Reflections on Traditional
American Indian Ways

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Reflections on Traditional American Indian Ways

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A caveat to the paper

We made a major departure from the scientific realm of research when we chose not to tie individual report participant's names to each commentary in this report. This was a conscious effort and was done on purpose. We understand that a move like this may cause legitimacy of the paper to suffer. But so be it. It is the content of the paper that is important, not telling who said what. It is important to learn in the elders way by listening to what they have to say.

Traditional scientific research modalities are specific and detailed and would prefer to have names of individuals tied directly to quotes. Moreover, such modalities are linear in design so that the reader may follow in sequential fashion. Conversely, American Indians have subscribed to and have sought out spiritual and traditional ways which forces them to learn from experience; they view matters from a broad perspective; more like global thinkers, i.e., seeing things from a wider perspective. This method of learning does not fit the scientific research paradigm. Perhaps A.C. Ross said it best in his book, Mitakuye Oyasin, "we are all related." He wondered, why had he not heard the traditional Indian stories from the elders? They told him, "you never asked." Many of the elders we talked to were never asked, or interviewed, in a way they could respect.

We decided to ask. The thoughts that went into conceiving this project come from real life experiences. The elders we spoke to were born and raised in the Second World War era when nearly all Indians lived on Indian reservations. The Indian cultural environment back then was relatively intact and an Indian person was virtually immersed in the culture.
This report is an attempt to capture the essence of some American Indian elders' thoughts about the American Indian way of life.

Today's generations of American Indians face many demands to survive and excel in the modern world. They also face the challenge of maintaining the American Indian way of life. Being American Indian today is possible because American Indian ancestors preserved the culture and spirituality. American Indians have a distinct way of life with their own stories, values and beliefs. In the past, American Indian elders handed down traditions to younger generations through the spoken word. Young American Indians were responsible for seeking out this knowledge from the elders. However, changes in contemporary life pose the risk that traditional knowledge will be lost. We hope this report helps people to understand the need for American Indian oral traditions to survive.

American Indian learning largely occurs through living oral traditions. European-Americans, on the other hand, generally learn from written formats that emphasize logical, linear thinking. This report highlights the difficulty of trying to integrate these two worlds. Holistic, American Indian perspectives are difficult to capture in a linear format. Moreover, it seems unnatural to write about oral traditions because they are more than just information. Much of the living essence of oral tradition is lost in the process of writing. While these written words cannot entirely capture what was shared by the elders, we tried to retain the oral tradition as much as possible.

During the winter of 1998, fifteen American Indian elders, representing the Ojibwe, Lakota, Dakota, and Ho-Chunk nations, generously shared their thoughts to make this report possible. The elders were both men and women. Some live on the reservation and others currently live in urban areas. John Poupart arranged the interviews through personal contacts and shared information with elders about the interview topic.

In the interview, elders were asked if they might talk about the way it used to be for Indian people, the changes they see happening in American Indian communities, and the future of American Indian communities. We also had potential questions that were utilized in some interviews and not in others, depending on the participant. Elders were intentionally allowed to share their ideas in an open-ended manner so as to allow them freedom in expressing their thoughts. This allowed information to come forward that may have been excluded by more standardized research methods. Elders shared their thoughts willingly and none suggested we should not do this project.

Notes were taken in 14 interviews and one interview was taped and transcribed. Therefore, the quotes taken from notes may not represent exactly what was said in the interviews. However, to ensure that we captured the essence of what the elders had to say, the report was mailed to them for their review and revisions prior to its completion. In this way, elders had the opportunity to amend what is presented here to more accurately represent their thoughts.

It is important to emphasize that this report does not answer the question, "What do American Indians think?". While many aspects of this report may be inter-tribal in nature, the information contained herein is not representative of all American Indian nations. As one elder states, "There is cross-over and connection [among the tribes] but there are also many differences in the traditional ways depending on the tribe. What people have to know is that there is no pan-Indian way of doing things."

This report is intended to start describing some elders thinking about the traditional ways, rather than to provide any answers to the complex, contemporary situation of American Indians. Perhaps, as a result of this paper, more people will begin to see the significance of American Indian traditions.
It was just a way of life.

In the old times, American Indians lived a traditionally Indian way of life. They did not call it "the traditional ways," it was just the way they lived. Margaret describes, "I never considered them traditional ways, it was just a way of life, just the way I was brought up. Aunties and other family didn't come and say, 'Today we're going to do it the Indian way.' You lived that way all of your life."

American Indians pass down the traditional ways. They learn and grow from each other through everyday practice and oral tradition. Joe states, "It is a way of life that is not explained, but that is lived. Everything in living is a lesson." For this reason, the traditional ways of life have a dynamic quality. This is one of the reasons many elders do not want their interviews taped or videotaped. As Deb describes, "I will not be taped because it is one-sided." Taping does not allow for an interactive learning process, a living learning process, between people.
Learning about American Indian life starts before the child is born. Ray states, “I was called Anishinabe. My learning about the traditional ways began in the womb of my mother. She took care of herself in a spiritual way. She participated in spiritual ceremonies that have to do with pregnant women. The ceremonies are for the women and the unborn child. So, I began participating in Ojibwe spiritual nurturing before I came into the world.” Ray further describes, “When I was in the womb, my father sang to me at certain times of the day or when he desired. These songs were to help the child grow and be healthy.” Tom elaborates, “The man is supposed to treat the pregnant woman well. He sees that she eats strong food and he doesn’t yell at her or say anything that could scare the baby. Then, when the baby is born it has an easy time. Children are raised and learn these things as they go along in life.

American Indian traditional ways of life are learned through experience. Mike states, “It wasn’t anything I studied. It was how I was raised because those before me were stingy and clung to the culture. They had an intrinsic resistance against assimilation. The people hung onto the beliefs in the face of adversity.” Deb relates, “I didn’t learn about the traditional ways, I was raised that way.” Even those who were not raised in a traditional home relate that they returned to the traditions by learning about them as a way of life. As Frank, an elder who returned to the traditions in his thirties, says, “Practicing the culture and the traditional ways is a way of life rather than something that you carry around as knowledge.”

American Indian learning occurs through observation, listening and doing. American Indian culture is taught through practice. Nancy states, “Our parents taught us by example. They taught us that you always feed guests and practice hospitality, share and respect elders. They taught us the importance of the family.” American Indians learned not just from their parents, but from their entire family. In thinking about how she learned the traditional ways, Nancy relates, “There was no distinction between extended and nuclear family, everyone was family. One of the most important persons in my life was my Aunt Susan. These are relationships of the heart.” Dan also explains:

“I had an adopted mother, too. One of the traditional ways is to make a relative. Her boy died when he was 12 and she asked my mother if I could be her son. So she was my mother too. I had three mothers. She came from the old way, from the Mdewewin and I got a lot of teachings from her. I used to listen to her for hours, to her teachings and her stories. Sometimes I would ask questions and sometimes I wouldn’t have the answers.

Nancy explains how children learn to drum through observation and doing. She says, “When I think of the drums, I think it is the purest form of teaching. The drum sits in a circle, in the sacred circle. The boys stand next to those who are drumming and watch while they practice. The younger ones learn by doing it and by paying attention.”

Another elder, Frank, describes how he learned about the sweat lodge from his spiritual mentor. The first time Frank went to sweat he said to his mentor, “You’ll have to tell me what to do.” His mentor replied, “I’m not going to tell you what to do, I’m gonna show you.”

Because teaching is through example, learning the traditional way of life involves observing, and learning through trial and error. In learning how to sweat, Frank recounts, “I went, [and I] didn’t know what I was going to do...I hauled 24 stones that were red-hot. I learned to keep my pants on because I put my swimming trunks on and had everything off, barefooted, and I’m trying to haul those stones, close to that fire. I figured one thing — leave your clothes and shoes on as you haul in all the stones and you don’t burn the bad. That’s how you learn things. I had other sweat ceremonies that I went to, and I learned to leave my pants and shirt on to haul in all the stones.”

Storytelling is another way of learning about traditional ways. For the Ojibwe and Dakota, stories were told only when there was snow on the ground. This was because certain stories and words are too powerful to be talked about at other times of the year. Once the harvest and hunting were over, and the wood was collected, people sat around, told stories and talked about their ways of life when they were growing up. The storytelling tradition is still integral to American Indians. Stories were for entertainment during the long winter months, and they also served to hand down values and beliefs. Grandparents are often looked to as storytellers.

Bill states, “Grandmother could tell me stories and stories. She’d tell stories to make us kids laugh, and all other types of..."
"The old people were what you'd call a 'blueprint in life'.”

Stories.” Bill tells how, “She [my grandmother] taught me to respect older people and people that are handicapped. She told me these things in Indian. You have to respect the older people because they know much more than you do. Grandmother talked Indian fluently. She always told me in Indian to try to do the right thing.”

Traditional winter storytelling was absent for those sent away to boarding schools. Many American Indians raised in boarding schools report that they learned about the traditional ways at home during the summertime. Margaret states, “The traditional ways were taught to us in the home in the summertime. We learned about food preparation, drying corn, picking berries, sewing and making quilts for the winter. These were the things you had to do for survival.”

Childhood is not the only time to learn. Learning is a life-long process. Many people raised in the boarding schools returned to learn about the traditions as adults. Learning occurs throughout life, even for those not sent away to school. Nancy, a woman in her fifties raised on the reservation, explains, “I am still learning about the traditional ways.”

American Indian elders are teachers for the younger generations. Dan states, “The old people were what you’d call a ‘blueprint in life.’ You never learn those things in school.” Older American Indians have a distinct way of looking at and living in the world. Dan indicates:

The old Indians have a different type of thinking. They have an appreciation for what you’ve been given. They have a connection to the spirit. We live with things we don’t know anything about. Elders carry some of that stuff from the generation before.

Older American Indians understand all life as connected to the spiritual and natural worlds. Dan further relates:

One thing I liked about the old people is that they had Indian thinking. For example, my mother and I were driving down the highway and saw a stand of dying birch trees. She asked me if I knew why they were dying. I probably would have explained it as pollution or some other technical explanation. She said the birch trees are dying because no one is using them anymore. They are sad because they no longer have a use. Now that I think about it, this is kind of like the elders — no one is using them anymore. That’s what I call Indian thinking. They would relate themselves with the connection in nature.

Interestingly, today, learning is also passed up through the generations. Nancy is learning about the drum from her son. She relates, “My son is teaching me and his dad because he belongs to a drum group and because of the obligation that goes with keeping a drum.” Moreover, tribes are attempting creative ways of revitalizing the traditional way of life. In the Red Lake school, for example, they have instituted learning about Ojibwe language and culture as curriculum requirements. This is not only to help children learn the Ojibwe language and culture, but to also help transfer the knowledge to adults. Jeff reports, “We are hoping that by teaching the children the language and some of the traditions in our schools, that they can bring that information back into their homes and teach their parents.”

Finally, the younger generations learn from, and teach each other. According to Nancy, when young children start getting into trouble, “...some of the older kids, such as those who belong to a drum, will take them under their wing. The younger people don’t just learn for the elders, they learn from everyone.”

Knowing the native language is central to the traditional way of life. Nancy relates, “I can’t stress enough the importance of language. If you can’t think in your language you lose some of the values and beliefs.” Certain things can only be expressed and understood in the native languages. Deb reports, “The language was used in our house. I think everything I teach today came from elders who don’t speak English.”
American Indian Communities in Change

Elders have different perspectives on the changes happening in American Indian communities. The following is not intended to be a complete history of the changes that have occurred in the lives of American Indians. It simply represents some elders' reflections on changes they see happening in the communities. Several elders express concern about what they perceive as the loss of American Indian culture. Joe states, “The legacy that has survived to the younger generations is just a remnant of what it once was. It is nothing more than rag tags.” This is a difficult situation for the younger generations who may not be retaining what remains of the traditional ways. Bill comments, “Indian people are not the same today as they were when I was younger. Kids today seem to have forgotten the culture.”

Another concern is the degree to which American Indians are becoming assimilated by European-American culture. Mike says:

"Everybody wants to be an American and have the American lifestyle. Everybody on the reservation wants cable TV installed. All the kids want Nintendo... People can go to ceremonies and seek initiation into the societies and information of the past, but they are becoming assimilated by America. What does it mean that everything that Indians possess is in danger of ending? How can things continue if people don't know the language or the history? The value system between what is Indian and what is European-American starts to become indistinguishable."

People are also concerned about the effects that gaming is having on the communities. Gaming has brought many changes to the communities. Margaret states:

"There have been changes in the community through gaming. Most people coming back to the reservation are thinking of profits, not the traditions. They like the money, the green stuff. They should ask themselves, "What can I contribute to make our community a better place for the future?""

There is a particular concern about the state of native languages because the loss of language is a loss of culture. Mike reports:

"About five to ten years ago I started to get alarmed. People can go to the drum society, go to the elders, give tobacco, ask questions about the traditions, and ask the elders about their own lives as Indians. They could even join Mdewewin. But, I am concerned about the Ojibwe language. Out of approximately 35,000 Ojibwe in Minnesota I can't name ten under the age of forty who are fluent."

"I am concerned about the Ojibwe language. Out of approximately 35,000 Ojibwe in Minnesota I can't name ten under the age of forty who are fluent."
to people that they have to do something because that is stressful. Instead, I might suggest different paths for them to take.” This comment highlights how understanding the language and understanding the traditional way of life are intertwined.

For those who speak the native language, there is a sentiment that it must be understood within its own cultural context. Some people may speak the native language, but not understand the stories or meaning behind the words they use. As Tom states, “Many people don’t know the meaning of words.” One cannot simply learn the language without also understanding its meaning within the traditional value and belief system.

It is a challenge to speak the traditional language and maintain traditional ways: The American Indian and the European worlds often become mixed. Sam states, “I used to like to go to the older people. When they talk Indian they were so precise with their words. Nowadays when we talk Indian we tend to chop it up, we get into that ‘hurry up’ business.”

While many people report that learning the language is essential to maintaining the traditional ways, others look at it differently. Tim explains how he was able to come to terms with not speaking the language by looking at it from a spiritual perspective. When he was worried about not speaking the language, he says, “I had an uncle who told me, ‘Don’t worry about which language you use. The Creator created all the languages and if you speak in English he will understand you.’”

The past twenty years represent a significant period for American Indian people. Margaret states, “Forty years ago, I first

“…the traditions never disappeared. The traditional ways have been maintained quietly and now more and more people are getting involved.”

Indians had a harder time of it. The late 60’s and early 70’s are when I started to notice changes.” In the past twenty years, many American Indians have returned to their American Indian identity. Many contemporary American Indian people are trying to learn about the traditional ways. Deb says:

Everybody is seeking out their identity, maybe not everybody, but most Indian people are wanting to learn about the traditional ways. They are seeking unity and harmony within families and communities. They are asking, “How can we do this now? How can we learn to live in harmony and unity?” Because that’s what we’re about as Indian people.

Carol relates, “More people are becoming aware and understanding respect for life. We are all in a time of re-birth. A lot of people are waking up. Many people are realizing, and it is not just American Indians, that a lot can be learned by the harmony that was taught through the traditions.”

While the interest in returning to the traditional teachings might be viewed as a resurgence of interest, it is important to note that many American Indians have always worked to maintain tradition. Nancy relates, “…the traditions never disappeared. The traditional ways have been maintained quietly and now more and more people are getting involved. More and more people are going to the traditional gatherings.” Carol elaborates:

The resurgence of interest in the traditional ways began with the 1960’s and the baby boomer generation… except that the traditions have always been there. They were never completely taken away. In that way, what we are presently experiencing is really not a resurgence because it has always been going on. We might call it a “getting back to the traditions and culture.” It may take us a while because we are still paying the price of years of oppression.

The continued existence of traditional ways in the face of years of efforts to annihilate them speaks to their power. Carol states, “Our culture has survived against all odds. We are talking about some very powerful stuff here.”

American Indians are unique peoples with distinct cultures. As the original people of this land, American Indian tribes retain their right to govern themselves as sovereign nations. Therefore, they are in a unique position to maintain their traditional cultures. Ray states, “People are beginning to realize the significance of who they are. Indians haven’t been a part of the melting pot of this country, we didn’t assimilate like the immigrants who came from other countries.”

Even though European contact brought many changes to the way American Indians lead their lives, they are still distinct peoples. Deb indicates:

Our lifestyle has changed, but not our way of life. Our values, our attitude is the same. It’s in our blood because we’re Indian people. It’s in our make-up, in our physiology. How we think about things is different. I knew an Indian lady who was adopted as a child into a white family. She was raised in that family and eventually married a white man. One day her husband said to her, “You act like an Indian.” She had never thought she acted differently, it was just the way she was. She ended up leaving her husband and went back to her people. She fit right in. We have our own way, we’re a different culture.

“People are beginning to realize the significance of who they are.”

went to the city and many Indian people were there, but they didn’t identify as such. They didn’t identify as Indian because they needed to survive, and
More American Indian people are standing up for their ways of doing things. Nancy says:

With respect to the resurgence of interest in Indian traditions, there is more willingness to believe in ourselves and to challenge the institutions imposed on us such as education, welfare, health and courts systems. We are seeing the negative effects of these institutions and we are seeing that we have more answers. Now we are seeing it is more important, for example, to resolve conflicts in the traditional way of restoring relationships. We have an elder hear both sides and mediate rather than immediately throwing someone in jail. We are remembering how to live peacefully with each other, and standing up for our own ways of doing things.

Ray relates that he sees a lot of changes happening in American Indian communities. He views these changes more in terms of maintaining traditional value and belief systems. Ray relates, “We are now beginning to search for what our ancestors had, in terms of values, not so much in terms of the old way of living.” Today there are many more people actively seeking to learn about the traditional teachings. He states:

People are searching for their spirit names, sweat lodges are increasing. Hundreds of people are coming to the Grand Medicine lodge. For example, about 300 people came for the winter teaching this year. Ten years ago with a winter teaching ceremony we’d be lucky to have 20 people come for the four day ceremony.

However, there is confusion for some American Indians in their efforts to learn about the traditional ways. Ray explains:

There are some people doing it in such earnest that they make-up and add things to the ceremonies. [For instance], people are making their own pipes whereas a real spiritual pipe is never carried by the one who makes it. There now exists a lot of confusion and competition. There is a tendency to try to define what is right and what is wrong and this adds to the confusion.

I am not confused. I’m doing what was taught to me by the Grand Medicine lodge. The Grand Medicine lodge is a reliable place to learn. That’s why so many are going to the Grand Medicine lodge.

There are challenges even for those seeking knowledge from the traditional sources. Ray reports:

What makes it different now is that we have lost the language. Very few understand the language and even those who are conversant find it difficult to understand the spiritual meanings of the language. I am fluent in Ojibwe, but I still learn new words and new meanings of words from the elders. Coming back to spiritual values is not an easy task, especially for those who live in the city. For many in the city, going to a pow-wow is how they follow the spiritual way. There is also a great emphasis on the sweat lodge. But that’s not it, that’s not where it is. It is in the Grand Medicine lodge.

Important Knowledge for Younger Generations

The following are elders’ thoughts on what they think is important for younger generations of American Indians to know.

One of the first things that elders want young generations to know is, as Bill states, “the Indian ways teach you how to live life.” The traditional ways teach the basics of how to be a good person and how to get along with others. This is a way of teaching and learning that is lived, rather than stored away as information. It is always happening. Margaret says, “It is not just a seasonal thing like, ‘Summer-time is here, I should go to the Sundance.’

You live that way all year round.” Carol emphasizes:

Unlike other kids, our kids can’t afford not to learn their traditional ways. We depend on the children for our survival. And it isn’t something that the kids can just “practice” a few times a week. It has got to become part of them, it has to be sincere. You can’t just go to a Sundance once a year and think that you’re maintaining the traditional ways. It has to be a part of your life everyday of the year.

It is important to understand the traditional way of life is grounded in spirituality. Dan relates, “There is always a spiritual connection.” The traditional way of life is lived in a spiritual way. Joe states, “One of the hopes the old people have is that the younger generations will return to the spirituality. That they can live in a way that they respect the earth, giving freely, avoiding wars, and living equally with the creatures and other people.” This return to spirituality entails learning to respect life and to give thanks to the Creator. Sam explains, “We give thanks to the Creator for the things that
we have in this life. When things happen, we don’t question it. We don’t say, ‘How come me?’ That way we keep it natural and life goes on.”

Many elders do not believe the traditional American Indian spiritual practices should be combined with Christianity. Carol relates, “Nowadays priests and nuns are using some of the traditional ways. They are incorporating sage, cedar and sweetgrass into their ceremonies. Our traditional ways should not be mixed with Christianity.” American Indian spiritual teachings is integral to Indian culture, and pieces of it cannot be integrated into other ways. Ray states:

American Indians need to learn about our own spiritual teachings… To learn about the traditions we need to practice the teachings of our people. For example, if you make a mistake, you do not get down on your hands and knees and ask for forgiveness. That is not our way. We have medicine and sage to cleanse ourselves of our mistakes, of our bad thoughts, and of our bad feelings. When we get up in the morning, we light sage and smudge our bodies. This purifies it of our bad feelings. To do what people have done for generations back. I want Indian children to begin to learn that — the basic fundamentals of good living, about how we deal with the frustrations of life.

American Indian traditions teach the basic fundamentals of good living. Many elders want the younger generations to learn that being healthy and a whole person is essential to leading a good life. Carol says, “I think of the four parts to the medicine wheel — the spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional. Spirituality underlies all aspects of the medicine wheel. Those things are supposed to be in balance to be a healthy person.” Maintaining a healthy life involves keeping all aspects of the medicine wheel in balance.

Nancy points out how drugs and alcohol can disrupt this balance. She states, “One thing that is difficult, it is a negative and I don’t want to dwell on the negatives, but it is something that needs to be taught. We need to help young kids understand that drugs and alcohol are not part of the natural ways of life, that there is a natural high to life.” Eating a balanced diet is also important. Frank comments, in the physically, or to start getting the proper rest, the proper diet and exercise of their body to feel good. Next one is spirituality, because spirituality determines our attitude, our thinking, our behavior. We need to be naturally alert, learning as much as we can about life and the way to live, a positive way to live. And emotionally, we need to be able to have some management of our emotions like anger and frustration that affect how we think, feel, and all those things. So we need to be constantly valuing and taking care of these things. When we take care of ourselves, that’s what we’re taking care of — our emotions, our intellect, our physical beings, our spiritual, so that we’re a good, solid, healthy person spiritually. Those are the things that the children should know. I smoke cigarettes and that’s not good for me — for our health, for our muscles especially. I couldn’t get out there. Long time ago a guy my age, 62 years old, would still get out there and run out and chop wood, run up and down. I can’t do that. I weigh too much, I smoke too many cigarettes, I drink too much coffee. So I’m not really a good example of what a warrior’s physical, mental and spiritual capabilities are. I (just) sit here and think about it.

To live the traditional way with the four aspects of the medicine wheel in balance requires learning how to listen to the Creator and to oneself. Dan states, “If you want to learn you start with the root, the root inside of yourself.” Dan relates, “I think the biggest question we have to face is ‘Who are you?’ We are searching for who we are… If you know what you are, you can see anything in life and the spirit will guide you.” Younger generations need to know who they are. Dan explains, “The most important thing is that I have to know myself… It is not egotistical. You were chosen to do certain things in life with that group of people that you walk with. This answers the question of ‘Why me?’”
Listening is essential to understanding who you are. Margaret states:

Kids need to listen more, to listen to their inner selves. The younger generation should be listening. Some elderly people have the knowledge and they know how to survive and teach the old stories. Kids today have to listen more. Kids today say, "I'm bored." I say there's plenty to do, all you have to do is sit down and listen — listen to themselves, to have confidence. We as adults have to encourage them to sit and listen. We need to teach them to take pride in things.

Learning how to listen takes time and practice. Deb describes, "We need to teach the young people to value their senses. We have two eyes, and two ears, but only one mouth. We listen. We don't have any 'why' questions. We were taught to use our brain." Sam tells a story of how he helped a group of kids to learn the importance of observing and listening. He recounts:

We live in a fast world and we don't stop and listen. When I worked as a camp counselor, I took a group of kids out one morning for a hike. I took them on a trail and we hiked hard and fast. We hiked that way for a couple hours and then I had them turn around and hike back, hard and fast. When we got back for lunch everyone was so tired. We sat around for a while, ate our lunch and rested. And then I told them that we were going to go on another hike. They all moaned and complained that they were too tired, that they couldn't do it. So I told them we were going on a different kind of hike. I took them out on a different path this time. We went out and I stopped and asked them for a volunteer to sit down where we were standing. Finally, one of the boys stepped forward and said he'd volunteer. I asked him to sit, be quiet and listen. Then I took each one of the other kids and spaced them out so they couldn't see each other. I told them to sit and listen, to see what they could hear and see for fifteen minutes.

Learning and living the traditional way of life is not easy and it sometimes involves sacrificing comfort. Dan explains, "Everything he's given you, you have to walk through, you have to experience it. You can't always walk in the grass, sometimes you have to walk through the sagebrush." Frank describes:

It's hard to have a good cultural education in the classroom... You can read about it, you can talk about it in a classroom. Once you get out there in the garden and plant something, dig that plant up, you know there's some work to it... But I know there were some kids that went out to Wilder Forest for gardening out there. And you know they did it, it was kind of a novelty for about two to four days. Three or four trips out there, pretty soon that got old. The ground is hard, it's hot up there, the weeds keep coming. "I don't want to do this. It's easier to go to the store and get it." When they hit reality, that's just like going out to the sweat. "Yeah I really want to sweat." So you go out there and you say, "Well, you know the sweat begins with building one. Building the sweat lodge, going out and picking some rocks, cutting up some wood and splitting it." All that's work. They say, "I just want to sweat. I don't want to do all that work..." When you find out how rigorous the lifestyle is, the lifestyle of spiritual living is, you get discouraged. Like me, I thought I could go into the air conditioned church, I don't need to be suffering like this [in the sweat lodge]. Those young kids think the same thing. And so a lot of them drop out.

Even though it is sometimes difficult, there is satisfaction and connection found in spiritual living. Frank states:

A lot of the kids come to sweats and the fire's going already and somebody carries the rocks in. So they really haven't had a chance to experience [the sweat]. You get a good feeling when you come out of a sweat. It's a better feeling when you know you built that sweat, you built the fire, you brought the rocks, you chopped the wood that heated the rocks, you hauled the water. And those things are the sacrifices for something good. To be able to connect them to those things, to have them do that, to experience it, is the best teacher.

Almost every elder stressed the importance of young American Indians learning their native language. Carol states, "Language is key to learning the traditions." Language is essential for understanding the traditional culture. Sam indicates:

I think our number one tradition should be our language. Indian language is so poetic. When I hear the old people talking it is so descriptive and poetic. They way they talk paints a beautiful picture, so rich and so colorful. So these young people don't know what they're missing if they...
don’t speak their language.

There is much the younger generations cannot know without their native language. Cultural, spiritual and other things can only be described and understood in the native tongue.

Elders want the younger generation to live and learn according to American Indian values. Deb states:

The younger generations need to learn about the value system. They need to learn the values of fortitude, industry, generosity, love, honor, respect, courage, wisdom, leadership, duty and reverence. They need to be taught to respect — not taught to fear. When you are respectful, there is no fear.

Respecting all life as sacred is a fundamental American Indian value. This involves being humble and thankful for the gifts in life. Margaret says, “We were a sincere and humble people. Traditional men and women will talk humbly about life and they are very thankful.” The traditional values are linked to caring for other living things because everything created by the Creator is sacred. Caring for nature is a reciprocal relationship. Sam indicates, “Working with the land is good for anybody. That’s where the tradition lies. If you take care of nature it will take care of you in a good way.”

Elders also want younger generations to learn the value of sharing. Joe relates, “This is tied to the traditional Indian value of life and respect for all living things. [You are] to use only what is necessary. [You are] to give thanks for that which you take, and to give to your neighbors.” Nancy explains, “Kids need to learn to share with others. We used to do it out of necessity and poverty. We had communal values for everyone to help each other survive.” Nancy describes how this happened in her community:

…everyone supported one another. If somebody died, nobody asked about what they should do. You just did it. There was sharing and giving. Everybody was poor and you put together what you could. As we pick up the ways of mainstream society we are not like that anymore. Sharing with guests was very important. There was always something to give to people who came over. Grandma never turned anybody away, they’d never leave empty-handed. She’d always give them something.

The value of sharing manifests itself in the American Indian practice of adopting people into their families. Bill indicates, “The Indian way is to take a child who has no parents, an orphan, into their hands.” Sam recounts, “My wife and I took kids in, kids who needed a place to stay and parents to take care of them. And we never asked for anything.”

Sharing and helping others are values and qualities especially important in American Indian leadership. Margaret states, “If you are a leader, you take care of the people. You show respect. For example, in the old days, if you were a leader you saw that everyone else was fed before you and your family.”

The story of American Indian history told in mainstream educational systems is incomplete and often inaccurate. Many elders want the younger generations to learn the true and accurate history of American Indian peoples. Deb says, “The younger generations need to learn about their history and the contribution we’ve made to America. They need to learn about their history and they need to learn about who they are. To learn about how valuable they are. Their life is sacred and they have a purpose here.” Tim maintains, “Younger American Indians should learn about themselves and our own history. We need to learn the specifics of who we are because the historians generalize too much.”

It is fundamental that younger generations learn the traditions specific to each tribe. There are many differences between tribes. Bill states:

Indian kids need to look at their history. A central part of the history was living in the world and dealing with the seasons. Indian people were brave. Indians lived differently depending on the tribe; it was a function of where they lived. For example, the Navajo who lived in a warm, dry area lived differently than the Ojibwe who lived with the four seasons.

Learning about the traditional ways of each tribe involves understanding the names and the different clans within a tribe. Deb relates, “The younger generations need to learn about who they are, their history, where names come from, and the clans that they’re from.” Learning the history of tribal names is one aspect of learning the history of a tribe. Sam recounts:

Back when Europeans came and were doing what might be called genocide, some of the Indians assimilated into the melting pot. Some Indians felt really strong about themselves and about who they were. They kept their Indian names after the Europeans came. A lot of the names that Indians have right now are artificial names that they took on because Indians didn’t use to have a last name. The Indians who needed names often adopted names from the European people around them at that time. That’s why the Ojibwe, for instance, now have a lot of French last names; because the French were around them at the time they needed to create new names. But this was really an artificial naming ceremony. [Indians] have a traditional spiritual naming ceremony. This is a very important part of Indian life. I would encourage the young people to change their names to Indian names, to come back to their Indian names.

Understanding the history of different spiritual practices is also important. Tom states, “The Big Drum ceremony is a teaching that tells you who you are. A lot of people don’t understand it yet because they don’t have the old people to explain to them what it is about.”

In addition to learning about the specifics ways of one’s tribe, many elders believe it is important the younger generations receive a modern-day education and become skilled at a profession or a trade. Ray explains, “On top of all that [the traditional teachings], there is a need for modern day education and learning about living in modern day society. There needs to be some Native Americans, like myself, who can go and talk with Congress, and who can teach the modern day skills.”
Challenges for the Younger Generations

“There are different conceptions of what it means to be a traditional Indian. What is traditionalism?”

Younger generations of American Indians face many challenges in seeking to maintain the traditional way of life. Elders identified some of the challenges facing the younger generations.

A major challenge for younger generations is the confusion surrounding what constitutes traditional ways. Mike states, “There are different conceptions of what it means to be a traditional Indian. What is traditionalism?” Sam elaborates:

There are still a lot of people around who practice the traditional [American Indian] ways. But then what are we talking about when we talk about tradition? We use tradition so loosely it has started to lose its meaning. We need to examine what we are talking about when we talk about tradition. For example, I come to this coffeehouse every morning and have my cup of coffee. Is that tradition? To get up in the morning and do something good for the day, that’s a good tradition.

Part of the confusion is due to non-Indian claims of knowledge about the traditional ways. Deb explains, “A lot of young American Indian people are confused because they’re told many things. People put research together and make statements about all Indian tribes and it leaves them confused because they heard something else at home.” Younger generations become confused by these non-Indian sources. Joe explains:

Today there are many groups of young people practicing the traditions. It’s redeeming to see them come back to the traditional values. They are running into difficulty because much of what they do is borrowed from other traditions that are not their own. There are non-Indians out there who put together traditions and practices based on information from unreliable sources and they teach the young people. For example, there are many New Age people exploiting the Native traditions and using them to make money. These teachings are created not out of tradition, but rather constructed from history, books and creative storytellers. The New Age is a different world from the traditional Indian world. The younger Native Americans in college may not be getting the right information. This leaves a lot of young people confused because they don’t know what is the right information. Maybe we need to have an information clearinghouse of some type.

Non-Indians are not the only people misrepresenting the traditional ways. Some American Indians make claims to knowledge or power they do not have. Tom states:

Many people misconceptualize the spiritual ways. They do not use what is passed down, but what they and others sometimes create. Some Indian individuals fool people to think they have power. They are really not medicine men, they just make things up… So much has been lost, but it is coming back. We have to be careful about how it is brought back.

Many of the traditional ways were lost with the older generations. Margaret relates:

I’m glad I don’t have children growing up in this era of time. It is more difficult to raise them in the traditional ways. A lot of people want to go back to the traditions, but there really isn’t anybody old enough to bring it back. There is a lot stuff in books written by white people, but these are not the things that were taught as Indians grew up, in the oral tradition.

Educational policies and practices were and continue to be one of the biggest issues for American Indians. Boarding schools took generations of American Indians from their homes and were a deliberate attempt to bring an end to traditions. This effort was carried out in collaboration with various Christian schools and churches. Margaret states:

Years ago we never thought of it as prejudice and racism. The government put us in schools to get an education and to keep us from getting our own culture. Catholic schools were

“The government put us in schools to get an education and to keep us from getting our own culture.”
subsidized by the federal government to teach us to destroy our self-image as Indians, but we never thought of it as that at the time.

Joe elaborates on the relationship between Christianity, the United States government and the effort to destroy American Indian culture, language and spirituality. He states:

The church attacked from two sides. One, it was in conspiracy with the government. Two, it made Indians believe it was our friend. The church handed Indians over to the government once it had changed Indian beliefs and Indian education. This was a deliberate conspiracy to take the land from Indian people. Many Native Americans today are Christians and don’t practice traditional Indian ways. I don’t have anything against Christians and there are a lot of Native American people who practice Christianity. But, we need to recognize that this was a deliberate action to change and annihilate Indian people.

Boarding school education brought major changes to American Indian life. Joe elaborates:

Education has had a strong impact on American Indian communities. A major influence on the changes in Indian communities was education by the Catholics. The church had a strong influence. It brought several languages and stories of salvation and resurrection. We Indians already had our own stories for that type of thing. For Indians, spirituality was a way of life, not a denomination such as Roman Catholic or Presbyterian.

Younger generations have been educated in non-Indian educational systems. In reflecting on the impact of educational systems on American Indian ways of life, Dan relates a story. He says:

There is a story about an educator out east who asked a chief for ten people from his tribe to come attend the university. The chief then sent ten of his people to the university. Twice the educator asked the chief for ten people and the chief sent ten people both times. The third time the educator asked the chief for ten more people. The chief said to him, “You send me ten. The twenty I sent you forgot how to live. They’re useless.”

American Indian cultures, traditions and language have survived despite deliberate attempts in education to annihilate them. Even so, several generations of American Indian children have now been educated in non-Indian educational systems. The younger generations must learn the ways of mainstream European-American culture for survival in the U.S. educational system. Going to school and learning from books is not the traditional American Indian method of learning. Thus, many American Indian youth struggle in school. Frank explains:

I think probably there’s a few things that give some difficulty to the teaching of culture and language to children. I think that number one, there’s a difference in teaching and there’s some difference in the way American Indians learn. Take for instance, I can go to a seminar on bookkeeping techniques. I go to class and read in the books and listen to the instructor. But how I learn the best, the fastest, is doing it. Doing the work and having someone walk me through it.

American Indian learning styles traditionally occurred through listening, observing and doing. This is unlike modern educational practices that focus on the transfer of knowledge through electronic or printed media. Consequently, younger generations may find themselves caught between the two methods of learning.

“Kids today have so many other things in their lives.”

Another challenge for the younger generations is to see the value and importance of maintaining traditional American Indian ways even while there are other things competing for their interest. Margaret indicates, “Today our kids are so into mainstream space-age technology. Everything is at their fingertips through computers. Kids today have so many other things in their lives.” It is a challenge to stay close to American Indian ways when the European-American lifestyle permeates their lives. In reflecting on the situation, Deb maintains, “It’s not like there are two worlds anymore, because they are only learning one way and that’s from the books and the white people. It’s like being brainwashed to think and act like white people.” This is not to suggest that American Indians should reject everything offered by the European-American way of life. Deb explains, “I can borrow from the white world and be Indian. For example, we borrow paper when our teachings were passed down by mouth. It doesn’t make me less of an Indian to borrow things from other people.”

“A major difference between now and when I was younger is that children grow
up in a different type of home..."

Changes in American Indian families have affected learning in American Indian homes. Unlike the old days, younger generations may not be learning traditional teachings in their families. Joe states, "A major difference between now and when I was younger is that children grow up in a different type of home, often with only one parent. Or, when the social system takes kids out of the home, kids grow up without stories of history." Without extended family or an American Indian upbringing, children often do not learn the traditional ways. The separation of elders from the younger generations is a major problem. Nancy indicates:

One of the problems is that elders belong with their families. We have a beautiful and well-run nursing home, but I view the fact that we have a nursing home as a failure. The elders should be at home with their families. Kids need the unconditional love of grandparents. Grandparents play an essential function in raising them. They are patient and they talk things out with the kids. It's a different relationship than kids can have with their parents.

Still another challenge is parents who do not maintain the traditional lifestyle. Margaret relates, "Some parents are trying to teach them, but not all. We have lost a lot of our people to alcohol which has destroyed good minds."

Racism is identified as a particular challenge for younger generations seeking to learn the traditions, language and culture. Racism occurs at an individual level, and also manifests itself institutionally when American Indian ways of life are not represented or are devalued by mainstream institutions. Deb states, "The main difficulty is racism and prejudice. That's why we have our own Indian schools, treatment centers, colleges, and half-way centers."

It is a challenge to survive in non-Indian systems that do not value American Indian culture or traditions. Joe relates, "Part of it is survival. Survival is important...How do we survive? Part of it is that we survive in the system." The clash between American Indian and non-Indian ways of life make it a challenge for younger generations to maintain their traditions, values and beliefs. Mike indicates, "How do you change kids values? They see that the people who study the traditions are dirt poor on the rez and they ask, 'What did it give them?' Because the system didn't value their way of life."

In reflecting on the situation, Nancy contends, "Racism is alive and out there, but that only makes us more determined to be there for our kids." She points out that, "The great irony of the reservation, of having put Indians all together, is that we've been able to preserve what we are." A major challenge for the younger generations is how to preserve American Indian traditions while living within the confines of non-Indian systems.

Moreover, it is important that American Indians not be racist. Ray relates:

In our traditional way of doing things, when the enemy came through our camp we took care of them. We welcomed them, shared our food with them and gave them a place to sleep. White people are not our enemies, they are just people. The same as the Hmong, or the blacks or the Mexicans, they are not our enemies, they are just people. We can start overcoming racism by ourselves not being racist.

Policies and practices of the United States government have been and, for the most part, continue to be unsupportive of American Indian ways of life. As Carol points out, "Every governmental policy was designed and calculated to either exterminate or assimilate Indians."

Despite these deliberate efforts to end American Indian ways of life, American Indians continue to maintain their traditions. However, it is difficult to do so within the current governmental systems. Mike states, "It is difficult to recapture the culture and language, given current constraints placed on tribes by U.S. policy and a lack of support by the U.S. government. The only way up and out is to latch onto the U.S. system."

Governmental systems that make attempts to help American Indians generally do so from a paternalistic mode of helping, rather than helping American Indian tribes gain the resources they need for self-determination. Joe notes the tragic irony of this saying, "The U.S. government likes to parade Native American people as a noble people. Behind that they don't care about the people or try to help them maintain some connection with the past. On one side they cure us, on the other they try to kill us." Carol elaborates:

This country works in funny ways. We were oppressed by the government. They took everything away and now they are giving us money to get it back. First they took us out of our homes and put us in boarding schools where we were forbidden to speak our
language. Now they are giving us money to bring the language back in our schools.

Elders express a desire to have governmental policies which support tribal self-determination. Mike explains, "Indian land is being managed by the state. Indians need to have control over their natural resources to be able to control anything. It is almost as if all the tools tribes had were stripped by the U.S. government." Many would like the U.S. government to return tribal resources and power needed for self-determination.

Tribal governmental systems and some of the people working within them are a challenge for many American Indian people. Many contemporary tribal governments are fashioned after European-American patterns of government and do not reflect traditional American Indian ways of leadership. This can create a problem for those working within these systems. Because of the way tribal governments are structured, they may find themselves operating from a European-American perspective rather than an American Indian perspective. Joe states:

The politics of people sent to represent American Indians are also part of the problem. Part of the solution is making good choices about who is sent to represent us in the governmental systems. There are currently many people who are representing people of dual positions from only one position — the government point of view rather than the "people of the land" point of view. That's what we are truly, people of the land.

There is a desire for tribal governments to provide real support for maintaining traditions, culture and language. Mike relates:

A lot of lip-service is given to how important language is, but nobody takes the time to learn it. Tribal governments talk a lot about maintaining the language, and a year later they are still spouting the same empty echo. We've gotta move beyond lip-service. Tribes need to make language a major tribal initiative and back it up with real support and follow through.

In addition, many elders would like to see greater inter-tribal unity. Tom states, "A long time ago, the Ojibwe, Potawatomi and Ottawa lived together... Maybe one day we'll come back together." Many elders share the hope that tribes will come back in unity as a way of strengthening tribal power. Mike states:

Indian nations need to maintain a larger connectedness with each other. In the past 20 years there has been a movement for tribal governments to fragment and assert themselves as individual Indian nations. This weakens the Indian position. There is more strength in unity.

Helping Younger Generations Face Challenges

Elders identified ways to help the younger generations face contemporary challenges to maintaining traditional American Indian ways.

Elders were the traditional sources of knowledge for younger generations in American Indian communities. Traditionally, elders passed information on through the oral traditions and by example. Joe explains, "They [the younger generations] need to have an awareness of the ceremonies, of the traditions, of the stories and the storytellers. This will give them direction. Elders don't point to a direction and say go there, they give you values and you learn by their example, by the example of the stories." It is essential that American Indian young people have opportunities to learn the traditional ways from American Indian elders. Carol relates, "Kids need to take the time to ask questions of the elders and to take the time to listen." Learning from the elders will help younger generations face the challenges of today's world. Joe states:

The younger generations not only need opportunities to learn from elders, they also need guidance about how to interact with elders. Nancy relates, "Kids need the opportunity to learn about the traditional ways and the freedom, the freedom to ask questions. Sometimes they are confused about what they should and shouldn't ask." Younger generations need mentors to help them understand how to learn about the traditional ways. Joe states, "What is needed is guidance. The younger people need guides to greet them and help them through learning the traditional practices."

Moreover, younger generations need support from elders. Margaret maintains, "We need to let kids know they are the future of this race. A lot of young people want to do it, but they need support from an elder."

Education is a central component to helping younger generations maintain the traditional ways. Margaret indicates, "Education is very important. It is the only way we will be able to survive. We need to start focusing on education, and on bringing in elderly people that can help the younger generations."

Elders see a strong need for the development of educational systems grounded in
American Indian traditional values and beliefs. Nancy asserts, “We need to develop more systematic ways of teaching the kids and of reinforcing each other.” Establishing education based in American Indian values is particularly important because children are in school rather than learning from their family and extended families. Carol explains, “We are currently institutionalizing our kids through day care. We need to incorporate the extended family into the institutional systems. We need to think about nurturing our kids, not just educating them, because the institutions have become the substitute parents.”

There are many ways to incorporate traditional American Indian ways into contemporary educational systems. Again, there is a strong need to involve elders and other people from the community in the education of children. Carol describes:

“We need to have the grandparents out at school and in the Head Start programs. We need to create more of a connection between the various parts of life. We need the adults who work in different roles on the reservation to go into the schools and spend time with the children. We need to integrate the people. Kids have to know these things for our survival.”

Incorporating American Indian ways into the educational system need not entail a rejection of non-Indian forms of teaching and learning. Carol states, “We need to concentrate our efforts to teach the traditional ways by looking at the norms of kids today. We need to create our own cultural game-boys, trivia, books and computer programs. Anything that is used in education can be done from an American Indian cultural perspective.”

Elders indicate that younger generations need tribal support to help them maintain traditional culture and language. Mike states, “There needs to be a massive internal, intrinsic exercise of governance by tribes that are patterned after the values they want to promote.” Elders identified the teaching of language as a central area in which tribes need to exercise their inherent tribal powers. Mike states:

“Tribes should set goals for language revitalization. Language is where our true strength lies — it is everything we have reserved... We need to have a greater tribal commitment. Tribes need to promote a climate where the language can flourish and grow.”

This commitment must be backed-up with the resources necessary to make it happen. Mike asserts:

“The greatest value needs to be placed on Ojibwe language. There needs to be no more empty platitudes about recovering the language and tradition — they actually have to make it happen. Indians themselves have not placed value on language or taken it to their heart and soul. We should reward those who know the language, with either modern day or traditional recognition of value.

To do this, tribes need to have access to resources to exercise their powers. Mike asks, “Tribal government does all they can, but their tools are limited. How do we get it so that we have enough tools?”

The Future

“It’s the children, once we lose children we won’t have a future. We’ll all be big brown white people. We have to teach the children.”

The following are elders thoughts about the future of American Indian communities.

Today’s younger generations are the future of American Indian people. Margaret states, “It’s the children, once we lose children we won’t have a future. We’ll all be big brown white people. We have to teach the children. We need to ask ourselves how much time we give to our children and grandchildren because they are the link to the future.” Deb relates, “Today when I hear the elders talk, they are always praying for the unborn future generations of Indian people. This generation needs to remember those that are yet to come — to make way and prepare for those that are yet to come.”

The younger generations need to be educated in the traditional American Indian ways. This education needs to come from American Indian people themselves. Carol indicates:

“We need to define education for ourselves, and success for ourselves. Education needs to be balanced with the traditional way of life. We should take our kids out to the sugarbush and berry picking. Education does not just occur between four walls. It is a way of life, and it is also an education. Maintaining the traditional way of life needs to be as pressing as the mainstream, white education.

There are a lot of things people need to go back to maintain American Indian ways, one of which is the oral traditions. Tom
relates an example, “When I am out making sugar bush with my family, I sleep in the same room, with my grandkids. I lie on the bottom bunk and they on the top bunks and they say, ‘Grandpa, could you tell us a story?’” Maintaining the oral tradition is central to the way of life. Joe states, “The oral tradition is very important. It is really an apex of Native American communities.” Moreover, elders recognize that American Indians need to utilize contemporary methods to ensure the education of younger generations. Deb maintains, “There is no reason that this [the traditional ways] should be lost because there are people who can write this down and teach the young folks.”

In thinking about the future of American Indian people, Carol relates, “There are hard questions that we need to ask ourselves.” Some of the questions are about what American Indians are willing to do to maintain the culture and traditions. Mike explains:

What is tradition? What is culture? Indians have to define and decide for themselves. They have the opportunity to do something. It’s a choice to not do something or to do something... This could be a time of great promise or of great disappointment. It all depends on what we do as a people. We make history today, all the time. We hold a lot of power. If we allow things to remain the same, that’s our decision.

Carol elaborates:

We need to take a candid look at the state of the culture. We cannot afford to be romanticizing about ourselves like other people have done. For example, if any of our children are taking their lives, then there is something very wrong, something very wrong with the way we are doing things. We need to stop and think about why we are doing what we are doing rather than just going through the motions.

Reflecting on the situation and making a decision to do something is only part of what is needed to create a future for the younger generations. As Carol suggests, “Sincere efforts will be what will change it.”

Elders believe that American Indians’ ability to adapt and change will help the traditional ways of life survive into the future. Ray states:

One of the greatest attributes that Native Americans possess is our ability to adapt and to change. We were able to change when Europeans came or else we’d have been wiped out by now. When things changed and we had to participate in the modern day economy, we did it. We were able to adapt and change and at the same time not relinquish our identity, our spirituality, our clans. We still share with each other and help each other.

American Indians are unique peoples and maintaining the traditional ways will help them to survive in today’s modern world. Ray predicts:

If I had to look to the future I’d say we are going to return to wealth and prosperity. It is okay to have material goods so long as we maintain our spiritual values. In the future, our people will be a contributing sector of modern society that all people will recognize as unique, perhaps to the extent of idolizing. It’s happening today.

Ray further suggests, “We need to try to guide ourselves in living a good modern way — to teach the people not to ridicule, and to always give what they have no matter who they are.” While living a good modern way is a challenge, it is also a very exciting time for American Indian peoples. Mike relates, “We are on the doorsteps of greater things. I have hopes and dreams of a people strong in language and tradition, powerful and happy.”

A Final Word

This report is a rare opportunity to read about the thoughts of American Indian elders on a subject of crucial importance to Indian people. The knowledge in this report was shared with us because the people we interviewed trusted it would be treated with respect. We have made every effort not to betray that trust.

We express our sincere thanks to the elders who contributed to this project so willingly. Any accolades or praise for this report must go to the participants who shared their thoughts with us. We have contributed our skills in compiling this information, but this report would not have been possible without the sincerity and legitimacy of their voice. We urge the reader to treat this information with the same respect in which it was given. This knowledge has been passed down through the generations and its value is priceless.