HIGHLIGHTS:

- Cree songs. Performance and explanation of funeral songs.
- Story of a woman's vision of the afterlife.

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** Speakers on this conference tape
Ernest Tootoosis: ...grandchild as well. We're blessed in our generation with a man like that. And we have to work hard to train for the next generation, train young people like these - really good to have them here listening to that kind of talk. It felt good to come in here all the time I was here although the days were very long, and kind of tired, towards midnight, especially when I have to get up at seven, seven thirty in the morning. I'm used to getting up at eleven o'clock or in the afternoon.

But let me pray to the Creator. This song I was given, I asked it to be given to me by George Cattleman who passed away a few years ago from Hobbema, Alberta. There are eight songs that follow one another. These are songs, teaching songs reminding of ourselves from the words of these songs. I don't know if I could sing them all and if I could say all the words because I don't use them that much. These songs are used at a burial ground when we bury the traditional way.

(sings) (Prayer in Cree) The words in there are (Cree).

I guess this is what we did here in the beginning of our pipe ceremonies here. Let us love our God, our Creator. So the old people, they called him, they reminded him this is what's going to happen. When we do that, God's creation gives thanks. The spirit world gives thanks. (Cree) This is what he's supposed to do. These people are calling to the Creator who is supposed to do that. A lot of things that are mentioned here, our very way of life, our language, our living in harmony with nature and obeying the natural law of God, all that, is very pleasing to God. His servants are there to help us and most of these are servants, messengers of the Creator, the spirits. So when we do that, we remember our God. His servants, his workers they give thanks, they give thanks. They thank us for calling for our father. That's the words of that song. Supposed to sing that four times.

And those other words, the other songs, they continue. They remind us about a pipe. Now we are talking about a pipe. All the spirits, they're thankful because they know God gave us that to use when we pray. Now we are burning, now we are sending the sweetgrass smoke into the heavens to the Creator. Again, (Cree) give thanks.

Now we take our drum, we hit our drum. Ah, the spirits again to give thanks because we have sent a message to the whole universe; the vibrations maybe hit the whole universe. All spirits know, everybody knows, we want to communicate with that Creator and they give thanks again. Now we have taken our rattle and we rattle it. Again we send a message to God's creation; we are thinking about our God; we have called him; now we're going to talk to him. Again, the spirits, they give thanks to him. All the things, now we're talking about our ceremonies, (Cree). We're talking about the poles, (Cree). Again they remembered, again they give thanks. Now we're
talking about (Cree) bowls of berries, bowls of food for the departed one. Again they give thanks. And these songs, they continue like that. Always the spirits, they give thanks because of what we do. I guess that's what has been missing in a lot of places - we don't give them a chance anymore to give thanks. The workers, they are just unemployed by now I guess. Maybe they are drawing unemployment, I don't know. (chuckles) They are not working anymore because we quit using them. So I guess maybe we have to go back. And we learn that.

I hope, as Ronny was saying yesterday, that a gathering will happen here next year, a bigger gathering, something like Morley. I think I heard him say maybe Morley is coming rapidly to an end. I don't think it will. I think there are certain factors that caused that. There were less people attending the conference over there this year. I think Morley will just continue and it'll build up itself again. I think the big factor was that Regina gathering of native people in the world, indigenous peoples. A lot of people went there and spent their money there and for people that wanted to go to Morley and Regina and today, you spend one week in Regina where you are going to spend money. You just have to spend money. You just have to pay to go to the powwow. You pay to the grounds and so on. That's how it is operated. Everything you bought; entry fees into all these things. And for native people who are not loaded with that kind of money and they go and spend their money there one weekend, go another week and spend more money to look after themselves at Morley - that just didn't happen. I talked to some people and that's what happened. And well, we take in Regina this year - next year I guess maybe we can go to Morley. But Morley did happen, less active days and there were less people there.

I don't think it'll come to an end but it's then the wishes of some of us people that the eastern Indians should have an opportunity to have their big gathering here too, the same as in Morley because it's not always feasible for people to drive and to travel across the continent. To go to Morley from the east, it is fortunate people that have money, or are paying money somehow, that made these trips. But if they did have it here it would give an opportunity to you people, local people especially, to come to a gathering like this and refuel yourselves with the teachings of our elders, of the older people, because that's how we're going to develop. The more you hear about it, you probably want to hear more about it. And as I see it we've been off-balanced by the Europeans and their system and their teachings and their beliefs and our Indian thing has gone down. We're here but this is the dominating, this is what controlled us, as very cleverly it's been telling us. But once you come like that and your cultural, spiritual Indianness off-balances this thing here - that's when Indians quit drinking - that's when the young people don't dope anymore - that's when people make a special effort to go to Indian gatherings and to go to ceremonies - that's when the young people would rather burn sweetgrass than whoop at the bar because this thing is off balance. And after,
when that happens, I don't worry too much about those kind of young people. The main thing is the parents, even if they don't believe. Our ancestors believes the Christian parents. If you love your children and they start acting kind of funny - they don't go to church but they want to learn the Indian way - if you love your children, leave them alone. Encourage them to do that, because you have tried to raise them in that other way, and we're losing them every day because they got to be drunks, they got into drugs. They even got into such a state that they'll commit suicide or even hit us parents. If they have found an alternative, encourage them to do that.

Learn with them. Come out of that shell, that fear of sin, the fear of God. Indians, there is no teaching of the fear of God. "God-fearing people, they say"; white man says that. I don't blame them a damn bit for fearing God. What do they do? They disobey God, they kill his son. I'd be damn scared too if my ancestors killed Jesus and I'd be scared to go now. But us people, we have nothing to be scared about. Everything that God gave us here is so perfect, so loving, powers and functions of nature, and you know, if you can flatter yourself with it, it's been created to look after us, to give us life; to perpetuate life; that's all. We have nothing to be scared of.

Our ancestors, they tell us that there is a heaven, Indian place, a waiting-period place, some place where people have travelled and come back. They only seek Indians there. I have a sister-in-law - my brother Joe who lives in Alberta - his legal wife has been parted for years. She lived through the white man for a number of years and she got to be an alcoholic. Heart trouble and all this, and she's a sickly old lady now. Last summer, the summer before she came when I made my last Sundance. She brought some cloth but she was ashamed to show up in this ceremony. So she sent these things to me in the lodge. So I prayed for her and I made to lift the offerings where they were supposed to go to. And later on she told me, "The reason why I done this is I have a dream," she says. "I wasn't drunk or anything," she says, "but I wasn't asleep and I saw this - I went south with somebody - a road going up, up. Then they go like this," she says. "Sandy, and all these tracks of people going that way; little ones, big ones, old tracks. Everybody had moccasins on," she said. "I didn't see one heel or shoe, that's all. And it got to be better, more grass. Finally got so beautiful, I could just smell the beauty of sweetgrass, the beauty of land. Everything was so green, so new. Then I smelled sweetgrass burning and I heard drums; Sundance is happening. And then I went over the hill here and I knew I must have heard somebody, but I couldn't see him, but I knew somebody was taking me there.

"Here was a big gathering just like we used to have on the Montana reserves. When I was a little girl, Indians used that Sundance there - two, three hundred tipis them days - everybody travelling with horses. You could hear bells ringing just as far as you can hear - horses. Everybody used to tie a bell on their horses and hobble them. It used to be just like that
over there."

So she said, "I'll walk to this Sundance. People walked by me; they never even looked at me. And usually when we make these lodges, there is some branches are left over. And usually they pile them someplace by the lodge. When they finish the lodge, they pile all these things instead of hauling them away. There was a pile like that. But nobody paid attention to me," she said. "There were guys coming and the old people singing and dancing and changing. They quit singing. All are sitting there; and the dancers were there; people bringing offering in there; and just, nobody. Those people, they just walked away. And I seen my two brothers. They were little boys that died long ago. They were chasing each other around. They don't even see me, my own brothers. All of a sudden, my dad and mother walking by here, they went into the lodge. Never even saw me. How come - nobody talked? My mother won't even talk to me? And I just sat there." And she said, "Nobody cares for me here, I might as well go home; might as well leave here. Nobody pays attention to me, even the ones I know."

She said she got up and she looked like this and all these cloth that we hang, that we offer to the Great Spirit and the spirits. She said, "I see them just like big long ribbons, going like this. Way up there till I couldn't see them anymore. They are attached over there somehow. All these offerings, that's where they're attached. Then I came home. Nobody take care of me, nobody. I came home and I started coming back to (inaudible) and I woke up then. But I don't think I was asleep when I came back. I come on top of the house; you could have seen my body here. Then all of a sudden somebody pushed me and I fell on my body. That's why," she says, "these are the colors of cloth that I sent to you. These are the colors of cloth I saw in the Sundance lodge." She said, "I believe that Sundance because I saw it."

When I told her, I said, "Now," I said, "I think you should dance in a Sundance." She said, "I'm a stranger." "I think that is what will cure you," I told her. "You have to dance the Sundance. I think this is the message you got." I don't know if she will dance or not. But these things like that - she's too old, she's too loving an old lady to make up a story and tell me that. You know, I'm not loving, I'm an old man. I wouldn't, I just couldn't make a story and tell you guys just to think I was a big guy or that I had powers or... (End of Side A)

(End of 1982 Conference Tapes)

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