



Mi'kmaq: First Nation people

Spirituality in Conne River

Narrator:

Although the community traces its roots back to at least the 1700's, many of its members were assimilated, often through marriage into the Catholic church, which became the predominant religion of Mi'qmaq people.

Chief Misel Joe:

The Pow Wow is slowly but surely replacing the importance of St Anne's Day. When St Anne's Day used to be a social gathering, and St Anne's Day is just a few weeks away.

Interviewer:

Is that why you decided to have it just before St Anne's Day?

Chief Misel Joe:

I wouldn't admit that to the Bishop, no. But yes.

Narrator:

Chief Misel Joe has sought federal funding to allow the community to establish a First Nation identity, separate from their Catholicism, though Mi'qmaq spirituality has always been part of their lives.

John Jeddore Junior:

My father is Roman Catholic but he respects the environment I think like a Mi'qmaq person does. We were walking, in the nature park, and I noticed the way he would walk would sometimes be erratic. And you know, he'd walk normal then almost like he was walking over things.

I asked him why he was walking like that. And he took me back to one of the spots where I'd noticed, like a change in his pace. And he looked and he pointed down and he asked if I'd noticed anything down there. And I told him no, it didn't look any different than anywhere else on the trail.

And he said down there, there's a shrew down there, there's a little shrew trail. A shrew's like a little mouse with a big nose and they're kind of blind so they kind of run around. They're not nice, people don't like shrews. But it's still animal. And he said there's a shrew trail there its under the snow, it's like a tunnel.

And he said if I were to walk on that tunnel then I'd probably ruin that shrew's trail and he wouldn't know where he was going when he'd come back from getting his food. And it's something that no one else would think about. I didn't think about it.

It was something he knew to avoid doing. And that comes from that First Nations side of him. I think that being a Mi'qmaq person has shaped his view of the environment different. He's Roman Catholic, and I think that he does have some inherent spirituality about him that sets him apart from a Roman Catholic from St Albans.

Someone who's non-Mi'qmaq.

Even though he missed it, even though he wasn't exposed to it in person there's still something deeper that shapes him.

Narrator:

The resurfacing of traditional Mi'qmaq values can sometimes present difficulties.

Dan Jeddore:

Yeah I feel denied. I do feel that I missed out on something. Not so much the song and dance but the language.

My grandfather I did hear him speak a bit but I learned later in life why he didn't speak it is because there's influence of his wife who was not a First Nations either. And usually it's the mothers that raise and rule the roost I guess, in a way, right you know.

Unfortunately I didn't see the need to carry it on. I didn't see the importance of holding on to it at the time because I didn't see it. Like I said, it wasn't taught at home.

Patrick Augustine:

It's an impact on their identity, they feel that they're at a loss.

When they lose the language, you lose a lot of concepts, that don't translate very well into English. The English language uses 'harvesting' but in the Mi'qmaq language its, like Netukulimk which is, it's just a concept that you only take things that you would need and use. And you wouldn't take any more than that.

Like I wouldn't go and gather blueberries and because there's a lot of blueberries there, I decide to take them all. I would just go and gather the ones that I would need, and the ones that I would use. And I would leave some there for other people or leave them there for the animals, like the bears or whatever.

John Jeddore Senior:

We took salmon yes. But we never took not a lot of salmon we took three or four for supper. And next day you want some you go back in.

There was a man come in from outside one time and put a net across and got 17 barrels of salmon. We never took that in 20 years.

Patrick Augustine:

I grew up listening to my mother telling me stories about our culture, about the family, some history. They would tell us stories about little people, they would tell us stories about supernatural people.

Stories about Glooscap, about how he shaped the land. They would talk about their ancestors, and how they would fight against the Mohawk. They were enemies of the Mi'qmaq at one point in time. They would say that their grandfather was a Ginap, a super strong man and how he would lift barrels and carry them on ships and how he would hide that strength from other people. But they also talked about plants, medicinal plants and stories like that, as I was growing up.

When I got into high school, I began to read a lot, I used to get permission from my French teacher that I'd be able to go to the library, because I explained that I didn't need the French language, because I was already bilingual. And they would allow me to go to the library and I read up a lot about Sioux culture, Blackfoot culture, or Ojibway cultures because I was just curious. And while I was reading in high school, I also came across some material on Mi'qmaq culture.