Glooscap and the great Creator teaches us to stay humble. Let them give you the wisdom of the ages and guide you on the path of respect and humility.

— Saqamaw JeS’n Penwa’ (Chief JaSen Benwah)
VISITING WITH OUR MI’KMAQ ELDERS
Cape St. George, Newfoundland

BENOIT FIRST NATION
2016
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Cape St George is unique in many ways. It has been isolated from the rest of Newfoundland for so long that it has a very unique cultural identity. In a time when the rest of western Newfoundland was being assimilated into English Newfoundland culture, a few communities on the end of the Port au Port peninsula held onto their culture and language. Alas, the French barely held on and the Mi’kmaq language all but disappeared. The cultural identity, however, remained.

Sometimes I feel like an outsider in this community. My roots don’t go very deep as my parents migrated here in the late sixties. However the people of this town have always made me feel welcome. So mine is in some a sense an objective point of view. This perspective may have helped me in my search for the Mi’kmaq story.

Cape St George has two strong cultural identities: Native and French. I too share these identities with a certain precariousness: I am French but I am neither Acadian nor of direct French descent: my ancestors are from Quebec. I am native but I am not Mi’kmaq but Mohawk. So in a sense I fit in to the local cultural landscape as I am part Native and part
French and in another sense I am doomed to be an outsider in my home town.

One thing I did discover as I interviewed the fascinating Mi’kmaq elders of Cape St George is that there is a richness of tradition here that transcends the polarization of culture. These people had a common struggle that dictated the shape of their daily routine: survival. Many of their memories are dramatic in that they were taught to survive in a harsh demanding isolated environment with little help from the outside world. In a way this isolation preserved some of their cultural identity.

Ultimately everyone I talked to did not share my point of view. I was not considered an outsider by anyone and was welcomed with warmth and kindness. They were willing to trust me with their stories and I hope that I merit that trust. I certainly feel that I have gained an appreciation of their history and tradition.

In this booklet we have scratched the surface of the rich history and culture that surrounds this area. The men and women that have revealed a glimpse of what it was and is to be Mi’kmaq in Cape St George have invited you to experience a small part of their experience. I hope you enjoy.

MICHAEL FENWICK
Benoit 1st Nation Héritage Program
I lived in red brook. All my life.

My grandmother Grammy Desiree, she was Indian yeah. Run away from Nova Scotia that’s what my father told us now. And then she come here with Uncle Joe, Uncle Mike, daddy and aunt Clemaze. That’s real Indians. Grammy Desiree she was a real Indian. Start from there and going up. Oh I remember going to visit Grammy Desiree and that. She was a nice old woman. Yeah, I remember that.

Well, my father was a fisherman and my husband was a fisherman and all my brothers were fisherman, just about all of them. Uncle Joe had a sawmill down there in the field. My father had a water mill in the brook, in the dam. Yeah. He had a water mill. Sawing logs. Now Johnny, my half-brother, Johnny he had a place there, he had a barn. We all used to go to the barn dance. You hear talks of the barn dance? They all played the music, accordion, violins and everything, the whole works of them.

Oh Grandma Desiree she was a real Indian, her. Oh my
gosh, well, she reared up all her children when she got here, so I guess there wasn’t very much for her to do. She only had a small little house. That’s all I remembers. Can’t remember too much back.

She cooked seal meat and rabbits, plant her own vegetables. They had their own meat. They lived from the sea and the land. Their own vegetables from their own gardens. And own meat: sheep, cattle. Oh yes skin the rabbits and knit and everything, card your wool and then spin your wool.

Uncle Joe had a mill down here, that’s all I knows. He had cattle a farm, not really a farm but he had cattle enough to live off of. Vegetables, and all that. Cattle and horses.

My father was Johnny Mic and then my Uncle Joe Mic, Mike Mick, they were called Mics. (Why were they called that) I don’t know. I don’t know it was background or what or was Grammy Desiree. They was micks anyhow. Well that was it, that’s what he was called Johnny mick. Joe Mick ...didn’t seem to mind that he was called that. Everybody, Uncle Johnny mick they used to call my father. Uncle Joe Mick. Micks.

The old Indian ways was, I think, the best ways. Well, they were planting their gardens. There was no... The ground was good, the sea was good. There was no chemicals or nothing at all. Put out their own vegetables and everything. The water was
clean and the land was clean. But now the water is no good and
the land is now no good. Longtime ago you just dig a little place
to put your potatoes in and carry your potatoes in your arm.
But now. Everything’s gone. They lived better. There was no
such thing as sickness, people getting sick and cancer or noth-
ing like that one time ago. Very seldom one would die. Now
they’re dying every minute cause everything is polluted. Water
is polluted and the land is runned out. Too much insects now.

Picking berries in the woods. Raspberries, squash berries,
lots of it before the moose come. When the moose come the
moose clean it off. You go in the woods all day picking berries.
Everything was clean

Cod fish, halibut, name it, name it you get it in the water.
Cod fish, halibut, squids, lots of it, lump fish, now, no more of
that now. All the good stuff is gone. You don’t know what to
eat now.
My name is Angela Simon Chaisson. Two names. I grew up in Cape St George.

I remembers grandma Cormier I guess, she was Indian. I remember her mother but I was only about three years old, so not very old when she passed away. I didn’t really know great grandmother. But I remember the old lady. Grandmother Cormier’s mother.

She was a Chaisson. Mom is Indian so am I. Mom’s mom is Indian. Because her mother is Genevieve Benoit, right. She married grandmother Cormier’s father. Before that grandmother Genevieve Benoit was married to a Chaisson, right? I think so cause grandmother was a Chaisson. She was a Chaisson and then she married Johnny Alfred Cormier, my grandfather mom’s mother and father. She was a Cormier then and as far as I know she was Indian ‘cause mom told us they were Indians. But we weren’t allowed to say those days that we were Indians. I don’t understand why today they want to be Indians, right? In those days, no, we’re not Indians. And dad was French of course so we’re half and half.
Grandmother liked music. She loved music and she loved to sing. And she’d make the children dance. And you know Victor Cormier and Jack Cormier? She taught them how to play the accordion. She used to sing and she’d make them play it and they would play and if it was wrong they had to do it again. And she used to make us dance. She’d make horrible music and she’d make them dance and Jack and Victor had to learn and that was it. Because Uncle Charlie used to play a little and she made the kids learn and it was traditional with her, the music was very important. And she could dance like you’d never believe. Oh I remember that. Dance? Oh unbelievable. She was very good. She really could dance. Something like the step dancing. Get on the floor, boy, and the music be on and she wouldn’t stop ‘til the music stopped. She would dance and dance and dance. Her birthday is sept 8 same as me, I was born on her day. On her birthday she danced and she died a few weeks after. She was 87 years old. And she danced for them on her birthday. And she got out there and Victor, victor was her favorite, he played for her and she danced for him. They wanted her to dance and she would not unless Victor comes and plays. Victor come and played for her and she danced.

This was a big thing for us knowing that grandmother at that age wanted to do that on her birthday. I always wanted to see her on her birthday- it was her day, my day. Yeah. That was grandmother Cormier. I got her picture here she’s truly Indian.

I left home, I was young, I was about 27 years old. So she passed away when I was gone. But she was always good to us. She fed us. We were very poor off those days. We’d go there and we always had a piece of bread and molasses. She fed the kids and all these things, she always did nice things. But as far as Indian things, I don’t remember anybody being too much into it.

Every generation has got one called Angela. As far as I
know from her. Yeah her name is Angela. Then she had a
daughter Angela, mom had me Angela, Joe Demer got one
Angelique, that’s Angela and there’s more. Got all the way
down the generations. She had one called after her. Her name
they used to call her Angeline, that’s French cause her husband
was French. She spoke French too. They didn’t speak Indian
though. Not as far as I can remember they always spoke
French.

Yeah, she was a nice old lady grandmother.

She used to boil roots. She go in the woods and she’d come
home with some roots from the trees and boil that. She’d give
it to the kids and she’d drink it herself. It’s really good for you.
She would give mom a bottle every year. She’d do that before
the winter. We had to get treated with all this medicine and it
was weird, ughh, it was terrible. But we had to drink it. She
believe in the roots from the trees.

She picked everything. She picked red current, black
current and she’d make something out of that. That was her
favourite. We didn’t bother with that but she did. Yeah she
used to go in the woods and get all her roots. She had a special
name for it, what it was, I don’t know, but she knew what she
was doing. So that was an Indian thing. To go out and get
roots and boil it and she made medicine out of it.

I remember her brother was called Narcisse Chaisson.
They were Chaissons see she was married to the Chaissons.
Uncle Narcisse he used to be her brother but he moved out to
mainland so we never got to know him too much but we know
some of the kids. She had a brother called Julian. Yeah another
one there. They’re all gone of course but she had lots of sisters
right. Big family really. I think we counted them one day. All
sisters - there was only two brothers: Uncle Narcisse and uncle
Julien. But the rest was all sisters: like old Joe Lainey’s wife
Julia, and Uncle Adolph Simon’s wife Cicely. Her name was Cecelia but they called her Cecily. And in Marches Point, Alfred Marches wife Aunt Maggie, Aunt Melina, Aunt Justine and Catherine was the funniest one of them all. She was funny. Married in Sheaves Cove to Angus Young I think. There was one aunt Jarmine married near Stephenville Crossing, what they call it, not really there, between Stephenville and Corner Brook? She lived there.

There was a lot of girls. Yeah a lot of girls like mom even had more girls than boys. But she never had that many children, grandmother Cormier, who only had Uncle Charlie one boy, and she had Aunt Eunice, mom, Aunt Bridget, Aunt Nora and Angela. I think five girls. That’s all she had six. All girls only one boy. See she never had a big family. They were married 9 years before they had children. She was quite the lady. Now grandmother Genevieve they called her, grandmother Genevieve Benoit. Well she was married to grandfather Victor they were mom’s grandparents. My grandmother’s parents. I didn’t know her. I was too small to remember her.

I remember when she died. I was small but I remember them building the coffin. Dad was one that made it, him and
grandfather Cormier. You are small but you remember certain things. And I remember being at mom’s, they called her Ginny, Grammy Ginny’s gone. She was pure native. She was a Benoit to begin with. No I don’t remember anything about her. No. Mom said she was a nice lady. Mom always thought the world of her. Very nice. She was living at Uncle Charlie’s house like you know she was living with them when she passed away at the end of the Cape. That’s all I remember as a child. I can’t remember what she looked like. Too small I guess. We weren’t allowed to go out there, we were too tiny to go.
My name is Conrad Benoit, a resident of Campbell’s Creek in the Port au Port peninsula. I was originally from Cape St George. Grew up in a little community called Loretto, which was way off the beaten path of the main drag about maybe about three, four miles back in the country. That’s about where I grew up.

I was about five, I suppose, when my father said to me this day, he says, “you know” he said “you’re Indian, eh?” I said, “Is that your polite way in telling me I’m a savage?” “No,” he said “You’re an Indian.” I said “Oh. How come this is the first time I’m hearing of this?” “Yes,” he said “you’re Indian. My grandmother,” he said “was a full breed Mi’kmaq Indian. Grammy Desiree Benoit.

But that was the first inkling I heard of being aboriginal.

People were getting sick, of course, dehydrated some of them or malnutrition or whatever depending. And then they had this stuff called beef iron wine. But whenever that would run out dad’d make his own stuff. He’d get dogwood rind and cherry
tree rind and boil it on
the stove and the juice
from that he’d give
us that to drink and
that would build up
our immune system or
whatever. At that time
there used to be boils,
and the only way they
could get rid of that
was with a poultice. It
was done with bread
and hot water. They’d
boil the water hot as it
could be, they’d pour it
on that bread and they’d stick in on there and buddy the next
day that was gone. It would draw the infection out and a couple
days later it was gone. I remember one time dad had a bad cut on
his hand right and he went in the woods and he got them little
saps of the trees, like gum and he took it and put it all around
and sealed off where the cut was. Four days later the mark was
there but it was cured. It was amazing. I guess we didn’t realize
it at the time but that would seal off the infection so it gave it
a chance to heal. Cause your body would heal naturally any-
way right. But yes that was some of the things that I remember
from back then and I don’t know where they got it from, so
it had to be from his mother who was aboriginal. I mean you
do as you see, right, pretty much, so I mean it was that kind of
stuff... Other than that... there was no aboriginal language as
such spoke. They were French, my parents were French so they
spoke French most of the time. But I didn’t learn any of the
French, all I learnt was English, right. Because we weren’t sup-
posed to speak French because we were going to English school, so we had to learn English. So by the time I got to grade nine I didn’t know no French and it was too late then to start learning French, right. So I kind of got robbed both ways, pretty much.

Well, we grew up pretty much off the land. My father farmed a lot so we had a lot of animals. We grew our own vegetables, all that kind of stuff. Of course as I said farming and the stuff that dad did when I was growing up. If you wanted a rake to rake hay, you better have some tools to be able to make that, because you weren’t going to Canadian tire and buy it, because there was no such thing then, right. So you made all these rakes, you made all these pitchforks with wood. It was amazing to see it. And then their rigs and racks, hay racks and stuff like that, but I mean that is I think is European. That’s nothing to do with the aboriginal way, right.

Mom always did cook. She cooked chicken and that kind of stuff and like I said, we lived off the land. We raised cattle. We salted stuff and she cooked it with vegetables and that kind of stuff, right. They had the basic stuff like flour and stuff that you buy, that you couldn’t grow here. They’d bring it in with Abbotts store right on Port au Port. I remember, they had to go by boat down there cause there wasn’t even any road here on the peninsula. Go down by boat and bring in your supplies in the fall for the winter months. She used to make bread on the stove, little pieces of dough and throw it on the stove. Used to be almost like a bannock type thing. I remember that clearly because she used to do that a lot. Especially when she’d have some dough left over, she’d throw it on the hot stove and let it cook like that and flip it upside down. It was some good. Like Toutons. They did it in a different way, right, cause they fried it in fat then with pork in the frying pan. That was toutons. But before we did that I remembers mom putting it right on the
stove, taking the bread and putting it on the stove letting it cook and flipping it over and that was good.

I remember they used to in the winter time they would take meat and put it into a burlap bag, a potato bag and tie a string on it and put it in cold water and keep it fresh in a stream. I remember we used to have to go get water at that time too. We used to have outside wells. We used to go with our little pails to go get water. I don’t know if that’s aboriginal, I think it’s more European. I remember we used to salt stuff. Like fish, salt fish. And salt meat, to cure it. I remember we used to make cellars. Dad used to have a big cellar. Used to put it underground and of course the frost wouldn’t get at it. Right. And there used to be a wood lid on top of that. Potatoes last there all winter, never had a problem. They grow the eyes and that eventually but they were good, they were alright. And in the spring, what was left it was the seed to plant. And it was a continuous thing, right. Dad always had lots of vegetables: I remember him growing peas, carrot, turnip, cabbage, potato and parsnip. What else? I think that was all the vegetables they could plant back then.

It’s just like the hay in the summer time. In the fall you had to clean out the old hay from the barn and throw that on the manure. That made extra manure and that they used for growing the vegetables. So nothing was wasted. It was a fertilizer then. It was good cause it was there, they didn’t have to go anywhere to get it, it was right in the area, you just wheelbarrowed it with a wheelbarrow to the rows of vegetables, threwed it on and that was the end of that. Cause where we lived to, we were about, must have been, three miles from the ocean so you couldn’t get any seaweed or nothing like that. Cause seaweed was also good for putting on vegetables. It just wasn’t feasible at the time. Too far away to get it.
They did all their own knitting. They sheared all their own sheep, they did all their own wool, they made all their own cards, spinning wheels and stuff like that. That was all homemade. There was nothing like that bought as such. And cream and stuff like that, I mean there was no separators or nothing like that back then, they just let the milk settle and the cream would come to the top and that was it, that was your cream. And if the milk was sour, they would make sour milk buns with it, either that or feed it to the pigs. Cause we used to have pigs and all that too. So pretty much nothing was wasted, everything was used.

I see pictures of my grandparents and great grandparents today and I know you can tell they are native, they even look native. But no, there was no drumming or no nothing like that, but there was always music. There was always fiddle music. Especially by the time I come along they could buy guitars and stuff like that, so there always music around. Accordion music or fiddle music and there was always a party, every weekend was a party and that’s how I learned to step dance.

I remember Victor Muise and them fellers talking about stuff that went on, right. He used to tell me his grandmother used to sing songs and that, but I’d be too young to hear that kind of stuff. There were lots of music, all kinds of music on the go but never any drumming or nothing like that, so we were cut out of all that, pretty much. Which is kind of sad because it makes it that much harder now for the new generation coming up. Unless they get it right from kindergarten class coming up then they’re going to be in trouble.

You could tell by their facial features as to see what natives looked like today. They were it. They were native, there is no doubt about it. Especially Grammy Desiree she was wicked, she was really pure native. And I mean I can see it in the family as
you are going down the line with the darker skin. I don’t know who I keep after but I’m lighter. I don’t have that native colour. It doesn’t mean I’m not native. We were not shown any of the native ways cause I guess they were so busy trying to carve out a living.

But no, I don’t remember nothing native like drums. No never seen it. Like I said, all I seen was fiddle music and guitar music and step dancing and that kind of stuff right but nothing to do with drumming and such like you see today. From the time that I can remember to the time that I grew up all I remembers is dad saying to me I was native. But that’s it. Other than that nothing. And I see the few medicines that they made and the kind of stuff with the poultices and other stuff they make. Some kind of stuff with mud. I don’t know what it was but it was muddy and that was to put on sores that would cure sores. And chicken fat was another thing. That would cure sores too. That was a home remedy. Because there was no such thing as salve. What that chicken fat would do is soften it up and give it a chance to heal. Cause that poultice thing was passed down from great grandparents, right.

We were told we were native but that’s all we never participated in anything that would be considered native that I knew of. Maybe there was stuff done before my time from before I am able to remember.
It isn’t too much different now than it was 83 years ago. It’s much better now, easier on us. Been through one war. World War two, it was sad. My home was up there just up on the hill. I was the only girl in the family. I had four brothers.

Those days if you were a native you had to keep it pretty dark cause people were scared. See they couldn’t announce they were part Indian they would be punished or something eh? So they had to keep everything pretty calm. We had to do our own stuff, we couldn’t go to them for anything.

Dad was left all alone so he learned us all his five kids learned us to do our knitting. We had to knit for ourselves the only thing we come to the hard parts he’d help us. To make a living you had to work pretty hard.

I didn’t know the people that drove the Indians away and that I didn’t know them I was too small for that, too young to know. I think they were French or something. They came here to fish, them, but they didn’t want the Indians around. They
took some Indians for their wives because my grandfather had an Indian woman. Married an Indian woman.

We never went short of anything to eat and we never get cold because we had our own sheep for our own wool, and our clothes and my dad and his friend had made us a loom. And we put wool into it and made pants for the boys, long sleeves, coats, hats and blankets for the babies. Part of that he learned from his mother. Her name was Desiree, grammy Desiree. I remember her. She used to teach my grandfather lots of stuff, how to do this and how to do that. They had to survive. They had to hunt and stuff like that and get stuff. Some kind of birds and rabbits. They get all that in the forest, eh? Lots of berries, all kinds. So we kept pretty busy picking up all that. She showed us how to preserve jams for the winter.

Because then once every six months it used to be a big boat would come around the cape and used to bring all kinds of stuff. She used to order stuff for bottles for putting preserves in. All our meat was preserved, our jams, our fishes; lots of salmon, halibut and mackerel. Cases of it. Oh yes she was the head of it grandmother. Oh yes we still do it today. If we were going to serve our chicken today, there was a certain time a year the chickens were big enough and the hens were cleaned and killed. Cut them all up in bottles, she had her bottles all on the table and we fill them up with meat and we add a little bit of salt to that and boil that for four hours. And then after she screwed them all on good and she tell us to put that aside and listen when it’s going to be cold, it’s going to “Chut” it’s going to make a sound. That was a day for meat. The next day probably be fish. Grandfather had a cellar underneath his house. you go down the stairs and there she had all kinds of bottles full of stuff. And then the winter time comes we didn’t have to bother with nothing like that cause we’d just go downstairs.
And our vegetables, we had our garden so we used to grow our onions and our lettuce and tomatoes, potatoes, carrots and parsnips. We grewed it all in the gardens. So then comes October we had to go and dig up our potatoes put them in the basement, save them for all our winter. We had lots to eat all winter long and then when come spring, plan again. Do the same thing over again. So we always had lots to eat.

And daddy made him a little house over the well where we used to get our water from, a hole in the ground up above in the field, we had a shelf in there we used to keep our cream and our butter. Cause we were living up there and it wasn’t too far from the water. We had lots of stuff like that.

Winter was pretty busy cause by the time we get up and we had our breakfast, we had our cows to milk, then when the war was on there was no school hardly. The milk all sterilized and put in, there was no separators or nothing them times but basins and that on the shelf, and when it was cold there was the cream on the top. We take all the cream off and she’d put in a jar and after the jar get full she’d put it another big one and when it get almost full she’d make fresh butter with that. There was a man, a Benoit from Marches point, he used to made little coolers with birch wood with a cover on and we put all our butter in that in layers. Fill it up like that for the winter. We had lots of homemade butter then.

She was an oldish women she was only about 95 pounds. I remembers her I can see her with the long skirt on. I don’t know how they found her, I think she found my family from St George’s and they learned her to speak English. I don’t remember her talking Indian to us. She’d boil a herring for her dinner but that would be for two or three days. She had to run away cause another bunch a people had come in. But I mean her husband was not with her then, it was only her alone. I don’t know
what happen to her after. I kept with her mostly in my young days. There was so much to do you know to live, for the winter. We had no power or nothing most times. We had cows to milk, had to sterilize and cream it. And we had to put it in bowls and make butter out of it. And we had chickens. We used to plant potatoes and gardens. We had to boil it to make some feed for our hens for to get our eggs of course. Then she wasn’t long with us. She went to live with her people then after at Loretto. Her daughter lived there. After that I never saw her much. I had to help my dad. He was left all alone with five children after his wife had died.

They had to pick up for their winter too I mean a lot of them starved to death. Cause they didn’t have anything to eat. But after she got settled there living over close to her family there and she learned a lot of English from her children. She spent her time picking up leaves and certain kind of a root and that she used to make this medicine with it. If we had a toothache or if we had an earache or if we had something else wrong, fell down and hurt our arm or something she was there to doctor us up.

Don’t remember her talking about her family. I used to go pick berries for her up in the yard and she used to tell me about what it was like when she was a girl. She would take the rabbit skins and make herself a mattress and that. It was just boards on top of a frame and they used to put in the rabbit skins. She’d take the skins and skin it, with pieces of wool we’d get off the lambs and she’d make herself a bed with that.

MEDICINE

She would go into the woods mostly up in the rocks in the country and she’d pick up some kind of a leaf, yellow it was
from the earth and she’d boil that to make medicine. Makes no matter what you had. She wasn’t a talkative woman mostly in her language she would talk. But she wouldn’t talk to us. She talked to us in English, eh.

DESIREE MEDICINE AND FOOD

Well for cuts and scrapes often I would go to her cause if you fall down in the woods and scratched or made a big cut or something in your arm or in your leg. I’d go to her. She had her own medicine, her own bottles, for headache or a bruise. If she see us coming crying, if we had fall down hurt our arm or a finger. The boys used to go in the brooks with a pole and they’d get some big things about that long, trout they used to call it and sometimes they come with hook there in their mouth. Poor Grammy be there with her medicine with her cloths get that there out. She ‘d pull it out with her teeth. She’d fix that up. Good old woman. After she left, we missed her. We used to go pick some blueberries for her up in the pasture for her.

She used to love cake and buns. We were going to make a moose stew or rabbit stew, chicken stew or something like that, make some dough balls and stuff like that. Cook some meat in a pot, put some vegetables in and then make some dough balls with flour and that; you’d open it up and put molasses or jam inside. That was good too. Cause before we had lots of mouton and stuff like that it was all we had eh. If you wanted a feed of mutton you had to have your own. Chicken or duck, we had lots of duck, we had lots of pigs. Whenever we want fresh pork. We made lots of fresh bread, some with raisins in, some more with blueberries in, some more white cause we could only get one kind of flour.
She was a hardworking woman too. She wasn’t very big though, but she could knowed anything. Used to get seal to and all the fat, she used to use a lot of fat from the seal to make soap to wash the floors and all that and cod livers too. She steeped the livers and she’s take the oil. She’d give the children all the small ones a dose the cod liver oil she’d make that in bottles and give us a dose of that and you’d help to make it so it was good but she cured some people poor old soul.

And then there was up there an old Indian, I don’t know where he came from, he was living in Marches Pointe a nice while. We used to call him “Doctor Joe.” He used to go in the woods and get leaves and roots and all that and make medicine for boils. He could cure anything. Him he’d sell his pill bottles. He was good for sores him and that. He’d make his medicine with roots and all that he’d get out of the woods, give it to the people. He was very much like my Grammy Desiree was.

There wasn’t too many of them Indians after the war was all over wasn’t that many left. A lot of them had run away from Newfoundland they went to Chéticamp. They stayed there a nice while. But in Newfoundland, now there’s a lot of Indians, a lot of them came back with children and all that. Finds it easier to make a living here, not as good over there: you can make a garden plant all your stuff for to eat.
It was a big family of us eh. Most we had to do bring in wood, carry water. Wash clothes, you put ‘em on the line with the wool to keep it on the line. Food? There wasn’t all that much, we’d get a meal a day I suppose and when Christmas times comes we get nothing. There was nothing to give. Over the years we used to get an apple for Christmas we thought the world of that. Same old same old.

My father was supposed to be Indian cause his grandmother was Grammy Desiree. You must have heard about that well that was his mother I think it was. I guess his family- I forget their names- they must have been Indian. He used to do a lot of different stuff, eh. Like he’d make jam or get something from the woods eh and boil it or do something with it. You know what I mean? I couldn’t read so I could never get what it was. But now the dogwoods, he used to tell us if there’s a lot of dogwoods it’s going to be a bad winter mais he dit if it’s only a few not so many it will be a nice winter. Well b’y it’s looking good. I believe it! Because we had hardly any dogwoods this year and so far it’s
pretty good eh? God knows.

Ill tell you one time every New Years is his birthday see so his father used to come visit us for New Years to have his birthday and then he’d leave. I’d make a cake for him. He was sitting down to the table having some cake and he said to me “you know Leona” he said “it’s time to go now.” I says “There’s lots of time.” “No” he said “I’ve been here since last year.”

I always think about that I don’t know why.

Anyway you know I had four kids. Two in Manitoba one in Ohio and one in St John’s. And you knows he got a set of twins a boy and a girl. The little girl is a diabetic.

My grandfather was old Johnny Mic. I don’t know I saw him taking some stuff out of the trees and eating it. Some kind of a stuff. And you knows them ferns eh? I saw him pulling that out and eating the stuff in the ferns he said it was vitamins in that. We don’t know. We try it and it was ok. But he was never sick that man, eh, my father. The only time my father got sick they took him to the doctor and he died on the way going. Never was to a doctor in his life.

And it was called an apple what is it called used to grow on the trees. I forget the name of it but I don’t see it no more. (Crabapple maybe). That there was good medicine. He used to boil that and put it in bottles. And he said if anybody get the flu or anything or sick. You know how they used to know that they were sick? A reading. They get a looking glass and that’s how they used to know. My brother, Leonard, he was sick, very bad, eh, and once in while I could see him watching to see if he could breathe to get it in the looking glass, eh? And anyway that day he went to check his breathing: “Not good” he said “not good. I don’t think,” he said he’s going to make it. But he said the only thing can cure him it was called conchamal-shum. Now, a bottle about that high (about 10 inches) and a man
with a fish on his back. Now that’s the stuff he said could cure him. “All the stuff I got here I think is not so good. But that will. Now you gotta go” he said “to Port au Port.” And where was Port au Port? So me and my brother Aidan said if we gotta go to port au port we’ll go. So we left from Loretto going down. We got to Marches Pointe there was the Campbell’s. Rona was her name, she said “where youse going?” I said “We are going to a place called Port au Port because our brother’s pretty sick.” “You know where to go” I said “No, we don’t know where Port au Port is.” But she said “I’m going to ask my mother see if she would let me go wit youse.” ‘K she went and asked her if she could come with us.

So we start walking and walking and walking. Never had a road like they got now, it was another road eh? So we walk and we made turns and...whew I said “how long more is it going to be? Aidan said “I don’t know we’ll keep going anyway.” I think it was three days we were gone, when we got in Port au Port there. Rona she said “We’re in Port au Port now.” We gotta go across the road cause the Abbott store is on that side. Now the Abbott store is on this side. We went there and a man came to the door he said “Can I help you?” I couldn’t say that very good either. I said “I am looking for a bottle of consha..well I said I’ll make it shorter. It’s a man with a fish on his back. Do you have that?” “Yes” he said. I guv him 50 cents I think it was. It is a round piece of money, anyway he took it and he thanked me and we start for home. We start coming home. We kept coming and coming and coming it was dark, daylight, dark, daylight. So anyway we made it. So Aidan was behind me and I heard my mother say it to my father. He said “Is he still alive?” Daddy said “He’s still alive but his breathing’s not very good.” So Aidan went in with the bottle of stuff. So they gave it to him. He got better anyway. And we thanked Rona
And she told us, that’s before that we come from Port au Port we went to the house with her and her mother was Angeline I think was her name “Come on in my children” she said. She gave us each a piece of bread with molasses on. Oh what a lunch – must have been four or five days we hadn’t eaten -what a lunch that was, and then we started going home and that’s the end of the story.
My grandfather Kerfont who lives across the street is native. The only thing I can remember is that I used to go there and he learned me how to smoke the pipe. Well he said you know it’s just like the Indian used to do puff it out. You know you smoke pfftbbbb do that eh? It’s just like Indian sees a spirit. How true it is I don’t know. But I got sick. Then his wife she said “Now my dear man, you’re going to get it. Now she’s sick she can’t go home.” I lived down there see. It’s the only thing I can remember.

And my other grandfather March I don’t remember him at all. Even my grandmother.

My father was in the army married twice, I’m in the second family. He was a hardworking man. He was only 54 died of cancer. Mom died when she was 78 I think.

See I was young. They were not talkative people. Mom didn’t, my father either. He wouldn’t talk about nothing. When he’d drink yes he’d talk about the army but not too much of it. But he’d never say what he did there. He said he was out of there that’s all.
Well I got married I had 2 kids. They’re both were in the army and Carl is a male nurse Kevin is a chef, the baloney man they calls him. He has a daughter, she’s a doctor. And I adopted Mary cause I had no girls, she is working in Halifax. So that’s my happy life with my children.

To tell you the truth nobody talked about it, not to me anyway. They used to call us Indians but they didn’t say why. We used to play cowboys and that with slingshots and they used to call us Indian people but it’s all that I know.

But now I don’t go out so I don’t know nothing either. I would love to be in the band, the Indian band. Cause if I’m part of it in the past, I’d like to be in it now too. But I’m kind of old for that, but still I’d like to be part of it. I wish we’d known more about that. People would talk more about those things in our past. Cause it’s only then we’d know what we are now. It’s all forgotten and that’s bad.

My sister, now, she used to dance the Indian dance. And my son she could do it. I could too but not now. I could sing it one time but I can’t right now. I used to love to play it; I used to play it on my hands. I guess you can’t bring back the past. What I would like is to get together to show us what it’s like. Because we knew there were Indians here before. They were the first people around here.

My oldest son is in it, he don’t have his status yet though. Kevin is trying too. I don’t have my status either. Couple a years I’m in it. I’m not guaranteed one yet. I can’t go to the functions that’s the worst. I do things for them if they want it. If they need anything for the band or something like that if they ask me I’ll do it, if I can’t do it I’ll get someone else to do it. I’m willing to help. It’s to bring back the culture in Newfoundland.

Parents at that time didn’t talk about it, to them it was a bad word or something. We were people too; they were people too,
the Indian. I guess that’s the way it goes eh. It’s like they say you can’t have everything.

My native blood comes from the Marches, the Benoits and the Chaissons three sides.

My husband must have been native because Basil Phillips has his own card. Well his great grandmother was pure Indian her. They called her Esther. We used to call her old Esther and she was pure Indian. She lived in a small shack where the store is. (Ozzies) There was a little store where she used to live. She was old. Sometimes she would go down to the shore to get her wood for firewood. Nobody would help her so I used to go down with her me. Bring her some wood.

To me she was a nice person but they used to call her the witch cause she was frightful. How could I explain that? She was in rags you know and old and stringy hair. But to me she was a pretty woman. Funny thing, eh? To other people she was a witch. Because she was dressed like one. At that time she used to wear a black shawl that’s how come they called her a witch. But she was not a witch. Sin. Now her I can barely remember her. It’s only cause you talked about Basil. The time I saw her she was an old woman. She had the skin and the high cheek bone and she had the hair, long black hair, all long clothes. Oh my goodness, that was before I got married. And I’m married now 63 years.
I was born right here in Degrau, right up on the hill there. My mother, well, what she used to do was make all our clothes, knitted everything for us and she had a loom to weave cotton and she had sheep to shear. She used to go working for everybody else: she used to paper, paint and shear their sheep. She used to work both places: home and for other people too. Cause my father was kind of crippled, he had a sore back all the time so she was kind of the breadwinner for a while.

She also made her own soap. You know, she’d save the fat off the seals and she’d make her own soap. That’s what she used to do, yeah. She’d take the ashes from the stove and mix it with the oil, I don’t know how she did it but she used to make soap. She must have learned it from her mother, I guess, or her grandmother. I don’t know if she was pure Indian, but she was young and her parents were.

I met my mum’s mum, that’s the only grandparent I met. The other ones, I didn’t meet them, they were dead before I was born. Oh, she was a good old lady, she was smart and she’d do
everything, you know, like my mom did, yeah. She’d make all her own stuff too.

Them times they probably didn’t talk about being a native, right, it’s only coming out there the last couple of years, right? All I know is we did everything like the natives did: we had to go picking berries in the summer and pick up the jam there in the winter. We had to help my dad with the fish. He used to fish and we had to spread the fish on the flakes to dry, then we had to bring them into the storehouse in our arms. We had to do all that, right. And if he built a barn or something with logs we had to go gather moss to plug up the cracks. Yep, we had to do all that.

And my mom also used to make a medicine. If a baby had the diarrhea or anybody had the diarrhea, (they didn’t call it diarrhea then) but she used to pick up the roots, the strawberry roots and boil it to make medicine.

The used to call it sore guts... they didn’t know them big names before, right. Big names like marmalade.

And for babies, if they had cramps and that; you know the stuff you get off the hay, what they call that now? Caraway seeds. They’d boil that too for the babies. There was no such thing as Castoria or anything like that for babies before. When the babies had cramps there was no grip water, or anything them times, that’s what they used to use. We had to go pick that too off the hay, pick it all up or we’d break it off and she’d dry it behind the stove in a bag. So when it dried off, she had a bunch of caraway. They use’nt to call it caraway then, they used to call it Lonnie. What kind of name that was I don’t know.

Before I was born they had a house up on the hill and it burnt down just before I was born. I think the house burned in February and I was born in April. So they only had the shelter, like I say, they had to plug the cracks with moss in order to keep
it warm. And there was cracks in the floor and the rabbits running around under there. That’s what she told me, cause I wasn’t born.

In the past there were no toilets. We had chamber pots in the rooms, had to be emptied and cleaned every morning, kerosene lamps that had to be filled with kerosene every morning, the globes had to be washed and shined. We had the wooden floors, we had to scrub and we had no brush. We had to take spruce boughs and scrub the floors, white wooden floors. So it wasn’t easy.

I only found out that I was Mi’kmaq about six or seven years ago I guess. You know when everything start coming out and then we knew that we were.

You know we had to live off of the land and off of the water, so it makes sense. We had to make due, like the Indians are doing now, like you see the pictures on TV, what they’re doing. Well, we had to do the same thing. We had no running water, we had to carry water for everything. Well it’s hard work.

Food mostly was fish and seal meat. My father kept cattle and sheep, we had that for food and they used to plant their own potatoes and vegetables. That’s what we used to have, sometimes it wasn’t much you know. They’d pick up for the winter and sometimes by the time March came, the food was getting pretty scarce. That’s why they used to call March the starving month. I was only young then, but they had to make due with what they had. They had to ration. Flapjacks on the stove. Oh yeah. Mix up Flour and water and I don’t know what else they put in it and bake it on the stove. Eat seabirds, oh yes. There was rabbits and there was birds. My father’d pluck them, he had a rod he used to burn in the stove and he’d burn it all over, burn the feathers off. We’d eat that, wasn’t easy. Turrs and even little John Bulls, tiny little birds, take about 17 or 18
to make stew. They used to skin all that. I don’t know how they catch the little ones but the big ones they kill with a gun. But the little John Bulls I don’t know if they could shoot that they were so small. They survived eh. They had to survive.

And see, it was so far to go to the stores. My father used to have to get the horse and the sleigh to go to Port au Port to get freight for the Abbots store right there. Used to have to go all the way to Port au Port to pick up groceries for the store.

For Christmas it wasn’t very rich either. For Christmas we might get a half an apple in our stocking and maybe a couple little candy. That’s all we had. Scribbler and a pencil, we always had that for school. It was poor times but it was good times. You know now nobody appreciates anything, not the kids anyway. We had the Mummers. You don’t get a mummer now. You can’t I guess, you don’t know. Yeah. I like Mummers.
STANLEY: Yeah almost 64 years now
I remembers old Grammy Desiree.

Daddy, now, that’s her son. His name is John they used to call him Johnny mick. Mick, cause you know there were lotta of Micks in the Indians. And he used to go down in dory, row boat, down to Marches Point and he used to pick her up. She would come up home in Red Brook and I remembers her coming up from the bank and she used to wear a long black dress right down to the ankles and one of those little black bonnets tied under the chin, no teeth in her mouth and she was always laughing like the Indians do. And she come up home for all day. Very beautiful, beautiful, gentle old lady. Yeah she was really nice. And in the evening, you know, daddy used to take her back in the row boat to Marches Point. That’s a nice ways there from Red Brook down to Marches Point.

The people were ashamed to say they were Indians. Nobody
would say they were Indians because they were ashamed of the Indians and now the Indians means so much to our culture, you know, to our people it means so much now. And you can get so much from the Indians today. It’s unbelievable. Some people is very fortunate what they are getting from the Indians with the status and that. But before it was so different.

Our mother told us that old Grammy Desiree was Indian so that is why we knew about it. And old Grammy Desiree was a Lainey and she was born in Mainland, that’s where she came from Mainland. And she had a big family. Well when she married she came to live in Marches Point.

Anytime you see an older man you can almost see the Indian in their face. You know their structures and that is Indian. Indian look. Their tougher looking people than the white man, tougher looking and they are tougher. And they’ll face anybody you know.

Well, I mean to say if we were all told when we were small that we were Indians and brought up like the Indians you know that would be nothing wrong, there would not be one thing wrong. But that was always hidden away. Pushed away. You know and it’s just not right.

My mom, my grandmother she never like said anything bad about the Indians. She always thought a lot of the Indians, you know, which she knew that’s where we came from. You go to school now when you were small and say you were Indian- oh my goodness that would be a federal offense. It was mostly kept secret you know.

If they would get seal in the spring there was nothing wasted: all the fat was all saved and the meat was all saved and the seal skin was all saved. And she used to take the fat and she used to cut it all up into bits and she used to put it in a frying pan on the stove and she would fry that right hard and she would take
the fat and she would make a cake. And then the fat that was left there, the remaining chunks, they used to call scruncheons and she used to put that in the cake. Make the cake now with a bit of molasses and flour. It was all good. I guess we wouldn’t eat it now but it was healthy. Was very, very healthy.

That’s the way they used to live there was nothing wasted. Now lots of time they used to make seal skin mitts and seal skin boots and all that kind of things they used to make. Lots of times they used to make seal skin what would you call that they used to put their knifes in (a sheath).

STANLEY: They used to make everything on their own.

ALICE: There was no deep freezes and all that kinda stuff like there is now, but what they used to do if they would get a seal, they would have an outside shed and in the winter it used to freeze so much and they used to hang it up in the ceiling and then that used to freeze all winter long you know. Which was good. There was no lack of food before, cause there was so much in the ocean and there was so much on the land and that’s how they provided their winter from the land and the sea. You know there was no shortage of food. Only thing coming towards the spring the long march they used to call it. The Indians used to call it the long March, mean to say when the food was all running out and it was getting scarce. Always managed. They would always manage because before they used to start the fishing in March there was lots of fish before. Lots of herring and all that kind of stuff. So from then on they had more things to eat.

And then they used to live off the seabirds. Actually Grammy Desiree, daddy used to kill her crows, yes. Grammy Desiree and he used to pick them, pick the feathers off. He had a long steel piece of iron and he used to put it in the comfort stove and
he used to redden it and he used to squinch the crow and clean it off and he used to give it to Grammy Desiree. And she used to bake it. But it was like the hard meat you know. Squinch now: they had a long piece of Iron with a little handle on and they used to put the iron in the comfort stove in the coals and it used to get red and they used to pass it all over the birds, all over the crow and that it used to squinch everything that was on, if there was any feathers or anything that was left there they used to squinch that off.

STANLEY: It was all kinds of birds they had before here eh? That’s what they used to do. Not that long ago. He kill a gull, grandfather there, I used to kill four or five. And I’d bring it all to him. And my son.

ALICE: He’d be in his glory that’s the Indian food.

STANLEY: He’d take the feathers off and squinch it there and my son the fat coming right out, my son and squiching away. And when you wanted the feed - well he had it.

ALICE: But that was good food though not like. It’s different what you are eating now. Now it’s all processed food and all that kind of stuff but before it was pure it was the pure thing.

The seal used to come in March and the herring used to come in March and the cod and then in April they used to start with the lobster traps.

Sap for your cuts and it was some kind of a root- I don’t know what kind of a root it was.

STANLEY: Oh yes yeah I remembers that.
ALICE: It was a medicine for the cold. It’s a root they used to clean off and give it a boil it was good for the cold.

STANLEY: Strong, right strong.

ALICE: And for the headache they used to use something call Sidgews? Sidgews. Some kind of a leaf that grows out in the field. They used to take the sidgew scrunch it up with your hand, they used to put it on a piece of cloth and then they used to tie the piece of cloth on their forehead. Yes that’s what they used to do and it used to cure their headache too.

In the old days the Indian days everything was good to eat there was nothing lost?

STANLEY: Nothing lost.

ALICE: Even for to make their home brew they used to go in the woods a get the spruce bows. Spruce bows.

STANLEY: Black Spruce.

ALICE: Black spruce. And they used to take the bushels and they used to put it in a pot and let it boil and strain it and they used to put that in their home brew.

STANLEY: Tastes good too.

ALICE: Good gracious you might hear talk of spruce beer. Well that’s spruce beer. That’s how they made their spruce beer.

STANLEY: I made a good many five gallon buckets. I guarantee you.
ALICE: Ha-ha Yeah. So I mean

STANLEY: And is always a bunch of us would be making that stuff and we pass it to one another to see which one is better.

ALICE: I see old people before like fishing they would leave in the morning go out in the deep sea in a small boat rowing boat and twelve, one o’clock they used to come ashore – like they say the fish up to the gunwales eh? You know. Cod up to the gunwales. Beautiful, beautiful. And we used to be down the shore on the slipway in the summer waiting for daddy to come ashore. It was so calm we used to hear ‘em coming ashore from way out, eh. The strokes in the water and the rowers hitting the water and the boat.

Oh we used to say “Listen, daddy’s coming to shore now.” And we used to wait and we used to wait and then he’d get closer and we used to see him, then you know, and we used to help him to haul up the boat.

STANLEY: And full of fish.

ALICE: Full of the biggest kind of cod. Beautiful yeah. And before you know there was no fridges so they had to salt everything that they had. They had a pungen tub. Pungen?

STANLEY: That was a ninety gallon molasses.

ALICE: It was round.

STANLEY: It was ninety gallon. Used to come here. And when it be emptied they just sell them, you know. Cut it into two to put the fish in.
ALICE: They used to sell them to the people. They used to take that pungen tub, they used to put water in, keep water in all the time for it not to go dry up, to keep it swnle like you know, and then when they salt fish, they would salt their fish in that pungen. They had pungen full of cod, pungen full of cod heads, pungen full of halibut and another pungen full of dried squid. Everything like that all what they used to get they used to salt it all into pungens now. So they had lots of food for the winter put away.

And with their animals that they used to kill in the fall. The fresh meat and all that used to be hanging out in the shed all winter. It would freeze all winter long. They had fresh meat which was good. No preservatives just pure from the earth which is good.
Penwa’ Mawi-Amskweseweyey L’nue’kati is pronounced Ben-wah um-skoo wess-so-whey ul-noo-eh-gut-dee and translates as Benoit 1st Nation. Formed in 2005 in honour of the original 1972 Cape St. George Indian Band that was formed under the original Nation Association of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Pjila’pioq. The Benoit Lnu’k/Mi’kmaq Community traces its history back to the Chegau/Shegone family, to Francois Benoit and Anne L’Official, and to a number of other Lnu’k/Mi’kmaq families who are the ancestors to most of the Benoit family of Lnu’k/Mi’kmaq in Taqamkuk. We are proud Benoit (eagle) clan. Other prominent family names in our community include Benoit, Young, Jesso, Cormier, Chaisson and Marche. We are status Indians under the provincial Qalipu Mi’kmaq First Nation Band.

Lnu’k/Mi’kmaq have always had a prominent presence in
St. George’s Bay (Baie St-George) and on Payun Aqq Payunji’j (the Port au Port Peninsula). Many of our Lnu’k/Mi’kmaq ancestors came from around Pitu’pa’q (Bras d’Or lakes) in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. We also have Beothuk connections.

Benoit 1st Nation recognizes the Qalipu Mi’kmaq First Nation Saqamaw as our Taqamkuk Chief of the Taqamkukewa’q (Newfoundland Mi’kmaq) outside of Miawpukek First Nation (Conne River). However Saqamaw Misel Joe remains as our traditional Chief of all of Ktaqamkuk (Newfoundland).

The mandate of the band is to bring cultural, traditional, language and historical programing to our youth, women, family and Elders and to all of our Mi’kmaq community in the region. To safeguard our traditional knowledge, to preserve in for the generations to come.
Glooscap and the great Creator teaches us to stay humble. Let them give you the wisdom of the ages and guide you on the path of respect and humility.

— SAQAMAW JES’N PENWA’ (CHIEF JASEN BENWAH)