

When the stories disappear, our people will disappear: Notes on language and contemporary literature of the Saskatchewan Plains Cree and Métis – Peter Bakker
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With approximately 70.000 people the Crees are the most numerous aboriginal nation of Canada. They live in small communities from the Atlantic Ocean to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Traditionally the Crees are hunters-gatherers and trappers. Some western bands excelled in the buffalo hunt (See Mandelbaum 1940 for a description of the Plains Cree buffalo culture). There are still hunters on all the reservations, but most of the Crees do not have regular jobs.

The Crees played important roles in the fur trade on the prairies. They were so important, that also the other, neighboring, tribes and white people used the Cree language.

Cree is an Algonkian language. The etymology of the name 'Cree' is controversial, but in any case not of Cree origin. The Crees call themselves nêhiyaw and their language nêhiyawêwin (the accent on the vowels means that the vowel is long). Algonkian languages were traditionally spoken on almost the whole North American east coast and in Canada to the Rocky Mountains. Many of the east coast languages are now extinct. Other important Algonkian languages are Ojibwe (also called Saukteaux or Chippewa), Montagnais or Innu, Blackfoot, Micmac and Delaware. The Cree language has several dialects, whose mutual intelligibility is sometimes low. Plains Cree, spoken on the Alberta and Saskatchewan prairies and in Montana, is one of the main dialects. The stories given below are all in the Plains dialect of Cree and in a different language which is a mixture of Plains Cree and French (with some Ojibwe).

Amerindian languages are notoriously complex. Among those, Plains Cree is one of the least complex ones, even in comparison with other Cree dialects. There are only two

nominal endings, the sound system does not yield problems, word order is free. Only the verb structure is rather complex. There are two conjugations. There is agreement with subject, but also object and indirect object in the verb. Verbs have different forms for animate and inanimate subjects or objects. Animate beings are not only humans and animals, but also stones, spoons, bread and fish, but not meat, forks and some plants. For more information about Plains Cree, see Ahenekeew 1987, Wolfart & Carroll 1981.

Relatively much has been published in Cree. A large part is (Christian) religious literature. Further there are anthologies of traditional oral literature, often recorded by white people (e.g. Bloomfield 1930, 1934, Ahenekeew 1986, 1988 all in Plains Cree, and Wolfart 1988 in Swampy Cree). Only a minority of the Crees can read or write the Cree language, either in Roman alphabet or in the traditional syllabic writing system. The latter is gradually getting obsolete among the Plains Crees. English is quickly replacing spoken Cree. On the plains, few young people under twenty still speak the language on the Plains.

Because of the fur trade a new nation emerged, the Métis. Their ancestors are European (mostly French) fur traders and Amerindian women (mostly Cree and Ojibwe). Their culture is markedly different from both Cree and French culture. They also have a language of their own called Michif (from French Métif, meaning mixed-blood) which is still spoken in some communities in the northern prairies. The verbs and demonstratives are (Plains) Cree and the nouns are French (Rhodes 1977). The Michif language will probably be extinct in one or two decades.

Telling stories has always been an important part of the Cree and Métis cultures. Stories are still exchanged at all kinds of occasions. Even some ceremonies and official

conferences may start with jokes. Good story tellers are highly valued in the communities. As stated above, virtually all young Plains Cree and Métis now grow up speaking English as their first language. It is not yet known what consequences this will have for the oral literature. The stories are said to be 'not as funny' in English as they are in Cree or in Michif. This has to do, among many other things, with the fact that in Cree one can easily create new, funny sounding words, for events. For instance, a man who lost his excrements while running, was called kâ-misi-pahtâ-t, a hilarious word in Cree, roughly translatable as 'shit-and-runner'.

Story telling is also important among the Métis. Michif stories are taken from both French, Ojibwe and Cree sources. For some people the stories are connected with the Michif language. One Métis elder I asked about stories said she doesn't really remember them as she has no opportunity to tell them nowadays: "My grandchildren only understand English."

Probably some of the stories will continue to be told, but in English. There are also communities where Cree is learned by people when they are reaching adulthood. Nevertheless, disappearance of the language may be more than a symptom of the replacement of manifold aspects of Cree ways with Western life-style. Via the Cree oral literature a world view and a value system are transmitted to younger generations. These stories are among the most important aspects of the Cree culture, being unauthoritative regulatory social forces in the communities. Some elders consider the traditional stories the backbone of their culture, even that much that one of them said: "If our stories disappear, our people also disappear".

Traditional stories which do not have a clear historical base and which are usually situated in a different world that preceded ours, are called âtayôhkêwin in Cree. True

stories are called âcimowin. These are orally transmitted histories, and anything else. The Métis have the same distinction, les contes versus les histoires. We will give examples of both of these, including different types of âcimowin. All of these were recorded in 1988 in Saskatchewan. Some of the story-tellers consider themselves Métis (and they may or may not be Indians according to Canadian law), others are legally Indians. Some of the stories are in Cree, others in Michif and one in English.

The âtayôhkêwin stories, roughly translatable as sacred stories, myths, legends or fairy tales, often talk about Wîsahkêcâhk, the Plains Cree trickster, half-human, half-god, always hungry and looking for food, but nearly always he experiences that the animals are his superiors. He can communicate with animals and plants. The telling of these stories is associated with different taboos. For instance, tobacco has to be offered before telling an âtayôhkêwin. In other communities these stories can only be narrated between sundown and sunset, or else the story teller will soon get lost in the woods. Often these stories give an explanation for certain natural phenomena. Nevertheless, when these stories are told, there is always a lot of laughter. Many of these stories are told by the Métis too, having Wîsahkêcâhk or Nenabush (from the Ojibwe) or Ti-Jean (from the French) as its hero. In the first story (in Cree) given here (story 1) one is warned against eating a species of moss growing on rocks that is lightly poisonous. Further an explanation is given for a certain fungus growing exclusively on birches. The second story is a traditional Cree story which explains the fact that bears have no tail. It was recorded in the Michif language.

The native people often have good memories for events. Some people tell about historical events of centuries before in great detail in these orally transmitted stories. An example of 'oral history' in Cree is story 3, which deals with the protection of the dog's paws when used to pull sleds in winter about thirty years ago.

A Métis example is story 4, in which the story teller narrates how the Michif language, the mixture of French and Cree, came into being. The story is of course in the Michif language.

Jokes are also very important among the Crees. Telling jokes happens at all meetings. The Indians are among the few peoples who tell jokes about themselves, and not about the neighboring people. Usually they are silly, but in their silliness they can be very smart. An example of a joke is story 5, which is in Cree. Often jokes start off as if they narrate real events, but only in the end it appears to be an invented story, as in the story about the trapper and the wolf (story 6). This story is in the Michif language.

Further traditional stories are those that contain a lesson. In the Cree culture it was (and still is in many areas) unusual to tell other persons how they have to behave. Advice (or criticism) can be given by telling a story in which a certain person takes a certain decision. The teller of the story then hopes that the hearer will do the same (or in some cases the opposite) as the person in the story. The 'moral' will not be explicitly formulated, unlike in many Western societies. An example of such a story is 'God comes to visit' (story 7). The moral is not given, but still very clear. The source of this story may very well be European, though it is in the Cree language.

To give an example of the continuation of the story telling tradition in English, I finally give a traditional Cree story (âtayôhkêwin) which I recorded in English (enriched with some Michif) as told by a Métis story teller. It is a literal rendition and therefore it gives a good impression of modern story telling.

The spelling system used here is the standard spelling for Cree as outlined in Wolfart and Ahenekeew (1988). To give an impression of the intricacies of the language, the

second story is also given morpheme-by-morpheme glosses. In the Michif stories the non-Cree (French, English) elements are underlined. Some of these stories were published before in Cree and Dutch in the Dutch periodical *Wampum* (Bakker 1989). I am grateful to the storytellers for sharing their wisdom with me.

1. wîsahkêcâhk êkwa waskwayak. (Wisahkechahk and the birches)
Victoria Daigneault, Sakitawak, Saskatchewan.

wîsahkêcâhk wâsakam sâkahikanîhk ê-papâm-ohtêt. asinîhk waskîc kikamoki ekwa ê-kakwêcimât: "tânisi ê-isihkasiyêk?", ê-itât, "nisimimitik?"

"'Kisiwâskatikakîsak' nitikawinân"

"êkwâspî matakvensamuyak!"

sôskwâc ê-mâci-mowât. tâpiskôc les crêpes mah-mîcisot êkonisa.

êkwâspi Wîsahkêcâhk ê-sipwêhtêt ê-mâcît. êkwa môswa ê-wâpamât. mwêhci wî-paskisiwât, ê-mâci-puikîtot ê-wusahuwât môswa. êkwa kisiwâsit.

asiniy ê-cipusiyît ê-mihkwa-kisapiskisôwât êkwâspî ê-ôtinât iskotêhk ohci. êkwâspî êkota ê-apit. ekwa mikîhkasot wâskitwîy. êkwâspî papâmohtêt ekwa kê-pahkihtatât omikî. Kîhtwâm êsa êkota ê-pimôhtêt. kê-miska êsa omikî. kê-mîcit êsa. kê-nakamohikot piyêsis, wîsahkêcâhk omikî miciw. êkwa êsa piyêsis namoc ê-kiskêyihthak kê-nakamoyit. waskwayak nîhtîthak kê-nakamoyit.

"namoya nimikî kê-mîciyân; nikawiy okahkiwak ômisi ana ê-kîpahkihtatât." piyêsisak kêyapic ê-nakamocik. êkwa wîsahkêcâhk ê-kisiwâsit. pitikona omiki ê-pimosinatât waskwaya omiki ohci.

êkôni ê-itêyihthak kê-nakamoyit. êkwa kê-kikamok waskway wîsahkêcâhk omîki.

2. maskwa (the bear)

May Desjarlais (+), spring 1988, Lebret, Saskatchewan.

1 Kwêkwê ni-nohtê-âcimo-n

Something 1sg-want-tell-1sg

2 kuhkum ê-kî-âcimot, kayâs mâna ê-kî-âtayôhkê-t.

grandma COMP-PAST-tell-3 long ago usually COMP-PAST-narrate-1>3

3 un ours awa êsa ê-wî-nitawi-kwâskwêpicikê-t.

a bear this it-is-said COMP-VOL-go-fish-3

4 dans le lac kî-itoht-êw êkwa la blanche misiwê kî-api-w.

LOC the lake PAST-go-3 and the white all-over PAST-sit-3

5 un trou kî-mônahkipat-am.

a hole PAST-dig-3>0

6 mâka nama-kîkwê kî-ayâw avek kwâskwêpitsikê-t.

but nothing PAST-have-3>0 with fish-3

7 so le trou kî-munah-am.

so the hole PAST-dig-3>0

8 êkuta le l-ours kî-pistat-êw sa swê

there the bear PAST-put in-3 his tail

9 kinwês êkota kî-api-w.

long time there PAST-sit-3

10 kî-akwaskaci-w

PAST-freeze-3

11 kî-wîhkîw, kî-wîhkîw, kî-wîhkîw

PAST-wait, PAST-wait, PAST-wait

12 êkwa sa swê ê-kî-pasikopitahk

then his tail COMP-PAST-pullout-3>0

13 kîsk-ipit-ahk.

broke-pull-3-0

14 tânsi mîna ê-pasiko-t, nama-kîkwê une swê kî-ayâ-w.

how again PAST-stand up-3 not-at-all a tail PAST-have-3>0

15 êkosi anohc nama-kîkwê ayâ-wak les autres o-sway-a.

so now not-at-all have-3pl the others tail-PL

3. Maskisina atimwa kici

Rose Laliberté, Sakitawak.

kayâs ayîsiyiniwak atimwa êkwa mistatimwa poko ê-kî-pimohtêhocik. ê-kî-maskisin-ihkawâcik atimwa, maskwamiy kâ-mayâtisit êkâ ta-pîkosinisi-cik ositiwawa. le padla ohci êkî-osîhtâcik maskisina atimwa kici. ê-tahkopitahkwaw le padla atimwa ositihk êkwa la corde asici ê-sohkapitahkwaw.

4. Métif.

Margaret Desjarlais, Lebret, Saskatchewan.

"Les Canadiens come across, les Sauvagesse mâci-wîcamâweyak and then puis êkwa les enfants ê-ayâwâ-cik. La Sauvagesse namôya kaskihtaw en français ta-kitotât ses enfants. Le Français namoya kaskihtâw ses enfants ta-kitotât en cri. En français êkwa kitotêw. êkwa quelques les deux kiskinohamahk. kîkwây ôhci pîkiskwêw rien que en cri ekwa en français.

5. wawiyatâcimowin.

Henry Daniels, Sturgeon Lake, Saskatchewan.

kayâs omâcîw ê-mâcît kâ-miskak wâpamonis. ê-itâpahtak kâ-wâpamât ostêsa. Mâka ostêsa ê-kî-nipayit pêyak askiy, êkoni ê-itêyihtâk kâ-miskak ôma masinapayiwîn. ê-kîwêt wâpahtêhêw wîkimâkana. " ê-miskawak ê-sakihak awa. macokosan wâpahta." wîkimâkana wâpamisoyiwa. kisiwâsiw awa iskwêw ê-wâpamisot. ê-itêyihtâk onâpêma wâh-wâpamiyit ôhi iskwêwa kâ-minispayiyit. Awa iskwêw omamawa wâpahtêhêw ôma masinapayiwîn. wâpamisot awa nôtokwêw, kâ-itwêt: "tâpwê e-mâyâtisit!"

6. Le loup de bois (the timber wolf)

John Gosselin, Lebret, Saskatchewan.

"un vieux ê-nôhchikêt, you see, êkwa un matin êwaniskât, ahkosiw, but kêyapit ana wî-nitawi-wâpahtam ses pièges. sipwêhtêw. mêkwat êkotê itâsihkêt une tempête. maci-kîsikâw. wanisîn. pimôhtêw, pimôhtêw. êyahkosit êkwa le-vieux-iw-it nohtêsîn. d'un gros arbre picipat-apiw. "êkota ninipin," itêyihtam, "une bonne place si-nipiyân. ê-wâpamât ohi le loup de bois ê-pê-pahta-yi-t. ha, ha. hê hê! ka-kanawâpamêw le loup awa pê-isi-pahtâw êkota itê apiyit. êkwa pâstinam sa bouche ôhi le loup ê-wî-utinât. pastên son bras yahkinam, right through awa le loup. the wolf dans la queue ohci-utinêw, par la queue âpoci-pitêw! kîhtwâm le loup asê-kiwê-pahtâw! ha ha ha!.

7. kisêmanitow ka-pê-kiyokawât.

Florence Nayneecassum, Atâhkakohp, Saskatchewan.

pêyakwâw pêyak iskwêw ayamihâw ekwa nêwâw ê-koci-kosit. ê-kî-kiyokawât. êkwa ê-kî-pêhât kisêmanitowa ka-pê-kiyokawikot. êkwa ê-kikisêpayâk ê-piminawasot mistahi kahkiyaw kîkwê. ê-kisisahk ayâkêseya ê-wî-pê-kiyokawikot kisêmanitowa. êkwa awiyek ê-pê-pâhpwêhikêt iskwâhtêmihk êkwa êsa ê-tawapinikiyiw êkwa êsa yohtênâm iskwâhtêm. êkwa êkota awâsisa ê-tahkonamêt oyâkanis ê-nihtahtamikot sîwinikana apisîs. "namoya!" itwêw iskwêw. kâ-kapiyayiw ê-minihkwêcik kitêmak kahkitêmak kakî-atawêcik. kipowêpinam iskwâhtêm ana iskwêw. êkwa kîhtwâm apihtâkîsisâk mistahi piminawasow. pêhow. mîna âsay pê-pâhpawêhikêyiw mîna awiyak êkwa nitaw-apinikiyiw êkwa iskwêw ê-nitatamawât anihî iskwêwa ê-nohtêyapakwêt êkwa ê-kîskwêpêt. êkwa " namoya!" itikow, "namoya okîskwêpênasak nipamihâwak!" êkwa kîhtwâm kipowêpinam iskwâhtêm âsay mîna. ikwê êkwa iskwêyânîk kâ-mîcisocik âsay mîna kahkiyaw kîkwê. kisisam ê-pêhot kâ-pê-

kiyokawikot kisê-manitowa. êkwa iyi-saskaci-pêhot êkwa âsay mîna awiyak ê-pê-pâhpawêhikoyiw êkwa nitaw-apênikoyiw êkwa êkota ê-nîpawit nâpêw ê-nôhtê-âpacihtaw sîwîkicikan, aya ê-wî-sîwîtamowât simâkanisa aya mêskanâhk nânitaw ê-wîsakisinicik. êkwa ana iskwêw "namoya!" itwêw êkwa âsay mîna kipaham iskwâhtêm. êkwa mwêstas êkwa nitawikowisimiw ê-tipiskayinik ayakesk êsa ê-saskaci-pêhot ka-pê-kiyokakot kisêmanitowa. êkwa onipâwinihk pah-pimisin êkwa kâ-wâpamât awiyak êkwa ê-wâpiskisiwit êkwa kâ-pîkiskwatikot. itikut:" âsay ôma nistwâw ê-pê-kiyokahtân êkwa inihinstwâw kâ-pê-itohtêyân ê-katêtisahoyan. namoya êsa ôma tâh-tâpwê ê-kakwêcimoyan."
êkosi.

8. Wisahkecahk's adventures.

John Gosselin, Lebre, Saskatchewan.

Wîsahkêcâhk êsa kayâs dans d'un lac ê-apit les canards kî-wâpamêw [Wisakechak was sitting along a lake when he saw ducks] -ducks. And he invited dem over "pê-pasakwâpimisimowik!" [Come do the shut-eye dance!] You see, dat mean dey danse wit deir eyes closed. ê-nakamon [there will be singing], he said. O.K. So dat ducks come out and he was sitting dere and singing and de ducks were goin around dancing. And he grab one now and again and break deir neck you know. One old duck I guess had one eye open, seen dat, and she hollered:

"tapasîk! ati-micisohikonân! [Run away! He is starting to eat us!]

So he ran away.

Anyway, Wîsahkêcâhk he got dese ducks ready and he made a big fire and he stuck-em in dere to roast dem like an open fire and den he says:

"I wanna lay down, I wanna, nit-ayêskosin. [I am tired]. I wanna sleep for a while. ninipân aciyâw."

So, he told his arse: awiyak pê-ituhtêt, kika-wihtamawin. [if someone is coming, tell me]. You see."

So. O.K., he went to sleep and all of a sudden: BANG! He jumped up, noting, noting around. He slapped himself on de arse:

"kikiyâskiskin!" he said, "you're a liar!"

So he lay down again, he went off, he jumped up and he looked around, noting, slapped himself again:

"kikiyâskiskin!"

So de tird time he jumped up, couldn't see noting around. "kikiyâskiskin!", he told his arse again. So he got up. De legs were sticking out of de fire, de coals, you know. De ducks, he start pullin dem out, dere was noting dere, just de legs stickin in, you know, so de coyotes or whoever stole dem he he put de legs.... pushed de legs and ate de rest, you see. So he got mad at his arse, he says:

"kikiyâskimin! kikipahênd".

So he heated up a stone and he sat on it. God's grace when he sat on dat hot stone, his skin you know, hiiiiit!

"Aha," he says: "kikway itwê-yin?" [what do you say?].

So he went and got a scab dere, you see.

So he was climbing up a hill. He was just like a little kid, climbing up a big hill. And when he got to de top he sat down and starts sliding down on his arse. Of course de scab come off, you see. So when he went back up de hill he found de scab wit a hole in it, you see. So he picked it up, put his finger in it, took a bite, he was whirling it in his finger. And de birds were singing.

Wîsahkêcâhk sa calle wîmîciw!". Dat means: wisakechah you are eating your scab."

Wîsahkêcâhk sa calle wîmîciw."

And he says to de birds:

"kiyâskinâwâw! musum ôhi kayâs mustuswa ê-kî-paskiswât," [you are liars! Grandfather shot this buffalo long time ago] - like his grandfader shot a buffalo. ayi ayito nôhkom ê-kîpâsahk uma wiyâs ahiwê [my grandmother dried the meat], meat-like, see dis hole, dere's ayi itê musum ê-kî-pâskiswât [that's where my grandfather shot it], dis hole."

And he put his finger in it.

"Well, it's O.K."

He walked. Anyway, he walked and den he met a woman. God, dey felled in love. He got married. And dey had two kids. While de kids...., in de story de kids grew up fast, a girl and a boy. Guy, she got to be a beautiful girl. De girl, when dey was laying in his tent he was well looking, jesus!, he liked her, you know, so he made a plan, dat he's gonna die, heh, heh. Anyway, he took sick. He was sick for two, tree days and he told his old lady: "If I die, he says, you wrap me up in a blanket and you make a scaffold up on de trees and you put me up dere. And den you move, over here der is lake he says. You move dere and you camp dere. And while you're dere, he says, a young fellow will come to de tent. And he says, you give him our daughter. ka-mîyo-pamihikowâw. He look after yous real good. kamîyo-pamihikowâw." O.K. Anyway, he died, and dey wrapped im up in a blanket, natê kî-do-wêwêkêwak dans un échaffaud. [They wrapped him on a scaffold]. So den dey moved away. kîpiciwak nêtê le long du lac. êkotê kî-kâpêsiwak, [they moved their camp farther near the lake. There they put up their camp] you see, êkwa [and then], oh, dey stays a while, all of a sudden dis young man come dans la tente, in front of de tent êkwa li garçon awa têpwâtêw: [and the boy shouts to him:] "ahaw, ahaw, nîstaw, pihtikwê!" [Hey, hey, brother-in-law, come on in!]" He call him nîstaw [brother-in-law] right away, you see, "ahaw, nîstaw, pihtikwê! pihtikwê!" So de guy come in he sat wit de girl right away, you see, beside de girl, and he talk and..., well, sure, he was married den. Miyâw ohi la fille! [he gives him this girl!] So a few days him, old Wisakecak awa, he go over wit his son hunting den and de son didn't know it was his dad. He tought it was his broder in law. Anyway, dey go hunting you know, and all of a sudden de old lady kinda notice nawac kostawêhimêw. [that he was scared of her] Mon dieu, [My God] so kîtahtawê itêw êsa sa fille êkwa son garçon: [one moment she said to her daughter and son]

"pê-pîhtikwê êsâ tasê." [come inside immediately]

"You wrestle wit im. ê-wî-tôtamâhkik. [that's what you have to do] You wrestle wit im."

"Eh, ma foi, tâpwê!" [but certainly!]

ê-mêtâwêwak you know dey played wit him ê-pîhtikwê-yi-t mêkwât ôki notinitocik ôhi la vieille awa yasi-pitam la brayet. [while she came inside while they were fighting that old lady she pulled down his breech-clout] she pulled down, ma foi, you could see de big scab on dere. And she said: macikuhkus! awa dans li sakâhk isôniyâhât, you know, he took off; he run, dat guy.

Den he was walking by a village and two little boys was playing.

tânsi kê-tamihkâ.

ayiito, one boy said:

"kipêhtên ci wisahkêcâhk otânisa ê-wîkimât?" [did you hear that Wisakechak married his daughter?]

"onec," he said.

Den he took off and dat was de end of his story.

He married his own daughter for a while but his old lady got im!

English translations of the Cree stories.

1. Wisahkecahk and the birches

Victoria Daigneault, Sakitawak, Saskatchewan

Wisahkecahk was walking around the lake. He saw things sticking on the rocks and he asked them:

"What's your names, my little brothers?"

"Sickmakers, they call us."

"You can't make anybody ill!" and then he started eating them. He kept on eating them, as if they were pancakes.

After that he went on to hunt. Then he saw a moose. Just when he was to shoot, he started farting and so he chased the moose. He was angry. He took a pointed stone and made it red-hot. Then he took it out of the fire and went to sit on it. His back-part was so sore. There came a wound.

After that he walked on, but he lost the scab of his wound on his way. When he came back on that same spot, he found the scab and ate it. He made the birds sing, because he was eating his scab. And he didn't know that it was not singing birds, he thought it was the birches.

"It is not my scab I am eating, it is the dry meat my mother had lost here."

But the birds kept singing. W. was furious. He made the scab into a ball and threw this to the birches, because he thought they were singing.

That's why still you can see W's scab sticking to the birches..

2. Why bears have no tail

May Desjarlais (+), spring 1988, Lebret, Saskatchewan

"1 I want to tell something (2) grandma told me (3) a long time ago when she used to tell myths. 4. There was a bear who wanted to go fishing with a rod. 4. He went on the lake and there was ice and snow all over. 5. He dug a hole. 6. He had nothing to fish with, (7) that's why he dug the hole. 8. Then the bear put his tail in there. 9. He was sitting there a long time. 10. It was freezing. 11. He waited, he waited, he waited. 12. Then, when he pulled his tail out, 13. it broke. 14. When he stood up again, he had no tail. 15. That's why today they [bears] don't have tails."

3. Mocassins for the dogs

Long time ago people used to travel with dogs and horses only. They made mocassins for the dogs when the ice was bad, so that they would not hurt their paws. Out of canvas they made the shoes for the dogs. They tied the canvas to the dogs' paws and they would tie it with a rope.

4. The Michif (Métis) language.

Margaret Desjarlais, Lebret, Saskatchewan

When the French Canadians came from across the ocean, they started to marry Indian women and then they had children. The Indian woman couldn't speak French to her children. The Frenchman couldn't speak Cree to his children, so he spoke to them in French. Therefore some of them learned to speak French and Cree. Therefore he speaks only French and Cree (mixed).

5. Joke.

Henry Daniels, Sturgeon Lake, Saskatchewan.

Long time ago there was a Cree hunter who found a mirror. He looked at it and he thought he saw his brother. But his brother had died a year before, so he thought he had found his portrait. When he came home, he showed his wife the mirror: "I found this, it is the one I love. Look at this portrait." His wife saw herself. She was angry when

she saw a woman, because she thought her husband 'had something' with the woman of the portrait. The woman showed the portrait of the lover to her mother. When the old woman saw herself, she yelled: "She is really ugly!"

6. The timber wolf

John Gosselin, Lebret, Saskatchewan.

'an old man was trapping, you see, and one morning when he woke up, he was sick, but still he went to see his traps. He left. In the meantime a storm broke out. It was bad weather. He got lost. He went back to find his place. He walked, he walked. But as he was sick, the man who was old, played out then. He sat down against a tree. "There I will die, he thought, "this is a good place to die." Then he saw that timberwolf running towards him. o, o. He kept looking at the wolf. He came running towards where he was sitting. End when the wolf opens its mouth to take him, the man pushes his arm forward in its mouth, right through the wolf. He takes the wolf by his tail and pulls him inside out! The wolf ran back home again. Ha ha ha!

7. God comes to visit.

Florence Nayneecassum, Atâhkakohp, Saskatchewan.

Once upon a time a woman was praying. God tested her four times.

God was to come and visit her. She was full of expectations about his visits. In the morning already she prepared a big meal with lots of things. She was cooking, because God was coming to visit her. And somebody was knocking on the door. She went to look, opened the door. There was a little boy with a cup to borrow sugar. The woman refused. She slammed the door.

And again, when the afternoon came, the woman cooked a lot. After a while again someone knocked. She went to see who it was. There stood a drunk woman who wanted a drink because she was thirsty. "No!" she said. "I don't want to have anything to do with drunks!" and again she slammed the door.

When it was time for supper, again she prepared lots and she stayed waiting for God's visit. When she was almost fed up with waiting, again someone knocked. She answered the door and there was a man who wanted to use the phone. He wanted to call the police, for there were some wounded people by the side of the road. But the woman refused and slammed the door again.

Much later she went to bed that night, after she had waited so long for God's visit. When she was laying in bed for a while, she saw a clear person in white and he talked to her. He said: "Three times already I came to visit you and all the times that I came you sent me away. You don't really pray."

T h a t ' s

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