HIGHLIGHTS:

- Elders speak of their concerns regarding leadership on the reserves; new young leaders with education but no experience; the ignoring of the elders and their advice; the failure to educate the young in traditional Indian ways.

JONAS LARIVIERE:

My friends and relatives, I come from Canoe Lake in northern Saskatchewan. I guess I come from the farthest north to all that's here today. Where I come from it's all bush. First, I don't know very much of what I can talk about, as I have never been involved too much in this kind of thing and I don't usually talk very much. I just want to get to understand the Indian culture and the different ceremonies that are done. I want to get to know my fellow Indians, their languages, and their thinking, and their kindness. And I'm very thankful. I hope that the ones I left behind, feel the way I do about this, because at my reserve it's very bad. The young people just don't listen to us anymore, we are really hard pressed by it. This is going to give us a very hard time. I usually talk about this at home with my family as this is the only place I can talk; at our reserve there's no one that will listen to us. The people are just like white men; they don't know anything about this Indian culture. The young people at our reserve are completely lost; they have never been told anything. There are a few people older than I am at my reserve, but they too can't talk to these young people.
And the leaders are young. They are the brains of this reserve. I will say again as I said yesterday, we have had two chiefs so far this year. The first chief we had lasted one year and he resigned because he couldn't take what people said to him. And then there was another one. We tried to get someone who was older, but the young beat us out, so this other young chief got in, and he's worse than the other one. He doesn't do anything at all. We all thought that he was a hell of a good man, when he was elected, but we were badly mistaken. He was a housing foreman on the reserve and he always ran things right at that job, and this is why we thought he would make a good chief. He was the only one in the family that didn't use alcohol, and as soon as he began chief it was as if someone said, "Come on, drink," and he drank. And I guess he started digging into the band funds, and when these older people seen that, they put up a fuss. The people were really trying to find out what he was doing and he had to resign. They were supposed to have had nominations on Friday, but I don't know who will be elected. But these young people sure made a mess of our reserve. Us old people we don't feel this is too much as we get our old age pension. If our band funds all disappear we still keep getting our money. But we feel for our children and grandchildren. They are the ones that will be hurt in the future, and this is what hurts us old people. My wife and I we usually talk about this, that we are going to go broke - that is, our reserve. And we cry thinking about it, what it will do to our loved ones. They are going to break the reserve, and I was planning on coming here with my wife. She was going to come and listen; she has never heard anything like this. But at the last minute she backed out, and she said she couldn't make it. She's not very well and maybe she thought the long ride wouldn't be very good for her. And I would like to ask you people if there is some way you could help us. Maybe talk to our leaders, and the other young people we have, to try and talk to these people. I would like the leaders here if they can come up and have a meeting at our reserve. I have sent for Dave Ahenakew a number of times but he doesn't show up. And he was a very good friend of mine, and I would like to meet him. I will tell him anytime, anywhere, why he did this. And now these other ones that are trying to start this up, to try and get the elder to talk to the young people, I heard about this and soon I got a letter and they wanted me to come to this workshop and I was very thankful. And I'm really happy to be with you people. To see you do the pipe ceremony and sweetgrass is something that's never been done on my reserve. And I'm thankful right from the bottom of my heart, to hear you people speak the way you do. I would like the workers here to come up to my reserve and see what they can do. I feel that our young people has to be wakened up and told about who we are and what was given to us. So there are quite a few older people up there that would be very happy to listen. When Eli came to see us we were unable to do anything as everyone was
busy, but Eli came to me and told me that Smith told him to come and see me. And for this I was very thankful also. And Eli stayed with us and took some tapes of my brother-in-laws and myself and he brought them home. And now he sent for me. I was supposed to bring someone along with me but was unable to do so. The one that was going to come with me had bad luck. His own son went up to their home when he was drunk and started trouble with his father and he hurt his mother by throwing her on the floor. She is my cousin. She's a little better now in the hospital. She is able to walk a little right now by hanging on to a chair or a bed. So this young man raised a lot of hell out there. But these old people don't know anything. Today they let these young man free. They don't think nothing of him hurting his mother and sending her to the hospital. And this is why I would like this man to come up there even for one day and explain this respect that we are supposed to have to these young people. Explain to our children they don't understand anything about Indian culture. Our children, they have never been told about Indian culture so they are just like white men. They don't have no respect and no kindness and no love for us old people. And this is very hard on me, as this man said this is going to be really hard on us in the very near future. It will hit us with full force. I don't think it is very far away and then our Heavenly Father is going to punish us for forgetting him. We can't seem to change our lives to change the lives of our children.

I have seen what went on in the past and it sure changed now since the liquor came in. That killed us right there; everything has been getting worse and worse. And whenever I think of what the old people used to say, I cry sitting alone in my home because this was what they said was going to happen. Sometimes my wife comes to stay with our daughter for a rest for a few days, and this is when I do some heavy thinking. What is going to become of our young people? They are going to destroy themselves, and that's the right word destroy themselves. They are not going to punish the elders people; they are the ones that bring this on themselves. They figure they have lots of brains; that's why they won't listen. After they burn themselves in the white man fires they might wake up. And I hope it is not too late. But they are coming closer to this every day. They don't know how close they are to the end of the cliff. They don't know when that will tip over. These are our own children but what about the children they will be having. So we have to try and tell these young people we have now, so they in turn can try and tell their children. My wife is very strict with our children. She always telling our children don't do that or that, and they seem to listen but I will talk about them a little.

My wife, I guess, was mad at one of our children; that's why she's not here. She was very mad when she found one of our grandchildren staying home alone and told us that her parents were away drinking. We didn't see them drinking but the young lad told us they were, and this is what upset my wife to see her grandchild left all alone while they were doing something
that's useless. And this is what she told them when they got home and they didn't answer back to her. "You are the people that will be killing me in the near future. I feel it right in my heart of what you have done, leaving your little child alone, while you go drinking. And for this reason I won't be able to go with your father to the workshop in Saskatoon. You're the people that cause me to be weak because I worry about you all the time," she told them. And this is why I'm kind of in a hurry to get back home, because of my wife not being too well. But I will have to see my cousin first before heading back up north. And this is my request for those of you who are leaders here and to try and arrange something so you can be able to come up and talk to our young people. And about my son-in-law, he's nice to talk to and has a good job but this man is baldheaded as hell. My wife told him even that he had a devil head. He told him what he was doing to his mother too, by the way he's living." She wants you to live a better life, to try and bring up your children the right way, and you never listened to her. You think that you know more than her. Well this was the woman that carried you. This woman is the reason why you are here today, and now you won't listen to what she says. You are killing her little by little every day." And so my son-in-law never answered her back anymore. But just the same he is very hard. This stuff the young people do, he's all for that. And the liquor has got him too. And I'm hoping that Eli here would come up and kind of chum around with him; he knows him good. But just to see if he will change, on account of his children. Maybe Eli could talk to him in a way that he will understand, because if you tell him out straight and he'll go and do it anyway. I'll try and tell him anyway. Thank you.

SPEAKER:

I am very glad to hear you elders talk, but I can't get used to speaking myself. I am not accustomed to speaking even though I'm old. I never did very much public speaking in my lifetime. But I sure enjoy hearing you people. And I'm very happy to be here with you. This is all I can say. I greet you all, my friends and relatives.

MR. STAR, STAR BLANKET RESERVE:

My friends and relatives, I'm not much of a speaker myself, but I've heard elders when they gave lectures. And I enjoy hearing you people and I enjoy being here with you. All what I've heard here this was told to me by my elders. They used to say that we will have a hard time in the future and we see that now. So now what I hear today I'm very thankful it reminds me of what I was told. At my reserve it is the same. I can't say that it is good as it is what we have today, young people running our reserves. There are a lot of things they miss that should be looked after. And we have older people capable of running these, but we seem to lose all the time. The leaders, they send older people to different meetings, but when they come back with something, they don't want to listen, so I don't know what they really want. And this is hard on me too. They
have no respect for the elders; they have no respect for anybody as far as that goes. And so these people really give me a hard time. And I can't say very much more as I said before I'm not a good speaker, but I am a very good listener. And a lot of you people have very good things to talk about, which I like very much listening to. I only ask you to remember us in your prayers and may the work you are doing succeeds, so we can all be one once again. I ask this in our Manitou's name, who cares for us all. This is all. Thank you.

JOHN ROCKTHUNDER:

I will say thank you myself, my relatives. It is just now that I'm beginning to understand what you are discussing. This is the first time I've been invited here. I enjoy hearing all the lectures I've heard so far. Because this is right that many of us are completely lost. We have forgotten our Indian way of life. But today now you remind us of what we had thrown away. But hearing these old ideas brings back a lot to me; for this I want to thank you elders. And I would like to thank Alex Bonaise about how much he remind us of our ways. This is true we are losing our Indian way of life. I told him that today that he's used to talking to people about this, but we are not like that. He does a lot of travelling just talking to people, reminding them of their way of life, but we don't do that. We can't even speak at our own reserves as we laugh and make fun of each other too much. As soon as someone makes a mistake in what he's saying we laugh at them. And this is why we are afraid to speak. These young people today that's what they do to us. You are right when you say that they know more than we do. And these are the same people we care for all their young days. Now they go to school and say we old people, we don't know a damn thing. But some of us that are still hanging on to what our elders told us, when we tell these things to our young people they tell us, "Oh this happened long ago, it's not here anymore." And this is where we see that they are beginning to get lost. And another thing this woman that is sitting with us today. I thank her very much, for coming to listen. The former participants of these workshops, they are asked what these workshops are all about, and these people they don't say nothing. I don't know if everyone does that but I'm speaking of the people in my part of the country. Some women are very good speakers; they can spread around what they hear. So this would be very good if we had women in this meeting. They would be able to tell it to other people. And I think it's very good that we have this woman here today. The women they are with their little children all the time and this lecturing should start right from the home.

And another thing, the tipis that were mentioned here, these elders said something about tipis. And this is another thing that I'm just beginning to understand. And I think this will be a very good idea if we could have these. This would be an ideal place where we can go to share our ideas and here we would hear the truth being spoken. A person would think there
how it was with our elder. In the past what he was given and what he did to have survived this long. A person would see the truth there and he would come to believe that. "My relatives here is really working at the truth." This would be on his mind.

And the young people they would get a chance if they listened to the elders, and I'm sure they would enjoy listening to the elders. And I can't say very much more. I only hope that you workers succeed in what you are doing. So hope we all pull together and pray together for our children and grandchildren. So now I greet you all. Thank you.

CHARLEY BUFFALO CALF:

I come from Maple Creek, Saskatchewan and the name is Charley Buffalo Calf. I was sent here by members of my band to attend this workshop and as far as I make out so far my mind is completely changed to what I thought these workshops would be. It is very nice to hear words like this again and this is why my mind is changed. Because I didn't know what this was all about, but now I'm very thankful, my relatives, that I know what you are trying to do. I know this is what we need because even if us old people still hang on to our way of life, the young people they don't know nothing about it. I was brought up by elders, my father and mother. I also seen my grandparents. As a child these were the people that told me these things. So I'm very glad that I hear words like that again. They always said that respect comes first among Indians, respect the old man and respect the old woman, no matter who it is. It's very nice to see a young person go and talk to an old man, even if he doesn't know who he is. And I can't say very much more as you people said what I thought myself. So I hope you succeed in what you are doing. I know it will be very hard but if we work together we might see that we are accomplishing something. But you people reminded me about my elders. What you say here these were their sayings also. This man that was just speaking he said the truth in everything he said. I have one of my sons with me here. I want this child of mine to listen to you people; I want him to understand you people. He's going to school now but I took him out to bring him here to listen to you elders. I want him to think and know how the Indian was a long time ago. I want him to know about respect and never to talk back to an elder. And this is what I would like for my son here to listen to you and I hope that he tells people his age when we get back on our reserves as it's too bad what the white man is doing to our children. It's true that they are smart they have a lot of book learning, but I think that he should hang onto the Indian culture also, because this is our God-given right. Manitou gave us Indian a language. He gave us the color of our skin, and this we will never be able to change. The white man will always say, "There goes an Indian," no matter if we lose our language and have all the education in the world. We still can never change our skin. We should never forget our pipe ceremony; and I was very glad and very surprised on how this meeting started off this morning.

The people at home are the same as what I've heard that they
don't seem to care and they give up. And a lot of times this happens to all of us. But the people at home are the same way. Whenever we have some kind of ceremony there's people there going in cars with a bottle in their hand. Well this discourages the elder who's making the ceremony as we should be all helping him. And this is what's bothering us too is the alcohol. Some of these people, that's all they do is drink. They don't work but they seem to get money somewhere to buy alcohol with. And so this is our biggest problem. We are not a big band so there's not many of us. But just the same our young people are not listening to us. But when I came in here and heard what was being said, then I will help all I can myself. And this will be all for now, but I hope and pray that each of us will have a safe journey home, so once again we can see our families and relatives. So if I have said a wrong word please forgive me as I didn't intend on hurting anyone here. So this will be all and thank you.

ALEX BONAISE:

I will say a few words again and by this time I guess you know who's talking. I come from Little Pine Reserve in Saskatchewan, and Cutknife is my address. This will be the third time that I will be speaking. I told you how I stand as far as Indian culture goes. I showed it to you and I pointed it to you. And these two elders that are sitting here, I gave them some money to buy some tobacco for themselves, because I [am] very thankful about the wonderful words they gave us. And also I thank each and every one of you. This is what I try to spread around to Indians all across the Dominion of Canada and United States. I still have a few places to go, as I said before. I'm going about talking about everything including the treaties, everything that was promised to us and these chiefs and councils you people mention now and again. I don't know anything and I don't recognize anything. I don't understand anything but I want to be more Indian. I want my children to grow up as Indian and live the way life was given to us. To see if anything can go into their ears. They are born of Indian parents and they should hang onto this for as long as they live. We have forgotten our culture too much. I want them here again today where we can see them. Learn our children about these things, so they can have a good life in the future. And also to try and step over this thing that's going to make us cry. I was in a meeting in Edmonton and they had a chiefs meeting an Indian Association. There was over 300 chiefs at this conference. And there were more councillors at this meeting. I was there also. I was invited to go and listen and I am worth nothing. I couldn't speak for a chief. I haven't got enough brains to tell people of what's good. I still think I am a child at 70 years old. I never want to get ahead of anybody at anything. I just want to learn more about Indian culture. I cry for it in my old age. The whole Indian continent culture is lost because people didn't understand. The young people they don't understand. They turn our thinking and they laugh at us. These young people don't understand. They bounce back wherever they try to go. And he doesn't seem to want to move again. And this is what
happens when he doesn't have respect from the place he's raised from. He's born from his mother and he doesn't understand his mother. As soon as he's big enough he gives his mother a slap in the mouth. And he does the same to his father. And this is what's wanted, for a woman to try to make her children understand in their young age. She's supposed to pass on to her children her strength and understanding and tell her children never to forget their Indian culture. And this is what's forgotten in all the women. Lots of them they will rather take the bottle rather than their children. And this is where we get a lot of these people that slap their parents around.

Our culture is really weakened up to what it was long ago. Today at 60 or 70 years old what do I look like and I can hardly see anymore, and I'm nearly blind. I'm getting deaf and I can't hear very good. My legs they won't work the way I want them to. My arms, I can't carry wood in for myself anymore. And this is how weak we get when we get this old. Long ago our forefathers lived to be 100 or over. So this is where we lost what was given to us which is our Indian life. And this is why it's very hard when we want to learn our culture and customs. We haven't very many elders left now that knows these things, so I don't know how we will get all our young again. We have to get them involved somehow. We have all the same feeling. We all feel the same if someone were to jab us with a needle. We were all given feelings and we all have the same pains and cries. And this is why they say whenever we have sins we pass them on to our children. And all this sort of thing which is very seldom told to a young person. And this is the person that should be told these things, because he's the one that's lost. We are not supposed to show him what we see outside or hear outside. This is what's going to make us cry. We don't show him this; he learns from the white man. If the parent makes up her mind, these ones that have two or three young ones, if this parent wants to be an Indian she will take this - this we do of using sweetgrass and having a pipe ceremony. This child will have an idea of Indian way of life. This is the Indian way of life. I have mentioned five things here; this was given to us by our Father. He gives us good clean country to raise our children. And so he gave us medicine to use and he also gave us things to make us strong. He gave us water. He used to give us slough water when we were still Indians. When we went by this kind of water we could smell how clean it was. Today everything is polluted. And our Manitou intended for us to live by these things and never to give them up.

Now I will tell you about the chiefs' conference in Edmonton where over 300 chiefs gathered and even more councillors from different bands. As I was about to begin and I stood by the microphone, I couldn't even see one chief at all even though there were over 300 people at this meeting. Same with the councillors, I didn't recognize one of them and I didn't see one of them at this meeting. All I could see was these leaders as they were the people that was running the thing. And this was what I told the chiefs, "I am going to scold you or give
you hell. Have pity on me for what I'm going to tell you, that
I haven't seen your chiefness or leadership. We have lost what
we were promised away back in 1910 till 1927. In the middle a
chief was recognized and a councillor was recognized also; they
were decorated by the Queen. He was made some promises by the
Queen and was told to be kind to his people because it was
these people that elected him in the first place. He was to be
the first to know of the people's fears and what was causing
them trouble. Also he was supposed to be that man to
straighten all these things out. Today nothing like that
happens. The chief nowadays they are a little stuck up and
don't want to do nothing for their people and their people,
their reserve. They think, "I'm smart that's why I'm chief."
Well, why can't he do anything for his people or his reserve.
He doesn't look at the elders even when these people are blind
and can't help themselves. Also they should be able to look
after the old woman and children. And this we see. Where are
the things that was promised an Indian? The chiefs don't want
to go after them." And this is what I told the chiefs at
Edmonton. So this will be all for now and I hope to see you
all again sometime, and I greet you all. Thank you.

(End of Interviews)

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