportunity to experience this wonderful love relationship with God.



Just like a child, I stand before your throne,
Seeing not the mighty scepter, or a massive seat of gold.
My eyes just see my Father, as I climb up on your chair,
Thinking no one else can see me; if they do, I just don't care.

No one else can love me, just the way you do,
Before time and creation, I was always son to you.
This world and its battles, quickly fade from sight,
As I lean a little closer and your arms just hold me tight.

Strange how all my questions need no answer here,
Just the fact of being, like looking in a mirror.
My heart beats now with passion, whose flame burns in your eyes,
Just more of that great fire, to be my only prize.

The noise of all creation will soon come to an end,
Just to hold your children, orphans become friends.
Warriors, priests, and kings, see God Almighty there,
But I, the child. Just see my Dad; seated on his chair.



Daniel Goddard





Jesus answered him: If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

(John 14.23)

Tshitshue shatshitun

True Love

I was only five years old when my father died. In those days, it was customary for the eldest son to become the head of the family in such circumstances. My brother dropped out of school at the age of twelve to earn the meager wages that would feed our family. I remember being hungry in my childhood days; we had nothing to eat. There was nothing in the fridge other than beer. Many were the days when I left for school hungry. Those were difficult times for the little boy that I was.

On my own initiative, I often went to see our neighbours pretending that my mother had sent me to borrow some bread. I was lying in order to get something to eat. Fortunately, when I went to visit my grandparents, we went hunting, we ate three meals a day, and I was happy!

At school, the nuns would often ask me if I had had any breakfast. Ashamed of my family's situation, I would answer in the affirmative. I didn't want to let people know we had nothing to eat at home. Yet, I was pale and weak; most of the time, I would have had nothing to eat, neither for dinner the night before, nor for breakfast the next morning. Adults who came to our house to drink also ate all our food; there was nothing left for us. At lunch time, I would run home in the hopes of finding a good meal... only to go back sad, disappointed, and tearful.

My parents were religious people. Every week, we went to church. At home we would kneel on the floor to recite prayers — always the same ones. Yet, this practice only added to my confusion. How was it possible to pray to God while living in such miserable conditions? How could the brokenhearted, such as we were, believe in the existence of a loving God?

My little child's mind had no idea what to do. My heart was wounded and so tightly closed it was no longer able to give or to receive any love. I was convinced that the pain I felt would never go away. There was not even a glimmer of hope in sight. I was completely left to myself; nobody was mindful of me. Yet, I desperately needed to be understood and to feel loved. I needed the tenderness of loving parents waiting for me at home with good hot meals. I needed help, and there was no one at that time to understand me or to lend a helping hand. All this abuse broke my spirit, and all these memories are still very painful.

Today, I understand what it was that destroyed my mother: it was her addiction to alcohol. As a teenager, I was too young to realize this. I became a delinquent and a thief. How many were the times when my mother hit me with all sorts of objects such as sticks and leather straps. In fact, she did so every time I made a blunder, and every time the police came to our house to accuse me of theft or some other mischief.

I acknowledge that on many occasions I was simply reaping the consequences of my actions. As I got older, I also took my turn at harming people; I was caught in a vicious circle. As a teenager, when I was able to steal without getting caught, I was proud of myself and I felt great. I felt like I was gaining status in my friends' eyes. I wanted to prove I was brave and not a coward, but in reality, I was at the bottom of a dark pit, trying to find my way out. I needed love so much, I would have done anything to attract attention. Without

realizing it, I was letting evil take root in me. I didn't feel any love for my mother; it was as if she didn't exist. All she had brought me was suffering; she had never even hugged me.

Truth is, both the young and the old can experience pain. A child's pain is different, but just as intense. Adults can express themselves and seek help; children, however, are helpless and tend to close themselves off. Outside support is not there for them; it's not within their reach. They remain prisoners of their own suffering.

Later, I got married. I thought that perhaps marriage would fill all those love-gaps in my life, that it would help me find happiness and peace. Alas, it was not the right remedy. My inner wound was deep and I kept suffering in silence.

We had three children: Gérald, Cédric and Johnny-Paul. One evening, I was at home, about to leave for a hockey game. In my arms was Johnny-Paul, my baby, and there was also my three-year-old, Gérald, who was crying because he wanted to take his brother's place. I pushed him away and told him to stop crying because I couldn't have both of them in my arms at the same time. Then I left.

On my way back, I saw a gathering of people next to my in-laws' house. I wondered why they were there. The street was completely blocked. I saw my friends and cousins who were whispering among themselves. Everyone seemed to be avoiding me.

When I got closer, I realized there had been an accident and that everyone was crying. Then I saw a body covered with a blanket and some blood flowing. Someone in the family came over to me and informed me that my little boy had been run over by a car, and that he had died.

I went inside my in-laws' house. I was hysterical. A nurse came to me and gave me a few sedatives. I completely lost touch with reality. All I can remember afterwards is the small coffin being lowered into its grave at the cemetery.

In the following days, many gossips accused us saying it was entirely our fault, and that we did not know how to take care of our children. I was beside myself and could not take it anymore. I wanted to flee from it all, so I left my wife and moved to Sept-Îles.

Revealing such events from my past is quite difficult. There are memories we would rather see disappear forever. I could tell of many other incidents that have impacted my existence. I could open another wound and share with you my distress following the death of my second son, Cédric, who committed suicide at the age of twenty-one. But for now, I prefer not to say anymore and give this deep wound a chance to heal.

My goal in sharing these sad events is to help others who are going through the same difficulties. The desire of my heart is to bring them some measure of hope. The few stories that follow are extremely important to me. They will let you know how it was that God rescued me and gave new meaning to my life. Let me tell you how it happened...

I was working at Moisie River, near Sept-Îles, where there was a young man who kept talking to me about Jesus and the Bible. It was the last thing I needed. I already had my religious convictions and I believed in the Roman Catholic Church. I was convinced that this guy was

in a cult. He kept saying to everyone: «Jesus loves you». All the workers mocked him. As for me, I can't explain it, but this phrase, «Jesus loves you», penetrated my heart like an arrow.

One day the young man came to me and said: «Clermont, you're a helpful person, but inside, you're a broken man.» Then he added: «I would like to pray for you.» I was intimidated and very uncomfortable. To this day, I still do not understand why, but I agreed. So, he put his hand on my shoulder and, for a moment, it was as if time had stopped. He said to me gently: «Clermont, have you ever seriously asked God to forgive you?» This question surprised me. I was on my guard. After all, I attended church regularly and made visits to the confessional!

Then I realized that I had never seriously asked God for forgiveness. I had never really turned to him for anything. Was it even possible for God to forgive me and completely remove all my burdens? Could he really forgive all the wrong I had done? I was bruised, wounded, tired. Was it in God's power to help me? Could he be the solution for me? I began to pray.

At that moment something happened in me: I felt lighter. It was as if a movie was playing in my mind as I prayed. I revisited all the evil things I had done: all the fights, the thefts, my repeated unfaithfulness to my wife, and all the harm I had caused to others; all of it was etched into my memory and was playing before me. For each of these things, I asked God to forgive me.

When the young man and I stopped praying, for the first time in my life, I felt completely free. I was light as a feather and happy as a child. It was as if I had never committed any sins. I realized that God had really forgiven me. I turned to the young man and told him that I felt the presence of God. This was a genuine and astounding experience.

I immediately got up and headed for the other camp nearby where there were other workers. I couldn't contain my joy. I knocked on the door and, in my enthusiasm, I told them that the Bible was true and that Jesus was real. I wanted everyone to know how wonderful it was to experience such happiness and forgiveness. Previously, I had been ashamed to mention the name of Jesus Christ, now, in an instant, I had become his disciple. The Holy Spirit came to dwell in me. It was undoubtedly the best day of my life.

But, it didn't stop there...

In the camp where I was staying, someone had left a parcel for me. I was a bit startled. As I opened the package, I discovered a bottle of perfume, and, to my utter astonishment, I realized it also contained a Bible. I started to cry. Believe me, this is truly how everything happened. For me it was a miracle. That night, I slept with the Bible tight against my heart and I fell asleep thanking God.

However, when I woke up the next morning, I started to doubt. There was a little voice in my head saying that this was only the product of emotion combined with coincidence. The more I listened to that voice, the more I doubted God. When I headed outside for breakfast, I saw in the distance the young man who had prayed for me. I didn't want to speak to him, so I sneaked behind the camps. During the short while I was hiding there, he came up behind me and invited me to attend a prayer meeting in Sept-Îles. At first, I didn't know what to say, but I finally answered that I would go with him.

So a few days later, I found myself in the company of people I didn't know, but who welcomed me with kindness. I was a little upset because I was a racist. I didn't like white people. In spite of this, I reckoned they were sincere, and it confronted my prejudices. I was twenty-one years old at the time.

The meeting began; the people started praying and speaking about Jesus and how he had suffered for us on the cross in order to save us. They also said that Jesus had risen and was present with us today. I was listening carefully.

There was a lady in this group I knew. She was accompanied by her sick daughter who was suffering from purulent ulcers that had spread into her throat and gave off a foul odour. She could not swallow any food whatsoever and could barely drink any water at all. The doctors were about to transfer her to a hospital in Quebec City.

One of the participants took the floor and explained that we are encouraged in the Bible to pray for the healing of the sick. For me, all these beliefs were completely new. It felt as if I was sitting in a theatre watching a movie. I closed my eyes and I prayed to God, «Lord Jesus, it was you who brought me here. I am filled with doubts about what I experienced this week and about what I felt when I asked you to forgive my sins. If you allow this girl to be healed right here in front of me, I promise that I will never doubt you again, and that I will follow you all the days of my life.»

A few people laid their hands on the young girl and prayed for her healing. She began to cry and returned to her seat next to her mother. Nothing had happened; no tangible result; no healing. The young girl wanted to go home. She and her mother left.

I stayed until the end of the meeting. Upon leaving, however, I felt the burden to go and visit them. As I approached the house, I heard people shouting. At first, I thought they were quarrelling. Just as I was about to turn around, I heard some «Hallelujahs!» in the midst of all their shouting so I decided to enter. Somebody said, «Clermont! Clermont! Our daughter has been healed!» I came closer and I saw the young girl sitting at the table, eating. She looked at me and said, «I am healed! I am healed!»

That day, I really gave my life to God. The joy and peace I had felt a few days earlier was my portion again. I felt very close to God.

A little later, I left Sept-Îles to return to my community. I told my mother all about that I had experienced; however, she gave me some sad news: one of my sisters was very ill, and the doctors were giving her only a few days to live. She had been hospitalized three months in Quebec City and then had been transferred to a city closer to us.

On the way to the hospital, I told my mother about the miraculous healing I had witnessed. She tearfully listened to me. Once we got there, I entered the room. My sister was unconscious and so skinny I could hardly recognize her. I was devastated, so I left the room. Then I felt the presence of God. His peace came upon me. I returned to the room and I asked my mother to come closer and stand beside my sister at the head of the bed, while I went to the other side. Then, I quoted for my mother the first words I had read in the Bible: «And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will cast out demons; they will lay their hands on the sick, and the sick will recover.» And I added, «Just as I have seen God heal the little girl in Sept-Îles, so he will do for my sister.»

I was not a very experienced Christian and I did not know exactly how to pray. I simply repeated the words I had heard during the prayer meeting. A nurse entered the room. I told her that God was going to heal my sister and that she would be leaving the hospital soon. She probably reckoned I was not thinking clearly on account of the pain I was suffering, so she looked at me with great compassion. For my part, I was like a child: I was convinced that my Heavenly Father was going to give me what I had asked of him.

At any rate, the nurse went about her business and took my sister's blood pressure. When she was done, she looked at her device, backed up a little, and took the measurement again. My sister was still unconscious.

The nurse then timidly told me that my sister's blood pressure seemed normal. She added that this kind of thing happens sometimes in very sick people: the pressure rises and then falls suddenly. Soon after that, the doctor arrived. I immediately explained to him that we had prayed and that we believed God would heal my sister. Although he was not a Christian, he still encouraged us by saying that sometimes incomprehensible things happen. Then he took my sister's pressure himself and told us that everything seemed to be going well. I was convinced that my sister was going to heal.

Three days later, tests showed that all the signs of meningitis had completely disappeared. Before long, my sister left the hospital and returned home.

Back in the village, I told everyone what God had done. Several people were amazed, but others laughed at me. I then remembered that I too had made fun of the young Christian that I had met at the work camp.

When God dwells in the heart of a person, it becomes impossible not to talk about him. Jesus Christ has forgiven my sins; he has saved me, healed my life, and given me his peace. To you who are reading my testimony and who are sad, alone and in great distress, I invite you to entrust your life to God. The Lord Jesus died on the cross for us; He rose again to give us life, to save us. If there is nobody around you to help you, know that God sees you. Talk to Jesus and ask him to come and live in you. He will give you courage; he will give you a new life. It is written in the Bible: «I tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God.» These words are true!

In closing, I would like to share with you a rather special experience that happened to me a little while ago.

On New Year's Day, we had our two granddaughters, aged seven and nine, visiting with us. The weather was mild and the sun was shining. After a splendid snowmobile ride we were all back in the house for dinner. I had been sitting at my computer for a short while when little Megan (seven years old) rushed over to me and looked me straight in the eye, exclaiming, «Moumou, Moumou, Jesus is coming to take us! Jesus is coming to take us! Will Mom and Dad be there?»

Stirred and startled by these words of hers, I was shaken and did not know what to say. At that moment, I heard something like a voice in my mind that was saying: «As you can see, I am speaking to you through the words of a child. I am using the simplicity of a small child to tell you that the day of my return is near.» I was shivering all over.

«Will Mom and Dad be there?» she had asked! I was confused and amazed at the same time. I knew that this little girl didn't know the story of Jesus, let alone that which concerns his return to earth in the last days. She knew nothing about that! The only thing she knew about the Christian faith was the prayer I say before meals, and the one I pray at bedtime when she and her sister come to our home for a sleepover. We never told them anything about the return of Jesus!

Not knowing what to do, I took my guitar and I asked Megan if she wanted to pray and sing with me. She nodded, then closed her eyes and raised her little hands to the sky. At that moment, I felt as if I was being transported with her elsewhere in the presence of God. I beheld this little girl with her eyes closed and her hands raised in worship to the Lord. She remained in that position throughout the whole song. My wife, Diane, watched us in silence, awed by what was unfolding before her eyes. It was a glorious and heavenly moment.

A few months prior to this event, the Lord gave me a dream in which I saw myself enter a large church filled with people. I was sitting with Diane, and we were watching these happy people dance and worship the Lord. I felt the presence of Jesus. Then I saw someone passing before us, waving a flag. He was running all around the church. There were people from other nations: Italians, Quebecers, Innu, and blacks. They were worshipping the Lord in this church. I was happy and amazed. When I woke up, I told my dream to Diane and she suggested I write it down because it was obvious that the Lord was trying to tell us something.

At that time, I was a member of an Innu Christian church. Being Innu myself, I had invested a lot in my brothers and sisters who lived in this community. One day, God showed me that it was time for me to go back to another Christian church I had attended before. I had not been back for several years. I asked Diane if she wanted to come with me and she accepted.

When we entered, I noticed that there were many more people than in years past. We headed over to the front where two seats were available. We were happy to see all these people dancing and worshipping the Lord. Then, as I had seen in my dream, someone waving a flag passed before us and began to run around the church. Diane exclaimed, «Your dream! Your dream!» Later, we were introduced to Italians who were visiting the city. There were also some French, Quebecers and Innu. All of this strangely resembled my dream... but where were the black people?

While my eyes were closed, my wife struck me on the side and repeated, «Your dream! Your dream!» I opened my eyes and, to my surprise, I saw two black men come sit right in front of us. Without a doubt, each element of my dream had come to pass.

I think that the purpose of this dream was to prepare me and confirm to me that the revelations I was receiving were indeed from the Holy Spirit. It was as if God was saying to me: «Clermont, before you consider my imminent return, I want you to be convinced that I am with you and that it is I speaking to you.»

To make a long story short, one or two days after experiencing this wonderful moment with Megan about the return of the Lord, as I was thinking about what had happened, I heard Jesus speak to me in spirit and say: «Tell this story to others.» Then, while turning the pages of a Christian magazine, I saw the name of a pastor whom I knew from thirty years back and who lived in a town far away from ours. His telephone number appeared at the bottom of the page, so I decided to call him.

He was happy to talk to me. During our conversation, I told him in detail what went on with little Megan. He was astonished. He then explained that, just before Christmas, a lady, accompanied by her five-year-old child, came to visit him. While he was talking with the woman, the child cried out, «Jesus is coming soon! Jesus is coming soon!» My pastor friend had been deeply moved by this.

I know it is not a matter of coincidence that I was led to call this man I had not contacted for over thirty years. I could have told this story to anyone else. Indeed, it was God who wanted me to hear what the pastor had experienced so as to confirm that my story was real and true. Would it be possible, then, that the Lord Jesus is about to return to judge this world? Since God speaks through the mouths of children, would it not be our duty to warn people and to tell them about this Biblical truth of the Lord's return?

I know that God has communicated such warnings to many other people and I believe we should take them very seriously. The parable of the ten virgins in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew is still very appropriate for our time. Jesus is about to return and so we must be prepared, pure and blameless. It is written in the Epistle of James: «Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.» It's up to us to turn to Jesus Christ in love and repentance and he will welcome us.

Jesus said: «Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.»(Revelation 3.20)

I hope this testimony will touch your heart and that you will come to the right decision!

I love you all.

Be at peace with God.

Clermont Picard





Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!
O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!
If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning,
More than watchmen for the morning.

(Psalm 130.1-6)

Onkwehón : we tsi nihontierha ne oriwahsonha'

Indian Affairs

For over forty years now, I have been a member of a small Christian church located in the heart of the Mohawk community of Kahnawake. In the family of God, there is no place for racism. Whether we are Aboriginals, white Quebecers, or Quebecers of any other race, we all live out our faith together: we pray together, we eat together, we rejoice together and we mourn together. It is the Spirit of the Lord that produces this unity among us.

Each culture has its own characteristics with its strengths and weaknesses. We must learn to love one another, despite our differences, as Jesus commanded. This requires patience and mutual understanding. It also requires we abandon our prejudices and accept our cultural differences. With the help of God, everything is possible.

I enjoy great friendships within my own people, as well as with the white people who attend our congregation. The Pentecostal Church was established here over half a century ago, and all our pastors were — and still are — predominantly non-Aboriginal people. We have loved them and have teamed up with them. The pastor we now have is not a Mohawk; he is an English-speaking Quebecer. We are very pleased to have him with us.

The Mohawk Nation is the most populous Aboriginal nation in Quebec and is spread over three communities: Kahnawake, Akwesasne and Kanesatake. We belong to the Iroquois nations, which, before the arrival of the Europeans, formed the Confederation of Five Nations.

At first, the Mohawks may appear to be aloof and reserved. They tend to keep their distance in the presence of strangers. They observe without revealing too much. But when friendships are established, their warm and generous nature comes through. The people of the First Nations are hospitable people. Yet, as you well know, we must rebuild upon a difficult past. For various reasons, relations between Mohawks and white people have sometimes been quite strained, including that terrible period of the residential schools. These wounds may take time to heal.

I have worked in a Mohawk community school for over thirty years. In this school, several of our teachers were non-Aboriginals. Sure enough, we wanted to know about their true motivations and why it was that they came to work with us. We wanted to make sure that they were really committed to our people and that they genuinely loved our young students. With time, I saw beautiful friendships develop to the point where many were in tears when one of these teachers had to leave.

However, this hesitation to trust others can work both ways. When Mohawk people decide to leave their community to work outside, they do not always feel accepted immediately. They too must prove themselves and show that they are trustworthy. Unfortunately, some employers have prejudices against Aboriginal people and act cautiously and sometimes even with contempt. This creates an atmosphere of mutual distrust and makes it difficult for good relationships to develop.

Over the years, many job opportunities have been created in our community. Consequently, very few people are working outside the community nowadays. I know we must rejoice at this, but there are also some adverse effects that need to be addressed. In that regard, it must be noted that there are some drawbacks to being confined to a restricted setting. Personally, I worked in Montreal for several years and found the interaction with other cultures and other workplaces quite stimulating. I was exposed to a wealth of experience, which has been helpful for my development.

Personally, I believe it would be beneficial for the new generation of young Mohawks to experience this cultural interaction. I have spent enough years in a high school to know that there is an extreme lack of motivation among our youth. Their horizons are limited, and they fail to realize the benefits of a good education. This opportunity is not fully appreciated in our community.

As a result, the young people tend to be careless, and this will no doubt affect their character, lifestyle and career choices. I have already noticed this weariness in some adolescents who fail to complete the chores entrusted to them here and there in the community. They have not learned to persevere or to make the required effort. They have not yet learned the value of satisfaction after a job well done. It seems to me that the people of my generation were more driven than the youth of this generation.

Therein lies a strange paradox. On the one hand, the Mohawk nation distinguishes itself by its pride, its courage and its warrior spirit. On the other hand, despite their remarkable intelligence and countless talents, many people in the community suffer from low self-esteem.

This low self-esteem does a lot of damage in the life of an individual and of a community. Sometimes, people become jealous and begin judging each other. If, for instance, some are committed to excellence and seek to stand out, there will always be someone to put them down or to destroy their motivation. It is difficult to break out of such a destructive cycle unless you have a strong character. Many say that this condition has developed as a result of the abuses done to Aboriginal peoples in recent generations, and there is probably a lot of truth in that. Currently, many efforts are being made to bring forgiveness and healing.

Others will blame the government for not doing enough to help the First Nations. Many injustices have been committed at that level, but I don't think the government is solely responsible for all the problems we experience in our communities. I would say that this reflex of constantly blaming someone else encourages a vicious cycle where we tend to believe that everything is due us. This is when people adopt the principle of least effort, choosing to remain inactive and expecting the rest of the world to fulfill their every need.

What is tragic is that this mentality is passed on from one generation to the next. I personally know some families that have been living off welfare benefits for three or four generations. We are certainly blessed to live in a prosperous country where there are programs to assist the sick and all those who are unable to support themselves. But developing a dependency mentality where labour, education and entrepreneurship are not valued can only lead to depreciation and destruction.

Fortunately, many Aboriginal people are aware of this problem and are putting considerable efforts into changing this philosophy of life. As I mentioned earlier, the local employment rates have risen in our community in recent decades, and I welcome such progress. I also

believe that entrepreneurship is important, although it should not be at any cost. I am alluding of course to the cigarette and tobacco trade – an extremely lucrative business that has flourished in recent years in the Mohawk communities.

First of all, I think we need to look at the moral aspect of this issue: can it be considered right and acceptable to create wealth for oneself in spite of other people's health? I am not convinced that this trade goes hand in hand with Mohawk pride. Second, I argue that this type of activity is not very likely to motivate our young people towards better education and better career choices. If they are made aware of the opportunity to earn a lot of money with no education requirements and minimum effort, they won't hesitate very long before opting for this easy solution. In the long term, they will bear the consequences.

Then there are those who seek to restore our people's pride by proposing a return to ancestral spirituality. The government supports such initiatives and has even included the topic of aboriginal rites in the textbooks assigned to all the schools of the province of Quebec. As an Aboriginal person and a Christian, I do not support this approach.

I do not believe that our people will regain its pride through the practice of religious rites. The pride of our people is to be found in its character and in its DNA. Just consider the lifestyle of our grandparents for a moment and you will be convinced. Mohawk communities were matriarchal. During the long periods when the men were away hunting, the women were the ones who took charge of the clan. Mohawk men are strong and courageous; they will stop at nothing. Good providers they have always been and must remain.

Mohawk women are women of character. They are good and responsible administrators. They know how to raise their families and how to work for the betterment of their community. These are the values that have been handed down to us by previous generations. These values need to be cherished and put into practice.

Back when I was a young girl, many men left the community to find work and provide for their families. They were not leaving to go hunting, but to work on construction sites. Others went to build skyscrapers in large cities.

When my spouse and I got married, we went to the United States and spent four years there. We then came back to the community. My son stayed with me, but my husband was away all week because of his job. Several other families have experienced the same situation. Living in the United States obviously implies communicating in English and neglecting our native language. In such conditions, the children eventually forget our language. The leaders of our community became aware of this problem, and they have since established programs to protect our language and our heritage. This I applaud.

Currently, very few men need to leave the community to find work. As a matter of fact, we have more local job opportunities. This means that our families are more stable, but it also means that we need more housing. This is one of the reasons for white people not being allowed to settle in our community. Priority must be given to the native families.

Prior to 1981, a law (the Indian Act) publicized by the Department of Indian Affairs authorized the inclusion in the community of any white woman married to an Indian. The problem with that law is that it gave more rights to these white women than it did to the Aboriginal

women. In addition, if an Aboriginal woman were to marry a white man, she and her children were deprived of all their rights. In contrast with this is the matriarchal society on which our culture was founded. In our culture, we call upon the mothers to transmit our values to the next generation.

I remember an old man who, in his day, was very much in favour of the protection of our culture. He used to say that this law did not do justice to our nation. According to him, by penalizing the Aboriginal wives, it was clear that this law did not take into account the reality of our matriarchal society. The government later changed the law specifying that no Aboriginal man or woman who marries a non-Aboriginal person is allowed to live in the community. Today, this issue is still a source of tension. The children of these mixed marriages are also victims and called «C31». At school, I have often witnessed the bullying these children endure. They are accused of not being «true Mohawks». Fortunately, many members of our community disapprove of these attitudes and continue to fight for better and fairer laws.

To illustrate my point further, let me tell you about my own situation. My spouse is a Mohawk and my children live in our community. The mother and father of my spouse are both Mohawk. As for me, my mother is a white woman, and my father is a Mohawk whose status has never been recognized. As a result, I ended up with no Indian status and was deemed illegitimate. This is even worse than the C31 classification. Let me explain the whole story.

Around the age of eight, my father was taken to a residential school. His grandmother had been the one taking care of him, but he was only nine years old when she died. My father's whole world suddenly collapsed. When he was finally released from the residential school, at the age of sixteen, he found a job in Montreal.

The mother of one of my father's young co-workers decided to take care of him. She even wanted to pay his tuition for a higher education, so he decided to go and live with her. My father wanted to become a priest, but it didn't work out and he went to work at Canadair instead. He assembled military equipment there during the Second World War. This is where he met my mother. They got married and had a first child: me!

Then he applied for a job at Kahnawake, at the Department of Indian Affairs. We moved into the community when my mother was pregnant with my brother. All my siblings were born in Kahnawake. I am the only one who was born in Montreal.

It was during this time that my father started to look into his genealogy. He discovered that he was an illegitimate child. The man who told him about this was his boss, a white man who worked for the Department of Indian Affairs. He didn't like my father much. He even called him a «bastard» in front of all the other employees. Sad and hurt, my father decided to give the whole thing up. He has always been considered a «no status» Indian. People who fall into this category have no rights in the community. And this rule also applies to their children.

A few years ago, we did some research of our own and found out that my father's father was indeed a Mohawk. He had just never accepted paternity. Our entire community is currently aware of these facts, but because it was never formalized on paper, our status has remained the same. In my case, my status is currently recognized because I am married to a Mohawk. I am under his guardianship,

as it were. We have been married for forty-four years, and our relationship is strong. I know it will never happen, but if my husband were to divorce me, I would immediately lose my status along with all my rights.

I am convinced that the leaders of my community would not apply the government legislation currently in force in my situation. However, if they were to do so, I would be forced to leave the community and settle elsewhere. I understand that we need to protect our culture and give priority to families that are purely aboriginal on the reserves, but I'm not the only one who is noticing that some situations are clearly unfair and unacceptable.

Obviously, if one day I had to leave the community, I would not be the only person affected. I'm thinking about all these friendships that I have developed over the years and that would be tarnished or even destroyed. I spent several years of my life in schools contributing to the betterment of my people and to the proper education of our youth. I am attached to all the people I have associated with. When I retired, they organized a big party in my honour. It was a total surprise. All the teachers were present. I will never forget this token of their love and appreciation.

In my opinion, all these emotional and relational aspects should be considered before excluding anyone from an Aboriginal community. Imagine the sadness my two sons would feel if they were to see their mother leave for some other place. The boys are optimistic and have the welfare of our community at heart. They have worked on various local projects. One of them is currently working with foreign companies to improve the quality of life of many Aboriginal families in other communities who live below the poverty line and whose homes are virtually uninhabitable.

Going back to the problem of low self-esteem, let me just say that this mentality is not easy to uproot from a person's life, let alone from an entire community. I would like to offer some alternatives and a few potential solutions.

In my view, the Christian faith is a key factor in creating a better sense of freedom in the lives of individuals and a profound transformation within a community. Keeping in touch with God and experiencing his love on a daily basis are two conditions that can literally transform our inner being. Low self-esteem is then replaced by a God-given unconditional acceptance. This reality creates in us a sense of peace and strengthens us to face the future.

With God's help, everything is possible. This is why people often ask us to pray for their hopeless situations. They know that God is almighty and that he answers prayer. Others come to church only on occasion, when everything is going wrong. They know they will be welcomed and that God will do them good. However, to experience a real transformation, there needs to be loyalty. A relationship with God should not be characterized by a series of sporadic events. We do not come to God only in times of crisis. It is when we walk with him daily and when we take him seriously that miracles happen.

The Christian life is not a religion. There is a price to pay to follow Christ. There are sins we must abandon; there are people we must forgive. When I was a teenager, I definitely wanted to succeed in life. I enjoyed studying; but I also liked boys. I concluded that the best thing for me would be to attend a boarding school for girls in order to better concentrate on my studies. I told my father about it, but he categorically refused.

I could never get him to change his mind. It was only later that I learned that my Dad had been a victim of the residential schools in his youth. He has never told us about this, but when I was informed, I was able to understand his attitude and his refusal to let me attend boarding school. He was perfectly justified in fearing for me and in wanting to protect me.

I know a very respectable lady who married, had children and led a happy life. She had also spent several years in residential schools, without being particularly affected. Then, at one point in her life, everything shifted. The trauma of her past suddenly resurfaced. The consequences were disastrous.

There is also a lady in our church who went through the horrors of the residential schools. Yet, she is able to realize that it is not God but men who should be held responsible for such atrocities. Open denunciation of the abuse done to our people is absolutely necessary and so are the measures that will foster healing. But we also need to make room for forgiveness and let it do its work. It is a power that liberates and heals. It can help us rebuild our self-esteem and get a fresh start. I do believe that, with God's help, all of this is within our reach.

The Bible is full of lessons that help us live happy and blossoming lives; it is in this book that God speaks to us and offers his solutions.

Let me share with you another biblical principle that is also a good cure for low self-esteem, namely, generosity.

Generosity helps us focus our attention on someone other than ourselves. Once we choose to adopt this value, it boosts our self-esteem. It is very helpful to be in a place where you can consider yourself a generous person. This not only helps us to form a good image of ourselves, but it also helps us to consider others as important.

You may be surprised to learn that, within our association, our little church has ranked second in Canada, per capita, for donations dedicated to missions in developing countries. For Christians, as for everyone else, it is quite natural to give priority to our own needs and to let others manage on their own. But, Jesus changes our heart and teaches us to be generous. What is more, obedience to the Word of God is always rewarded.

For example, our church building needed renovations a few years ago, but our finances were running quite low. A few years prior to that, we had decided to stop contributing to the general support of our organization because of our minimal income. It seemed like the obvious decision for us at the time. We even sold a table to an antique shop in order to accumulate funds. But we felt that, despite our own needs and our modest income, God was calling us to renew our commitment to our organization, so we chose to resume our contribution.

Today, I know we made the right decision. I can tell you frankly that, since that day, not only have we made all the necessary renovations, but our organization has never lacked financial resources. Donations come from near and far, often from unexpected sources.

God has appreciated the generosity of our hearts and has blessed us until now. Thus, we continue to give generously to meet the needs of people we don't even know and who live in distant countries. God's Word never fails. Jesus said, «Give, and it shall be given you.» God is faithful in his promises; he always fulfills his Word. And in the process, he transforms our selfish hearts and we become different.

The members of our church have learned to tithe faithfully, and they too experience the blessing of God. Other churches in our community have more members than ours and must hold fundraisers to meet their costs. We apply the principles of the Bible, and things are going very well... as God has promised.

In Kahnawake, our church has a good reputation, and people treat us with respect.

Frances Rice





Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

(Hebrews 1.1-3)

With all due respect, I would say that this ideology is subtly imposed upon us. Once again, some would want to decide what is good for us. I do not believe in the benefits of such a spirituality which encourages communication with the spirits of the dead. These beliefs have their roots in spiritualism. I do not think that they could be a positive asset for our people, let alone for our Aboriginal youth who are already going through great difficulties. In the Cree communities, we do not believe in a form of syncretism which would combine aboriginal traditional beliefs and Christianity.

Neither do we believe in the teachings and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. Here, we preach the Bible, the teachings of Jesus Christ. We are not caught up in a turf war and we are not interested in living in the past. We are a happy people, a people of faith that is moving forward.

I should add that we must make a clear distinction between aboriginal spirituality and aboriginal culture. I can say from the outset that there are many good things in our culture that are traditions we want to preserve and of which we are proud. We simply need to learn to keep what is good and discern that which is contrary to Biblical faith.

Some members of our Church are currently studying in the United States to perfect their skills in the areas of praise and counseling. We plan to open a Christian therapy center to help members of our community. Other members occupy key positions in local politics, education and social services. Still others are business people whose generous contributions allow us to achieve various objectives. We have also developed excellent relationships with members of the Band Council. We often get their assistance and financial support for the development of various projects.

For example, young people in our Church are currently in Atlanta to attend a major conference organized by internationally renowned speakers. All costs were paid by the Band Council simply because our leaders understood the merits of the Christian faith. They know that these conferences have a positive impact in the lives of youth and that these young people will, in turn, have a favorable influence on the lives of other youth. That's the power of faith: it produces a change for the better.

We also concern ourselves with the welfare of other surrounding communities. Our church brings together people whose second language is either French or English. This allows us to reach out to the Aboriginal peoples of various nations. I always taught the members of our congregation that the Gospel should be lived out not only in words but also in deeds.

We have visited very small communities further north who live in extreme poverty. We bought equipment that allows us to keep wild meat (beaver, moose, goose, etc.). The men of our church drive several hours to distribute this food to the neediest. We also supply them with furniture, clothing and even small gifts for Christmas and Easter.

Some of these people have been victims of abuse by the clergy. These events have wounded them and have made some of them quite resistant to the Gospel. They maintain that the religion of the white man must be rejected. However, we do not discriminate against these people; we help them generously. Gradually, they come to an understanding of the true Christian faith and then they become interested in discovering what the Bible teaches. We firmly believe that the Gospel is the ultimate solution to the problems of humanity.

For several years now, I have owned a map showing all the Aboriginal communities in the province of Quebec. Eventually, I'd like to see the establishment of Christian churches in each one of them. Although there are many sacrifices involved in moving to remote places, I would love to see the disciples I trained leave our congregation to plant churches elsewhere. I also pray that members of other Christian churches would have the same burden on their hearts.

I have found that non-native pastors can have a great impact in our communities. I have rubbed shoulders with many of them and we have developed some great friendships. When I became a Christian, my pastor was a white missionary who came from the United States. He had received the call of God and had a heart full of love for our people. He and other American pastors have done a very good job among the First Nations of Quebec. To be honest, I have to say that if the Cree Nation has become what it is today, it is partly due to the missionaries who came to establish Christian churches among us.

There are communities that prefer to hire an Aboriginal pastor. There is nothing wrong with that. I would say, however, that it is important for us to maintain collaborative ties with the white pastors. Currently, the involvement of white pastors is still much needed, particularly when it comes to the teaching and training of Christian workers. I personally know Aboriginal people who were prematurely promoted to the position of pastor without sufficient Biblical training. I think we should avoid this kind of situation. This is where a partnership with non-native pastors may be of great value.

The Cree Nation has not experienced a great tide of spiritual awakening. Rather, growth has come by way of tiny churches that were planted with patience. It came about when people realized the benefits brought by the Gospel, turned to Christ and gave up their bad habits. They became happy individuals and better citizens. The results are noticeable as there is lots of tangible evidence. I am, therefore, convinced that the Christian faith and the establishment of Christian churches is the best solution for the development of our communities.

Let me conclude by saying humbly that the Cree Nation is a nation blessed of God. At any of our large gatherings or official meetings, the authorities always ask the Christians to pray in order to receive a blessing from God. Some of the Chiefs and members of Band Councils are also devout Christians. We find that our leaders, even those who do not yet attend church, have learned to honour God and to appreciate his goodness and supremacy.

I would like to conclude my testimony with this prayer of blessing:

May God Almighty, the Lord Jesus Christ, bless you and reveal himself to you, people of the First Nations, and people of all other nations, who now live in this great country.

Allan Etapp





Again Jesus spoke to them, saying: I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

(John 8.12)

written: «You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.»

As Jesus has said, we cannot serve two masters at the same time. Either we serve the one or we serve the other. We cannot serve Jesus while continuing to serve the devil. As far as I'm concerned, I can tell you that I love my family and the members of my community. However, I have neither a passion nor even an attraction for the vain activities and entertainment this world has to offer. These things can easily become the focus of our lives.

For me, my reason for living is Jesus. I'm not very excited about what is happening on this earth; my real home is in Heaven with the Lord. Being a senior in our community, I am a respected man. What saddens me considerably, though, is the fact that people do not follow Jesus who, after all, is God.

We have a good friend whose name is Fernand. He lives in our village with his family. A few years ago, he and his wife were completely enslaved to alcohol. We used to visit with them and would tell them about Jesus even when they were drunk. With time, they understood the love of God and they both became Christians. The Lord is currently strengthening them. Fernand has an extraordinary ability to memorize the Bible. Ask him to find a verse and in no time he has it at the tip of his finger!

There is no Christian church in our community, that is to say, we have no building. Nonetheless, every Sunday we welcome some fellow believers into our home for a time of prayer and Bible sharing. We are happy to be together. We hope that one day God will send a pastor who will help us — this group of Christians who form the church — to grow further in the knowledge of God... and in numbers too.

Hanging on the wall of our living room is a large picture which constantly reminds us of what is really important in life. It proclaims a message of eternity to all who enter our home. This picture shows a crowd walking along a wide path. The people do not appear to be concerned about what lies ahead or where the path leads. They just walk along like a herd of blind caribous not realizing that their final destination is a huge chasm filled with fire. People are actually falling into it by the thousands. A short distance from the chasm is another path which leads to a large bridge. This path is easy to access and anyone in the crowd is welcome to follow it. The picture shows people who have chosen to leave the wide path for the one which leads to the bridge.

The bridge which allows individuals to reach the other side of the chasm is in fact a huge cross. This cross is securely extended from one side of the chasm to the other. It is the only bridge and the only way to safely cross over this abyss of damnation. The cross was placed there by God to provide an opportunity to avoid the eternal flames of hell for all those who would so desire. My wife and I have crossed this bridge and we know that we are out of danger. This is in strict conformity with the teaching of the Bible.

Early after my conversion, the Lord gave me a dream to reassure me. In this dream, I found myself in the middle of the night surrounded by darkness. The darkness was so thick that I couldn't see anything. Suddenly, I caught sight of a ray of light which was getting brighter and brighter. This light had a different glow and a different substance; it was unlike any other light that shines here on earth. While gazing at it, I began to cry. And then suddenly, Jesus appeared to me. I will never forget this dream. It is deeply etched in my memory and in my heart.

I had another dream. This one came to me after a very sad tragedy that has affected me profoundly. My brother was in a terrible car accident just outside of our community. He was behind the wheel of his truck and was driving down the side of a mountain. The brakes failed and my brother lost his life. In my dream I was at the place where my brother died; I was walking along the road and crying. After a while I was really exhausted. As I was about to collapse someone came behind me, grabbed me with both his arms, raised me up again, and supported me. When I turned around to see who this individual was... I saw it was Jesus.

I remember yet a third dream. This one was about my wife and me. We were both living in the forest as we often did when we were younger. My wife kept telling me that we needed a canoe. I went to fetch one and then we went canoeing on a very calm lake. I paddled quietly to the center of the lake, and then we paused to pray. I put the paddles across the canoe, leaned over them with my eyes closed and began to pray. When I opened my eyes Suzan was no longer in the canoe. I looked around and I saw that she was standing on the water, floating on top of a tiny board. At that moment I woke up.

It so happened that my wife also dreamed of a lake. She was standing on the shore holding a blanket in her hands. She got close to the lake and threw her blanket onto the water. Then she climbed onto the blanket and realized she could float. As she was praying, heaven was opened and she had a wonderful vision. In heaven she saw a splendid house unlike any other she had seen before. The house was long and there was a door on its facade. She looked and Jesus appeared in the doorway.

My wife and I are simple elderly people with little education. To participate in this book, I had to ask my daughter to translate our testimony because we speak neither English nor French, only Naskapi.

There are people who feel it is quite primitive to place our faith in Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls. Personally, I believe that all of us should consider the eternal destiny of our souls as our most important concern. At any rate, we know one thing for sure: Jesus is not a liar; he always tells the truth. The Bible is simple and it contains everything we need to know in order to avoid the abyss and to end up in the right place after death. In this regard, Suzan and I are at peace.

Jesus said, «I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved.»

David Swappie





May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth.

(Colossians 1.12-16)

Piley lintuwakon

A New Song

I belong to the Malecite Nation. A very long time ago, my ancestors dwelt on this land. Back then, we were a very numerous people. Today, our community has a population of about 1,800 people.

Times have changed a lot since the days of my grandparents. Our culture has evolved and our needs are no longer the same. We have adapted to many new situations, and modernity has forced us to rise up to new challenges.

I am a very active and successful business man. I have owned an exterior siding company, and I currently own a premium-quality woodwork company which is the main supplier for the Gibson and Fender guitar manufacturers. I have also worked for the federal government as an agent for Fisheries and Oceans Canada. I received my training at the RCMP school in Regina, Saskatchewan.

My father also was a very prosperous businessman. He was a bootlegger (smuggler) who sold alcohol to the people in the community. He died of a heart attack at the age of forty-eight.

With regard to morality and spirituality, we were of the Roman Catholic tradition, but I had no relationship with God. I started smoking marijuana at the age of ten, and consuming alcohol at fourteen. As an adult, alcohol, drugs and promiscuity with women was my way of life. Being very wealthy, I was consuming a lot of cocaine. However, the drug was affecting my management skills so much that I was forced to hand down one of my companies.

My most successful business has been and remains my woodwork company. Several years ago, I found out about curly maple, a very rare species of tree. One of these trees can sell for up to \$10,000 in the United States, in Germany and even in Japan. In fact, a defect in the growth of this tree creates a special feature in the wood grain. It is often used in the craftsmanship of the body or neck of a guitar. When I started the company, I was acting illegally; I had no operating license. Often I would even go out at night to cut some trees.

At that time, flipping through a magazine, I learned that the Gibson Company was using curly maple in the craftsmanship of its instruments. So, I dialed the phone number at the bottom of the page, I spoke to their buyer and offered to become one of their suppliers. The buyer asked me to send a few samples, and the very next month, we started doing business. Very quickly, my company's revenue doubled, then tripled, and on it went. I made it my honorable duty to go to Nashville and personally deliver the first order.

All the ingredients for success and for my family's happiness were there at my disposal. Unfortunately, my lifestyle and my drug habits were gradually doing their destructive work. My position as an officer with Fisheries and Oceans Canada provided me a very good income, but it was more and more difficult to reconcile my law enforcement duties with all my dishonest activities. It goes without saying that my immoral choices were affecting much more than my profession and my accomplishments.

There came a time when my substance abuse was so problematic that I asked my father-in-law to take over the leadership of the woodwork company. My boat was sailing adrift, and I knew for a fact that my lifestyle was destroying me, along with my wife and children. I needed to change, but it seemed beyond my strength.

Despite my sinfulness and arrogance, God had mercy on me. I say this because I remember a series of special events that happened when I was in my twenties. So let me backtrack a little bit.

At that time, I had already been using drugs for ten years. Bars would hire me as a singer, but my life was just an ongoing party.

One Sunday morning in my apartment, I woke up with a terrible headache. I turned on the TV and came across a program featuring Jimmy Swaggart, an American televangelist. The guy was sitting at the piano and he was singing and weeping. His song was about the cross and the blood of Jesus, and about the Lamb of God who takes away our sins. All these things had no meaning for me, and they didn't interest me either. However, a strong emotion got hold of me. It was completely beyond me, but I suddenly felt as if I was going to cry. I quickly grabbed the remote and changed the channel.

I had always been closed to the Christian faith. The mere mention of the name of Jesus made me angry. But the emotion I felt that Sunday was so intense that I irresistibly went back to hear the televangelist again. He preached about the power of Jesus Christ which could completely transform the life of any individual on earth. I knew that this was exactly what I needed: a radical transformation, a complete deliverance from these unhealthy habits that were destroying me. Swaggart kept saying that Jesus is able to act, regardless of the situation in which we find ourselves.

I was completely absorbed in these words. It was impossible for me to escape the strange sensation I was feeling inside me. Swaggart went on to explain how much God loves us and how Jesus showed his love by dying on a cross to save us. He invited us, the viewers, to turn to God in faith and ask forgiveness for all our sins. He claimed that Jesus Christ was present with us everywhere. He even added that Jesus was present in my apartment!

Then he returned to the piano and began to sing. His music was piercing my soul. I felt all my misery and my brokenness. I felt this overwhelming pain that was tormenting my life. But rather than turning to God, I turned off the TV.

In the days that followed, the songs I had heard were still playing in my head. I didn't really understand what was going on because, although I was a musician who owned hundreds of albums and who constantly listened to music, none of these popular songs had ever had such an effect on me. I was perplexed!

The following Sunday, I found myself in front of my TV again, listening to the same program. It was a beautiful sunny day; the curtains of my apartment were wide open. Sunrays were coming in, filling the room with all their light and warmth. Yet, inside me was only darkness and emptiness.

This time, I listened to the whole program, from beginning to end. When Jimmy Swaggart sang, I began to cry. The presence of God I had felt the previous week was there again. I listened carefully to the words of this preacher who was inviting me to put my life into the hands of Christ.

At the end of his message, he invited us to bow our heads before God and admit our sins. At this precise moment, I understood full well that I was a sinner, but there was still some resistance in me. Swaggart went on to say that only God can forgive us and save us. «Ask Jesus to become the Lord of your life», he said, emphatically.

I headed towards the window of my apartment and closed the curtains. I went to the door and locked it. Then I knelt in front of my TV and asked Jesus to forgive me. Instantly, I felt as if someone had removed a huge weight off my shoulders. When the program ended, I was convinced that something good was going to happen. However, several days went by and I remained the same person, looked exactly the same, and kept on making the same poor choices. I had not understood what it meant for one to repent of his sins. I thought I had been deluded, so I rejected this experience with God.

During that same year, I met a lovely young woman with whom I got married. We started a family together, but I was still going out at night, drinking and doing drugs. I would come home late, and when the children were preparing to go to school in the morning, I was still intoxicated. Clearly, these early years of marriage were very difficult. I was neither a good husband nor a good father. Our marriage was constantly put on ice, and my wife left me several times. Despite the fact that I was making a lot of money, I was destroying the people I loved. My life was a perfect failure.

In my moments of despair, I would go back to that unforgettable experience when I had knelt down in front of my television set. I would then address Jesus, promising to serve him forever if he would deliver me from my misery. Very often God heard the cry of my heart and answered my prayer. He consoled me, renewed my strength and gave me courage. But, as soon as everything went better, I returned to my same previous mess... This happened not only once or twice, but on repeated occasions.

Meanwhile, my wife started going to church. She was not very devout, but she made that decision on account of a comment someone made, saying: «If you don't want to follow Jesus, at least bring your children to church so they have a chance to get to know him.» Inwardly, my wife, Melody, understood the importance of living with God. She grew up in a very good Pentecostal Christian family. At the age of sixteen, she decided to turn away from God and to live her life on her own terms. But her mother had never stopped believing that one day God would change her heart, and she had never stopped praying for her daughter. My mother-in-law also prayed a lot for me and for our children.

I remember one day when my father-in-law – a man of integrity and a pastor's son, who had also experienced his moments of doubt – kindly explained to me how great was God's love for me. I replied that it was impossible for God to love me so much, because «he does not even know me.» My father-in-law smiled and said: «God knows you, Richard. It is written in the Bible that even before you were born, he knitted you together in your mother's womb.» I was still skeptical. At that time I had no idea I was about to experience a sequence of events that would affect my whole existence.

One Sunday morning, while my wife was preparing to go to church with the kids, I told her I wanted to accompany them. So I got myself ready and I attended the meeting in the morning as well as the one in the evening. Once again, God manifested himself, especially through the music and songs. I felt that same presence again surrounding me as it had in my apartment several years before.

When the pastor came forward to speak, I was in a receptive mode. His message went directly to my heart. Despite the crowd around me, God was speaking to me personally, face to face. To conclude his sermon, the pastor said, «I know there is someone in this room that God has been calling for a long time. It is completely useless for you to run in the opposite direction. I believe the Lord would like to tell you tonight: «Stop running away!» I knew full well that God was addressing me through the mouth of this preacher. Then he added: «God is offering you his assistance. He wants to restore your life and your household. Stop fighting against God, give your life to Jesus Christ, and he will take action!» Then my natural instincts took over: I closed my heart tightly shut and walked out of the church. In my heart, I knew that this pastor was telling the truth, but my pride was still resisting God. To be honest with you, I would say there was another reason I wouldn't follow Jesus. I had realized that living for Jesus would necessarily imply dropping some of my ways that I still held dear. This is quite a paradox when, on the one hand, you acknowledge the destructive effect of your sins, and on the other hand, you prefer to continue in them because of the pleasure they bring. What we don't realize is that, ultimately, sin will lead us to our doom.

The following Sunday, I accompanied my wife to church again, and, once again, the Holy Spirit moved me through the songs of praise. It is amazing how so few people have experienced the true nature of worship. Many believe that worship songs are just simple songs like any other, only with religious words. This may be the case in some traditional churches, but certainly not in Christian churches where the Spirit of God has opportunity to manifest himself. Christian songs are not only songs that speak about God, they are songs that also speak to God. The difference is huge. This is the reason why there is such enthusiasm at Christian worship meetings. You will see people with their eyes closed and their hands outstretched to heaven and others who remain silent with tears streaming down their cheeks. This is often what happens when we worship God with a sincere heart. His presence becomes so real!

When the pastor preached his message that Sunday, I knew that God was still speaking directly to me. Once again, I felt the pain in my soul and the shame of having ruined my life. Part of me wanted to run and nestle in the arms of God, but another part of me was paralyzed by fear. I was afraid of what people would think. I was afraid of what my family, friends and members of my community would say about me if I became a Christian. Despite the fact that I had never really been concerned about what people thought of me, I didn't want to face this dilemma, or the intimidation. Rather than responding to the pastor's invitation, I returned home.

I stopped attending that church for a while. The feelings of guilt I had with regards to my lifestyle were far from pleasant, so I reasoned it would be best for me not to set foot in that place anymore. However, a few weeks later, I was back. And, as you would expect, the presence of the Holy Spirit touched my heart again; and, once again, I resisted the call of God.

The following Sunday I was back in church with my wife and children, but this time things unfolded quite differently. The time of worship was fabulous, but when the pastor spoke I got angry. I was convinced that someone I knew had called him up to report all sorts of things about me. The message spoke to me so personally that I was convinced this man had received information on the details of my life. Of course, no such thing had happened, but it was rather the Spirit of God who was trying to convince me of his presence. God does not

need spies; he knows our every move. That Sunday God wanted to convince me that he knew about everything pertaining to my life and that he was fully aware of the state of my heart. He wanted to convince me he was there to love me and to help me.

During the sermon, Melody had to leave the hall to take care of our son who had started to cry, and I found myself all alone in the pew. Then the pastor asked the entire congregation to close their eyes and to start praying. He continued with these words:

«For a short time, think about the people who are close to you. Know that on the day you die, when you appear before God, none of these loved ones will be with you. You will stand alone before the Lord. You will then be held accountable for all that you did during your life. If you decide to reject God, you will have to suffer the consequences of your decision. Why then be worried about what others will think of you? It would be wiser to be concerned with what God will think of you.»

At that moment, I was fully convinced that God was speaking directly to me. He was inviting me with an outstretched hand. He was giving me yet another chance. Then the pastor continued, «I challenge you to take God seriously. Give him your life today. Jesus Christ is the one calling you. Be strong and bear witness to your decision in front of everyone here. Come forward and welcome the Lord in your heart.»

Everything was shaking inside of me. It was impossible for me to resist God any longer. I got out of my seat and, instead of heading for the back like I had done before, I started to walk toward the front of the church. The closer I got, the more I cried. There was, of course, this little voice inside me saying that all these people would find me ridiculous and absolutely absurd. But it had no effect on me; no matter what, my decision was made; nothing and no one could stop me. I knew that if I truly gave my life to God, he would deliver me and transform me.

So many times before I had promised God that, if he came to my aid, I would follow him. And, so many times I had broken that promise. Up to this point, I had never experienced this transformation promised by God for the simple reason that I had never decided to give up my sins. I had never decided to trust him completely and to put my life in his hands. The true reason for my refusal to follow God had always been linked to my unquenchable desire to continue in cheating, partying, adultery, drugs and alcohol. Following God involves turning away from evil. There is no transformation without surrender.

That Sunday I knew that, if I decided to follow Jesus Christ, there would be a price to pay. I made this decision fully aware of what I was going to have to do and, above all, fully aware of God's goodness to me. When I made it to the front, I was crying like a child before a crowd of three hundred people. My tears seemed inexhaustible. The pastor took me in his arms, and I cried on his shoulder. He too began to cry. I was thirty-two years old, and he was only twenty-two. Other people came toward us; they surrounded me to encourage me and to pray with me.

Someone went to see my wife – who was in another room – and told her that I had come forward and was praying. She did not react much upon hearing this; she didn't trust me anymore. Melody was convinced that there was no sincerity in my response. Her broken heart had lost the capacity to believe it. She had suffered too much. During all these years, I had neither been the husband nor the

father that I should have been. Therefore, she had no confidence in me, and I could not blame her for that. Fortunately, God was faithful, and that day was for me the beginning of a new life. I joined that church, and a little while later, I was totally delivered from drugs and alcohol. What a wonderful miracle!

Then one day, a member of the church offered me a small gift. It was a compilation CD of praise music by various Christian artists. Every time I would listen to it, the Spirit of the Lord would move me deeply. When the CD was playing in my truck, I had to drive wiping my tears, saying to God how much I loved him, and how much I was grateful for all that he had done for me. I could freely express my love because this music of praise really unleashed the sentiments of my heart. I could worship him with a passion.

All of this got me thinking. I wanted to understand the effect this praise music had on God, and why it seemed so important to him. For many years, I had sung and heard hundreds of popular songs that talked about human relationships and romance, beauty and suffering, or sadness and joy. I realized that all the songs I knew before were concerned only with man, and that a great majority of artists focussed exclusively on these themes. Once I became a Christian, though, I discovered that there is a music that speaks to God and not to men; a music that helps us to relate to him in a special way. This concept of addressing God in song shook my world. I then understood why his divine presence surrounded me whenever I heard these worship songs.

Because of this, I discovered that I could experience the wonderful presence of God even while driving my truck. I realized that my spirit could connect with the Spirit of God through music and worship. My understanding was being transformed. I had already realized the importance of reading the Bible in order to get to know God. Through the Bible, God communicates his instructions and his wisdom, and he reveals his character. Through the Bible, God directs me to the right path; he strengthens me and comforts me. In many different ways, he expresses the various blessings he wants to lavish upon me. But, in a way, the Bible works only in one direction. I say this because, theoretically, I cannot contribute anything more to God by reading his Word – it is he who gives and I who receive. Music and praise, however, constitute an expression of our love for God. This is something that we can offer him. I could also explain it by saying that the understanding of God's character is given to me through the Bible, and, in return, I can offer him my gratitude through prayer and songs of praise.

I also found that this intimate communion with God was working an immediate and profound transformation in my heart. During the first two years of my new life with God, praise music played an important role in the transformation that God wrought in me. At that time, I had not been playing the guitar for some time.

One day the pastor asked me if I wanted to learn a song of praise and sing it for God at the next meeting. I agreed. It's difficult for me to describe how I felt when I sang this song of worship. While I played and sang, God planted a seed in my heart. What he planted was a growing desire to be involved with praise and worship in church. Later, I learned a second song, a third one, and then many more. God continued to touch my life, and I began to write songs for him.

Over the months, I ended up in a recording studio working at producing a first album. This experience was very rewarding and I enjoyed it very much. A few years later, I recorded another CD. Several radio stations have discovered my songs and have started to play them all over the country and even in the United States. I am currently working at producing my third album. I was invited to sing in several Canadian cities and also in Europe.

My goal was never to become popular or to make a living out of my music. My desire is simply to share the Gospel and express my love for God through music and song. I don't object to the selling of CDs – studio costs being as expensive as they are – but I certainly want to avoid using my God-given gifts to make money. I prefer to give my CD away every time I have the opportunity.

I would like to add that God has not only blessed my life and restored my marriage, but he has also restored my professional life. Shortly after my conversion, while I was praying, the Lord prompted me to re-invest some time and energy in my woodwork company. At the time, that business was not yielding very much, but the savings I had been able to put aside in the bank through my other jobs allowed me to invest a lot of time into it. My father-in-law and I got together to develop a strategy, and the Lord began to bless our activities. God opened all the doors. Initially, we were selling a maximum of fifty pieces of woodwork per month. In very little time, we increased our monthly sales to one hundred, two hundred and three hundred pieces. Currently, fourteen years later, we are the biggest suppliers of curly maple for the Gibson and Fender companies. These companies alone annually buy approximately \$700,000 of our maple. Let me tell you that everything is so much easier when God takes matters into his own hands!

As you probably know, the hardest part of a marathon is not the first half, but the second. Over the last two or three years, I must acknowledge that my Christian life has reached a certain plateau... as if I was on autopilot. Of course, I love God with all my heart and I am very involved in church, but I feel that God is about to blow on me a second time. I think he is preparing me for something greater, for an even more intimate experience with him. I am happy to say that after all these years I'm still in love with him. But the most wonderful thing is knowing that he is still in love with me.

In closing, I would like to add this. Several years ago, shortly after my decision to follow Jesus, I found myself in the middle of a spiritual storm, if not a tornado of disbelief. I had hardly discovered the goodness of God and the joy of living with him when doubt began to attack me. I was afraid I had been deluded. I questioned the authenticity of my experience with God. I reasoned that, if this was real, and if the good news of the gospel was true, then how come nobody seemed to be interested? If the people in my community were made aware of a retailer liquidating his stock at ridiculous bargain prices, wouldn't they rush over to his store in great numbers? If God is so wonderful, and if the Christian life is truly what is best for us, then why was it that my wife and I were the only Christians in our community? At that time, I didn't know what to make of all this.

While I was going through this period of questioning, my mother-in-law phoned one of her friends to tell her all about the wonderful changes that were taking place in my life. This lady was a Christian and a member of a church in another city. She mentioned to my mother-in-law that a Malecite couple was visiting their church from time to time. We knew this couple; the husband had been a member of the Band Council of our community.

Some time later, my wife and I contacted them to invite them over for dinner. What a joy it was to share our journeys and to find out we had all been through the same experience of conversion to Jesus Christ. Shortly after this happy meeting, one of the pastors suggested we start regular Christian meetings. So we did. We chose to come together at the community center rather than in our homes in order to provide easy access for all. At our first meeting, we were only two couples, plus the pastor. Even though we were the only ones for several weeks, we were still happy to be there; we spent a lot of time together singing praises to God.

Gradually, one by one, people were added and we saw our little group increase in numbers significantly. To this day, we get together at the community center every week. Also, we have developed other programs such as a Christmas banquet that we offer free of charge to the members of the community. We get a few hundred people to join us for that event. Increasingly, the Malecite people are opening to the Christian faith, and that makes us very happy.

You can rest assured, God's love is genuine and the Gospel is true. They will never fail. The question we must ask ourselves is whether or not we really want to live for God and devote our lives to him. No one can make that choice for you. The decision rests with you... and you alone.

Richard Paul





I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart;
I will tell of all the marvelous things you have done.
I will be filled with joy because of you.
I will sing praises to your name, O Most High.

(Psalm 9.2-3)

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Forgiveness and Freedom

I was born in the Cree community of Mistissini, Quebec. When I think of my childhood I remember my mother, Margaret, taking care of us. But I have no recollection of my father, Charlie Blacksmith. I was told he was a gentle man with a big heart and that he loved to pray. He also loved having people dance to his fiddle playing. One day, I asked my mother how dad had learned to play the fiddle. She told me that a fur trader had given him the instrument and that he often sat by the river's edge listening to the sounds of the rushing water. Then he would simply let the bow glide over the strings and mimic those sounds. Over time, many villagers came to listen and to dance to his music. That's all I know about my father.

My mother was the community "doctor". She used traditional medicine to heal the sick. Growing up, one of my duties was to go into the forest to retrieve the plants she needed to prepare her medications. My mom was a gentle and loving woman who took good care of us. She taught me as many things as she could... until the day I was forcefully taken away from her to be confined to an Indian residential school, hundreds of miles from home.

Several years later, mom heard the preaching of the Gospel message and she welcomed Jesus, Lord and Saviour, into her life.

The other memories that come to mind are those of my rebellious teenage years in which I lived a wayward life of sin. Still, my mother loved me unconditionally; she was always there to help me. It was through her love, her grace and her acceptance, that I became convinced of my own sin. I knew my mother was living an authentic personal relationship with Jesus. I loved my mother very much and I had a lot of respect for her. I was longing for the same relationship she had with God.

In 1975 I married Louise and together we developed an interest in Christianity. We began to realize that we were sinners and that Jesus was missing from our lives. While sharing good times of fellowship with born-again Christians, we each realized that becoming a Christian was a serious decision that would have an impact on both our lives. Louise gave her heart to the Lord in the spring of 1977 and I did the same the following July.

That fall, as is the custom among my people, my mother, step-father and niece prepared to leave for a period of several months. They were going far away into the bush to fish, hunt and trap. At that time we didn't have an adequate means of communication to keep in touch with them. They had planned to stay on their hunting grounds until the following summer.

The day before they left, before boarding the plane, my mother came to our home and prayed for our children. Becky, our baby, was one month old. Mom took Becky in her arms and blessed her. She then turned to me and told me to take good care of Becky and of my other children. She also told me to honour and to respect my wife. Then she reached into her old purse and gave me all the money she had left and told me to spend it wisely. A few days later, I bought my first Bible.

That was the last time we saw my mother. Two days after her arrival at the camp, five hundred kilometers north of our village, their small boat capsized. My mother and my niece, Jackie, drowned. The news of the accident reached us two months later when a small aircraft landed where we were camped. Upon hearing the news I collapsed because I was bewildered and unable to understand why this had happened. As a new Christian, I knew how to pray for my family, my friends and my community. Each day before the tragedy, I had prayed for my mother's protection. And now I had to face the fact that she had passed away. I was devastated.

I started to question God. Had I not become a devout Christian who had abandoned his former way of life to follow Jesus? I made up my mind that Christianity was not worth my trouble and that God did not hear our prayers. Anger had invaded my heart; I stopped reading the Bible, and I also stopped praying. I was consumed with rage against God because he had allowed such a tragedy to take the lives of my beloved mother and niece. For several months, this battle against God raged in my heart.

In December of 1977, while I was out on the trapline one beautiful winter day, I stopped at the mouth of a river to light a fire and to have lunch. I relaxed as I marveled at the beauty of the freshly fallen snow. I did me a world of good. Everything was sparkling like gems in the sunlight. I was mesmerized by the incredible beauty, the whiteness, the purity, and the indescribable splendour of creation. I gazed at the clear water of the quietly flowing river.

Despite the beautiful scenery, I felt anger rising up in me again. How could God create waters so peaceful and allow these same waters to take the life of my dear mother? At that very moment he spoke to me, kindly but firmly, saying: "Where were you when I created the heavens and the earth and all that is therein? Where were you when I performed all these wonders your eye can now regard? Do you know the extent of my love for you, for your mother, and for all nations?"

Then God told me, with regard to everything that happens to us, that he is the only one to understand the plans and purposes of his perfect will. I then realized that I had to be reconciled with my heavenly Father; there was none other in whom I could confide. My biological parents had passed away. The only parents I had now were my Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ my Saviour, and the Holy Spirit; and they were going to be with me for the rest of my life. I asked God to forgive me for all my anger. And there in my desert, and in my loneliness, God came and took me into his arms.

My wife Louise and I entered into a deeper relationship with him and we both committed to serve him for the rest of our lives. Over time, and under the direction of God, we have participated in the translation of the New Testament in Cree so that the living Word of God would be accessible to our people in their native language.

One day, the Lord gently asked me if I loved him enough to leave everything behind and go wherever he would send me. I answered, "Yes", and I told him that I loved him enough to go where he would lead me, and to do whatever he would ask of me. Soon after, together with our children, Louise and I moved to Ottawa. This was very difficult on all of us because we didn't know anyone in Ottawa and we had to leave our people behind as well as our normal way of life. But this was our calling.

In 1997, we founded Gathering Nations International and we started traveling around the world as the Lord would lead us. We have organized international celebration events in collaboration with people from many different countries. Our common goal is to unite, and to sit at the feet of our Heavenly Father, in order to worship him. Our desire is to love and to embrace all peoples without discrimination. We want to witness the fulfillment of the prophetic destiny of every nation.

Kenny Blacksmith



I am a member of the East James Bay Cree Nation of Quebec, Canada. My community is called Mistissini, which translates “Big Rock” in English. I was born in October, on my grandparents’ trapline. My mother told me that I was so small she and my father thought I might not survive. They were very anxious because they had lost two baby boys before me.

The only way they could keep me warm was to wrap me up in the fur of a rabbit skin. My mother was unable to breastfeed me, and the milk I was being fed was running out, so, my father had to walk 40 kilometers on snowshoes to return to our village and get what was needed to keep me alive. By the grace of God I survived, and I am here today to tell my story. Several other children were born into our family. Ten are alive today, and I am the oldest. From birth until the age of five, I was surrounded by the members of my family. They loved me and took good care of me. At a young age, I learned to honour and to respect my parents and elders. My mother was a great example for me. I watched how she would take care of other people even when she had so many children of her own to look after.

Back in those days, there was no running water or electricity in our village. All the wood had to be cut by hand and water carried in pails from the lake. The food was cooked on a woodstove or outdoors over a fire. My mother would wash clothes in a tub using a washboard; and I have memories of her washing the clothes of women who had recently given birth and those of elderly couples as well.

Sometimes when their families were away on their traplines, these older folks came to live with us. For my mother, there was no end to reaching out and sharing with others. One day the roles were reversed: she was the one in need, and many people came to her aid just as she had done for them. This period of my childhood was a wonderful time of learning and fun. Life was peaceful, and I felt loved and important.

One autumn day, when I was almost six years old, I was suddenly taken away from my family. It was the government’s policy at the time; our parents had no say in the matter nor were they given a choice. Their children were simply taken from them and they were told that one day they would return to help their families and communities.

Overnight I found myself among strangers, thrust into a white man’s world. Needless to say, I felt abandoned, lonely, and fearful . . . much like an alien in a strange land. There were so many things to learn about these people and their way of life, not to mention having to learn their language in order to survive. Over time, I became like them in so many ways. In spite of this, somehow, God never allowed me to forget who I was, or from where I had come. I have never forgotten my people!

One summer when I was eleven years old, I heard about Jesus for the first time through a lady missionary who was living on our reserve. She loved our people so much that she lived like us; she studied our language and she ate the foods we ate. It was during a meeting she had organized that the seed of the Gospel was sown in my heart.

In the late 60s, several members of my people were getting saved as they accepted Jesus as their Saviour. We experienced a revival. As teenagers, my friends and I attended these meetings which took place in various homes. We heard the Gospel at the meetings but our main reason for going was to observe these people who we thought were quite bizarre. I had never seen anyone cry or dance in a church before. I saw people laying hands on other folks as they prayed, and then I watched some of them collapse under the power of the Holy Spirit. These things were very weird to us indeed, yet strangely, I was attracted to it. The seed of faith that I was carrying within me was being watered. Without my knowing it, God was working in my heart because he had a plan and purpose for my life.

A few years later, I met Kenny and we got married. Several friends and members of our families who had been saved kept telling us that we needed Jesus. After the birth of our first child, the conviction wrought by the Holy Spirit in our lives was so strong that we made the decision to become Christians. In Gospel language, we wanted to be born again. This all happened on our trapline, where God so strongly convinced us of his love.

And so it was that, back on the reserve on Easter Sunday of March 1977, I gave my heart to Jesus. My husband Kenny was saved almost immediately after me, and in July we were baptized together.

At that time I was eight months pregnant with our second daughter. From the early days of my conversion, my life was totally transformed. I will never forget that awesome feeling of peace, knowing that Jesus was now mine and that I was his! I knew he had set me free from all my sins and that my name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Kenny and I promised our God that we would serve him for the rest of our lives.

So many things have happened over the years. We have gone through many trials and temptations which have taught us to trust God and him alone. We have also experienced many personal encounters with God, many dreams, visions, and blessings in abundance.

Shortly after our conversion, I had a dream in which an angel of God told me that I had been chosen to help translate the Bible into the language of my people. God opened the way, and the work began in partnership with Wycliffe Bible Translators. The translation took over twenty years to complete. Now my people can hear God speak in their own language. When they read the Bible, their hearts are overwhelmed with joy. Many are being saved, transformed, renewed, delivered and healed by the power of the living Word of God.

We raised our five children in Mistissini. Our house was always open to strangers who would come to visit our community. We always enjoyed feeding them and sharing with them our traditional way of life. We also enjoyed sharing our testimony of conversion to the Christian faith.

In 1991, we moved to Ottawa, Ontario. In 1997, in fulfillment of another dream the Lord gave us, we founded Gathering Nations International. This ministry has led us to travel to many different countries. In May of 2005, I was invited to speak at a big Christian

Church in Toronto. On that occasion, God revealed the full meaning of our calling and set us free to serve Him and to serve all people.

Louise Blacksmith

The Covenant of the First Peoples of Canada

On June 21, 2006, Inuit and Métis pastors and leaders gathered in Ottawa as First Nation. Louise and I were among them and together we sought after God's heart for our people and for the nation. We all longed to see His presence manifested among us, but there was something blocking our progression.

For three days we prayed, we praised, we worshiped God, and together we shared what was on our hearts. We knew that: the time for blaming the white man was over; the time for blaming the Church was over; and the time for blaming the government was over. We also knew that God wanted to fulfill the prophetic destiny of our people as the host people of our nation.

We also acknowledged that we, as host peoples, lacked harmony amongst ourselves, and it had been this way long before any settlers had landed on our shores. It is easy to blame others for every wrong and for the pain we experienced. But we knew we had to take ownership and responsibility for the healing, restoration and freedom of our people. In the end, we knew we needed to make things right between ourselves, and also with God our Creator.

We repented before one another and we forgave each other for the historic wrongs we each had inflicted upon the other. We also repented before God and asked for His forgiveness.

Then quite suddenly, we were all immersed in the love of God the Father. A new love sprouted up in us and we arose with a great joy, and an eager expectation for what God was about to do in our nation! That day we realized we had a deep appreciation for all the people, the churches and the governments in our land. We realized that we had a new love for Canada! We actually sang our Canadian anthem, not once, but twice!

We all knew that none of this had been achieved on our own. By God's grace something supernatural had taken place. We ended our time together by agreeing to seal our new-found covenant relations in Christ through the signing of a document we entitled: The Covenant of the First Peoples of Canada.

This was a historic treaty written in the Spirit by a coalition of individuals. Its intention was to establish a new spiritual foundation for our nation. It expresses our vision, and mission as a people and nation of Canada.

The first article states that we, the Aboriginal people of Canada, support Israel. It expresses our commitment to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and to honour and bless Israel, in accordance with the Word of God.

The National Forgiven Summit

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper extended an apology on behalf of Canada and asked for the forgiveness of the First Nations, of the Inuit and of the Métis people, for historic wrongs that were committed, and more specifically, for the abuses many Aboriginal people experienced in the residential schools of Canada. In recent years, the Government of Canada, the churches in Canada, the First Nations, the Inuit, the Métis and the Canadians have made significant inroads and progress towards achieving a meaningful reconciliation throughout the nation.

Particularly noteworthy is the vision of Elijah Harper – former Chief of the Cree community of Red Sucker Lake, and former Minister of Northern Affairs for the Province of Manitoba – in Sacred Assemblies, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the apology of our Prime Minister, and now, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada which will no doubt achieve further progress in restoring honour and healing in First Peoples, and across the whole nation.

During the months that followed, there was no coordinated effort to elicit a national response to Prime Minister Harper's apology and request for forgiveness. However, the First Peoples of Canada, consisting of Christian First Nations, and of Inuit and Métis believers, under the coordination and leadership of Gathering Nations International, and in unity with the greater Christian community in Canada, worked together to write a national public response to the apology and request for forgiveness our Prime Minister had expressed in June of 2008.

From June 11 to 13, 2010, representatives and leaders from Canada's First Nations, the Inuit and Métis communities, the churches from the ten provinces and three territories, along with international observers and media gathered in a Sacred Assembly at the Ottawa Civic Centre to formally and publicly extend forgiveness to the government of Canada. This three-day event mobilized nearly 5,000 people around the following three main themes: gathering and witnessing unity of purpose, forgiveness protocols, and celebration of the freedom imparted by forgiveness.

This initiative differed from earlier attempts earmarked for facilitating reconciliation. While not neglecting the advances of previous attempts in healing and reconciliation, this event focused on empowering the “grass roots” by teaching the Christian principles of forgiveness within the indigenous culture, one family at a time, from coast to coast to coast.

Forgiveness is not a typical item on a political or legislative agenda – it is a spiritual concept. Just as wrongdoings can and do affect the future of individuals, families, communities, and even nations, so can righteous deeds. The expressing of sincere forgiveness, based on the unconditional love of our Father and Creator, is the key to unlocking the many doors that lead to healing.

Forgiveness would result in freedom. It would bring forth a renewed hope and life to our common desire for an improved vision of a shared future in our nation. To this end, Gathering Nations International sent First Nations' delegates to Aboriginal communities across Canada in order for the hearts of the people to be prepared to release forgiveness.

In the spring of 2010, at the culmination point of this Journey of Freedom, the Aboriginal leaders gathered and, building on the principles of The Covenant of the First Peoples of Canada, they drafted The Charter of Forgiveness & Freedom. This Charter was officially presented to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Chuck Strahl, who was representing the Government of Canada.

The Charter of Forgiveness and Freedom

On June 11, 2008, our Prime Minister acknowledged that the absence of an apology for Canada's role in the misguided policies regarding the Indian residential schools was an impediment to the healing process of Native peoples and an obstacle to reconciliation. In the House of Commons, and on behalf of the Government of Canada, he declared: "We are sorry." He then asked for the Aboriginal peoples' forgiveness for having betrayed their trust so profoundly.

Then we prayed and we waited for our leaders not only to acknowledge and celebrate this apology from the government, but also to accept and respond to this request for forgiveness. We knew that forgiveness was a necessity and an important key to open the door to healing, restoration and freedom from a dark past, both for our people and for the Canadian nation.

Forgiveness is spiritual in nature, not political. It cannot be achieved through legislation.

We knew that this endeavor of forgiveness involved taking a step of faith allowing God to achieve the impossible. We also knew that we could not demand restitution in the form of compensation, nor could we require that all things be straightened out before we agreed to forgive. Ultimately, it was through divine inspiration and benevolence that our Prime Minister had given us the key to a greater opportunity for the opening of this door of restoration.

In the early months of 2010, Gathering Nations International, supported by a team of First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals along with members of other nations and people groups, conducted a five-month tour across Canada to prepare the hearts of our people to forgive willingly. We prayed and laid down all our expectations before God.

The emotional, spiritual and financial cost of such a journey would be astronomical. Its culmination at the National Forgiven Summit would unfold in Ottawa and would coincide with the second anniversary of the government's apology. It was not going to be easy, but we chose to step out in faith and in obedience to God's leading. God was asking us to do something beyond our capacity, so we took it all to him in prayer. We knew that God wanted to unleash the power of healing through forgiveness.

On June 10, 2010, my daughter Bethanie, my wife Louise, her mother Mary, and myself, representing three generations of survivors of the Indian residential schools policy, met with our Prime Minister to give him a copy of The Charter of Forgiveness & Freedom. This declaration is a standing testimony to our response regarding his apology and his request for forgiveness.

From June 11 to 13, 2010, survivors and children of survivors of the residential schools formed a national coalition and acted as official signatories of The Charter of Forgiveness & Freedom. With 5,000 participants in attendance, and more than 2,000 other witnesses from twenty nations around the world via web streaming, we declared: "We forgive!"

On August 3, 2010, in acknowledgement of the National Forgiven Summit, our Prime Minister sent a letter stating, “I was deeply moved by the spirit of generosity behind The Charter of Forgiveness & Freedom. Yet, I also recognized that forgiveness does not remove the obligation of those who caused the wrong.” Thus the door is still open for a greater involvement in the restoration of our people and of our nation. There is much more to be done!

Kenny et Louise Blacksmith





Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

(Isaiah 60.1-2)

Guuti Mittimatalikmiitug

God in Mittimatalik

The Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet) community is located in Nunavut, in Northern Canada. It has a population of approximately 1,600 inhabitants, mainly Inuit.

In February of 1999, when I was coordinating a Christian conference at our church, a fabulous event occurred which transformed the lives of many members of Pond Inlet which echoed around the world.

Although the conference organizers and I had held several meetings that week, we decided to add one more on Sunday afternoon especially targeting the youth. Towards the end of this meeting, we invited all those who desired a closer walk with God to a time of prayer. During this time, something unusual happened.

Suddenly, a distant yet intensifying noise came to our attention. One of the pastors headed for the PA system, thinking it was simply a technical problem. After shutting off all the speakers, the noise continued to grow louder so he completely cut off the console's power supply.

After a while, the noise became so loud and powerful that the objects in the church began to shake. It was as if a Boeing 747 was hovering just above the building, except that these aircrafts never fly over Pond Inlet!

People were screaming, trembling and crying. We all intensely felt the presence of God. We didn't know how to react. Many lay on the ground, face down. For certain, no human being could have controlled what happened in that room that day!

During this time, the recording equipment was still operating and clearly recorded the mysterious noise along with the people's reactions. This recording rapidly spread around the world.

Even today, it is almost impossible for us to talk about this event without shedding tears. Our lives were consumed by the fire of the Holy Spirit and this powerful experience changed the whole of our existence. We knew we would never be the same again. We were amazed that the Creator of the universe would choose to visit a small nation such as ours!

Following this event, many Christians, pastors and journalists from different countries came to visit us. As film team even produced a documentary entitled «Transformation 2» on this extraordinary visitation. It is available, in English, on the following website: www.sentinelgroup.org. Part of the information contained in this chapter is taken from this excellent documentary.

Now, let me backtrack and tell you the whole story. Our elders say that, a long time ago, long before my father and grandfather were born, one of my ancestors, named Angutijjuaq, made the acquaintance of an Inuk from the South. This man was a messenger of God.

He told him an old story about a character named Jususi, who, according to him, was the Son of God. Angutijjuaq was an old man, but he was curious; he wanted to know if this story was true.

One night he had a dream in which he was searching for the truth. Suddenly, after roaming aimlessly for a long time, he arrived in a place where light collided with total darkness. He slipped through an opening between the light and the darkness, and managed to climb to a door which he was unable to open. And then, he woke up.

Angutijjuaq was perplexed. He did not understand why the beliefs he himself had taught his people were not sufficient to get him through this door. So, he went back to his people and announced that he would believe in Jususi, the Son of God, on the condition that he kill a seal that night. Such a catch would allow him to celebrate his new faith by sharing a meal with the members of his community.

In the evening, Angutijjuaq was still empty-handed. It was a dark, moonless and starless night unfavourable for seal hunting. Shielded from the wind by a snow bank, he kept watch for a long time and then he fell asleep on the ice.

He dreamed that a seal was coming towards him. He woke up with a start and realized that something had changed. As he stood on the ice, on this dark night, he saw his own shadow! Where was this light coming from? He turned around and saw three, winged, celestial beings coming down to him. They approached him, said nothing and then left. Angutijjuaq stood there speechless.

A moment later, he saw a seal. He harpooned the animal and dragged it to the village. Early in the morning, the people woke up and came to Angutijjuaq. They shared his meal in celebration of his new faith.

Several years later, missionaries from various countries and cultures came to us to tell us the story of Jususi, who is Jesus, the Son of God. One of them was John Turner. Originally from England, he lived among us with his wife, Joan. The elders loved him and said that he had become more Inuit than the Inuit. As well as learning our language and translating the Bible into Inuktitut, he traveled thousands of kilometers alone on a dogsled to preach the gospel in many communities. One of his trips lasted seven months and covered almost 5,000 kilometers. He founded a church in the village of Pond Inlet.

John Turner passed away tragically. One day, while returning from hunting, he bent down to help a girl carrying a bucket of ice; his rifle slipped from his shoulder and he was shot through the head. He died shortly after. He left behind two young children and a wife in her third pregnancy.

Joan Turner gave birth to a beautiful girl three weeks after the funeral of her beloved husband. She told us that the Lord had given her a vision in which a crowd of people, including many youth, was marching in the streets of Pond Inlet, headed for the church and singing praises to God. She firmly believed that this vision would be fulfilled.

Today there are descendants of Angutijjuaq living in Pond Inlet. There are also people who have converted to Christ under the ministry of Joan and John Turner. The small church built by the Turners still remains. In February of 1999, God faithfully fulfilled the vision he had given Joan Turner, and for that we are eternally grateful.

Approximately two years prior to this glorious and divine visitation, people in the community had been fasting and praying intensely. In 1996, at another series of Christian meetings, the power of the Holy Spirit revealed itself in the conscience of the people of this village. On that occasion, many came to church with a repentant heart and a genuine desire to follow God, and many were converted to Christ.

Night after night, people came to church carrying bags filled with illegal drugs, pornographic magazines and various other objects they wanted to get rid of. At the end of each evening, they stepped outside on the ice and made a fire to burn everything they had brought. With every passing day, the number of items to be destroyed increased to the point where police assistance was required. According to RCMP officers, the total value of what was burned that week was at least \$80,000.

Absolutely no kind of human persuasion could have produced such phenomenal results. Rather, it was the work of God in the hearts of the people which caused their transformation. It was a real spiritual awakening!

Prior to this event, as in many other communities in Nunavut and Nunavik, the people of Pond Inlet were weighed down by various evils. The rates of incarceration and of alcoholism in the Far North are three times higher than the Canadian average, and the pregnancy rate among teens is six times higher.

Formerly, alcohol was a destructive partner in the lives of many Inuit of Pond Inlet. On some occasions, almost all the people in the community got drunk. It was an ugly scene. Here and there people were screaming, while others were fighting. It was horrible. By the looks of it, the Far North had become the Far West! It was basically a free-for-all. Many women and children, having no one to protect them, became victims of physical and sexual abuse. To conceal all this pain, many young people turned to drugs, while others simply chose the path of no return and committed suicide.

At that time, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation produced a documentary that was broadcast nationwide and addressed the alarming issue of suicide in the villages of Hudson Bay. This report, entitled «Deadly Summer», revealed that in the Puvirnituk community, suicide rates among the youth exceeded the Canadian average twentyfold.

It seemed as if God had abandoned the descendants of Angutijjuaq. But, it was quite the opposite. In fact, God revealed himself! And many individuals came to a deep repentance and several villages were completely transformed. Only a divine intervention could have freed these people from their destructive cycle, bringing them to abandon their bad behaviors and regain their dignity.

An example of this is the village of Aupaluk, near Ungava Bay, where the awakening has had immediate and tangible results. Today, school-age youths are no longer using drugs or choosing suicide because they have been transformed by the Gospel. Every day, teachers and students take time to pray together. In this village, parents and children now enjoy a renewed zest for life.

While all communities in the Arctic are not at the same level of faith, it is clear that the majority of villages were positively influenced by the Gospel. In some communities, it is estimated that 90% of the people are devout Christians. Suicide rates are virtually nonexistent, and we also observe the same data regarding crime. Families that had been destroyed and divided were gradually rebuilt as the Holy Spirit healed hearts. These people are not ashamed to testify loud and clear that Jesus has been the solution to all their problems.

The political arena has also been influenced by the Gospel. Several Nunavut legislators are Christian. In some localities, the mayors hold prayer meetings in the boardroom twice a week. They understand the importance of asking God to help them make good decisions for the benefit of their community. The Bible says that when leaders act in righteousness, the people are blessed.

There are also other tangible signs which confirm that God has poured out his blessing on the land. Portions of land that had become unproductive are once again producing berries. Hunting and fishing are also on the rise. What more can we say! Is it not wonderful to see that God Almighty has chosen to manifest himself in this remote area of the Arctic to a humble and unknown people?

Some will question the authenticity of the work of God by pointing out that these regions are still facing many problems. As one of our missionaries so aptly put it, «We should always look at things in their proper perspective.» The extent of this transformation is demonstrated by the spiritual health of the community as measured before and after the awakening, not by focusing only on ongoing problems.

I believe this divine visitation at Pond Inlet is proof that God exists and that he is present among us today. I also believe that, through this event, God intended to show the world that even the most remote places and the seemingly most hostile people can be transformed by his Word. In my opinion, this visitation was a sign from the Lord. Before leaving this world, Jesus gave us a great commission. He asked all believers to preach his Word to all nations. He prophesied that the generation who would reach the ends of the earth with the Gospel would be the last before his return at the end of time.

In this regard, I find that the Far North, an almost inaccessible area covered by cold and darkness six months every year, is one of those distant places, as is Qaanaaq in Greenland, which has received the Gospel of Jesus Christ and has believed. I am therefore convinced that this prophecy is about to culminate and that we will soon witness its fulfillment. Until then, we must continue to bring the Gospel to all those who do not attend church.

I would also like to emphasize that this glorious event, this mighty visitation of God that we experienced in Pond Inlet, is the fruit of his compassion for a suffering humanity. The awareness of our desperate situation has, no doubt, prompted us to many long hours and months of prayer asking God to intervene. But it would be absurd to believe that all of this happened because of our remarkable spirituality. Only God deserves the glory for this event and the positive results that ensued.

This divine encounter has obviously left an impact on me that will never fade. Even after all these years, to simply talk or reminisce about that wonderful day revives in me this strong presence of the Holy Spirit. However, I cannot live my relationship with God by relying solely on past blessings. I must depend on God today. Faith is something we must exercise at every moment and every turn. It is therefore necessary to remain in communion with Jesus on a daily basis.

I have been part of a Bible translation team for nineteen years and now we have the privilege of reading the Bible in our own language. Reading the Bible daily is essential if we want to nurture our relationship with God and stay on the right path.

The Bible says that «Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.» That means he is present here and now. My prayer is that he would bless all those who read this testimony, which is also the work of his Holy Spirit. I pray that he might help you repent of your sins. Jesus died on the cross and paid the price for your forgiveness and your salvation. Jesus is the only Saviour.

Joshua Arreak





For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): I am the Lord, and there is no other. I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I the Lord speak the truth; I declare what is right. Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

(Isaiah 45.18-22)

The New Birth

In the first chapter, Gopitji explained the new birth. This wonderful experience is the greatest of all miracles. It gives to us the assurance of our salvation – that we have eternal life with God – and the privilege of following Jesus all the days of our lives. To help you make the right decision, here is a summary of what the Bible teaches on this subject.

- God is the only God. He is eternal, all-powerful and the only creator of the universe.
- God showed his greatness and beauty by creating the earth like a gigantic fresco. However, this magnificent work of art is but a mere reflection of the artist he is.
- God created man and woman in his own image – able to love, to be loved and to choose freely. He gave them the earth that they would take care of it.
- God established physical and moral laws so that human beings would live in harmony with creation and with each other.
- In the Garden of Eden, God had put two trees that were different from all the others: the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. One was for honouring God, the Author of life and the other for showing humanity that they have been granted freedom to choose between doing good and doing evil.
- Unfortunately, humans succumbed to temptation. They disobeyed God and let evil into their lives. Humanity lost its purity forever. Consequently, its relationship with God was destroyed.
- Sin and evil came like indelible dark stains and defiled the soul of every human being. Disease, hatred and destruction also established their reign over the earth. As a result, after death, people's souls descend into hell to eternal darkness.
- God, like the loving Father he is, has done everything to shield human beings from suffering the terrible consequences of evil and of their bad choices. Thus, he has provided one sole way of redeeming their lives.
- God incarnated himself in human flesh. Jesus was his name.
- Jesus proved his divinity to all through his miracles and his teachings. But humanity rejected him and crucified him.
- Rather than defend himself through demonstrations of divine power, Jesus bowed his head like a lamb being led to the slaughter. He knew he had to bear the sins of humanity in order to redeem us.
- Jesus' body was placed in a cave sealed with a stone. On the third day after his death, he was raised from the dead. His disciples as well as several hundred people saw him well and alive and acknowledged his resurrection.
- Jesus proved to all that he was God incarnate: truly God and truly man. He is still alive today, and his Spirit is at work on the earth.

- Through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus suffered death in our stead. He took upon himself the wages of our sins. Now, he simply requires that we believe in him and that we ask forgiveness for the harm we have done.
- Jesus is the only one who can remove the dark stains on our soul. He is the only one who can save us so we can avoid the darkness of hell after our death and have eternal life with him, in purity.
- Jesus Christ came to live among the Jewish people, like the prophets announced in the Bible. He did not come to establish a religion, but rather to restore our relationship with God. He is the Creator of all peoples of the earth. Jesus is not the God of the Whites or the Blacks or of the Indians, the French or the English. He is the one true God of the whole earth. There are millions of true Christians in the world of various languages, cultures and nations.
- Today, God gives you the opportunity to freely turn to him and be saved or to turn away in unbelief and rebellion. All that was needed to show you his love and to grant you his forgiveness, he has done. But he cannot choose for you. Whether your sins are many or few, only God's forgiveness can cleanse your soul.
- In order to be saved and forgiven, you need to:
 - Humble yourself and admit that your soul is defiled and that you have committed acts that displease to God;
 - Acknowledge that Jesus is God, that he died on the cross to redeem you and that he is the only one who can cleanse your soul and forgive you completely;
 - Ask Jesus to forgive you;
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to come live in you to give you the desire and the strength to turn your back on sin.

Once you become a Christian, it is essential that you read the Bible every day to get to know God and, especially to put his Word into practice. Also join a Christian church where the Bible is faithfully taught. This is what the Lord requires us to do.

Here is a short prayer to help you invite Jesus to come into your life. Pray it sincerely.

“Lord Jesus, I acknowledge my need for you. I confess I never made room for you in my life. Nor did I ever take the time to read your Word or be concerned about what you had to say. I have run my life according to my own rules, never checking whether my beliefs and my actions were in accordance with your will. I considered you a mere man and have denied your Divinity. I have despised your love and your work on the cross. Forgive me, Lord. I ask you to come live in me; cleanse my soul of my sins, I pray; deliver me and heal me. Amen!”

To receive a free copy of the New Testament:
Call toll free: 1.888.868.0404



For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says: The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

(Acts 4.11-12)

A Christian Church

There are thousands of sects and religions in this world and there is also a lot of confusion over spiritual matters. If religions or ancestral beliefs had been sufficient to redeem the human soul, God's incarnation and atoning death on a cross for our sins would not have been necessary. Considering the many existing religions in his day, Jesus could have taught that all religions are good and that salvation only requires adherence to a set of spiritual beliefs. But that is not what he said.

There is widespread ignorance in the world today regarding the actual teachings of Jesus on salvation and the afterlife. While God is totally accessible through the revelation of himself in the Bible, our ancestors have blindly adhered to human beliefs or to the teachings of a religion which forbade the reading of the Bible. Although many claim to be Christian believers today, the only way to discern whether an individual is truly a follower of Christ is to examine the authority he grants to Christ's teachings.

Jesus said, «I will build my Church.» True faith in Christ is not compatible with seclusion. This is precisely why we have Christian gatherings. Fundamental in every true believer's life is to join an existing church where the Bible is the final authority in matters of faith and conduct, or failing that, to work at the establishment of a Christian church in his own town or village.

A Christian church does not consist of mere spectators but of people genuinely devoted to Christ with an earnest desire to put his teachings into practice. Its foundation is the Word of God, not the commandments of men. It is not sectarian; it cares not for turf wars. It subjects to Christ, not to a domineering clergy. It is a source of life for all its participants and for its community. It takes an interest in the needs of people both here and abroad. It preaches the Gospel boldly and faithfully.

In some countries, the Christian Church numbers thousands of believers. Elsewhere, it is made up of only a few genuine Christians. Regardless of the place or number, pleasing the Lord through obedience to his Word is all that counts.

If you are interested in starting a Christian church in your own town or city, we invite you to contact us. We can offer you support.

Call toll free: 1.888.868.0404

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(Additional resources from the Internet)

Bill Weise's testimony
http://www.divinerevelations.info/documents/billweise_23minutesinhell_text.htm

Gathering Nations International
gni.arlenbresh.ca

Prime Minister Harper's apology for the Indian Residential Schools System
<https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649>



I remember... I was only a little boy. I remember that night, that very cold winter night. We were in a log cabin, seated in a circle around the wood stove. The elders of the community were gathered there. The setting was solemn. They were saying amongst themselves: "Something is about to happen... something powerful... a light. A great light is coming and will shine over our community... a great light no one will ever quench."

(Pastor Allan Etapp, Waswanipi, Quebec)

UASHTEU Light and faith in the heart of First peoples of Quebec is a collection of testimonies written by members of the ten Aboriginal nations and of the Inuit nation of the province of Quebec. Filled with authenticity and faith, revealing from time to time the shadows of past wounds, these genuine narratives will assuredly stir beautiful emotions and trigger profound reflection.

This light, humbly offered by the descendants of the First peoples, reflects the beauty of divine wisdom. It comes as no surprise that Christ would choose messengers among the nations which have been our hosts and which we have dispossessed in the name of the Christian faith. Did not Jesus choose to be born among a people who despised and rejected him?

Looking beyond racial prejudice, these men and women reach out to us with candour and honesty. They have discovered the key to the treasure we lost long ago.



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