

# The Boy from Buzwah by Cecil King

## CHAPTER ONE

### GROWING UP WITH PA, MAMA AND *Kohkwehns*

*Miigwetch, n'dikit, Wekomehyek Nongo Monpe Wenassamigabowitonegok—behmi Peetchi Zeetahyahn Dush N'ge Bigossenmah Wo Kina-gego Nehtahatod Wewedgeewid, Wee Moshkineshkawid Nebwakahwin Onje N'dahkodowinan Djeminokagoyeg . . .*

This was the prayer of my grandfather, John King. Before he spoke to a gathering, he would ask the Master of Life to make his mere words a good medicine to those who heard them.

The purpose of this writing is to finally set to paper the story of my life. This work represents that story and perhaps, more arrogantly, can be referred to as my memoirs. My name is Cecil King and I originate from a household prominent in the area called Two Clock. There I begin my life's saga.

I am *Odawa*. My grandfather maintained that, in the beginning, there were three biological brothers—*Odawa*, *Pottawatomi* and *Ojibwe*. Together, they were the *Anishnabek*. Over many years, they went their separate ways and, as a result, three separate nations were formed—the *Ojibwek*, the *Odawak* and the *Potawatamiik*. In the old stories, we are remembered as *Niswi Shkoden Wiikanendowin* (the Three Fires Confederacy). We, the *Odawak* were the younger brothers, the *Ojibwek*, the eldest brothers and the *Potawatamiik*, the middle brothers. To this day, we of the *Niswi Shkoden Wiikanendowin* speak the same language, reminding us that we are descended from the same ancestors.

We call ourselves *Anishnabek*. I am *Anishnabe*, which literally means, “I am a person of good intent,” or, “I am a person of worth.” Our people believe that we and other human beings are all fundamentally “good.” While we take pride in being *Anishnabe*, we see ourselves as part of the larger human community. We recognize all of humankind as the creations of *Kizhe-Manito* (the Great Benevolent Spirit).

My ancestors inhabited the lands adjacent to all the lakes and rivers in the middle of the continent in the area referred to as the Eastern Great Lakes Basin. In the centre of this region, on the north shore of Lake Huron, the part called Georgian Bay, is *Manito-miniss*, Isle of Manito—

or “Island of God.” The Old Ones say that Manito-miniss is a gift from the Creator to the Odawak and has been the traditional homeland of my people since time immemorial. We did not come from some faraway place; Manitoulin has always been our home. Our elders tell us this. In many stories, our Old Ones have told us about our beginnings and this is my attempt to share what I have learned. It is said that the Odawak travelled from our island all over this vast land in the four directions, from the Atlantic coast in the east, then westward to where the great Mississippi River divides the continent and then northward to the height of land, from where the rivers all flow the other way, then southward to the Florida Gulf. We lived and thrived, exercising our sovereignty over this vast land, living by the laws of the orders and respecting our reasons to be.

In the Odawa world view, there is only one law and that is *Enendagwad*, the Law of the Orders, prescribed by the Maker of all things. Creation came about from the union of the Maker and the physical world. Out of this union came the natural children, the Plants, nurtured from the Physical World—Earth, their Mother. To follow were the animalkind, the two-legged, the four-legged, the winged, those who swim and those who crawl, all dependent on the plant world and Mother Earth for succour.

Finally, last in the order comes humankind, the most dependent and least necessary of all the orders. Human beings, of all the Maker's creatures, are totally dependent. Our existence in the order of things is dependent upon the benevolence of those with whom we co-exist. Aware of this interdependency, our people looked on the other orders as our parents, siblings and kin. The Odawa worldview, then, is established on the belief that in the order of things, human beings are last. We are acutely aware of our interdependency on all the other orders. The Odawak respected the physical world, the plant world and the animal world, for without them there would be no life or meaning. Meaning exists in the interrelationships of things, in the way in which things happen together. We see that only together do things have meaning and become whole. I am from Two Clock, a suburb of Buzwah on the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve, Manitoulin Island, Ontario. Joe Jocko built a store. He felt there should be a name and that's when he came up with Two Clock. I lived on the bottom corner of Manitowaning Bay. It is there that I begin my first walk in life, over eighty eight years ago. I grew up in a household with my grandfather, John King (Pa), grandmother, Harriet King (Mama), his wife and an elder my brother and sisters and I called *Kohkwehns*. Over the years, there were many other people who

joined our household for different periods. My parents and siblings lived with us until I was about five when they moved to their own place. At times, a hired man lived with us. I don't remember his name. *Getaykwe* lived with us in the little shack behind the house until she died. She ate with us and Pa kept the fire going at her place so she wasn't too hot or too cold. Pa, according to family history, was the grandson of David Madjig who was not considered one of the "owners" at Wikwemikong, because he had arrived as a refugee in the 1840s from Beausoleil Island. His family was still considered "outsiders" by the original Odawa "owners" at Wikwemikong. Mama, on the other hand, was Odawa, the great-great granddaughter of J.B. Assiginack, spokesperson for the Odawak.

As a child, I knew I was Odawa but by the time I came along, the priests and the white government agents had told our elders that it was more important for children to learn English than Ojibwe (as our language was called) and that we should not know our stories, our songs, our ceremonies or pray to *Kizhe-Manito* in our traditional way. We were to become like all other Canadians. My grandmother was trained as a teacher and she brought me up in the style of a very strict Victorian school marm. She was determined to teach me to be a good person and a productive citizen.

Mama believed that I would need English to get along in the world. I was raised speaking English under Mama's watchful eye, but Kohkwehns was a very traditional person and she taught me many traditional things. I learned Ojibwe expressions from her when we would go together to pick medicines and berries or do the many other things which she wanted to teach me. She was determined that I would be a good human being who lived in harmony with the orders. Kohkwehns was midwife for my brother, Don, and me but was replaced by another woman for the birthing of my sisters, Liz and Loretta.

Kohkwehns was tall and seemed to tower over us. She was strong. She had silver-coloured hair, which was braided and she was about 70 years old. She wasn't really my grandmother; in fact, she wasn't anybody's grandmother. She was the teacher that stands out from all the others. Kohkwehns always made my world so important. No matter how simple or childlike my world was, she had a way of making it the most important thing of the moment. We always walked places. She always had things that needed to be done at a certain time. She knew where to go and on the way, she would find things to occupy our minds. When we were alone together, she talked

to me like an equal. I was the important person. The whole trip would turn out as if I had organized it myself. We'd go for water, pick strawberries, pick medicines or gather birch bark. And once a year, we would go on a pilgrimage to her old house. We'd just sit in it and always have a treat. When we went to her house, she'd find things to look at. There was an old Bible and old catalogues. When we got home, she'd relate stories about things I had done which were very simple but she made them very important. She'd say, "*N'gee-kitchi-bapah nongo maba* (I really laughed at this one today)." She had a pipe and I would steal matches from my grandfather for her. At night, she'd sit out in the shed and smoke her pipe and braid her hair. I remember trying to get a stump for her to stand on to cut bark higher up the tree. I could hardly budge it and she had to help me, but afterwards she made me feel that it was my strength that moved the stump. Mama King was the one who named us all. Where she came up with my name has always been a mystery. "Cecil" was a very English name in the midst of all the French names in the community. My friends, all of whom were growing up in Ojibwe-speaking homes, found a way to change my strange-sounding English name into something they knew. They called me *Cheesan* which means "Turnip." No other Ojibwe word came close.

I went through life thinking that I had only one name and it was a shock, to say the least, to receive my baptismal record when I was planning a trip to Mexico in 1975, to find that I did indeed have a second name. The baptismal record read: "Cecil Oraza King." What does one do with a name like Oraza? And what would my initials have been? Thank goodness my schoolmates never learned of this!

I grew up in a household of senior citizens as they would be called today. My parents and siblings lived down the road. We had all lived with my grandparents when I came into the world on February 22, 1932, but when my parents moved away to their own place, I stayed at Two Clock with the septuagenarians. When my parents moved away I remember Mama saying to me, "So you're going to leave us?" I ended up staying.

I guess Pa and Mama liked kids. I didn't know much about them. Like most kids, I didn't question what their younger lives were like. I was aware of the picture of Rose in an old alarm clock housing high up in Mama's room. I somehow knew that she was a child of Pa and Mama's who had died. That is as far as it went. As a student working on our genealogy, I found reference in the 1911 census to Alfred, a child living in the household of Harriet and John King. This may have been a brother of my father that we were never told about. So, I may have been more

precious to two people who had a history of lost children than I had any way of knowing. However it happened, I became like a son to the Old Ones.

Kohkwehns was the resident nanny. I was always left with her when Pa and Mama went somewhere. Kohkwehns always had things for us to do as soon as Pa and Mama drove off. We picked roots, went for birch bark, dug up different plants that she needed, or picked berries. In those times alone together, we used to talk. I could ask her any question that was on my mind and she'd stop what she was doing and make it a very important occasion to respond. It was in these sessions with Kohkwehns that I must have learned Ojibwe. My grandmother, as an old teacher, believed that it was her responsibility to teach me to speak English and so it was the language of the household when I was being addressed. But in those times when Kohkwehns and I were alone, we were in an Ojibwe world – Kohkwehns' world.

The Ojibwe language was spoken in our household, too, but only on certain topics. Mama spoke Ojibwe quite easily but as certain events took place, the language would swing into English. Kohkwehns, as I understand now, was a fluent Ojibwe speaker until she joined in at the supper table where she would enter into the world of English. Mama spoke only English at mealtimes but seemed quite comfortable in a treatise in Ojibwe. Pa spoke only English at the table, but when he needed to emphasize his topic or give it some import, he would come charging in in Ojibwe. He was never stuck for an Ojibwe word. So I might as well say that English was the language at the table but other times, other places, Ojibwe would take over.

We had a comfortable home. Our house was large compared to other dwellings in the Two Clock area, made of logs and stuccoed walls. It was two levels with the bedrooms all on the upper level and I slept upstairs. It is my impression that Pa built this home himself. Everyone built their own houses when I was growing up in Buzwah.

My first awareness certainly starts here. We were comfortable – Pa, Mama, Kohkwehns and I. We all united as a family unit, each with his/her own role and each played the role well. Pa farmed so we ate our own pork and mutton and drank milk from our own cows. Pa provided a good living for us. He seemed to always be cutting wood with my brother Don and Dad who cut firewood for their place as Pa did for ours. The house was warm and we were all cozy.

I had no alternative but to have a role in that, too. The wood had to be carried into the house, piled in a strategic corner, a practice that never varied and I knew, should I have tried something else, the fire in the house would have gone out. So, one of my commandments was never to be

late, otherwise Mama would soon be looking for me and I would endure a fitting punishment for my negligence. Kohkwehns was always my salvation for she would cover for me, one way or another. If Mama was particularly tyrannical, Kohkwehns would speak very quietly to Mama and try to tell her something amusing about me to make Mama at least smile.

This was routine life at home –never varied and always expected. I was content as long as Kohkwehns was there and I was comfortable –except when I started school. Things seemed upsetting to Kohkwehns and she had difficulties maintaining her roles in protecting me and appeasing Mama. Pa was always outside and never noticed the tyranny of Mama, though his involvement would seem futile as she kept out of his road to avoid crossing him.

Our lives had daily rituals. Pa would get up first and light the fire in the kitchen stove. He would sit beside it until it got going. Then he would fill the kettle with water dipped from the pail kept near the stove on the cupboard he made for it. He made coffee, when we could afford it, with the hot water. But tea was always ready. The teapot stayed on the stove and in the morning, what remained in the pot only needed a dash of hot water to be made ready again.

Pa kept a small cast iron black pot in the cupboard where the water pails sat. He would put just enough water in the little pot and put it on the stove. When the water was boiling, he got the bag of *ne-nah-be-gahn* (rolled oats) from its place on the shelf in the pantry cupboard. Pa measured the *ne-nah-be-gahn* by putting his hand into the bag and bringing out a precise amount for the boiling pot. He then stirred the porridge until it was ready for breakfast.

Life in Wikwemikong First Nation centred on the water. Growing up on Manitowaning Bay, our view always included water. Many teachings about the water came to me as a youngster. I did not learn to swim. Swimming was not a traditional activity. Our people feared the water and the water spirits who lived beneath. Kohkwehns cautioned me about the power of the water spirits. She said, “*Gi de be ne gwun midinahn.*” She said that the powers in the water would lure you into the deep water and you would drown. The spirit of the water would catch you walking near the shore, put a spell on you and the waves would suck you back into the deeper water.

I remember one afternoon when Mother and the rest of us were playing on shore. This was laundry day for Mother and Don, Liz, Loretta and I were playing in the water. We were swimming when, all of a sudden, Elizabeth disappeared into the deeper water. She was terrified and called for Mother. Mother flew into the water and saved Liz but this was an example of the

water spirit getting at us. We never went swimming there again. The water spirit became annoyed because we were making too much noise and disrespecting the water spirit.

Kohkwehns said that *Kwa shi* was the term for shipwreck or the “winds breaking the boat.”

Sailboats were *be mos igin*. The sail was the *mos*. *Dagowogda gi be boshkiiwuk* meant the “big waves would have crested” and would then enter the boat itself. If this happened a number of times, the boat would *gin dah un* (swamp). These were scary moments as it was felt that *Mishepeshu* (the Spirit of the Sea) was determined to sink your boat. Mishepeshu was a scary monster – it drowned people. This was in the minds of my seafaring people. Kohkwehns made sure I knew this and these stories.

Kohkwehns knew of shipwrecks. She had stories, some sad, but these tales were always told as a lesson. I had to know something from them. It seemed that Kohkwehns had arrived here by sea, though she was never clear where she had sailed from before settling in with Mama and Pa. This part of her life was private and she kept it to herself. I never knew exactly who she was or how she happened to be in our world. Small hints came out about her life and it may be that she was, in fact, Mama’s sister-in-law, the widow of Mama’s brother who we only spoke of as *Shoehn*. This would make her my great aunt by marriage in English terminology but this was never explained to me.

It seemed Pa had no problem with the arrangement. For Mama it was another thing; she always seemed to boss Kohkwehns. Mama scolded her at every opportunity, but Kohkwehns never seemed to mind. In my growing-up years, I watched this often and Kohkwehns never said anything. Pa and Kohkwehns got along, it seemed, and he used to tease her; they would laugh. She was always helpful in whatever Pa happened to be doing. I used to feel good when the two of them were together. Mama just totally ignored them.

Kohkwehns was a strong woman who could work with men on any task. She could chop wood and carry huge bundles from the boat when loading and unloading. Kohkwehns was there to help and, in fact, the loading or unloading never started until she was there in her place. She instructed me about work. There was an art to it, she used to say. She told me that some men never learned this and so they ended up hating work itself. This made the work harder to do, Kohkwehns would tell me. She taught me to like work. She used to tell me that if I saw someone working, I should edge my way in to help with the strength I already had. She said, “Never wait until you are invited to help. Just help! If the person doesn’t want your help, he will tell you but you will

know that he recognized that you know how to work.” This was Kohkwehns’ always-ready lesson. Some people just loved working and Kohkwehns understood what had to be done; usually I’d be there somewhere, busy at something she had set aside for me to do. And so, in my very early years, I knew a lot about what work was about. In fact, everyone learned this from Kohkwehns.

Mama tended the house. She seemed to like decorating, putting up fancy things like starched curtains on the windows. She would scrub the floor, although this was definitely one of Kohkwehns’ jobs. Mama would be there to criticize and stand over her. Scrubbing, I suppose was an art that only Mama knew and she was convinced Kohkwehns wouldn’t know. So it was up to her to show Kohkwehns how to do it. Our house was not exactly modern. Most of the walls were wallpapered, an art of Mama’s, though with the help of Kohkwehns. Some walls were wallpapered with basic newspapers. This would be Mama’s decision and that was all there was to it.

I found what I can only call *peace* in the atmosphere of our household after Mama had hung up a new set of starched cheesecloth curtains. I never knew how or where she got all the cheesecloth. This practice seemed to coincide with the festive seasons like Christmas or Easter. I knew our windows would be decorated and I knew it was Mama who would do this. This seemed to add to making a happy household. Pa and Kohkwehns never touched these curtains. I think this was out of respect for Mama—it was a silent thing. In the summer and spring months, these curtains were pulled aside and tied and lids with fly disinfectant now appeared. In the summertime we had to contend with the houseflies, as they were numerous. We never quite figured out the use of window and door screens. So swatting flies was a constant activity and an endless battle. Furthermore, refrigeration (although I did know what an icebox was) had not reached our household, adding to the fly invasion. Cool storage places like the basement or cellar of a home were used for preserving food.

Mama liked flowers and she would make bouquets for the house. She had what she called a tea rose in her flowerbed. I didn’t learn until much later in life that a tea rose was a special kind of rose not likely to end up in a flowerbed at Two Clock. I never thought to ask her where it came from; I guess I just thought that all plants were always there, but now I wonder where they came from. Her rosebush was in the bed beside the irises. When there were no flowers in her flowerbed, Mama would go into the fields and pick wildflowers for her bouquets.



Next to the house, which was Mama's domain, was the *Wigwamehnsing* which was Pa's domain. I would venture into this place which Pa kept so well-organized that he knew immediately if anything was missing. He had put evenly-spaced nails in the wall and hung a leather loop on each through which he could secure each of his tools in its own special place. I was a curious young man and wanted to know how everything worked. The workshop had a fascinating collection of levers, things to hit things with, things to fasten things with and things to demolish things with. I wanted to try them all. There was a vice, perfect for holding things, on a workbench. When things were broken in the house, they had to be fixed. Everything that was broken could be fixed. First, you had to take it to the *Wigwamehnsing* and clamp it to the vice. You had to look at it and decide how it could be fixed. If it was made of wood, you always had wood around to fix it. If it was tin, there were always rattail files on the wall in the leather loops where the tools were hung. I would use things to fix things and experiment with how things worked. I would fiddle around with tin and make something.

With Pa busy doing jobs to bring cash into the household, sometimes things that needed fixing around the place had to wait for him to attend to them. I remember that when I got big enough, I would sometimes decide to do the fixing myself. I built a wide gate once. I dug out the old posts and found enough lumber to make the gate itself. I had to attach chunks of iron to it. I got the bolts out that were there and placed them onto my creation.

I went into the bush, cut down a cedar tree, delimbed it and skinned it. I took our horse, Queen, into the bush with me. I wrapped a chain around the log and Queen dragged it home for me.

When I had dug out the old posts, I had made a nice hole. I decided to use Queen to put the new post in the hole. I blocked the hole and tied the small end of the log to the horse and pulled it up to a certain place where I could slip it into the hole. I pushed it different ways to make sure it was straight. I added gravel and stones to make it firm. Then I had to measure the bottom hinge into position. I put one in and then calculated the right distance for the other one. I remember I had to fuss and jiggle the gate until it slid into place.

*It swung.* I was so proud. I just sat all afternoon and watched the gate swing back and forth. Pa would never have taken the time to make another gate!

Mama, Kohkwehns, Pa and I bonded in every way that happens in a household. There were never any indecisions or ill feelings. Sometimes, approaching mealtime, I would get tired—like little ones are apt to do. At times, supper seemed to drag and never end. Kohkwehns liked to

make scones, which she did quite easily. Mama tended to do baking, something from the cookbook created especially for the meal. This baking was special and every one of us had to eat it. Mama would then speak to us all on the virtue of food and the respect we owed it and how lucky we were to have a plate loaded with food in front of us. This would go on for some minutes until Mama felt she had gone through everyone at the table. This happened many times and Mama left no one out. Everyone knew that each of us had a place in Mama's weekly tirade. Mama tended to complain constantly and about everything—the weather, the neighbours and her aches and pains. Pa would just listen. Kohkwehns always stayed in the kitchen. She kept an eye on the kitchen stove, keeping it going. She kept the kitchen clean, scrubbing everything. Kohkwehns never had an opinion as Mama would nip that in the bud, so she just kept quiet. She certainly looked after me. I knew she loved me. We used to have quiet visits and talk of many things. Kohkwehns knew a lot and had such wonderful stories.

Life at Two Clock in those days was uncomplicated. Nothing too chaotic ever happened and we were completely governed by the seasons and the weather, each month basically the same month over again. Nothing changed in the way we related to each other, even though each month had a different name.

Sunday meant two things—church and the Sunday papers. Every Sunday I was marched to church for confession because that's what the catechism said—you had to go whether you had sins or not. I remember one Sunday when Mama and Kohkwehns were trying to beat each other into the confessional so we could get out of church first. I was in the line and couldn't get ahead of the person in front of me. Then Henreh Pelletier jumped in front of me but Kohkwehns came out of nowhere and dragged Henreh back so I could get ahead of him into the confessional!

There were stories of priests who had come to the community long before I was born. There was one who was called *Behbahminwajimut* (the Bringer of Good News). Another called *Gizhigunung* (Day Star) was remembered for the way that he berated our people. My mother's mother was insulted that he called Indians "dogs" and he didn't stop at that. He went on to refer to us as "dog vomit." He lectured us on how despicable Indians were. He thought we were the lowest of the low. Even so, I was not allowed to analyze the behaviour of the priests. In my household, they were considered to be holy men, beyond reproach. My parents and grandparents did not allow me to question the priests' views.

Grandpa David Corbiere, my mother's father was known for being a very hard man. My memory of him is not as a hard man but a man who was very different from Pa. One of his characteristics was to yawn in church so loudly that everyone would stop and look at him.

After lunch on Sundays, Pa stoked up the fire in the other room and pulled out the reading material he had acquired during the week. I never knew where the newspapers came from or even whether they were current. I only knew that they appeared magically after lunch and were part of Sunday at my home. Pa read them and passed them on to Mama. She wanted to read them, too. So, Sunday afternoons, Pa and Mama passed the papers back and forth and discussed the events of the day. Occasionally I was dragged into their exchanges. I grew up in a household where the written word was enjoyed, savoured, explored and shared. Sundays were boring –and the only excitement was the turning of the pages of the newspapers.

I grew up in a bilingual/bicultural experience. I was aware that there were two patterns of speaking, two sets of behaviours and two ways of being. Most First Nations people grow up in a dual reality. For my generation, the two worlds were very distinct. You either stayed on the reserve or you left. If you stayed, your options were very limited. You could have a small farm with a cow, a pig and a small garden.

Pa had chosen to stay. Wabaginees, Pa's brother Charlie had stayed, too, but he became the postmaster and ran a small store. We had a small farm and small garden and we ate well. I remember in the summer, Mama made green pea soup with the first harvest. The peas were shelled and put into a broth made from salt pork. At the very last moment, Mama thickened the soup with a paste of flour and water. Later in the season, Mama made soup with a bone and whatever garden vegetables were available. New potatoes were a treat and fresh yellow beans made a very tasty soup. And, when corn came, the old family recipes for corn soup came out. Mama would cut the corn off the cob when it was very immature. In our part of the country, we had a very short growing season so Mama didn't take any chances with the corn freezing. In soup, these young kernels were very tender and tasted good. Mama had her own vegetable soup recipe. It always began with salt pork and onion then diced potatoes, green beans and the corn. Oh, how we loved it! *Nijeemnabow* (dried pea soup) was a special treat in the wintertime. It seemed we had it as a celebration.

Our fruit garden had a few apple trees and some plum trees. We picked wild plums; only some of them were sweet but we knew exactly which plants yielded the sweetest fruit. Kohkwehns was

the one we turned to for the secrets of the plant world. She had a source of knowledge that the rest of us didn't understand. But she knew things! Pa would prune them and they always bore fruit. Mama used to make applesauce, apple preserves and apple pies. Mama and I had a little game we played when she was preparing the apples for cooking; she would peel the apple so that the whole peeling was in a long spiral. She knew that I was just waiting to see how much of the spiral I could get into my mouth at one time.

We planted tomatoes and beets. Mama made chow chow from green tomatoes for us to eat during the winter. Cucumbers grew profusely but, as I remember, Mama never made pickles. We ate them fresh as they became big enough to eat. Our turnips were magnificent as long as Pa put King Bug Killer on the leaves.

*Mowizoh* (berry picking) went on all summer. It began in June when we were still at school. We used to crawl around on our hands and knees in the field next to the school and eat the *conjeeshun* (unripe strawberries). Nothing was left after a few recesses. *Puskominuk* (wild raspberries) came next and were picked all over the territory. *Pishkiigominan* (highbush cranberries) grew around Buzwah and Mama would boil them and squeeze the pulp through a piece of cheesecloth, usually one of the curtains. The resulting pulp was called *muskkiig mini pashkimin sigan*. As children we called it "toe jam" because that's what it smelled like!

*Boze* is a special word used to express all the things involved in picking blueberries. The word literally refers to getting into a boat (embarking), and because blueberry picking entailed going by boat to the berry-picking grounds, *boze* was used exclusively in that context. It encompassed all of the preparation for the excursion—getting the food ready for the trip, packing the tents and bed rolls, the berry-picking pails and other paraphernalia for storage, the cooking utensils and on and on. It is true to say that blueberry-picking time was a time of great anticipation and excitement for a little boy from Buzwah!

In the fall, we had *cusmonun* (pumpkins) which Pa would cut into pie-sized slices and cook in the oven. Then it was called *skaapkidehn*. The slow oven drying made the pumpkin sweet. We all looked forward to this treat. The land was not fit to grow any saleable crops. Being on limestone, the topsoil could not sustain much beyond what you could grow for yourself. In fact, the soil didn't grow certain things like carrots.

We had animals on our farm. We had three horses: Tony, Queen and Mikons. They were our horsepower for hauling wood in the winter and for planting and haying. In winter, they took us over the snow-covered roads and tramped the snow down so we had a road to walk on.

We had milking cows. So, like every farmer, Pa got up early every morning to milk the cows. He milked again in the evening, part of the natural rhythm of the household. Our lives were governed by such routines. It was good! It was almost as if the cows were part of the family. The same cows were there when I left the farm as had been there when I became aware of their presence. You might say we grew up together and Pa never butchered one. A relative, Jeannie Wakegejig had cows, too, and she was always worried about brucellosis.

The pigs were not so lucky; we ate them. If it was a sow, it bore little pigs that were not allowed to get too big because Pa didn't think he could look after them properly. He seemed to know the optimum size to keep the herd of all the animals so that we were self-sufficient and the animals had a reasonably contented life. Pa felt that when you got too many of anything, the quality of life went down for all the animals. So, even though we ate pork, the number of pigs and cows stayed the same. We butchered the pigs and smoked the meat in our own smokehouse which Mama managed with her usual tyrannical reign. Pa did all the butchering himself and I was his unwilling helper.

Pa experimented in anything he did like *zeetaginigokosh* (salt pork making). He would acquire a large oaken barrel from a grocery store in Manitowaning. The barrel had been a container for molasses (treacle) and when it was emptied, the barrel was normally discarded. This barrel would still have its walls painted with a coat of the *kitchi jiwagamisiggan* (semi-sweet molasses) which added a sweet flavour to the pork. Pa would butcher the pig carcass into kitchen-stove-sized pieces and pile it into the molasses barrel with handfuls of salt and a splash of warm water. This gave us our ham, side pork slices, bacon and roast parts. Nothing was wasted.

Headcheese was made out of the head. The pork skin was baked and used in baked beans. Bacon was made in the smokehouse beside the house which had been made before my time. It was closed in and covered with tin. I think my cousin, Eli King, made the smokehouse but it had become Mama's over time. The ceiling of the smokehouse had poles used for drying and smoking fish. The fish were hung over the poles, but if we were out picking blueberries or camping we would dry fish on a frame in the sun.

Kohkwehns and Pa would save the intestines and inner organs and start what was called *nugish* (blood sausage). The first step was to stab the pig and let it bleed out into a receptacle; literally, the pig would simply bleed to death. The blood was caught and saved and set aside. The organs—lungs, kidneys, heart and pancreas—were removed from the viscera and placed in a large cast iron pot with hot water and then boiled until thoroughly cooked. Strips of side pork were placed in another pan to be roasted in the oven. The biggest part of this operation, of course, was the emptying of the intestines and turning them inside out, thereby emptying the undigested food and washing them carefully to remove any remnants of feces. Meanwhile, Kohkwehns and Mama peeled dozens of onions. Mama said that she had found a way to peel onions without crying. They cleaned heads of celery previously acquired for this occasion and diced the vegetables. Now Mama took on the big job of grinding the cooked meat in the food chopper along with the onions and celery pieces. The roast meat was important to the sausage for flavour and the roasted fat. The collected blood, now in a large pan, was salted down and peppered and the finely chopped up meat was mixed into the blood along with flour for thickening. The intestines were now ready for filling with the mixture of meats and salt and pepper, having been carefully cleaned using a funnel specifically for this purpose. Mama calculated these intestines into two-to-three-foot lengths and filled them with the mixture. They were secured and placed in a big pot of boiling water. This finished the *nugish*. The intestines were watched and tested for firmness before they were removed from the pot and set aside.

Pa and Dad were grub farmers. A team of horses, a plow, a disc and a mower were the extent of the farm equipment and with these instruments we tilled the soil. A farm, of course, is influenced by seasons and so one can see which implements pertained to a particular season. I do not think that either Pa or Dad was the absolute farmer type but they performed as committed farmers as everyone else in the area. I did not like farming and swore I would leave the land as soon as I could. Very early in life, I could manage the farm. Driving horses, while interesting, had no appeal and since Pa could not afford a tractor, in spite of all his proclamations, I'm not sure if even a tractor could have enticed me to farm life.

I was not cut out to be a farmer; my boyish impression of farming was that you shovelled manure all winter and then your feet were muddy or dirty the other seasons. I'm sure that my lack of suitability for a career in farming was perfectly clear to Pa. Just as my dad had escaped the drudgery of farming to "work out" it must have been abundantly clear to Pa, Mama and

Kohkwehns that I was going to run as fast as I could from the farm when the opportunity presented itself. But, as long as I lived on the farm, I was the resident helping hand for just about everything.

We had our own flock of chickens, the ones that were known as good layers. Pa favoured White Leghorns and Rhode Island Reds. I guess he got his knowledge of the gifts of different chickens from the industrial school or the Wikwemikong Agricultural Society and his trips to the Royal Winter Agricultural Fair in Toronto. If he happened to get a chicken which grew into one of the breeds that he didn't like, that chicken was destined for Mama's stew pot or roasting pan. We ate eggs from our own chickens and I used to pick them up. There is nothing that feels as good as a warm chicken egg!

Easter breakfast was always special. Mama would colour the eggs when she cooked them. She had onion skins to dye the eggs yellow, raspberry preserve juice to make the eggs red and dyes from the store to make other coloured eggs. We had boiled eggs as the main course; even though boiled eggs were eaten on other occasions, somehow the coloured boiled eggs of Easter were extra special.

We had another poultry enterprise; we grew turkeys to sell. We never had the problems that I have heard of turkey breeders these days who talk of overcrowding, or the turkeys smothering each other when they are frightened. I remember our turkeys as sturdy, strong and healthy birds. We had one hen and our flock consisted of as many chicks as she nurtured. There was a time that I didn't have a dog; my dog died and Mama chose a turkey to be my new pet. So, perhaps I have a soft spot for turkeys!

Pa got about twenty poults in the summer to be raised and sold for Christmas. A buyer came to Mastin's Store in Manitowaning about a week before Christmas. Pa hitched up the horses and delivered our crop, all cleaned and plucked and was paid immediately. The money came in handy to buy the extras for Christmas dinner.

We had sheep, not just for their meat, but for their wool as well. Pa would shear them and Mama had a *Beemtaygun* (spinning wheel) where I learned how to spin wool. I remember that I made one ball of yarn one winter. I had a real feeling of satisfaction in being able to take wool and make it into yarn and then watch my grandmother knit woollen socks for Pa. It was so good to be able to see the whole process from sheep to socks.

Fall brought the harvest and threshing time was exciting. Bob McMullen and Mr. Little had an itinerant threshing machine that circulated around the reserve and when our turn finally came, it was a big bee and all the neighbour men came to help. Our crew were all good workers: Eli King and his brother Blaise, John Bearfoot, Ben Kanasawe and Dad when he wasn't away working somewhere. One time the threshing machine went through the floor of the barn. When the grain was in the barn it was a big occasion. The men loved it and there was a big feed.

In our household, Mama kept her strict schedule as soon as the fall fair was over. Anything that needed to be "put up" just sat and piled up until the canning pot appeared. It was scoured and made ready for whatever fruit or vegetable was available. Mama would start with plums. First, she would measure the amount of white sugar to be mixed in with the fruit. As the sugar and the water boiled down, the plums were washed and sorted for maturity to eliminate the possibility of missing rotten plums this early in the canning process. The plums were added immediately to the pot of boiling syrup and while they were cooking, Mama scoured a number of fruit jars, perhaps 30 at first, to make them ready for the canning which was now in full swing. The jars would be taken downstairs and arranged on shelves along the wall that Pa had long ago been ordered to build. Pa was never amenable to building shelves and I think Mama knew this and forced him to do it each year anyway. Once the plums were finished and safely in their respective bottles, strawberries were next. Then, perhaps she would preserve a run of peaches, depending on the harvests of southern Ontario. Mama would can all fall and we would eat preserves for many meals; this mushy fruit was a tasty diversion from our usual fare. This preserving for the winter lasted about three weeks before Mama would say the cellar was full and it was time to stop for the year.

We always had lots of tomatoes. Pa planted seeds in cans and the plants would be about six inches high by the time that the ground was warm enough in the back of the garden where Mama created her tomato patch. At the end of the growing season, if tomatoes on the plants were still green, they were picked and packed in boxes with brown paper to ripen. In mid-winter, Mama would surprise us with a ripe red tomato and make a wonderful omelette for breakfast.

In the winter, Pa supplemented our larder with fish. Ice fishing was an art. First, you had to chop a square hole about a length-and-a-half of the axe handle when laid on its side. You'd have to cut several holes in a row the length of your net. Then, you had to get your new cord which you would tie to a pole a little longer than the distance between the holes. You tied your line to the



stick and shoved it through the hole. Someone would catch the stick through the other holes to send the net to the end of the holes. This was called *ziibasigoge* which merely means passing from one hole to another under the ice. This stick was pushed with another crotched stick to move the net along in the water until the whole length of the pole reached the end of the holes which was the length of the net. When Pa found the pole at the other end, he had to raise it out of the water so that he could get the twine. After he caught the pole and pulled it out, he tied it across the hole. Pa would go back to the first hole to tie the twine at the first end. This meant that the person at one end pulled the net along with the twine to the end of the holes. Then that person tied the net to another pole across the hole. After that, Pa and I only needed two holes to lift the net, although you needed perhaps five holes in a straight line. Every Saturday we went and cut a hole in the ice at one end where the net began and another where the net ended and then in the same manner as when the net was set, it was pulled along by the twine to raise it. If a fish was in the net you *geetanamegwe* (disentangled the fish from the net). Once that was done, the net would be set again and the hole covered with balsam branches as a warning marker for others. The fish would be put in the fishnet box with slanted sides. The box was used for storing the net but when we caught lots of fish, it was also used to carry the fish home. Mama would be so excited that she would immediately grab one fish, clean it, cut it into pieces and heat up the frying pan. When supertime arrived, we would have a meal of beautifully-fried fresh fish. In the winter this was a delicacy. The rest of the fish were gutted, scaled, salted and placed in a barrel to be eaten later.

Winter, a season of virtually six months from November to April, was a quiet time when people seemed to hibernate. In our household, a simple outing to Manitowaning was an invigorating experience. We met new acquaintances and strengthened old relationships. At the end of this one day, everyone would return to their individual isolation, as was done every winter. When there was a church service at Buzwah Church the winter tranquillity would be broken by the forlorn pealing of the church bell signalling the gathering of the flock. This seemed to be more of an occasion for gossiping than for one's salvation because it was one of the few times during the winter when all the neighbours came together. Pa was a very important member of the church choir as he knew the Latin liturgy and led the laic participation in the service. Mama was there, too; she sang in the choir or played the organ. Many of our extended family were good singers and musicians. My cousins, Stella, Josephine, Rose and Stan (Wabigneess' family) were always

in the choir. Aunt Elizabeth was always involved in church activities. When it was needed, Stella could play the organ. I particularly remember us all performing in the Mass in G. We didn't have a director and more or less taught ourselves. As I got older, I could sing with the tenors or the basses depending on the piece and the attendance.

The church was heated by a huge box stove that Ben Kanasawe would have stoked up long before the priest arrived. I do not recall ever missing Sunday Mass. I suppose this was because Mama, Pa and I were well inculcated with Catholicism and believed that missing Sunday Mass was, in fact, a mortal sin. Pa and Mama had both spent part of their younger years at the Wikwemikong Indian Industrial School and, under the religious order of the Jesuits and Daughters of Mary, that experience had a permanent effect on Pa and Mama, so much so they were "dyed-in-the-wool" Catholics.

In those days, winters were winters and snowdrifts were expected and someone to *dwaage* was expected –it just happened winter after winter. Things were done the same way every winter. When people stayed indoors, a box stove provided warmth but the stove required firewood which meant having a trail to the bush to transport a load of wood back home. Firewood in our household was made every day, enough for that day only. Pa went into the bush, selected an old tree, cut it down, loaded it on the bobsleigh and hauled it home where it was sawed into stove-length pieces. Some splitting was done with the splitting-axe and when all this had happened, all that remained was to carry the wood into the house where it was piled in the same place every day to feed the box stove and the kitchen stove for cooking and a bit more heat.

Home in the wintertime was very cozy. Generally, we stayed in to watch the winter blizzard outside as it created snowdrifts, burying our trails. This never changed. Winter after winter, someone would *dewaagaanege*. Since we lived on a farm, we had farm animals to winter, which required animal shelters. Pa had pigs, sheep, some cows and, of course, the horses. This required daily chores. In the morning, we had to let the animals out, put feed outside and prepare a drinking trough with fresh water. The horses and cows were punctual about getting a drink. The pigs survived on kitchen slop. At the end of the day, we did the reverse of the morning chores. When we opened the barn doors, the animals would immediately file in and go into their individual stalls. Pa would then feed them hay which had been cut the summer before and stored in the barn hayloft. Nothing varied. Each day was the same day all over again. We had milking

cows and someone had to milk them. The milk was collected, brought into the house and separated. The cream was set aside for making butter.

The one chore that bothered me most in the keeping and feeding of animals was dealing with the manure. The amount that was manufactured required a particular day, every week, dedicated to shovelling it. Pa had two wheelbarrows which he used and one for me to haul the manure to a pile just outside the barn door. As I remember, this thankless chore happened Saturday morning and every Saturday morning was like every other Saturday morning.

In the winter when there were the usual blizzards, there were times I could not get to school. Where we lived was a bit of a distance from the school and the road was impassable after each storm so I had to wait for the *dewaagaanege* to break a trail. Since this, too, was expected, staying home was not a big deal. I suppose the teacher simply made allowances for this and there were times I could go nowhere, winter day after winter day.

All Saints' Day broke the monotony of early winter. November 1 was the day we honoured the dead. Actually, it was a day of visiting and eating. Kohkwehns used to say, "You never get overfull," even though you were fed at every house.

Christmas also broke the winter monotony. My first awareness of Christmas was quite early in the scheme of things. Mama had a calendar from the church and had a general knowledge of the Christmas story. The old priest at church for that Sunday opened with that story and implied that Christmas Day be observed like a Sunday and then told us a bit about the practices in other northern communities. These were customs practiced the world over. Mama had the knowledge in our household and could tell the customs of Christians; she more or less told us it was a good time and people agreed to be good to each other. Even the whole idea of gift giving was described to us.

Christmas was about having a household feast and we got ready for it—cooking and decorating. The Christmas bird, a goose, was very exactly prepared for the Christmas table. There was Christmas cake served with dumplings and icing, an extra-special treat made only once a year. Christmas became even more special when a day was set aside to go to the church before the Sunday of Christmas to decorate. Mama was very handy and had a taste for decorating. Kohkwehns was not so Christmassy, because she would not have known the images and colours of Christmas. But Mama knew all the history of Christmas and missed no occasion to instruct someone about it.

One particular Christmas, I remember a taxi arriving at the house from Little Current and the passenger was a woman called Rose Lewis. Mama was elated. Rose was her cousin and she had not seen her for a long time. The visiting began immediately. Cooking was forgotten as visiting was too important—to catch up on relatives, those who were still living and those already gone. Rose, herself, was a historian of some import and she knew everyone Mama talked about. The gossip was rampant and Rose was as grateful for it as Mama was. Kohkwehns moved into the corner as she had no knowledge of the people that Mama and Rose Lewis were talking about. Kohkwehns didn't mind as she knew an opportunity would come along when she would be a source to verify Rose Lewis' stories. Mama just let this go by and Kohkwehns remained on the outside of that gossip session. However, Rose never missed a beat and could almost keep score and add to the milieu. Pa stayed in the barn and created odd jobs for himself. This was the beginning of Christmas in the King household. With the days becoming shorter, darkness would descend early.

That first night after Rose's arrival, the visiting drifted to many topics until Mama said she wished it was possible to visit her remaining relatives—if only there was some form of transportation. It was Rose that opened with, "Well you have horses in the barn. We could hitch them up and maybe have Cecil drive them." That is what happened. Pa didn't want to go anywhere but was in favour of lending his team of horses as long as there was someone to drive them and that's how I ended up hitching up the horses and driving to Wikwemikong from Two Clock. Mama was thrilled with the idea as she, more than anyone, never went anywhere—according to her, of course.

It was dark when we took off on our journey—and it was a dark, dark night. Since I did not know anything about driving horses any distance, I did not know to take enough hay to feed the horses upon our arrival in Wikwemikong and during the next day. I had no way of knowing at whose place we would wind up—and, of course, Mama had no idea, either, but we were convinced this would resolve itself when we arrived in Wikwemikong which is kind of what happened. Mama and Rose seemed to know a few places, so we struck out for them. The first place, as it turned out, was the residence of Joe Atchitawens, Mama's first cousin. We rapped on the door and when Joe answered, he was dumbfounded when he discovered Mama and then Rose Lewis. He was elated, stoked up the fires in the house and the visiting started immediately. Joe was just as glad to see Mama as Mama was to see him. Rose had not seen him for a year, so there

was some catching up to be done and Joe had lots of stories to tell his guests. A trip of this kind certainly meant an overnigher. Some bedding was borrowed from next door as this topic became clarified. Joe was very hospitable and knew fully what had to be done on these occasions. The arrival of guests was an unusual event and proper respect was taken for granted. No one ever left hungry, especially at Christmas.

Joe had stoked his stoves so his home was nice and warm. Mama and Rose chose the bedroom upstairs where there was lots of room. It was only then that Joe asked me about the horses which were still outside where I had left them tied to his gate. I had no idea what I was going to do for the horses although Pa had always insisted that your first concern upon arriving at your destination had to be the horses. I talked to Joe and he understood what I needed and suggested his small wooden barn where I could unharness the horses and feed them. Fortunately, I had brought an armful of hay—hardly enough for a team all night. But for now, this would have to do. Since Joe did not have any hay himself, he suggested that we go to Jerry's place the next day and use his hay, as he had lots. Jerry was Joe's brother which would make him Mama's first cousin as well. Mama ordered that someone go to Jerry's house and inform them of her arrival. My horses were fed and we bedded down for another night's stay and another night's lodging was resolved. The gossiping never stopped.

This was my first excursion with a team of horses. I had a lot to learn. Mama caught up on all her relatives and, of course, Rose Lewis learned of her distant relatives. By now, food was mentioned (I suppose since the horses had been fed) and the cooking began.

We left Wikwemikong to go back to Two Clock with a good feeling and made some sort of arrangement for Rose to get back to Little Current as the visiting was now over. I felt somewhat fulfilled and realized what was expected when you were in charge of a team of horses and took them from their barn. You have a responsibility. I will always remember Pa meeting me on our return from Wikwemikong. The first thing he wanted to know was, "Did you feed the horses?" and I had to explain. Rose Lewis phoned for her cab to return to Little Current. Mama's Christmas was over and she was satisfied with Rose's visit as, in her own terms, this was the icing on the cake.

That was the year I was inculcated with the mystique of horse sense. It wasn't enough to assume my horses would be all right after I had gotten them to another area of our farm. I arrived. I unhitched, watered and fed them. The horses knew their own comfort and they reminded me that

there were some duties when the horses knew the day was ending and the driving was over. Every day was the same and the horses knew that. Horses are affectionate animals and believe in their master but only if the master is in sync and the farm is run under his direction.

I remember the first Christmas that I convinced my grandmother to have a Christmas tree in the house. I went out into the bush just behind the house and found just the right tree. It was a little fir and I cut it down and brought it home. This was where Santa left my presents—under the tree. On Christmas morning when I got up, I found a little bag tied at the top. It was a bag of pennies. Next to it, Santa had left a long flat box. It turned out to be a game of Parcheesi.

Santa Claus was a tradition very strong among my grandparents. Christmas presents for the kids would be prepared and put under the tree and the house would be decorated. The children knew that Santa Claus would not come unless they were all asleep. When the crowd came home in the middle of the night, I could hear them laughing and talking but I had to get up early to go to Christmas Day service at Buzwah Church so I didn't get up. I had my responsibilities on Christmas morning along with other village boys Herman, Napo and Gawgee, I was a server at Buzwah Church services.

Christmas Day began with getting the turkey or goose ready for the big Christmas dinner, the main event. We would all dress up in new or semi-new clothing, special for the occasion. A new tablecloth materialized from somewhere and the best silverware was selected for the table. Pa sat at the head of the table and carved the roasted turkey. My, how our mouths watered as the meal was being served. Pa just loved that. Everyone had to eat and no one was left out. Those who were too shy to eat, Pa would give them hell right at the table. We ate this meal together, filling the table with twice as many eaters as we were used to—my brother, Don, Dad, Mom and my sisters, Liz and Loretta, Kohkwehns and any other relatives that happened to be around. The meal was a spectacular event that I remember very well. We really celebrated the Christmas holiday.

By now, the winter season would be in full swing. There would be lots of snow to contend with and Pa shovelled from the main door of the house out to the barn. If he wanted me to do this job, he usually gave me the order and I was obligated to do this chore. I had no difficulty shovelling; it was easy.

As the winter progressed, snow piled up and footprints of wild animals were everywhere. It was then that Dad went trapping, a skill I did not know he had. However, he had a trapline in the

forest behind our house and I followed Dad's tracks on the trail to see how to set traps and studied the art of trapping. Pa had never taught me; neither had Kohkwehns, even though she also knew how to run a trapline. I discovered Dad had an assortment of metal traps which he boiled in the household soup pot with sweetgrass before they would be strategically set in spots in the bush where animal tracks seemed plentiful, especially in places where they ate. That seemed to be all that was required. Dad was an intriguing individual and treated his trapline the same way. Animals were trapped and then the carcasses had to be skinned. Each skin was stretched out on its own frame and hung to dry. I learned the skills of skinning from Dad and Kohkwehns taught me about making the frames to stretch the skins.

At some time in the winter, Pa would tell Dad to tie up his fur skins and send them to Winnipeg. This was an important occasion and Dad would send his fur bundle out from Manitowaning Post Office and wait for a cheque to come, signifying the value of his fur trapping. I never knew whether this was good or bad, but it was a skill I learned from my Dad. I had learned how to snare rabbits; Kohkwehns taught me how to make snares. By this time, I had learned what snare wire is and that it was rather cheap to buy. I remember borrowing twenty-five cents from Kohkwehns to buy some from Charlie Hind's store in Manitowaning. That winter, Pa gave me a sharp-bladed jackknife and only Pa and Dad owned ones like it. It was a genuine Joseph Rodgers which Charlie Hind sold. When sharpened on the household grindstone, you owned a very sharp jackknife. I never forgot the brandname and that it was bought in Manitowaning; it was the only type that would do.

The same winter of trapping, I learned how to fashion my own slingshot. My friend, Gawgee had one made by John Bearfoot, a precise instrument used only for hunting. Napo, his brother, would take it from the house near Two Clock. I remember when I first saw it – Napo showed it to me right after he had taken it from John Bearfoot's house. This was a masterpiece both in carving and the cutting of rubber straps. And we would use it to hunt and hit things. Thus began the world of the slingshot. I understood how to make one and soon became very proficient in how to use it as well. This opened a new world for the boys at Buzwah School, since now every boy of some worth owned his own slingshot and we used them to kill rabbits, squirrels and certain birds. Our skills were infamous – around Buzwah, at least. It was during this time that I opened a fur-buying project. I bought squirrel pelts, traded rabbit skins and even traded ducks from the Two Clock stream. I would always be asked, "*How did you do your kill?*" and I would say, "*By*

*myself with my slingshot.*” As the fur trader, I paid up to twenty-five cents a pelt. I had some money and could pay for my pelts, but it was always the slingshot that settled any deal. I became famous for acquiring squirrel pelts. This was fairly easy but my skills increased.

I could fashion a slingshot in one afternoon, even when I was still in Buzwah School. For crafting a slingshot, you had to find a white ash tree with a symmetrically-croched limb—that is, having a yoke-branched limb. I used to walk much of our hardwood bush to find the right white ash tree with the proper limb formation and I was pretty good at spotting these. All that was left was to cut the branch, take it home, peel it and hang it from the rafters of the house. This “Y” branch needed to be symmetrical which required some strategic tying across the two prongs of the stick and letting it dry that way. Some carving would be required and then the rubber bands had to be obtained. I found you needed a genuine rubber tube from the car to make these straps which you then tied with store twine, in a loop on each branch of the dried, forked branch. I found tying a leather pocket at the centre of the rubber straps attached to the croched limb could become a detonation chamber and had to be made very precisely for overall accuracy. After this, all that was necessary was to take the completed mechanism to the bush with a pocket full of stones—half-inch projectiles found in river bottoms, the ones we found most accurate for our weapon. At 50 feet, these slingshots were deadly. I found that with the right attitude, I could drop a squirrel or rabbit with one stone. Kohkwehns was good with a slingshot, too, and she used to help when we had treed a squirrel. We rarely lost one. Kohkwehns used to cook the squirrel carcasses for me and my buddies Herman Kanasawe, and Joe and Albert Whiteloon. We’d have a feast after she had cooked our prey. I always ate with them.

The winter, the snowdrifts and the cold weather wended their way, day after day, month after month. Pa and Dad chopped wood for our house fires and Kohkwehns launched into her craftwork with birch bark. Kohkwehns used the scraps and trimmings from the birch bark left from the building of a large canoe. Then, she made eight inch souvenir canoes for the tourist trade. She made them to order for Ed Cummings at Manitowaning Lodge. It never was a rate where she could get wealthy but Kohkwehns was humble and proud to be able to supply groceries for the household. Beyond having to shovel snow, tend the cattle and plow the roads, our lives settled into a form of hibernation and we lived a very calm, slow life. I hung snares for rabbits and occasionally caught a partridge and even a deer once. Pa had shown me how to do



this. This was an exciting occasion, one to remind the household of some cultural practices as well as to be thankful for the Creator's bounty.

For Pa and our household, the first exceptional day in the winter was March 10. While the month of March would have already established whether it came in like a lion or a lamb and foretelling its prediction for the end of the month, March 10 was the first reminder that spring was on its way and winter was perhaps over. Pa declared it as the day that the crows came back. He would scan the horizons in search of the first crow sighting. Based on his obvious belief in the date, Pa would announce at the supper table that he had, indeed, seen the first crow. I was never sure if he had actually seen one but with his declaration, we were all certain that spring had come. It was unthinkable that March 10 would not bring a crow to Two Clock.

Things now began to change. We could speculate on when to start *Sisibâktokaying* (sugar-making season). *Mânakiking* (the maple trees) would have to be tapped and *wiigwas naganun* (birch bark dishes) or tin cans made ready to collect *sisibâkwatâbo* (sap, literally sugar water) dripping from the spile. Pa would go to Manitowaning to buy some new spiles as he did every year. Since money was scarce, Pa could only buy a few of them, not more than he needed. Rust ruined the spiles which had to be replaced after a single season it seemed.

Pa used a half-inch wood auger bit that he had among his pile of tools for tapping maple trees in a bush right next to the house. By the time I left home, Pa had started to cut down the maple trees, one by one, for firewood for the house.

The maple sugar-making season began as the days got warmer. Firewood had to be chopped for the fires that would heat the cauldrons or evaporators that would make *kijiga ininatigon* (the sap, literally that which leaks from the maple tree) into *jiwâgamisigan* (syrup). We would be involved in the *Zhigigewin*, the art of tapping maple trees. Since Pa was a *kikohnsekowinini* (tinsmith), he had acquired the old fireboxes and other furnace parts from the band schools which he fashioned together to make an evaporator. Originally, the furnaces would have burned coal and they had grates in them which made very good heaters for evaporators. Pa would make evaporator pans for anyone who had something to make fire in that he could attach the pans to. Pa created a large low pan from sheets of tin which he then set on top of the furnace fireboxes. As soon as the sap began to run, a wood fire was started and the collected sap was poured into this pan. Basically, the whole process involved the daily collecting of sap and keeping a good fire going in Pa's furnace contraption.

Pa tapped about 50 trees in our maple grove, some with two spiles. Everyone who collected sap had a carrier like a yoke on their shoulders to carry two pails at once. A trail was made, no matter how deep the snow was. Pa and I would go from tree to tree. I was the official helper to carry the tools, the spiles and the birch bark dishes or tin cans. Kohkwehns would make the *wiigwas naganun* to be placed on the ground at the root of a tree, supported by a pile of flat stones. She was the expert on *naganun* placement and she called herself *Iskigamisigekwe* (sugar-making woman). I had to find the stones for her. When I was helping the Old Ones, we were in a transition between the old way and the modern way. Tin cans, the modern receptacles hung from the spile after we poked a hole through the tin so that they could attach to the metal hook on the bottom of the spiles.

On a good day's run, we had to collect the sap every two or three hours. I can remember the first maple sugar seasons when I was very young but old enough to know what tree tapping was. Pa shaped an iron chisel in his blacksmith forge and then ground it sharp. This was the tool he used to notch the maple trees. In the notch was stuck a short 12- to 18-inch length of cedar which directed the flow of sap into the *nagan*. This predated the era of spiles. The split piece of cedar was flat and about two inches wide. Pa hit it hard enough to wedge it in a notch. The cedar was already sloped and when he made the notch, the cedar length was hammered into the tree on an angle. After he collected the sap, he boiled it in four cauldrons which he had made himself. He made maple syrup equipment for whoever needed it. When he got enough tin cut, he would get his muriatic acid, his blowtorch and his soldering iron. He would steal a zinc ring from Mama's fruit sealers and put it in the muriatic acid, make a paste and rub that on the edges to be soldered with lead, sealing all the seams. It's a wonder we weren't all poisoned!

When the sap was running, Pa would boil all day and into the night. So the wood and sap had to keep coming. That's where I came in. I would take the horse and drag a log out of the bush to where Pa was boiling. He would chop it up for the fire which was essential to the whole operation. I had to run home from school to go to collect more sap.

I grew up in the time of transition from wooden spiles to metal ones, from collecting in birch bark dishes to collecting in tin cans and from boiling in cauldrons to boiling in an evaporator. I had time to hate boiling sap in cauldrons as this system took too much wood—and guess who had to haul it! Pa's evaporator contraption was a God-send to me as it didn't burn so much.

To convince ourselves that a boil was finished, the maple syrup was tested numerous times. One method was to take a teaspoon of the syrup and drip it into a glass of cold water to see if it would make a ball. When it made a ball it was done. Although this was the final test that told them that the syrup was ready, the preferred method was to taste the syrup with a slice of scone!

When the syrup was ready, it was bailed out of the evaporator pan until there was just a little left and then the evaporator was tipped and the syrup poured out of one corner into a big brass cauldron. At one time, these pots had been government-issue and the only time you could tell they were brass was when Mama cleaned them with a stone and they shone a yellow colour! This pot, known as the *Zekwekik* (boiling down pot), was used for the final boil.

Meanwhile, back at the house, Mama would have been scouring fruit sealers for storing the syrup. She would have supervised the final boiling down of liquid from the evaporator and the brass pot would have been carried to the house. Mama bottled the syrup after determining the exact moment to take it off the stove. Only she knew this!

There were at least two other processes which took place at least once during the maple sugar season. A portion of the syrup was boiled down in a cast iron frying pan until it became taffy. To make this an occasion, there had to be some clean fresh snow around. The taffy mixture was poured on the snow where it instantly hardened. Oh what a grand time—a once-a-year treat for us all! Another day, a batch of the taffy would be pulled to make candy.

A small amount of *sisibaskwat* (maple sugar) would be made using the *mucukonson* (little birch bark boxes) that Kohkwehns made for us. The syrup was cooked until just the right moment before it *n'sesin* (crystallized). It was removed from the heat and immediately poured into the *mucukons*. It cooled to a sugar consistency in the little boxes. This was another real treat and I can't forget Mama's sugar pie, a favourite of the season.

Pa was the one who determined when the sugar-making process ended. In the morning at breakfast, he would say, "*Ishkwaga!*" and we knew it was time to remove the spiles, gather the cans, dismantle the evaporator pan and stand it upright by the stove. It was the end of another season and everyone knew it would be the very same next year.

Spring brought *Namehbinak* (suckers) to the river at Two Clock. The sucker run was an exciting time. We didn't even need to use a hook or fishing rod; all we needed was a stick and our arm to harvest fresh fish for our suppers. Later, the *geegohnsuk* (smelts) also ran and we caught them in scoop-nets. They were so good to eat!

Spring also brought spring cleaning. Kohkwehns made a new broom out of supple new tree limbs tied together. Spring also began medicine gathering. Kohkwehns picked *Nahmeshkohns* (Penny Royal; wild mint) to make tea. She picked *Weengushk* (sweetgrass) which she sewed with and wrapped it in a cloth until she needed it. She made mats for the table and used it to decorate the little birch bark canoes that she made. She would harvest *Wahbahgahg* (sage) if she came upon it by accident on our walks; we never deliberately went out to look for it. Mama used *Wahbahgahg* in cooking turkey or chicken. Kohkwehns looked for *sema*, which could be smoked as an herbal substitute for tobacco or mixed with store-bought tobacco to increase the quantity or quality.

Pa taught me that there was a right way to do everything; if something needed to be done, then it was done, but it had to be done right or left alone if you couldn't handle it. That was the way with everything. Growing up at Two Clock, this order was easily followed. I don't think my brother had this luck though Dad did things the way Pa taught him. The girls—Liz and Loretta—were hounded as well. Mama and Kohkwehns reigned over them on virtually everything—washing dishes, cooking, doing laundry, sweeping floors and forever tidying up, making beds and assisting in the endless sewing or remaking old garments. I used to kind of feel sorry for them but I had to be careful, or their task would fall into my hands with Mama or Kohkwehns in charge. This was never too bad as Kohkwehns usually took over relatively early in the process. I've always felt that my brother Don had it easier. He was always treated calmly on any task and took advantage of this by being extra good and very watchful on what to do next. By being extra gracious to Kohkwehns or Mama, he survived their wrath. I guess Don learned early how to charm the ladies!

Where we lived was right across the bay from Manitowaning. Our life was scheduled by days. Saturdays were for going to Manitowaning. Sundays were for going to church. Mondays and Tuesdays seemed to be for chopping wood for the fireboxes in the house. Chopping wood was not automated; we chopped it up outside the house after we had drawn it there from the forest. Chopping wood was everybody's job, including Kohkwehns'. She taught me lessons about wood chopping which set my pattern of thinking about it and generally set an attitude of the importance of developing the art. The chopped wood had to be sawed into stove-length pieces and some of them had to be split. This routine was always the same; everyone knew what

to do. Pa showed me how to sharpen the axe and he had made a grinding stone for this purpose. It worked very well, but it was totally handmade and had to be cranked by hand.

Kohkwehns was determined that I would learn how to be a good Anishnabe. It was she who would comfort me if I wanted to cry. Mama didn't think little boys should cry but Kohkwehns knew that sometimes little boys got their hearts broken and it was right that they learned to express their feelings. She was a tall woman who always wore an apron and it was very reassuring for me to nuzzle into her apron and let my feelings out. This had to be done out of sight of Mama. When I was upset, Kohkwehns was always right around the corner.

The 1928 Chevy Touring Car was Pa's pride and joy. Sometimes it was a car, sometimes it was a truck. It used to be a convertible but the canvas had been ruined in a rollover and Pa had replaced it with two-by-fours. It would have been a nice car if he hadn't rolled it. I owned the back seat except when it was time to take the ram to service the neighbour's ewes. Then, I had to share the back seat with the ram!

When we went visiting, Pa drove and Mama sat poker straight in the passenger's seat. One person my grandparents visited was Wabiginees. Pa and Wabiginees would get together in a corner and talk and talk. The women conversed in another part of the house. I circulated. As a result, I never did get the whole story in either gathering. I now realize that Wabiginees was one of our more traditional people, a real historian of our people. Unfortunately, by the time I came along, the traditional people were discouraged from talking Indian to the children and we missed out on the traditional teachings as a result.

I remember the time when Pa hung lanterns at the front of the car so we could travel at night. If the fuse in the lights was faulty, Pa could fix that. He would take the aluminium foil out of his tobacco and wrap it around the fuse. *Voila!* We would have lights again. But, when the bulbs burned out, there was no easy fix, so out came the lanterns and we were on our way!

We used to go and visit John Bearfoot. Behind his stove, he had marionettes which danced when the stove fan came on. Mr. Bearfoot made these playthings to amuse himself but when company came, he would take them down and show us what they could do.

My grandparents played cards when I was a kid. Cards were *Tadowinuk*. The state of playing cards was *Tadowin*. They each had their own deck of cards. They would play *Tadowinke* (solitaire) and when company came to the house, they would play Euchre. This was *Tadoinuk* (playing together with cards). There was a whole Ojibwe vocabulary around playing cards.

Gambling at cards was referred to as *Shoonya tadowuk* (they are playing for money). *Tadowin* was a card, *Gima* (*Gimak*, pl., the King), *Gimakwe* (*Gimakwek*, pl., Queen), *Jacquook* (Jack), *Medas wegun* (ten), *beshigik go beegun* (one), *mekadewzid* (black one) and *meskozid* (red one). When we visited Shehn Koplahn (John Wemigwans), he would give us heck. He lived in bed and had developed his own form of *Tadowinke*. He made four sets and displayed the remaining cards in sets of three. He would take the card that matched. If he could not find a card to match, he would move the first card from the pile to the bottom of the pile.

My elders had high expectations for me. It was taken for granted that I would go to school and do well. It was taken for granted that I would be a responsible human being, able to take care of my family and make an honest living. For Mama, that meant learning English and the manners and behaviours that were acceptable in white society. To Pa, it meant learning how to work hard, becoming independent, being accomplished at something useful and being able to sell my skills. To Kohkwehns, it meant seeing myself as part of the Creator's plan, respecting all the Creator's creations and living within the space that the Creator had meant for me.

It was taken for granted that I would work away from the reserve. I was expected to do whatever I did, not only well but in the way it should be done. This was a very strong precept in the King household and in my Odawa culture. We said, "*Enendagwad.*" This assumes that there is a right way to do everything, the way it should be done, in other words, the successful way of doing things.

Our people had to be successful at what they did. If my ancestors had not been successful hunters, fishermen, warriors, medicine people and traders, I would not be here. In our traditional society, our youth went on what was called the vision quest. During a time in isolation and fasting, our youth received a dream which, when interpreted by the spiritual leaders, foretold the young person's future life in the community. When the youth's future journey was told to the community members, from then on, the whole community supported the young person's journey through life. The young person had a purpose in the community and the community respected and supported that purpose. Individuals spent their lives "living their visions." Through this process, our communities had the specialists needed. The training followed the vision and the conditions for success for each individual were set in place.

In my world, with my three old people, no one told me that I was not capable of doing anything. Each in her or his own way supported me, providing the foundation for me to learn my

strengths and to become the person I could be. Mama used discipline to encourage correct behaviour. Pa showed me how something should be done and Kohkwehns listened to me. Mama worked on my head, Pa worked on my hands and Kohkwehns worked on my heart. Together they strengthened me. They developed my confidence, skills and the ability to respond to the world with my head, hands and heart.

From my grandparents, I learned that success depends on: high expectations; deliberate, direct teaching of the elements that develop capabilities into abilities; working on all aspects of the child's being (heart, mind and spirit); finding out who the child is and what he or she needs; providing unconditional support; giving a clear description of what constitutes "appropriate" behaviour and being fair and firm in administering the pre-determined discipline for "bad" behaviour; and above all else, convincing the child that it matters to you that he/she is successful.