

LET THE PAST GO: A LIFE HISTORY

LET THE PAST GO: A LIFE HISTORY

NARRATED BY ALICE JACOB

editing and analysis

By

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## ABSTRACT

Life history as an anthropological technique is rarely used due to an assumed difficulty with analysis; however, a consideration of life history narratives provides some insight into individual understanding of experience, which often becomes lost in abstract generalized accounts of culture. Anthropologists derive personal meaning and cultural meaning from the same observed behaviour and it is because the distinction between individual and culture is blurred in a life history that analysis becomes a problem. Following Radin's method of inductive analysis, this thesis is an elaboration of one individual's understanding of experience; an explication of inherent meaning, both personal and cultural, as expressed in the narrative of a Cree woman from Rupert House, James Bay, Quebec.

The intent of the narrator is to provide some insight into competent social interaction within a Cree context. The implication to be drawn from the narrative is that Cree social competence is the ability to maintain an acceptable balance between individual autonomy and social responsibility which allows for effective interaction in one's social, mental, and physical environment. The ideals of reticence, self-reliance, emotional control and non-interference in the affairs of others mediate individual action and social responsibility.

Through a series of vignettes drawn from her own experience the narrator provides specific examples of the relationship between ideal and action, autonomy and social responsibility. Various aspects of social competence are explored, as well as differing levels of competence. The narrative provides a clear and complete account of one individual's development of social competence.

To Alice Jacob and Annie Whiskeychan,  
with whom I have shared the private  
contents of consciousness.

"By words, by gestures, by postures and facial expressions, by painting, by music, we manage to convey to others some awareness of our awareness and even, in a manner of speaking, give our private contents of consciousness to each other to handle and evaluate. The private thus becomes public; that is to say; it is shared by two or more persons...there would be no communication if there were nothing to communicate, and every communication originates in the contents of someone's consciousness."

Harold McCurdy: 1961

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Within the discipline of anthropology, the term "life history" refers to the record of events in the life of a particular individual, a biographical or autobiographical account (Kluckhohn, 1945; Langness, 1965). Life history as an anthropological technique has had limited use; the account it produces is difficult to analyse, especially because of its subjective nature. As Frank has pointed out, "the use of the life history for scientific purposes demands analysis and abstraction. However, the self-evidence of the life history makes it difficult even to conceive of ways to analyse it " (1979:72).

Scientific analysis of the life history document based upon the imposition of theoretical constructs fails to reveal the particularity of the individual, who tends to become lost in the abstract, generalised account of either culture or personality. The focus of these accounts remains on the theory and that which it attempts to demonstrate, rather than on the individual. Although an examination of the literature suggests that various analytical approaches do reflect a consideration of the individual, "the use of life history materials for the ultimate understanding of Culture has remained fundamental" (Langness, 1965: 12).

The focus has not been on the individual qua individual, but on the individual as representative of culture (Langness, 1965:30).

Discussing the emergence of the concept of personality in the study of culture, Sapir (1949) assumed that it is from the same observed behaviour that one abstracts the patterns of culture as well as the individual variations reflecting personal meaning. Familiarity, or lack of it, with circumstances and individuals significantly influences which of these distinctions with reference to behaviour an observer is likely to make. Sapir argued that not only is culture "merely abstracted configurations of idea and action patterns, which have endlessly different meanings for the various individuals in the group..." (1949:201), but also "that vast reaches of culture...are discoverable only as the peculiar property of certain individuals, who cannot but give these cultural goods the impress of their own personality" (1949: 202).

He assumed that personality was not a "mysterious entity" (1949: 203) but a "distinctive configuration of experience which tends always to form a psychologically significant unit" (1949: 203). For ease of analysis a distinction is made between individual personality and culture, yet personal meaning and cultural meaning are to be derived from the same observed behaviour. It is because this distinction is blurred in a life history narrative that

analysis becomes a problem.

The recent interest in hermeneutics (Watson: 1976, Frank: 1979, Agar: 1980) as a technique for explicating a life history text seems to stem from the recognition that personal meaning is relevant to analysis. It is argued that hermeneutics more readily bridges the dichotomy between the individual and culture (Miller: 1981). Although the technique provides some insight into the individual in culture, the focus often remains on the technique, with the personal document providing an illustration for its use.<sup>1</sup>

The analysis of a life history is not just the analysis of a text, nor the demonstration of a technique, nor the explication of culture patterns. The document represents a particular individual's understanding of his/her life experience; it is an effort to articulate personal meanings. Analysis can and should generate insight into those meanings which are often implicit in the document.

The intent of this thesis is to provide some insight into the personal experiences of an individual Cree woman, and the meanings those experiences may hold for her. The focus in the explication of this particular life history document will be on both personal and cultural meaning as expressed in the document rather than on the individual as representative of culture, or the document as an illustration of technique. Although it is not my intention to argue that the individual whose narrative is to be discussed is

representative of culture, clearly, as an individual in culture, personal meanings will be informed by cultural meanings, and cultural meanings will be informed by personal meanings.

Following Radin's (1933) suggestion that one begin with a document and elucidate the inherent meaning, I shall discuss the meanings I believe to be implicit in a narrative I recorded in 1978, in the James Bay area of northern Quebec. For ease of discussion, I have broken the text into five sections following the breaks made by the narrator. After a short review of the life history literature, each chapter will include a section of the narrative and an elaboration of the meanings in that section. Finally, I shall make some general comments on competent social behaviour, the focus of the narrative, and its presence or absence in the experience of the narrator.

## ANTHROPOLOGICAL DATA AND THE LIFE HISTORY DOCUMENT

In the 1930s and 1940s an interest in life histories was fostered by an interest in culture and personality studies, as well as an interest in psychoanalytic theory with its focus on the individual, a factor which had been omitted deliberately from early ethnographic accounts. It was assumed that the individual had no influence on culture, with thoughts and actions being merely expressions of rigidly defined culture patterns. Nevertheless, Radin (1933) cautioned, an ethnographic account without reference to individuals, except as a reflection of cultural patterns, is a distorted picture.

Studies in culture and personality were efforts to consider the individual in culture. The particular individual, however, was overlooked in favour of an abstract generic man in a generalized culture. Although Radin (1933) criticized Sapir for his interest in an intuited generic man, Sapir recognized that abstract generalized accounts of culture patterns were impersonal, often ignoring human qualities. He understood that the life history or personal document might be the corrective. In the introduction to Dyk's Navaho Autobiography, he wrote:

"Navaho culture, so clearly patterned as an ethnological artifact, is here in the mind of the narrator an electrically

charged solution of meanings....  
but there is no declaration of  
them in this book, merely a quiet,  
subtle assumption of their reality  
in the minds of men."

(Sapir, 1938: viii)

Although ethnographers began to include the collecting of personal documents in their field research, efforts to understand the individual in culture continued to be a problem. Dollard's (1935) reminder that the recording of an adequate life history involves an intimacy with one's subject, as well as the subject's culture, was little acknowledged. The Autobiography of an Acoma Indian, recorded by Leslie White (1943), was just one example of this oversight. The text is short and White limited his comments to footnotes. In his introduction he referred to a lack of a sense of individuality among Pueblo, therefore making the collection of a life history nearly impossible. He assumed that individuality was lost in the formal, ritual patterns of Pueblo life. The possibility that sharing the truly intimate aspects of one's life with a stranger might not be agreeable, seems not to have been considered by White.

Discussing the use of life history documents within Anthropology, Kluckhohn (1954) argued that, in general, these documents have been superficial, inadequately annotated, with little or no analysis. He pointed out that they are often limited to accounts of objective events and provide

little insight into informant's reactions to these events. Kluckhohn, like Dollard (1935) before him, deplored the lack of theoretical analysis for life histories. Although both Dollard and Kluckhohn carefully outlined the methods by which they thought this lack might be overcome, nearly 50 years later, the problem remains; how can one adequately analyse a life history document?

Dollard suggested that the life of an individual needs to be taken as an object for study in both the field of psychology and sociology, pointing out that personalities are mysterious and largely missing from cultural studies which tell us little about individual experience and meaning. He wrote, "By and large the sociologists and ethnologists have abstracted somewhat fictive social structures from the realities of everyday life and have become so preoccupied with these abstracted patterns that they have lost sight completely of the culture-bearing individual" (1935: 271). Dollard seemed to argue for the recognition of the individual, as did Sapir (1938: viii, 1949: 595), but that individual was lost in a collective life which has historical continuity.

Dollard argued that the life of a person is a series of objective situations and that a life history is a record of how one reacts to these situations. He assumed that by abstracting patterns from this record one might come to a better understanding of an individual. Unfortunately, Dollard would make the same mistake he deplored if he were

to convert a particularly subjective personal experience into an object for study. Instead of abstracting social structures from the realities of everyday life, he would have us abstract patterns of behaviour from an individual's life, thereby reducing the individual's experience to abstract concepts to be quantified and verified.

Of those anthropologists using the methodological genre of life history, several--including Simmons (1942), Ford (1941), Leighton and Leighton (1949), and Aberle (1951)--have attempted to provide analysis and insight into the individual subject through psychoanalytic constructs. Spradley (1969) examined James Sewid's life in the context of successful adaptation to cultural conflict, and Mandlebaum (1973) provided insight into Gandhi's life by presenting it as a series of turnings. These preconceived categories are employed in an effort to render life history data scientifically valid. Although she avoided the problem of scientific validity Kelly (1978) considered the question of historical validity through verification of data. The memoirs of her Yaqui subjects were placed in an historical background and were checked and rechecked for accuracy.

Other anthropologists, including Dyk (1938) and Lurie (1961) seem to assume the self-evidence of a life history, providing a record of an individual's life story with neither analysis nor explanation. These documents, without analysis, are perhaps not a contribution to

scientific data, but do lead one to reflect upon the nature of human existence. Sapir (1938) states that life history documents can serve various ends, with form and content molded by those ends. He suggests that the memories of Son of Old Man Hat (Dyk: 1938) are neither dramatizations of cultural patterns, nor a contribution to individual psychology, but "remind us that human life is priceless, not because of the glories of the past, nor the hopes of the future, but because of the irrevocable trivialities of a present that is always slipping away from us" (Sapir, 1938: ix).

A third and more rarely used approach to a life history document is that of Radin (1926). Crashing Thunder, The Autobiography of an American Indian is an account of an individual's memories informed by a cultural context which is often assumed and implicit, rather than explicitly stated. Radin neither assumes self-evidence for Crashing Thunder's life experience, nor does he analyze Crashing Thunder's behaviour in terms of abstracted concepts. He does, however, provide an explanation of Winnebago concepts implicit in the narrative, lending insight into Winnebago culture as well as insight into life within the context of that culture. As Sapir (1938) suggested, the form and content indicate that the aim of this document is to show a given culture in operation; a dramatization of cultural patterns. And as Dollard pointed out, "this autobiography should be taken as

an inside view of the Winnebago culture rather than as a careful analysis of a human life" (1935: 206).

Kluckhohn (1945) credits Radin, Sapir and Michelson with generating early interest in personal documents. He acknowledged that these documents might provide new ethnographic material, but he expressed concern for the degree of conformity with accepted descriptions of culture that they might exhibit. Also, he questioned the personal adjustment of the individual who would record a life history. One should ask, he argued, is the document "sufficiently comprehensive to give more than a schematic picture of an individual's life" (Kluckhohn, 1945: 91). Those documents recorded by Dyk, Ford and Simmons represented for Kluckhohn excellent examples of the genre. He noted, however, that the autobiographies recorded by Michelson "are disappointingly brief, and while they afford some data on childhood experience and sexual life, they tend to be records of events rather than descriptions of informants' reactions to these events" (Kluckhohn, 1945: 88). Michelson's (1925) Autobiography of a Fox Woman is interesting, although short, and Michelson provides only limited ethnographic footnotes as background material. The document reflects a lack of intimacy with the subject similar to White's (1943) document.

Recently, with the increased recognition of the subjectivity of anthropology, the acceptance that the ethnographer and his relationships are important factors in field

research (Honigmann, 1976) has influenced the use of the life history genre. The life history has become transformed, and is now neither autobiographical nor biographical in the usual sense, but is "an elaborate, connected piece of talk presented in a social situation consisting of an informant and an ethnographer" (Agar, 1980: 223). Watson defined life history as "the way a person conceptualizes the stream of experience that constitutes his life as he knows it, in accordance with the demands and expectations he and others impose on the act of relating that life" (1976: 127). Frank seems to redefine and simplify Watson, suggesting that a life history is a collaboration between investigator and subject.

When an individual recalls for another the events of his/her life, these events are not necessarily thought of in terms of their cultural context. The narrator is relating memories of events and memories of reactions to those events, as well as present reactions to those memories. It is not the culture, but the individual consciousness that is the subject of the narrative. The culture is the background of the narrative because it is the context in which the events of a life have occurred. It is an individual's understanding of this context that gives the events meaning, meaning which is often implicit in the telling. The events of a life history are edited, perhaps consciously, perhaps unconsciously, by the subject before recording, and again by the ethnographer

as he attempts interpretation and/or analysis of these events. It is the collaboration between narrator and ethnographer that allows the ethnographer to translate implicit meaning into understandable context.

Sapir has noted that the difficulty in describing another culture is not an inability to understand the patterns or isolated elements of that culture, but an inability to place these patterns in a context "which is as unobtrusive as it is colorful" (1922: 570), a context in which the exotic milieu is not the subject, but becomes a texture, a background upon which individual consciousness becomes subject. There is then, a distinction between observed behaviour which can be isolated and converted into abstractions, referred to as cultural patterns by the ethnographer, and an individual's awareness and understanding of events as experienced within a particular cultural milieu; or one's consciousness. It is the development of an understanding of events, and the context of events, experienced in the life of one individual with which I shall be concerned throughout this thesis.

"The task of the ethnographer is to discover questions that seek relationships among entities that are conceptually meaningful to the people under investigation" (Black, 1969: 141). For the cognitive anthropologist, or ethnoscientist, this task includes obtaining information through a question/

response technique; asking a series of specific questions and carefully recording the responses. It is assumed that questions properly framed within the native language "constitute reliable reconstructible congruent patterns of stimulation for the native speaker" (Black, 1969: 142). It is further assumed that through the responses to these questions the ethnographer can determine native categories and concepts with reference to material and social culture; the responses provide the ethnographer with the principles of classification of the people under study. Analysis and validation of data are carried out through the use of computer technology, transforming information thus gathered into a public scientific document. Furthermore, the technique may be replicated, assuring the public of the ethnographer's precision.

In my experience, however, eliciting a life history does not involve a question/response technique. I would instead agree with Agar (1980) that a life history is an elaborate piece of talk, which, in the case of the James Bay Cree is informed by a tradition of narrative performance, an art form within a social context (Darnell, 1974, Preston, 1975). Once a Cree has agreed to "tell stories," whether drawn from personal history or from a more general oral history, he/she employs a narrative technique which is in essence a monologue, a technique which excludes question/response dialogue.

As Preston (1975) has indicated, within the Cree culture narration is a common form of communication. Even children play at narration, learning the technique. It is a portable art form well adapted to the small groups in which Cree hunters ordinarily lived in the past, and which remain an aspect of current resident preferences.

"Narration expresses patterned personal symbolisms in culture (social-psychological realities); its expressive appeal lies in its perceptually precise rendering of the complex and obscure meanings that are unconsciously abstracted by each individual-in-culture from his relationships with other individuals or with other phenomena."

(Preston, R. 1975: 21)  
(emphasis original)

Riddington, discussing adaptive strategies among hunter/gatherers states,

"A great premium is placed on the medium of oral communication and on the transmission of vital adaptive information across generations through oral tradition" (ms. n.d.: 3).

He points out that hunter/gatherers develop the ability to remember and communicate experience, with care given to detail, in order to recreate experience through language. Stories in this context, whether oral history or personal history, become more than entertainment, they become "vital channels of communication" (Riddington: *ibid*). The stories provide access to the accumulation of cultural knowledge and experience as well as individual knowledge and experience. As with other hunter/gatherers, the ability to remember and

communicate experience precisely is reflected in Cree narrative tradition. Narratives transform past experience into image, often evoking a sense of shared experience.

In a discussion of self-conscious awareness, McCurdy (1961) explains that the ability for sharing common experience with others is limited by the ability to form visual images of past experience. Therefore, sharing experience with others must be based, to some extent, on an ability to create visual images for oneself and then to translate those images into language, i.e. recreate experience. It is through the sense of shared experience evoked in the context of narrative that Cree knowledge and belief, embedded in action (Preston, R. 1975), may be transmitted orally.

A life history is a uniquely personal, subjective document. It is the mediated record of immediate experience. One may retell or recreate the experience any number of times, but one does not relive the immediate experience, therefore replication and validation in the scientific/ethnoscience use of these terms is not possible and not relevant to the analysis of the document. As previously discussed, however, the cultural meaning will inform the record of experience. Like the efforts of the ethnoscience, the efforts to explicate a life history narrative include identifying the conceptually meaningful relationships of that culture.

In his assessment of early life history documents, Dollard argued that if Radin's view were taken seriously, it might result in "a great enrichment of our view of other cultures and might strip our present researches of some of their stilted and abstract character" (1935: 262). Although Radin recognized the importance of the particularity of individuals, and he advocated the use of personal documents in the effort to include the individual in ethnographic studies, it is generally assumed that his concern remained one of explicating cultural patterns. Little disagrees with this assumption, stating that,

"Radin is not interested in pushing one personage over another, but neither is he interested in the general patterns of social and cultural life per se. Instead he is interested in a particular individual as an individual in relation to his society." (1979: 94)

Radin (1933) argued that the collectors of ethnographic data should be the natives themselves, and the role of the ethnologist should be one of editor and annotator. He assumed the ethnologist would be interested in the implicit features of culture. He noted, however, "the difficulty has always been that few of them were able to stay with any group long enough to disentangle these implicit elements, granted indeed, that it is possible for an outsider to do so" (Radin, 1933: 170). And yet, according to Radin, a satisfactory account of another culture can only be accomplished after many years of intensive and continuous

study; study which includes a knowledge of the language, an adequate body of texts, and the realization that it is the particularity of individuals and events, the essence of history (1933: 185) with which we must be concerned, rather than generalized men and women or generalized events. His method, beginning with a personal document, a text, presupposed this intimate knowledge of culture; knowledge sufficient to elucidate meaning as expressed in the text. The account of John Rave's conversion to the Peyote Cult (1933) provides an excellent example of this method, and Crashing Thunder, The Autobiography of an American Indian (1926) is considered a classic life history document. Radin's argument, essentially, is that one must begin with a text and elucidate the meaning inherent in that text.

#### THE PRESENT LIFE HISTORY

The intent of this thesis is to employ this method in an effort to identify and explicate personal meaning as expressed by an individual Cree woman. Although the focus, in particular, is personal meaning, Cree culture informs this meaning and is the background of the narrative. In general, the imposition of pre-existing models as a technique for analysis avoids the question of personal meaning, focusing instead on the illustration of a theoretical reference. It is my assumption that one does not have to reduce a life history narrative, a life, to the constructs of a pre-existing

model in order to find meaning. An experiential analysis, as opposed to, for example, a behaviourist or determinist interpretation, may generate a deeper level of understanding of both individual and culture.

This narrative recorded by Alice Jacob cannot be said to be a life history according to Kluckhohn's (1945) definition, or if compared to the documents recorded by James Sewid, Don Talayesva, or Son-of-Old-Man-Hat. Rather than providing a detailed account of her life, Alice has constructed several vignettes, each a social unity, drawn from events as she remembers them.

Without some knowledge of the significance, in Cree terms, of the events related in this narrative, one might simply arrive at a most obvious, and perhaps least adequate understanding. A superficial reading of the narrative yields a series of tragedies and hardship, occasionally touched with humour. Alice could be said to be an unwanted and battered child, rescued from a tragic social environment by a beloved grandmother. As is sometimes the practice in a Cree community, her grandmother gave her to a childless couple who wanted to care for her.

Although Alice made an adjustment to her foster parents, she was a willful and defiant teenager. Her grandmother and foster mother arranged her marriage to a man she neither cared for nor wished to marry. She was insecure as a young wife and somewhat incompetent, but with the aid of her grandmother and

husband she learned the skills expected of a Cree wife. Her husband threatened to leave her on more than one occasion, they lost their first child, and the deaths of both foster parents as well as a close friend were additional traumas. Finally, Alice herself nearly died while under the care of EuroCanadian "nurses".

Alice did not focus entirely on these hardships. She also recalled helping her foster father and her husband with trapping and fishing, she learned to be a midwife, she provided food for herself and others under unique circumstances, and she accidentally cured herself of intestinal parasites.

Why would anyone, Cree or EuroCanadian, want to recall and perhaps re-experience so many hardships? As long as this question is asked and answered on the basis of a narrow reading of the text, the intent of the narrator and the depth of meaning will be lost. By using Radin's method, elucidating meaning inherent in the text, and following Burke's<sup>3</sup> (1967) suggestions on the explication of a text, it is my intent, in the following sections, to clarify the meanings which I believe to be inherent in Alice's narrative.

I shall argue that the focus in this series of vignettes is competent social interaction, not trauma. (Each episode is an illustration of what competent Cree behaviour should be; behaviour informed by ideals of reticence, non-interference, and emotional control. These ideals are defined

and reinforced through a contrast with an image of social breakdown. Alice's descriptions of events draw one's attention to the behaviour of those participating in the events. While avoiding statements of value judgement, she illustrates both competent and incompetent behaviour, allowing her audience to reach its own conclusion.

Although recalling events and retelling them with precision is an integral part of Cree narrative tradition, the value of this life history lies not in the exactness of statements about past events nor in the precision of memories, but in the ability of the narrator to evoke a sense of shared imagery on the part of the listener/reader. It is through the ability to evoke this shared imagery, in telling and retelling of stories (pre-history, history, or current events) that Cree illustrate competent social behaviour, teaching as well as \* \*  
reinforcing the norms of reticence, non-interference, self-reliance, and emotional control.

expectations of Cree  
behavior

#### CREE SOCIAL COMPETENCE

Alice's narrative (like many of the narratives recorded by Preston (1975), often drawn from oral tradition, rather than life history as such) is, on one level, an account of hardship, and on another level, of how one successfully copes with or survives that hardship. It is the recounting of experience in order to illustrate Cree competence, the aspects of successful interaction with one's social, mental and physical environment.

"Competence refers to behaviour that demonstrates effective interaction with the environment and to a synthesis of internal strength or will and aptitude that is the potential for such behaviour."  
 (Preston, R. 1976: 465)

Because this thesis is an effort to understand personal meaning within a cultural context, competence will be considered from a Cree perspective, as it emerges from the narrative.

Social scientists have considered the concept of competence from linguistic, cultural, biological, and behavioural perspectives (Chomsky, 1965; Hymes, 1971; Keesing, 1971; White, 1963; Foote and Cottrell, 1955). My discussion of competence in this analysis is based upon my understanding of Alice's intent, to demonstrate Cree social competence and how the presence or absence of competence in one's actions effects oneself and others. The studies of the social scientists may provide a useful background for discussing Cree competence, but their definitions of competence should not be confused with a Cree understanding of the concept.

The social scientists differ significantly in their assumptions, arguing that competence is both an innate ability (Chomsky, Keesing) and not an innate, but an acquired ability (White, Foote and Cottrell). In either case, it would seem that the ability for persons to interact effectively within an environment, whether linguistic, social, or biological, requires the learning of skills through a developmental process; newly acquired knowledge and skills build upon and broaden previously gained knowledge, thereby

developing ability. This developmental process is one aspect of Cree competence.

Chomsky (1965) differentiated between what he referred to as competence, or the knowledge of language, and performance, the use of language.

"To study linguistic performance, we must consider the interaction of a variety of factors, of which the underlying competence of the speaker-hearer is only one. We thus make a fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and performance (the actual use of language in concrete situations). Only under the idealization set forth in the preceding paragraph is performance a direct reflection of competence. In actual fact, it obviously could not directly reflect competence."

(Chomsky, 1965: 4)

This distinction between knowledge and action, that performance does not reflect competence, directly contradicts the concept of competence developed in Alice's narrative. Although Cree recognize the distinction between knowledge and action, knowledge is regarded as embedded in action (Preston, 1976: 455). Cree competence includes the results of action, as well as action, therefore competence is reflected in performance. White's definition of competence, "an organism's capacity to interact effectively with its environment" (1965: 64) more closely approximates what I understand Alice to be describing in her narrative.

Cree social competence is the ability to maintain an acceptable balance between individual autonomy and social responsibility. The degree to which this balance may be

observed in action is an indication of the degree of competence one has gained. Because reticence, non-interference, emotional control, and self-reliance (Preston, 1975, 1976, 1979) are the ideals upon which individual action is based, one is more or less competent depending upon the degree to which one's actions, and the outcome of those actions, reflect these ideals. For the Cree, it is not the single units of reticence, non-interference or self-reliance which are of importance, but the balance one maintains between these ideals and social responsibility. Cree social competence therefore also includes the ability to recognize the outcome of one's action, intended or unintended, to assume responsibility for that action, and to alter future behaviour in the light of acquired knowledge. XX

Social responsibility within this context includes the ability to assume responsibility for others when the need arises, while at the same time recognizing individual autonomy and avoiding an interference with others. One must understand the difference between ignoring social responsibility, interfering with others, and assisting when one is needed.]

#### OUTLINE OF THE NARRATIVE

I shall demonstrate that the focus of this life history narrative is Cree social competence, the ability to maintain an acceptable balance between individual autonomy and social responsibility. In each section the narrator

illustrates at least one, usually more than one, dimension of competence. Several sections also illustrate the degree to which a lack of competence, or an unacceptable imbalance between individual autonomy and social responsibility, can have negative or tragic results. XY

In the first section the focus is social responsibility, which includes assuming responsibility for others when the need arises, acknowledging and expressing concern for others, and being prepared for the contingencies of the environment. Where individual autonomy, self-reliance, and non-interference in the affairs of others are highly valued, they must be balanced by social responsibility. The narrative begins with an example of non-interference carried to the extreme, responsibility ignored and the tragedy which was the result.

In the second section the narrator indicates that authority lies with the older generation. Ideally authoritative action is based on knowledge and wisdom and is an expression of social responsibility. Lack of experience is equated with lack of knowledge and/or understanding. This lack, too, may lead to tragedy. The importance of knowledge, an understanding of one's social and physical environment, and the recognition of the consequences of a lack of knowledge, or misunderstanding, are emphasized. This section ends with humour, a way of releasing tension and refocusing attention.

The importance of maintaining a balance between individual autonomy and social responsibility is the focus of the third section. The first portion of this section provides an illustration of the balance between individual autonomy and social responsibility, one means by which that balance may be achieved, and indicates that a degree of imbalance is acceptable. The second portion includes a particularly dramatic expose of the inadequacies and lack of competence often observed in the actions of EuroCanadians living in, or visiting, northern communities as administrators of one or another government agency. The aggressive expression of individual autonomy and self-importance which outweighs any observable indication of an understanding or recognition of social responsibility is an imbalance which is unacceptable, and constitutes incompetent action.

The fourth section is short, in response to the suggestion that the narrator discuss the kinds of things she had learned from her foster parents as she was growing up. She began with this information, but quickly moved to an account of the death of her foster father. The focus in that account is on the exemplary expression of social and mental competence. The circumstances of the death are seemingly ordered and controlled by the old man. He meets death as one should meet life, with knowledge, self-awareness, emotional control and responsibility. This ideal example of competence in death is followed by an example of what could be considered

a more ordinary experience, the death of the narrator's foster mother. The circumstances of the old woman's death suggest that although the achievement of the ideal may be what one strives for, one does not necessarily experience the ideal; one has very limited control of events. The narrator returned to the original question and completed this section recalling her apprehension as she learned to be a midwife.

The final section of the narrative has four parts. The focus in this section is a restatement of the focus of the first section, social responsibility. Each part is an example of the assumption of responsibility considered from a positive, rather than a negative perspective. These examples include the reluctant assumption of the responsibilities of midwife; the deliberate assumption of the responsibilities of a provider; an indication that responsibility should be maintained even in a joking relationship; and the recognition that social competence and responsibility cannot always avoid tragedy. The last portion reinforces the assumption that one has limited control of events.

#### A STATEMENT OF THE INVESTIGATOR'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE SUBJECT

"Every investigator soon realizes that the facts he is likely to secure depend, to a marked degree, not merely upon his knowledge and his interests but to a factor frequently overlooked, his personality. No matter how objective one may strive to be, where there is such a

close bond as the one existing between the ethnologist and his important informants, personal considerations are likely to enter which are apt to color his judgement, if they do not occasionally, entirely warp it."

(Radin, 1933: 113)

Both Dollard (1935) and Langness (1965) have indicated that the recording of an adequate life history involves not only a degree of intimacy with one's subject, but also a working knowledge, conscious as well as unconscious, of the culture within which one's subject is native. I think it is therefore appropriate and essential that I present here an account of the part of my life history that touches on the narrative I will analyse.

I first met the Cree people of James Bay in 1963. I came to Rupert House, not as an anthropologist, but as an anthropologist's wife, primarily occupied with three small children and the day-to-day existence in an alien environment. My own feelings of shyness and awe in this strange situation were intensified when confronted with traditional Cree reticence. Social interaction with these new neighbours was anything but easy. I was not completely avoided however, and eventually I was invited to observe the smoking of a moosehide. Gradually, since that time, friendships with several Cree women have developed into deep, lasting caring relationships.

I cannot estimate how much Cree culture I may have understood over the years, either consciously or unconsciously.

My understanding is no doubt greater in some areas than in others. I have had the opportunity to observe women, and to participate with them, in many activities, including domestic tasks, social gatherings, and religious functions. I have been allowed to share joy and sadness, as well as gossip, and my attempts to learn tasks that were unfamiliar to me--such as the skinning of a beaver, or the cutting and laying of balsam boughs--have been encouraged and tolerated with good humour.

In 1972 I began studies in anthropology, and by 1975 I was beginning to compare my experience of Cree culture with the anthropological literature I was reading. Although much of the material on the eastern subarctic was familiar, some was not consistent with my experience. I began to understand that studies which focussed on ecological adaptations, hunting strategies, or band organization and kinship provided anthropologists with some understanding of Cree culture, but told us little about individual experience and meaning. Personal experience and understanding of Cree culture as Cree women themselves related it to me scarcely existed in the ethnographic literature. This thesis is an effort to overcome this lack and to provide a source of information about Cree culture for the younger generation of Cree, whose experience has been vastly different from that of the older generation.

In 1978 I began recording the life histories of three Cree women from Rupert House, James Bay, Quebec. These recordings were begun at my request. I had by that time known all three women for twelve to fifteen years; the daughter of one had lived in our home for two years, translating and transcribing material for my anthropologist husband, Dick Preston. During July and August, I worked with Alice Jacob and Annie Whiskeychan, recording the narrative discussed in this thesis. Annie Whiskeychan not only acted as an interpreter for Alice Jacob, she also interpreted the narratives recorded by her mother, Hilda Diamond, and spent many hours recording her own life history.

Annie generously accepted me into her household and family during my stay at Rupert House in 1978 and she saw to it that my social interaction was reasonably acceptable. With this kind of close relationship, I began to feel less of an outsider and more a member of the family. These feelings no doubt did, and do, colour my judgment, as Radin has suggested.

My first memories of Annie Whiskeychan include watching her, in 1963, sitting in a ray of sunlight, weaving a fishing net, and later, listening to an unfamiliar melody as she sang a lullaby to one of her children. Although they preferred to have her with them, her parents allowed her to attend school for a few years at the Moose Factory residential school, Horden Hall. While there she not only acquired an

excellent knowledge of English, she also taught herself Cree syllabics, so that she might write home. When I met her, she had been acting for some years as interpreter for her father, the elected chief.

Alice Jacob came to Rupert House with her husband Willie and their family around 1965, from the inland community of Nemiscau. They lived with Willie's sister and family before building their own dome-shaped residence not far from Annie's tent. Both Annie and Alice now live in houses in the new village, remaining neighbours and good friends.

Although I do not remember the circumstance of my first meeting with Alice, I assume she was one of several women who came to check on my progress and tease as I attempted to learn beadwork from Josephine Diamond. I was present the day she sternly lectured her daughter for swimming in the Rupert River, a sport young girls are not encouraged to take up. I could not understand Cree, but I understood clearly the effects of public chastisement. Finally, I remember feeling some sense of acceptance the day I visited Alice and her husband did not leave upon my arrival.

Of the three narratives I recorded, I have chosen to discuss Alice Jacob's account of her life experience for several reasons. It was the first narrative I began to transcribe. I was aware that Alice was willing to help me expand my understanding of competent social interaction within the Cree community, and as I became immersed in the material,

I began to recognize an organizing theme, or perhaps message. Not only is the content of Alice's narrative a description of social competence and what can take place when competence breaks down, her own behaviour while remembering these experiences was a demonstration of that competence.

At a time when many aspects of Cree life are undergoing rapid change generated and intensified by the James Bay Development Project, it seems worthwhile and useful to provide a record of Cree ideals reflected in the experience of an individual Cree. More than half a century ago Sapir (1922) argued that we might come to a better understanding of another culture and depict the spirit of that culture by adhering as far as possible to texts given by native people. Radin agreed, writing, "the ideal collectors of ethnological data are the natives themselves and the more the ethnologists keep in the background, the more accurate and authentic will the archives on aboriginal culture ultimately become" (1933: 71). This narrative by Alice Jacob depicts the spirit of Cree culture, as it has been reflected in her life experience.

#### GENERAL SETTING AND BACKGROUND

Alice Jacob's present home, the community of Rupert House, is located at the mouth of the Rupert River, just inland from the southeastern shore of James Bay, in northern Quebec. Alice is a Cree Indian, born at a hunting camp somewhere in the bush between Nemiscau and Mistassini. These three communities, the lakes and streams of the Rupert River

watershed, and the surrounding forest, are the locations of the events described by Alice in her narrative. Geographically, this area is a part of the subarctic boreal forest; a forest of black and white spruce, white birch, larch and balsam fir, broken by ponds, lakes, small streams and large rivers. There is muskeg along the coast and willows along the rivers' edges. The communities are located on dry, sandy sites along the waterways. The Hudson Bay Company established trading posts at these sites, and although the Nemiscau post has been closed, others remain in operation.

Alice was born in the middle of November around 1930. She does not recall the date. Her mother was Hanna Tanoush and her stepfather was Willie Trapper. Her grandfathers and stepfather were hunters, and her early years were spent with parents and grandparents moving from camp to camp. The fur-bearing animals of the area had been severely over-trapped (Denmark: 1948) and the men often had difficulty locating the animals which provided food, clothing and income for their families. The economic factors of the Great Depression may also have affected these Cree hunters, reducing their income from the few furs they may have been able to sell to the Hudson Bay Company.

At age nine Alice began living with foster parents, Jimmy and Maggie Moar, who were also Cree, but who were year-round residents at Nemiscau. Jimmy Moar was the interpreter for the Hudson Bay Company manager at Nemiscau.

Around 1947, when Alice was 17 years old, her foster mother and maternal grandmother arranged her marriage to Willie Jacob, a Cree hunter from Rupert House, who was about 13 years older than Alice.

Alice recorded the day and month of the birth of their first child, but not the year. Several months after the death of this child, their second child, Eva, was born, probably about 1950. Their third child was born when Eva was six years old.

Alice recalled that Eva was her only child the spring she (Alice) averted starvation by retrieving a canoe from winter storage and setting nets to catch fish. She was then in her early 20s and the date was early 1950s.

The only specific date which Alice noted was 1965, the year she and Willie and their children moved from Nemiscau to Rupert House. Her unfortunate experience with Rupert House nursing staff took place that winter and it was early in 1966 that she and her baby were sent to Moose Factory Hospital.

At age 52, plus or minus a few years, Alice is a grandmother, but not yet an "old woman". Her experience has included the rigors of the hunter's life as well as the relative security of settled village life. Alice and Willie reside permanently at Rupert House and are active members of a small Evangelical Christian Church. Although Alice views her participation in the church as a source of inspiration

for herself, her interest, participation, and help must also be a source of inspiration for the young missionaries of the church. She is also an active and well respected member of the Cree community, maintaining a relatively "traditional" way of life. She has been prepared to help outsiders, myself and others, come to understand something of this Cree way.

CHAPTER TWO

NARRATIVE, RECORDED 3 JULY, 1978

Alice: (She said) her mother, before she was married, must have been pregnant, before her wedding. And then the man asked her to marry him. Her grandmother, her mother's mother, told Alice's mother, "I don't think that man is going to be very good to you, if you marry him." The father of the man that asked the mother to marry, the old man wanted Hanna, Hanna Trapper is her mother and her stepfather is Willy Trapper, and Willy's father wanted Hanna to come and meet them. Alice's mother before she married was a Tanoush. Her stepfather and her mother were married before she was born. It must have been in the summertime when they got married. And she was born in the fall, in November sometimes. They were out camping, trying to catch rabbits at the time she was born. And her stepfather delivered her when she was born, and they didn't have very much when she was born, they didn't even have a scissors with them. So she doesn't remember this, but her mother told her that. And he used a carving knife to cut the cord. 1

Annie: You know what that is, eh, one you carve with to make snowshoes or something?

Sarah: Like a crooked knife?

Annie: Yes, like a crooked knife.

Alice: (And she said) when I remember my mother telling me this, I always remember how they go about it when it's the doctor that's delivering the child, everything has to be in order and everything has to be sterilized, even the scissors that he uses. And she wonders what this crooked knife looked like, the one that her stepfather used, maybe it was even rusted, she says. "I don't know what I looked like, maybe, I don't know, maybe I looked nice, I don't know. 2

And then that's when it started. Right after she was born her stepfather mistreated her mother. She thinks it was because the way she looked then.

I guess; I don't know what he thought. Then they had another child, they had a boy this time, which is Alice's younger brother. (And then) that's when her memory comes, she remembers now. She knew her mother was being mistreated, sometimes she'd see her mother cry, sometimes she'd wonder why. And then she knew she wasn't treated right too. They were mistreating her, her stepfather was mistreating her. She remembers whenever her mother tried to help her, even dressing her, help putting her clothes on, her stepfather used to be angry at her mother. The way he talked, she could understand he was mad. And her brother, the one after her, grew up and he was running around. He didn't treat Alice the same as he treated this younger brother. Then they had another child. Then, she said, she was old enough to take care of her brothers. Whenever a small incident would happen and she happened to make her younger brothers cry, her stepfather would beat her up. (Annie checks to make sure it is the stepfather).

3

And she knew her mother wasn't happy to see he was treating her like this. In the winter time when they were out hunting they were never in the same place, they moved from place to place. She knew her mother was afraid to look after her, to see that she's dressed right. When she grew older she began to understand that they didn't like her or she wasn't, they didn't want her, sort of. She felt like they didn't want her in the family. So when she knew this she tried to look after herself and get herself dressed on her own.

4

And then one fall they were very poor. They didn't have enough food to eat. And she remembers that that year she was nine years old already. And when they moved from camp to camp she was walking. And when they moved, on their traveling, she would go with her mother. And that year, she remembers this, that year they lived with another family, it's her stepfather's father and family. And the other family treated them very badly. They didn't, they mistreated them, they didn't like to have them live with them. And farther out, that's where her mother's brother was camping. Her mother's parents too were there. And then they decided they should leave that family and go there, and live with her mother's parents.

5

So that day they left this family, her step-father's parents. And that day, that morning, they started off to go to her mother's parents' camp, she froze her foot. (And she said) she got herself dressed, her mother couldn't help her.

6

Annie: I guess she didn't really dress herself right.

Alice: She had a sister, she thinks she must have been almost one year old because she was already sitting up. And her mother had the baby in the toboggan pulling her. She had another brother, older than this little girl, and her stepfather had that little boy in the toboggan, and their belongings, and then he pulled that himself, he went first, ahead.

7

They had spent the fall on a lake, and their camp was about halfway from Nemiscau to Mistassini, that's where they were hunting. (And she said) that fall and winter was very cold. She tried to walk fast when she was walking because her mother told her to hurry, to try and hurry when she was walking, because her sister in the toboggan was crying. She tried what her mother told her to do, but as they were just starting off, they weren't even started off yet, they were just getting ready to bundle up the toboggans, she already had cold feet there. (And then, she said) as she was trying to walk, her foot felt funny, it felt like pricks and needles.

8

Annie: You know how it feels when your foot is going to sleep, that's the way her foot felt.

Alice: And then finally, she wouldn't walk any more, she fell down. (And she said) while they were walking on the lake (Annie: must have been a big lake they had to cross and it was cold) while they were walking her sister was crying in the toboggan and her mother said, because she couldn't walk, "Maybe your sister will be freezing out here on the lake too." Then her mother said, "Maybe your foot is frozen, why you can't walk." She knows her mother loved her, but she was afraid of her husband, to look after Alice right. Then she told Alice to get on the toboggan. She said, "I'm going to try pulling you both." And then she got on the toboggan. And she didn't even feel the (you know) she didn't even have any feeling in her foot any more. It was sort of as if it wasn't her foot any more. (Annie has some

difficulty in translating the feeling of the foot.) (And she said) my mother looked very poor in health during this time I'm talking about. Even the clothes she wore were in very poor condition. And she was very cold, I could hear her teeth rattling. I can't forget that, how my mother looked that time.

9

Then she saw her stepfather coming back to meet them. They were still on the ice, they still couldn't go up in the bush. And when he got closer (Annie: the distance I guess he thought that they would hear him), he started to yell at her mother and he sounded as if he was mad at her. He said, "What's holding you up, you're so slow," and her mother told her husband, "Alice keeps falling down when she tries to walk." And her stepfather told her mother, "why do you bother with her!"

10

When they got across the lake and into the bush, he had left her little brother there, and he made a fire, there where her little brother was sitting. And her mother, I guess she was so tired she had to sit down, she went near the fire to sit down. And her mother took her moccasin off, took her sock off. As she was untying her moccasin she was crying. (And she said) sometimes these memories come back to her and she remembers because she was sorry for her mother, but there was nothing she could do about it. (Annie: It's kind of sad.) And then, as soon as she took her sock off, half her foot was white because it was frozen solid. (Annie's voice is tense with emotion.)

11

Sarah: Oh, that's what it looks like, then (through tears and sniffs).

Annie: Yes, that's what it looks like because it's frozen, I guess. All white. (This exchange relieves some of the tension that has been building as the story progresses. Annie chuckles softly, also releasing tension.)

Alice: And then she started to put her hands on it, sort of trying to thaw it, with her hands. And then, her stepfather tells her mother, "Put her moccasin back on, there's nothing we can do for it." So she couldn't walk any more, when they were travelling. So they had to bundle her up and pull her on the toboggan. She went on her

stepfather's toboggan then, with her little brother. There were two of them, so he had to pull both of them. They travelled for--they had to stop three nights on the way, before they reached her grandparents' camp.

12

At that time they didn't have any food at all. Nothing, not even tea, they just melted some snow to make water and they drank that. When they stopped in the evening, like, after they set the camp, to spend the night there, her stepfather would go out and dig in the snow for these--

Annie: What you call those things on rocks?

Sarah: Lichen?

Annie: Yes, lichen. That's what they would--they would eat this lichen. The way they prepared it--it looks like it has a head on it, and it has sand on the head, sort of. They take that off and then they put it in the kettle and boil it. The juice tastes (I don't know) something. She said it doesn't taste too bad to eat it, the juice, and you eat the lichen, too.

Sarah: I think that must be lichen. Is it sort of a grey in colour? (Annie checks this with Alice.)

Annie: She said there's different colours.

Sarah: Yes.

Annie: Black, and something like grey, almost white, she says.

Sarah: Yes, I think that's what it is, but I'm not sure.

Annie: Umhum.

Alice: Umhum.

Annie: So she said, they felt better after eating it when they were hungry. It helped their appetite.

Sarah: I think maybe, things that grow like that, I'm not sure, but I think it has vitamins in it, that it absorbs, the way plants absorb vitamins.

Annie: Umhum.

Sarah: And so, even if they are boiled in the water, they are putting nourishment in the water because the vitamins are going into the water, and that's probably why they would feel better. (Alice is unhumming all through this.) It would be more healthy than just plain water. (Annie translates this to Alice.)

Alice: It wasn't easy to find them in the winter under the snow. Her stepfather has to recognize a certain spot where he thinks there might be rocks. That's where he would find them. (Annie: he couldn't have found very much, it was hard and in the winter.) And sometimes he got more than he -- -- and then he'd just bundle it up in a canvas, and then he'd bring them home like that wrapped up in a canvas.

13

So that first night they spent, from leaving that other family behind, it was very hard for her, after her foot was thawed, from being frozen. And she remembers crying from the pain, because it hurt so much. And then her mother told her not to cry, even when it hurts. She said, "Your father's going to beat you if he gets angry because you cry." Then in the morning again, they started off, early in the morning. And when they stopped to have a drink, to make fire in the middle of the day, they just stopped to eat, that's what they would eat. She would cook this lichen in a pot where she could just heat it up when they were travelling. And they ate a little bit of that in the middle of the day.

14

(And then she said) after the third night, this is the fourth day they travelled, they met her uncle, her mother's brother. She remembers very well because when they met him he had a fire going, a big fire, and he had put boughs all around the fire, like. And he had tea, he had boiled some. Her mother was behind. Her stepfather and her brother and her in the toboggan met her uncle first. She remembers her stepfather first talking to somebody. She couldn't see because she was bundled up in the toboggan. She heard her stepfather tell her uncle she was frozen. And she heard her uncle say, "I think you are very mean to her. I don't think you look after her right, don't take care of her right." Then she felt her stepfather untying the bundle where her brother and her were, on the toboggan.

15

Her uncle's name was Philip, and her uncle came over as she was getting out. He took her near the fire. When he reached the fire, she saw this bearskin where he had the boughs, and that's where her uncle put her. And very close, not too close to the fire, he had pieces of bannock he was thawing, it was frozen. (Alice chuckles as she explains this.)

16

And her mother wasn't there yet, she was behind still, didn't catch up with them. It's a long time since the last time she saw bannock last, and she saw that bannock sitting there, her uncle trying to thaw it. (And she said) I don't know why, the bannock didn't even look good to her eyes. She doesn't know why. She told her stepfather, where's that kettle, where they have lichen they have boiled. She told her stepfather, "Where is that, why don't you heat it up." (another chuckle)

17

(And then) as she was sitting by the fire she could see her mother coming out of the bush. And her Uncle Philip went to meet his sister. When her Uncle Philip reached her mother, she said her uncle broke down and cried, maybe it was because the appearance of his sister. So, her uncle told his sister, Alice's mother, to take off her snowshoes and sit down on the bearskin, too. As soon as her mother sat down, she couldn't get up again. And she (Alice) thinks it was because she'd eaten no other food besides that liquid for a long time and when she ate it, she just couldn't move, after she ate the bannock and tea.

18

And her Uncle Philip had brought a toboggan, a big toboggan, and he had brought a canvas and blankets and the bearskin. Her Uncle Philip made a bundle on his own toboggan, and he put Alice's mother and Alice and her baby sister there, and he pulled the toboggan himself. Her mother was exhausted and tired from (not/that) eating I guess. She couldn't move hardly, her legs. Her mother was very poor in health, to her eyes. She noticed that she was very poor, maybe it was because she was nursing and she didn't have very much to eat. And her baby sister was sick, too, it was sickly, maybe it was because she didn't get enough to eat.

19

When they left where they met her Uncle Philip, when they started off again, they didn't even

have to stop to eat again before they reached her grandparents' camp. And then, when they got there, they only give them a little bit of food, for the first time. It was her grandfather's orders that they should get only a little bit to eat because they didn't have enough for a long time. And her grandmother was very sad to see them in the condition they were in when they reached their camp. Her mother, on her hip bones, her skin broke, maybe it was because she was so thin. She was really thin. Alice could tell even though she was only nine years old. Her grandmother thought it was from the lack of food, and from being mistreated. That's why she was so thin, so poor in health. She can remember when she got there, her grandmother talking. She was really broken up, and she was crying, and she was talking. It sounded like she lost--she saw somebody, she lost somebody.

20

And then when they reached her grandparents' camp, right away, her grandmother took her away from her mother. She took her to their side of that tent, inside. And then she doesn't remember--she doesn't know how many days she doesn't remember.

21

Annie: I guess she was really sick.

Alice: She doesn't remember, she must have been unconscious. Shortly after they got there, I don't know how many days, her little sister died. She thinks that--she was so sick it seems like a dream to her, but at the same time, she thought she went away, and she went away someplace. She dreamed, or she went away, and she was walking in the clouds. And then she dreamed, as she was walking, she reached a house, a big house (she said), a mansion, like (the emphasis here is on how big the house is) a big house, right in the middle of it, it was long, right in the middle of it, there was the door. Then when she got close to the door, the door opened on its own. Then she went in the door, when it opened, and she stood there. Then she remembers going inside, and when she looked ahead, straight of her, she didn't see anybody, then she looked around on either side of her. Then she remembers on either side of her, as she looked on either side, she saw this fence,

on either side of a step or a stairs, and then she saw these children. These children were very happy, just children, she saw. (Voice tones reflect this happiness.)

22

Then (she said) she saw somebody coming forward towards her, straight in front of her. He was tall and he was dressed in white. (And she said) she was laughing at him as he came towards her, and she had a smile on her face, and she felt happy, and she didn't feel, her foot wasn't sore (chuckles here). And then, this person who came, when he reached her, he talked to her and he said, "You're going back again, you're going back to your mother." So, (she said) when this person told her that, she didn't move right away, she just stood there. She remembered him handling something. It looked like a little dish, a very small dish because she managed to hold it like this in her hand. And in the little dish was something very small, a little bit of, a--it looked like a piece of meat, raw meat with blood on it. And the man told her, "Take that home" to her parents. Then she turned around towards the door. And then when she turned back around, turned her head, to take one last look at this person who -- ----. Then she smiled at him again, and then he put his hands like this (Annie holds her hands up so that her palms are visible) and she could see there a cut, and she thinks that he took a piece of his hand here like that, and that's what she had in this little dish. So when she saw this wound here, as if it was cut off from here, she thinks, "That's what's in my dish, here" in this little dish she's going to take home. (And then) she thinks that she's going to take this home, and they're going to eat it (and then), she thinks that, there's enough here for everyone in the family. (And then, she said) as soon as the door closed after she went out the door, she thinks she started to cry.

23

When she woke up with the dream, or came out of it, they told her she wasn't sleeping, that she had her eyes all the time open. Her grandmother told her that she was gazing up. And when she woke up, she had tears in her eyes, she was crying. She felt like she was waking up, and at the same she felt like she just went out and came back again.

24

(And then) when she remembered, she heard her mother and grandmother crying. (She said) her mother was bowing on her chest, when she was crying. And she could understand what she was saying when she was talking, but she couldn't talk (you know) she couldn't make herself to talk. She couldn't move either, but she still remembered she had brought something home in her hand. (Alice chuckles) (And then) for quite a while she couldn't talk, but she could hear the other people talk, and she could understand what they were saying. (And then) she could remember what it's like inside there, the sun was shining into the teepee, inside the teepee. (And she said) it was hard for her, (you know) she couldn't talk, and she couldn't move.

25

When she was able to talk, she talked to her mother. She still remembers the words she said to her mother. (She said) she only was able to say very little, a few words. She told her mother, "Don't cry." She also said, "I came back again." And she heard somebody talking when she said that. The voice said, "She doesn't know what she's saying." It was one of her mother's sisters that said this. It wasn't so, she remembers, she knew where she was, and she knew she heard what she said. She heard it very clearly, that her mother was crying. (And then) she could talk some more, and she told her mother, she said, "Take this thing that I brought." (Alice chuckles)

26

Annie: Well, I guess they didn't really know what she was talking about, what she brought because nobody came to her side to take anything from her, she said.

Alice: And she heard her grandfather say, "Try and give her something, see what she's going to do." (And then, she said) when they gave her something, she knew it wasn't the thing she brought home that they were giving her. (And then) she managed to say to them that she wanted to sit up. She told them, "Help me to sit up, I'm not sick any more." Then her grandmother started to talk. (And then) her grandmother said, "Do what my grandchild says, I love her very much." So they got her up, they sat her up and they moved her from where she was lying, to another spot. She says she felt better after they moved her to another place. She

felt like she wasn't sick any more. (And then) she asked for something to play with when she was sitting there. And she knew her grandmother didn't really believe she was well. (And then she said) wherever she went, she thought, where she went, and I knew I was sent back from there, she says.

27

And her mother came close to her and she started to hug her. And her mother cried when she was talking to her. And her mother said, "Your little sister left us, she's not here in our tent any more." (And then) when this happened, when they lost the little one, she didn't know. But, apparently, she didn't even feel sorry about it. She says she doesn't know why she felt like this, she wasn't even sorry, or miss her sister. Maybe it's because she saw these children very happy where she went.

28

Annie: You know, where she went, and came back.

Alice: So from there she felt better.

Then one morning, she said, they were talking, the older people were talking among each other, and they were giving orders what they must do to her. She heard her grandfather talking. Her grandfather said, "It will be better if we take her to the settlement. Maybe the manager in Nemiscau will be able to help her a little, will be able to do something for her to help her." (She said) she heard her grandfather say her toes are falling down like this, down like that.

29

(Alice takes Sarah's foot and bends her toes to the floor to demonstrate how her toes were falling down.)

Annie: So this part of her foot must have been dead.

Alice: (And then she said) when she heard her grandfather say this, she couldn't feel any pain at all in her foot. And then they got her ready to bring her down to the settlement.

30

(And then she said) it's very hard for me to forget what happened when they started to get her ready to leave that camp, to take her to the settlement. She told her mother, as they

were getting her ready, dressed up to go, she asked her mother, "Can I come back to stay with you again, after my foot is all better, if it's not sore any more?" And her mother told her, "I'm going to let you go."

31

Annie: She won't be able to stay with her mother any more.

Alice: Her mother said, "I can't take care of you right." And her mother said, "If you get better, if your foot gets better, and you feel better, maybe somebody else will take care of you." And then she asked her mother, "Will you be close by, staying where I'll be after?" And then her mother said, "Yes, if we live longer in the future, we will be close by, we'll see you all the time." (And she said) that's the day she left her mother, she never stayed with her mother again, and she was only nine years old.

32

Annie: So, that's what happened to her after her foot was better, it wasn't sore any more and she was well, somebody else brought her up. She stayed with another family.

Sarah: Did her mother stay close by, did she see her mother after that?

Alice: Yes. (She said) she couldn't get over it for a long time, that she couldn't stay with her mother, and she used to cry all the time (you know) because she wanted to stay with her mother. She thinks now that she must have hurt her mother very badly, when she did this, when she used to cry, because she wanted to stay with her, because her mother used to say, "Go home! Go back to those people you stay with." And that's how she would say. But now she thinks it must have been hard, and it must have hurt her mother very much.

33

Sarah: Were the people she stayed with relatives?

Alice: No. That couple never had any children. So she lived with them until she got married. She was seventeen when she got married (so she lived with them eight years). (And she said) she couldn't walk right on her foot for a long time. Very long. It healed very slowly.

34

Sarah: Did they take them off?

Alice: Yes.

Annie: They cut that off, eh?

Alice: (She said) she didn't feel any pain when they cut it off. It looked like it was decaying, just the skin, there. (And then she said) they couldn't even put stitches in after they cut it because, I guess, her skin was dead at the edges, and then it wouldn't stay. That's why, I guess, it took a long time to heal.

35

Sarah: That's probably why she didn't feel anything, because it was already dead.

Alice: Yes. That's what the manager told her, the manager that cut it off. When they cut it off, they just put a piece of newspaper to cover her eyes. (Annie chuckles) She couldn't look, and he cut it with the scissors.

36

She doesn't know exactly the month she froze her foot. She thinks maybe January, you know, the coldest month of the winter. And she said she couldn't walk until after breakup. That's when she tried to walk.

37

Annie: I guess it hurt to walk on it because it wasn't healed yet, I guess.

Sarah: The family that she stayed with, were they better to her than her stepfather was?

Alice: Yes. They treated her better than her stepfather. (She said) they never beat her and she never got the strap. (She said) she was very afraid of them, maybe it was because she was beaten all the time, before, by her stepfather.

38

So when they got to the settlement, she doesn't know exactly how long it took them to get to the settlement from her grandparents' camp, she thinks maybe two nights they spent on the way before they reached the settlement of Nemiscau, and when they got there --. On their way they stopped at somebody else's camp, they spent the night there at these people's camp, she doesn't know them. Her stepfather came along when they brought her to the settlement. But her stepfather wasn't

able to carry anything, he just walked on his own. She doesn't know why he came along (she said). When they got to the settlement, they went inside Jimmy Moar's house first, then from Jimmy Moar's house they took her to the Hudson's Bay manager's house.

39

Her Uncle Philip was there, too, he came down. She knew her Uncle Philip really loved her. The manager said to this man, Jimmy Moar, he used to translate for the Indians for the Hudson's Bay manager. He translated for her uncle and her stepfather. The manager said he was sorry to see her foot frozen like that when she was at that age where she would be very happy to get around on her feet, to walk around, to get around. So, the manager asked her stepfather, "What happened, how, what about, why, she froze her foot." She doesn't exactly remember the words what he said when he answered the manager, when he asked him that question. (She said) her Uncle Philip started talking, too. Her Uncle Philip told the manager, "I'm very sure she wasn't looked after right." He told the manager that her stepfather had another child. And the manager asked if that other child was frozen like her, too. The manager was really amazed how come only one child was frozen. So her stepfather started to cry, and the manager quit asking questions about it. And he stopped talking altogether, he didn't talk to them any more.

40

And the manager told the men he wasn't sure he would be able to help her. She thinks they didn't have any kind of medicine. (She said) she remembers him putting ointment on it. This ointment was sort of yellow colour. Every morning, three times a day, every morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening he would change the bandage, he would soak her foot and then put this stuff, this ointment on it, and then bandage it up.

41

And then her stepfather and the others who came along to bring her down, went back to the bush, to their camp.

42

Sarah: Then they left her with the other family at Nemiscau?

Alice: Yes, they left her with Jimmy Moar and his wife, and she lived with them. She said she remembers them telling her, "If you get

better, your foot gets better, and you're not sick any more, we're not going to let you go again. We're going to keep you." (Annie chuckles) But her grandmother had already told her that she would take her. She remembered that even though this couple told her that they wouldn't let her go. She remembered her grandmother telling her she would live with her.

43

And then, in the spring when the snow gets hard, when the snow is hard because it melted in the daytime, and it freezes and it's hard, her mother came to see her (cheerful chuckles all around). They had moved closer to the settlement. I guess they had moved camp, and they were closer to the settlement, and that's where her mother came from when she came to see her. They were catching rabbits close by the settlement, and her mother came. She just came to see how she was, that's why she came. She spent the night there, one night, she spent one night in the settlement (Alice chuckles) and she wanted to go to bed with her mother (Annie chuckles, and we all laugh). And that couple she lived with let her sleep with her mother.

44

She remembers her mother taking home a little bit of food from the store, like flour, she said, a little bag of flour and a little bag of sugar, too. (And then she said) when my mother left, I cried again, when she left. (Alice and Annie laugh at this.) Her mother told her "We'll see you again when we come back, when we'll be using the canoe when we come back." So when the people started coming back after breakup, her grandmother came and her mother came too. (And she said) she thought she went through a hard time there then. She wanted to stay with her grandmother. (She said) she understands she would never be able to stay with her mother again because her mother had told her that she wouldn't be able to stay with her again. (And she said) the couple she lived with really put up a fuss over her.

45

Sarah: They must have liked her a lot then?

Alice: I knew they had learned to love me and I guess it's because they didn't have any children of their own. So that's when my grandmother said I could stay with that couple permanently. It was OK with her, if she couldn't keep me. So

she stayed with that couple until she was married. (And she said) when she had children of her own, her adopted mother called her children, grandchildren.

46

Sarah: If she didn't have any children, they would be her only grandchildren anyway.

Alice: Yes, she said, Jimmy Moar, her adopted father, was old when he died, his head was white, and he was blind.

Sarah: Maybe they were old when they took Alice then?

Alice: Yes, they were old. When that old man died, she had only one child, her oldest one. But the old lady lived longer. (She said) her son Jimmy was the baby when she died in Moose Factory. She died about 15 years ago. (And then she said) the longer she stayed with them, the longer she referred to her as her mother. (She said) when she got married she cried because she was leaving them.

47

Her mother didn't live in Nemiscau. I don't know, (she said) a long time before she was married they had left Nemiscau, they had moved to Mistassini. So that's where they lived, where they still live now. Both of them, her stepfather and her mother are still living. Last month they went to Mistassini and she saw her stepfather and her mother.

48

Sarah: Has her stepfather's disposition improved as he's gotten older? I hope so.

Alice: Yes.

Annie: Well, I guess when he got older he sort of improved as he got older because he didn't treat her like that after she was married.

Sarah: Maybe that made him feel bad, when she got sick like that?

Alice: And sometimes they write to her and her stepfather says, "Come and see us while we're still living."

Annie: It's nice Alice forgave her stepfather for mistreating her.

Sarah: Yes.

Alice: Because of what happened, she doesn't want to treat her stepfather differently than she does her mother, she wants to love them both. She has three brothers and one sister, so there's five of them living. Her mother had more children than that and she lost some. 49

Annie: You know, the sister she lost and I guess she lost some after.

Alice: She lived with this couple after she was adopted, Jimmy Moar and his wife. They stayed all the time in the settlement because (you know, I guess), he had sort of a steady job with the Hudson Bay as a translator or working for the manager. 50

And then maybe sometimes the manager would let him off, maybe let him off for his holidays. This man she lived with, and they were able to go out camping, maybe fishing. They didn't go very far. They didn't go out for a long time, they weren't gone long. (And then, she said) after her foot was strong enough in the winter she was able to help that old man a lot. She went with him to set traps, (Annie chuckles) and she went with the old man fishing through the ice and setting nets. And then she went setting rabbit snares. 51

Sarah: That sounds like she had to be a son as well as a daughter.

Alice: That's right (she says). When she got married, she was seventeen when she got married, and then, I don't know how many years after she had her daughter Eva. Her first baby was a boy, and I don't know how many years after she was married, and then Eva after. Her first baby didn't live. She lost it within a year. He wasn't even one year old, the baby, when she lost the baby, then her next baby was Eva. (She said) she didn't stay in the settlement any more after she was married. (She said) she went out on the trapline with her husband. And then when she came back from the trapline, or from hunting, she would always move in with this couple she stayed with, she grew up with. Her husband is not from Nemiscau. 52

Annie: Would you like to know how they met? (giggles)

Sarah: Sure (more giggles).

Alice: (And she said) when she was carrying Eva, before she was born, they went to the settlement for Christmas, she remembers a trader came, somebody who brought stuff in to sell. And they were already getting ready to go back out to their camp. They were all ready. They had packed everything to go and she was over there where they were selling the stuff, I guess, where the trader was.

53

(Annie begins the next portion in Cree and catches herself saying, "Listen to me talking in Cree" and we all laugh.)

(And she said) this couple she lived with, she grew up with, they were very sorry she lost her first child when he wasn't even one year old. When they knew she was going to have another baby, they wanted her to take it very easy. (And she said) it happened when, she didn't even know exactly the month, exactly where her pregnancy started. Her adopted mother had already asked her when she was expecting to have this baby. And she told her, "I don't know." She had her first baby on November 5, and lost the baby May 8. (Alice lists the months between November and May in English.) (She said) when the baby was born and she stopped losing blood after the baby was born, she didn't have any more periods after that. She didn't know exactly when her pregnancy started because she didn't have her period. (She said) she didn't know she was pregnant until she could feel the baby move. (Alice laughs at herself.) (She said) when the baby was born (the baby died in May), and all summer she didn't have a period and then in the fall she found out she was expecting again. (She said) when they came to the settlement in December, they wanted to be in the settlement for Christmas, she didn't have a clue when she would have this baby. And she knew her adopted mother was worried about her because they had planned on going back right after New Year's to their camp.

54

The trader came into the settlement on January 9. (So she said) she was over there looking for something, I guess, to buy. (She said) she was--he was selling his stuff inside a tent. And then during the time she was going around looking for something to buy, she knew she was going into labour. Then, while she

was there (she said) this would be their last night at the settlement. They would leave in the morning to go to their camp. (She said) by the time, before she could go home, she was so sure she was going to have this baby (giggles). Then she went home to her (adopted mother).

## ANALYSIS

The first section of the narrative is a series of seemingly unconnected events, including the marriage of Alice's mother, Alice's birth, the freezing and subsequent loss of Alice's foot, a significant dream, and finally, the relinquishing of parental responsibility on the part of Alice's mother and the assumption of those responsibilities, first by grandparents and then by foster parents. These events were grouped together by Alice as she first began the recording of her life history. One can assume, as Burke (1967) suggests for the literary writer, that Alice was conscious of developing a particular imagery in order to reinforce a particular idea.

By grouping this set of events together Alice illustrated the negative consequences which result from the lack of competent social interaction. She also began to make the distinction between competence, behaviour informed by social responsibility; and incompetence, behaviour which ignores social responsibility. The aspects of competence brought into focus in these events include acknowledging and expressing concern for others, recognizing and being able to assume responsibility for others when the need arises, and the need to be prepared for the contingencies with which one may be faced.

The narrative begins within the context of the family into which Alice was born, and it illustrates the extent to which tragedy may occur when individuals avoid social responsibility. The need to be prepared for a particular situation or the contingencies of the environment is also illustrated. The lack of preparation as described in this beginning sequence of events may have been the result of ignorance or it may have been the result of deliberately neglecting responsible social action. In either case, the actions indicate incompetence.

With a shift in context from natal family unit to grandmother's family unit, Alice begins to illustrate competent social interaction. Mature adults work together as a unit to support each other, assuming responsibility for others when necessary, while maintaining for themselves and encouraging in others a recognition of individual autonomy and self-reliance.

It is my assumption that it is important always to keep in mind that it is not personalities with which one must be concerned, it is instead, individual actions and the relationships between persons. Competence, or the lack of it, is reflected in one's actions. It is therefore through the observation of behaviour, either directly, or through its recreation in narrative, that one comes to learn, as Alice learned, what it is that constitutes competence in a Cree community.

Before Alice was born, her mother married her stepfather. Her stepfather's competence was questioned by her mother's mother in the statement, "I don't think that man is going to be very good to you, if you marry him" (2:1).<sup>1</sup> Although Alice's grandmother expressed her concern, she did not interfere with the marriage, which was requested by Alice's stepfather's father. Alice's mother's behaviour, too, may reflect a lack of competence; she was pregnant before she was married and she did not marry Alice's father. These events, however, are not significant, receiving only passing comments so as to give background information for the events to follow.

Immaturity, lack of preparation and to some extent ignorance on the part of this young couple are illustrated through Alice's comments about her birth. "I was born in November sometime. They were out camping, trying to catch rabbits at the time I was born. And my stepfather delivered me when I was born. They didn't even have a scissors with them" (2:1). Alice expressed her own concern about her stepfather's competence when she wondered about his crooked knife. "And I wonder what this crooked knife looked like, the one that my stepfather used, maybe it was even rusted" (2.2).

What is most significant about this situation is not that they had no scissors with them, or that the crooked knife might have been rusted, but that they were alone. There

was no woman with them to deliver the baby. This lack of preparation for the expected birth suggests that Alice's parents lacked sufficient understanding about the circumstances of childbirth.

The paradox of childbirth is that this ordinary, everyday occurrence remains an extraordinary event. Within a Cree context this is a particularly critical time for both mother and midwife. At the moment of birth the expectations of competent social interaction are suspended. The mother must relinquish her self-reliance, to rely upon the assistance of another, and at the same time the midwife must assume responsibility for the life of the mother and infant. In some sense both these actions constitute an interference with the autonomy of another. It is crucial that both mother and midwife act without panic.<sup>2</sup>

Normally a knowledgeable older woman is midwife, often one's grandmother, perhaps one's mother or mother-in-law. If a woman is not present a competent man is capable of acting as midwife, but the infant is born into an anomalous environment which could have some effect on its future. The anomalous environment into which Alice was born may have been the result of immaturity on the part of her mother and stepfather; they may not have realized the birth was imminent. Or it may have been a deliberate action; they may have chosen to manage without a midwife's assistance. In either case, their behaviour indicates a lack of consideration for the child,

and was the beginning of a life which Alice remembers in terms of neglect and incompetence.

Occasionally, within a Cree community, a young woman may have a child whose father is not the man she eventually marries, as was the case with Alice's mother. When this situation does arise, the stepfather normally accepts the child as his own, assuming the role and responsibilities of a natural father. Although paternity is known, rarely is there an indication that this older child is in any way different from other children in the family. What made Alice's early childhood notable was her stepfather's deliberate avoidance of responsible action in relation to Alice, which in turn influenced her mother's relationship to her.

Until a child is capable of caring for his/her own physical well being, the adults around the child must assume that responsibility. As a child Alice recognized that her stepfather did not care for her; she was not treated the same as her siblings were treated and her stepfather berated her mother for trying to care for her. Her stepfather preferred not to acknowledge her presence and he ignored the social responsibility an adult has for a child in his/her household. Rather than the usual teasing and threats as a means of discipline (Preston, 1975:15, 1976:464), Alice's stepfather would beat her. "Whenever a small incident would happen and I happened to make my younger brothers cry, my stepfather would beat me up" (2:3). An overt expression of aggression is

an interference with the personal autonomy of another and is one indication of incompetence.

As a child Alice was in a household in which the adult behaviour, the actions of her mother and stepfather, often reflected a lack of social responsibility. In addition to the difficulties she may have had to face in this situation, the whole family had to cope with the contingencies of the environment, for which they were ill-prepared. "That fall and winter was very cold" (2.:8). "My mother looked very poor in health during this time I'm talking about. Even the clothes she wore were in very poor condition. And she was very cold, I could hear her teeth rattling" (2:9). Alice's stepfather was having poor luck in hunting. "Then one fall we were very poor, we didn't have enough to eat" (2:5). Because they thought they were not welcome at her stepfather's father's camp, they decided to move to her mother's father's camp. This was a four day walk and they had no food. "At that time we didn't have any food at all, not even tea" (2:12).

It was during this move that Alice's foot became frozen. The freezing of her foot is the specific event upon which the narrative is built. It is also, quite separately, the pivotal point in the development of the narrative. Until this point, the focus has been on actions reflecting incompetence. After describing the occasion on which her foot was frozen, the tragic result of an accumulation of irresponsible actions, Alice shifted the focus of the narrative to the

counter-balance, the expression of social responsibility and competence.

Alice's account of her frozen foot is an example of the tragic consequences which could result when a child has to assume responsibility and self-reliance beyond its capabilities. Although a child of nine could be expected to dress herself and would have developed the stamina needed for the long walk between hunting camps, she could not be expected to be completely knowledgeable about the extreme cold and therefore be able to prepare for it. Alice explained that when she dressed herself that morning, before they began the move to her mother's father's camp, her mother did not help her (2:6).

Alice knew her feet were cold before they left, but apparently she did not tell her mother and apparently her mother neglected to check. Both actions could be said to be an unusual expression of reticence, generated by fear of the stepfather's anger. One individual's lack of social responsibility is not limited to his/her own actions, but affects others and leads them to act abnormally. Under normal circumstances communication between Alice and her mother would have been less reticent, more intimate and supportive.

When Alice could no longer walk and her mother tried to help by putting her on the toboggan with the baby, her stepfather continued to refuse to acknowledge responsibility, saying, "Why do you bother with her?" (2:10).

Alice's mother continued with her across a large lake, to the place where her husband had made a fire. As they rested, Alice remembered, her mother checked her feet. "She took my moccasin off and she took my sock off. As she was untying my moccasin she was crying. Sometimes these memories come back to me and I remember because I was sorry for my mother, but there was nothing I could do about it" (2:11). Under normal circumstances emotional control would preclude crying. Alice has made it quite clear however, that this was not a normal situation.

It is probable that Alice did not put her socks and her moccasins on correctly, thus allowing her foot to freeze. Annie explained as she interpreted, "I guess she didn't really dress herself right." When Alice's mother took her socks off, not only could she see the frozen foot, she could see how Alice had dressed herself. Her tears no doubt reflected her sympathy for her daughter's condition. They were also an indication of her recognition, and regret, that this condition was the direct result of her own lack of competence; her inability to look after the child as a mother should. Her actions and her husband's actions had profoundly damaging consequences.

Alice's personal autonomy had been violated. A frozen foot is a particularly serious injury because walking (along with canoeing) has always been, and remains, a major means of transportation for the Cree. The possibility that Alice might

become crippled and dependent on others, rather than self-reliant, was very real.

As indicated before, I think that Alice's frozen foot is the pivotal point in this portion of the narrative. Prior to this point the behaviour discussed has reflected, in general, negative aspects of social interaction. The shift away from a description of actions lacking competence to a description of actions beginning to express social responsibility is very subtle, noted first in Alice's stepfather's comment, "Put her moccasin back on, there's nothing we can do for it" (2:12). This statement not only indicates a change of focus in the narrative, it also indicates a change in the relationship between Alice and her stepfather.

This change in the focus of the narrative is more clearly expressed in Alice's stepfather's actions when he took her on his toboggan, but his own recognition of social responsibility for Alice remained tentative, and he continued to be a threat to her. When she cried with pain as her foot began to thaw, her mother told her, "Your father's going to beat you if he gets angry because you cry" (2:14).

The change in the narrative as well as the possibility of a change on the part of Alice's stepfather are again indicated through Alice's discussion of her stepfather's ability to locate lichen, an ability which requires some understanding of the physical environment. This discussion of lichen focuses on positive rather than negative aspects of Alice's stepfather's actions.

When they met Alice's mother's brother, Philip, he spoke directly to her stepfather about his lack of care and responsibility, saying, "I think you are very mean to her, I don't think you look after her right, don't take care of her right" (2:15). This statement seems to indicate direct interference with another person; a violation of the ideal, non-interference. In the course of this analysis it will become evident that there are several occasions when behaviour which seems to reflect a violation of ideals is instead a deliberate action based on an awareness of an extraordinary situation. This is one such occasion. A frozen foot is not to be taken lightly. Under these circumstances, Philip's comment can be understood as an intervention in support of Alice; it is an interference reflecting social responsibility. Alice's stepfather's relationship to her was at this time ambiguous; his change of heart was not yet directly obvious to others, yet his behaviour toward Alice was no longer irresponsible.

The change in the narrative is completed as Alice described the meeting with her mother's brother. She began to highlight the contrast between her natal family unit and her grandmother's family unit. These differences are first to be noted in her uncle's behaviour. He expressed his concern for both Alice and her mother, crying at her mother's condition. He was well prepared for travel in the cold, he was hospitable, strong and healthy. He took Alice, her mother, and her baby sister on his toboggan for the journey from his camp to Alice's

grandfather's camp. Upon their arrival at her grandparents' camp Alice was taken by her grandmother to her side of the teepee.<sup>3</sup> By doing this her grandmother exercised the authority of the older generation, removed Alice from her stepfather's household, and assumed responsibility for her. Preparation, concern and responsibility are the dimensions of competence expressed in the actions of Alice's grandmother and uncle.

Alice does not remember what happened after their arrival at her grandparents' camp. She said, "I was so sick, it seems like a dream, but at the same time, I thought I went away someplace" (2:22). The circumstances of this dream experience are strikingly similar to the experiences recorded by Don Talayesva (Simmons: 1942) and Black Elk (Neihardt: 1961). There is also a parallel in the contemporary medical literature which refers to the experiences recorded by individuals who have recovered from clinical death (Moody: 1976, Siegal: 1980). Placed in the context of the similar experiences of others, Alice's dream can be understood as a journey across the barriers of consciousness, and being of great importance to her.

Many Cree consider dreaming significant. Dreams are not only a source of knowledge, they can also indicate that a dreamer may have spiritual power (Tanner, 1979: 126). I understand from my discussions on dreaming with other Cree women that the problem is to know with which dreams one should

be concerned and how to interpret them. Often the meaning of a dream is not immediately clear, but as the meaning unfolds, the dream will be remembered (Preston, 1975: 232-234). That is, if a particular experience reminds one of the dream, the dream may be interpreted in the light of that experience. The meaning is embedded in the experience.

Alice provided almost no clues as to how she interprets her dream, which has Christian overtones distracting one from any specifically Cree reference point. The image of the happy children and the man dressed in white, who told her she was to return to her mother, reminds one of the traditional church school pictures of Christ and the children, with the caption, "Suffer the little children to come unto me."

Although Alice never discussed it with me, other than to record it, I think we may assume that she considers her dream experience an important event. The meaning I may attribute to it however, may not represent accurately the meaning it holds for her.

She says of her return, "When I woke up with the dream, or came out of it, they told me I wasn't sleeping, that I had my eyes all the time open. My grandmother told me I was gazing up. I felt like I was waking up and at the same time I felt like I just went out and came back again. My mother and my grandmother were crying (2:24). Later, when she could talk, she told her mother, "Don't cry, I came back again" (2:26).

Alice was near death. Perhaps her family thought they would lose her as well as the baby, who died while she was ill. She remembered that she was not sorry about her sister's death. "When they lost the little one, I didn't know. But, apparently, I didn't even feel sorry about it. I don't know why I felt like this, I wasn't sorry or miss my sister. Maybe it's because I saw these children very happy where I went" (2:28). We may assume from this that Alice understands her experience as a return from death.

The image of the happy children in Alice's dream is an image of security, warmth, and love, qualities which were lacking in her home environment. "I knew my mother was afraid to look after me. When I grew older I began to understand that they didn't like me, they didn't want me, sort of. I felt like they didn't want me in the family" (2:4).

When she saw the man coming toward her, she too felt happy and she could no longer feel the pain in her foot. She became a part of the image. The man, who was the source of the security and warmth Alice felt, gave her two gifts; the gift of life, "You're going back again, you're going back to your mother," (2:23) and a gift of nourishment, "In the little dish was something very small, it looked like a piece of meat ... and the man told me, 'take that home' to my parents ... and I think I'm going to take this home and we are going to eat it. I think there's enough here for everyone in the family" (2:23).

The dream person's giving of the gifts may be understood as a demonstration of the ideals of competence and generosity in adult behaviour with relation to the individuals for whom one may be responsible. If one gives life, one is responsible for life, and must provide for its survival. Emotional nourishment, warmth and love secure the will to live. Physical nourishment insures that possibility. We may assume that the man Alice met in her dream returned to her her spirit, her will to live.

Alice returned to her family with a knowledge the others, including her grandparents, did not have. She recalled, "I knew my grandmother didn't really believe I was well. Wherever I went, I thought, I knew I was sent back from there" (2:27). Alice knew she had been sent home and that she would recover. Her family not only did not understand that she was well, they did not understand when she told them, "Take this thing that I brought" (2:26). No one came to take anything from her. It may have seemed to them that her words made no sense, an indication that she might not yet be well. They did not know about the gifts she had been given, however, they let her do as she asked; they sat her up and moved her to another place in the teepee. After that she felt she was not sick any more, and soon recovered enough to be moved to the settlement of Nemiscau.

The critical point in Alice's life is not the freezing of her foot, but is her return from illness. She nearly lost her life due to the neglect of others. Through her dream she regained her will to live, and her sense of living in the midst of concern and responsible support. Friends have said about her that her life has been very hard. Her narrative verifies this statement; however, as a mature woman she exhibits a physical stamina and spiritual strength which suggest to me that her dream has been a strong force in her life.

Alice recalled the morning she was taken to Nemiscau. Her grandfather decided, "It will be better if we take her to the settlement. Maybe the manager in Nemiscau will be able to hep her" (2:29). It should be remembered that Alice's grandmother assumed responsibility for her when she took Alice to her side of the teepee, at the grandfather's camp. On the morning Alice was taken to Nemiscau, her mother gave her to her grandmother. She gave up her role as mother to Alice, acknowledging her inability to care for her, saying, "I'm going to let you go. I can't take care of you right. If you get better ... maybe somebody else will take care of you" (2:31).

This separation was not only difficult for Alice - "I couldn't get over it for a long time, that I couldn't stay with my mother" (2:33) - as an adult she understands now that it was difficult for her mother also. By giving up her child

for someone else to care for, Alice's mother was demonstrating a growing self-awareness. To recognize that she could not care for Alice and to be strong enough to give her to someone else rather than keeping her and letting her try to grow up without proper care, is a subtle expression of responsibility almost lost in the more obvious actions of Alice's grandparents.

This is where Alice ended the narrative, remembering the day she lost her mother. The remainder of this section of the narrative are bits and pieces in response to my questions about what happened after she was taken to Nemiscau. Alice returned to some of these bits later in the narrative, but at this point they may not have been essential to the image she may have been attempting to create. Alice has created a series of images illustrating various aspects of competence and social responsibility by describing the actions of her mother and stepfather, her uncle, and her grandparents. Nevertheless, two of the additional details do add to our understanding of these images.

Alice was taken to Nemiscau where the Hudson Bay Company manager amputated the decaying portion of her foot. The manager questioned her stepfather about her foot and expressed his surprise that only one child had been frozen. In response, her stepfather stopped talking and began to cry.

"The manager was really amazed how come only one child was frozen. So my stepfather started to cry, and the manager quit asking questions about it. And he

stopped talking altogether, he didn't talk anymore. And the manager told the men he wasn't sure he would be able to help me" (2:41).

The stepfather's refusal to speak was an unusual manifestation of reticence; perhaps he feared retaliation on the part of the post manager, or perhaps he was simply withdrawing from a situation in which he had no way of knowing the outcome, or perhaps it was both.

For whatever reason, the withdrawal from speech was in response to the exposure of his failure at acting responsibly. Alice's stepfather's tears, like her mother's tears at the sight of her foot, were a direct expression of his recognition and regret that her condition was the result of his lack of social responsibility. It would seem that the deceased baby was not mentioned in this exchange with the post manager. Although Alice's stepfather's tears may be considered an indication of his recognition of irresponsibility towards Alice, they may also reflect the memory of this recent loss.

Alice's family returned to her grandfather's camp, leaving her with a Cree couple, Jimmy and Maggie Moar, who remained in the village most of the year. Alice recalled that her mother came to visit in the spring and Maggie let her sleep with her mother. This memory, of a nine year old wanting to sleep with her mother, brought chuckles to both Alice and Annie. The next day, when her mother left to return to the hunting camp, Alice cried. This memory also

caused Alice and Annie to chuckle.

Both the desire to sleep with her mother and the tears at her departure reflect Alice's insecurity in the face of her recent trauma, and her need to be assured of her mother's love. They are also manifestations of Alice's immaturity. The expression of reticence and emotional control begins early. The laughter brought on by the memories corresponds to the laughter any child's actions lacking reticence might generate.

"With respect to a typical life cycle, reticent norms begin to show at a very early age (easily discerned by age two), but they are frequently violated. Adults may laugh and even encourage a child who is assertive, so long as he is not violent or destructive."

(Preston, 1976: 486)

Even though she had just recalled an extremely difficult time in her life, Alice could laugh at what might be perceived as childishness, and Annie could laugh with her.

In the development of the narrative, there is a gradual indication of the possibility of change in the actions of one who lacks competence. Tears, when faced with the consequences of his actions, are the clearest expression of this change in Alice's stepfather. The shift from behaviour lacking in competence to behaviour informed by social responsibility previously noted reflects a transition on the part of Alice's stepfather as well as a general transition in the narrative.

Attitudes toward individuals who manifest behaviour lacking in social competence are highlighted in this shift. Although Alice's stepfather's behaviour had exhibited incompetence, he was not considered to be evil, nor was he irretrievably incompetent. When he saw Alice's frozen foot, he began to recognize that his reluctance to accept social responsibility had tragic consequences. With this recognition he began to alter his behaviour. Because his actions may not have immediately reflected any significant change, his wife's brother remained critical. Finally, his tears reflect his change of heart.

The lack of social responsibility is hardly overlooked, being remembered and related rather dramatically in this narrative, but neither is it justification for retaliatory or vindictive response. In answer to my question about her stepfather, "Has her stepfather's disposition improved as he's gotten older?" Alice explained, "My stepfather and my mother are still living. Sometimes we go to Mistassini and I see my stepfather and my mother. Sometimes they write to me and my stepfather says 'Come and see us while we're still living.' Because of what happened, I don't want to treat my stepfather differently than my mother, I want to love them both" (2:49).

Throughout the narrative Alice's description of events indicates that the acquisition of competence is a developmental process which includes the recognition of social responsibility and an understanding of the consequences of

one's actions. One's interactions with others is influenced by one's knowledge and understanding of particular situations. As long as it can be seen that one has learned from one's experience, and one's behaviour reflects that knowledge, it would seem that the Cree are prepared to accept the individual that each person (Cree or non-Cree) is encouraged and allowed to be.

Annie Whiskeychan was trying to help me to understand this point when she commented, "It's nice Alice forgave her stepfather for mistreating her." I first understood Annie's comment simply as a way to deflect my questioning about Alice's stepfather. After a great deal of thought, I recognize that my question focused on personality rather than action, indicating that, to a degree, I had missed the point of the narrative. Annie's comment reflects reticence, non-interference and indirectness as she politely informed me of my mistake. She did not directly interfere with my questioning or my understanding of the situation; however, her statement was an indirect way of suggesting I had asked the wrong question, and it provided an alternative understanding, should I chose to accept it.

CHAPTER THREE

NARRATIVE, RECORDED 10 JULY, 1978

Sarah: You have to do something besides giggle, you two (referring to Annie and Alice).

Annie: She said, "I start off when they wanted me to get married."

Sarah: OK.

Alice: (She said) she wasn't very happy to hear that because the man who was going to marry her wasn't from the settlement of Nemiscau. She doesn't even know when Willie asked if he could marry her. Maybe, when he came to Nemiscau, he must have asked her foster parents if he could marry her, but she didn't know, until the old lady she lived with told her about it. So she wasn't very happy when they told her about it. And she said, "He's too old." (Alice continues to giggle.) So they told her, "You shouldn't try to be the boss."

56

Sarah: Oh?

Alice: "You can't make up your mind by yourself because you're not old enough."

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: "So, if you marry somebody older than you are, things will work out fine." Still (she said), still she wasn't happy about it. I guess she thought about it often and then she used to cry. But she thought that when Willie came to their place, she thought that he was very ... (pause) like... he thought a great deal of the old lady she stayed with because he used to bring presents to her, sometimes meat. So Willie must have been 30, I guess, or over 30. So, after that she knew she couldn't stop them. So she didn't say anything. She thought, "OK, they can do what they want to do."

57

But they didn't get married right away after. They didn't get married until after one more year. (And she said) she went around with this boy that winter. (Alice giggles again.) So she would rather have gotten married to this boy.

When they found out that she was going around with this other boy, they talked to her a lot, trying to persuade her to quit going around with him. Her grandmother and her foster mother talked to her together, and her grandmother said, "We're related to that boy you're going around with." That boy wasn't even from Nemiscau. He was from Waswanipi, because I'd never seen him before. That's the first time I saw him. (She said) that's why I didn't know I was related to him. This boy only had foster parents. He didn't live with his own parents. And they came to Nemiscau, the foster parents came. The foster mother of that boy came to see them (Alice's foster parents) and asked them if they (Alice and the boy) could get married right away. So there was very many problems (she said). There was lots of talking. She was outside with this boy. They were talking and they were laughing, then, because they knew they were talking about them inside the house. 58

So one day when she wasn't home, she was out in the bush getting wood. So after she came back she started to do some work around--in their home. And a girl came in and she gave her a letter. So she could read the Cree syllabics at that time. And the letter was from this boy she was going around with. He said, "I guess it's over for us. It's all ruined for us. I guess we can't get married." But he said, anyway his foster parents told him, "You're getting married anyway," they said. "We're going to find a girl in Nemiscau for him." Another girl. Maybe the foster parents wanted him to get married because he was an orphan. He didn't have parents. So he told her to write to him back what she thinks about this. So she didn't even write to him. She didn't know what to say. 59

(So she said), I don't know how many days after, he wrote to me again. And he told her in the letter he was really going to get married. He said in his letter that the girl he is marrying is very much older than he is. From his age, she was much older. And he asked her if she could be the bridesmaid at their wedding. So she started to write to him back, this time. She wrote to him. She said, "I feel shy. I feel ashamed what you ask of me." So, I guess, they were getting ready to get married. 60

And Willie came to the settlement of Nemiscau. And Willie came with somebody from Rupert House. She doesn't know who it was. He was out trapping, I guess, and he came to Nemiscau. And what happened was, when she was going around with this boy, they didn't go in secret. People saw them together. (And then, she said) she wasn't ashamed to go around with him because they both wanted to get married to each other. So, I guess, you know how gossip goes sometimes? 61

Sarah: Yes.

Alice: Some mistakes got into the gossip and something went wrong, the way people talked. I didn't bother to look for Willie, you know, to even go and see him when he came. But I guess she just heard he came. And I guess in the night, that night, they gave him a drink. They were drinking. So while Willie was drinking somebody told Willie, "That girl you wanted to marry here in Nemiscau is going to get married." So I guess Willie wasn't very happy to hear that. So early in the morning, (she said) Willie was gone. And Willie had asked her adopted mother to stay in their house when he came. Well, maybe he went home. I wasn't, you know, I wasn't aware of it. I never bothered to watch him. And then later on, she knew that he was gone. So she never paid any attention even though she found out he was gone. So she didn't ask anything about it either. 62

And then, sometime later, that boy she went around with wrote to her again. He asked her again, he told her that they were getting married and he asked Alice again if she could be the bridesmaid. And he was getting married to her friend. She went around a lot with this girl. Then I asked the girl, "When did he ask you if he could marry you?" Apparently, the adopted parents of this boy went to see the grandmother of this girl. And then I asked her, "Are you really going to marry him?" And she said, "Yes." And then the girl asked her if she could be the bridesmaid, because the boy said he had asked her to be the bridesmaid. I said, "I guess I will be your bridesmaid, but I am very shy about it." So I was the bridesmaid at their wedding. 63

- In the spring, after breakup, (she said) they got her ready to get married. And they couldn't get married in Nemiscau. And they brought her down from Nemiscau to here (Rupert House) by canoe. And sometimes she was very upset and lonely. She didn't know anybody at Rupert House. And she'd never been here before. And when they got here, by canoe, they got her ready. They made her dress. (She said) she felt better when she saw how nice her dress was looking. (Alice and Annie laughing.)

64

There were four girls that were married, including herself, four couples. The other was Alice, and Janie and Ella and Alice Jacob. She doesn't know if either of the four of them was very happy about the wedding.

65

Then they got ready to get dressed up to go to the church for the wedding. Then the other couples said they would go first because Willie's the oldest one. She was 17 herself. So she felt upset even to hear this, you know, the way people talked. (And she said) she got a little bit, as a gift for the wedding, from Willie's relatives and his brothers here. His father and mother were already dead when they got married. After their wedding, they went back to Nemiscau. They were there in Nemiscau for a while.

66

Sarah: When was the wedding? (Alice and Annie discuss the date. Alice says July, later says June. Annie confirms June.)

Alice: July--June.

Annie: June, I think it was June, 1948-49. I'm not sure what the year was.

Alice: They didn't stay in Nemiscau very long. Then they went up the river to where they were going to hunt and trap. (Then she said) she wasn't very happy to go. She didn't want to go away from her foster parents. Then her foster mother told her, "You can't look after us any more because you're living--you're married now and you have to go where your husband goes." So they left Nemiscau.

67

I can't say I knew everything, what a woman does after she's married. And Willie was able to tell her what to do. (She said) we stayed with other people. There wasn't just two of us out there. Sometimes she was worried. She was wondering what she was going to do, like when he made his snowshoes and then about the lacing. And she was worried that she has to make his mittens and his moccasins. She wasn't really happy.

68

(And then she said) they built their teepee, a big one, so they can all be in one teepee. Her grandmother was there and her grandmother helped her a lot. It was her mother's mother. She was a big help to her. If there was anything she didn't know, if she didn't know what to do with something, if she was going to make something and she didn't know what to do, she would ask her grandmother. After freezeup, after it was good to travel, walking, they all went separate ways, two families together. (So she said) we were out there. So she doesn't remember everything that happened there.

69

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: And then she doesn't know what happened but some-time later on just Willie and her were together, by themselves. (She said) she lived with Philip Jolly and his wife Ellen. Later on in the year, maybe in the spring like, she remembers this incident very well. And she wants to laugh when she remembers it. She never used to take one stocking off where she froze her foot. She always left it on. (giggling) She was embarrassed about her foot.

70

And Willie said to her one day, there was just the two of them there, he asked her why she was so embarrassed that Willie would see her foot. He said, "I'm sure you are not the only one that has a deformed foot like that." (And she said) when they didn't live with other people, she was lonely, homesick. She started to think about her foster parents right away. Sometimes she almost cried. It was in the morning and Willie said to her, "I think you should take your sock off so I could see your foot," and she said, "No." Willie told her, "If you don't take your sock off and let me see your foot, I'm

going to leave you here by yourself." So he said to her lots of things to persuade her. Finally she took her sock off and he saw her foot.

71

Annie: I guess she was not old enough. She was afraid when she was alone, when Willie would leave her and she was alone by herself. So I guess that's why she obeyed Willie when he asked her to show him her foot.

Alice: Then after he saw her foot, he seemed to feel different towards her, to sort of pity her, feel sorry for her maybe. So after that, after he saw it, she was less embarrassed any more that he would see it. But she wasn't able to walk for a long time, any distance, as they moved camp, when they travelled and she had to walk with snowshoes. (And then she said) if she walked in one day, she would get a blister with blood under her skin. It was very sore if she would get a blister there from walking. It was very sore and it was hard for her.

72

Sarah: I guess that's the place where your foot rubbed, when walking, does this, you know, and that would be the place that it would rub, I guess and that's why it would get a blister.

Annie: Umhum.

Alice: That's right.

And then they spent the spring in the bush. They didn't come back.

73

(And then she said) in that summer she was pregnant with the first baby she had. When they came back from the bush later on after breakup, she told her foster mother right away that she was going to have a baby. And that summer they went up to Mistassini by canoe. She said it was very hard to go there. She didn't know anything about having a baby then. She didn't even know how to take care of herself. They stayed in Mistassini for a while that summer. She went to see her mother. She was already living in Mistassini.

74

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: (She said) her mother wasn't very pleased when she saw her. She knew there was something wrong, but, she asked her what was the matter. She wanted to find out from her mother why she wasn't pleased about her. And her mother said, "Couldn't they find somebody older that you could marry." She meant that she thought Willie was too old for her. So she told her mother, "I couldn't boss over myself. I couldn't make my own decision for myself, who to marry." So she told her mother, "Never mind, stop worrying, not to worry about it." And she said, "Maybe I was in worse condition when I was smaller." So her mother was different after that. She took things as they were. And Willie was really good to her mother, too. He would give her money, too. (And she said) her mother felt better after and she would--she felt better about it than she did at first. And then they left Mistassini to come back to Nemiscau. When they came back from Mistassini, they only stayed for a while in Nemiscau. They came down to Rupert House. (She said) she was very amazed that she was able to carry this baby full term and she didn't do any harm to it, the way she was going. Well, I guess she didn't think about it at the time, but after the baby was born, she really thought to herself, things could have happened the way she was carrying on when she was pregnant. 75

Sarah: Like the travelling?

Annie: The travelling and lots of work she had to do.

Alice: There was lots of portages when they were coming, and then going up the river, she had to carry something on her back, too. (And then she said) sometimes she would fall down, too, with a load. The road would be slippery and she'd just slip. Sometimes they have to make bridges where it's wet, and it's slippery on the logs--it's bad walking. And then they got here (Rupert House). And they stayed here for a while then. 76

(So she said) while they were staying here at Rupert House, Willie used to drink a lot. Sometimes he would be gone for two nights. And they would stay with Charlie Blackned in his tent. They would invite them to their tent to live with them when they came. And she remembers

that old man, now, Charlie Blackned. He used to get mad, and he used to say, "Go and look for Willie, where he is. Why does he bring this girl here, just to be mean to her?" And he said, "I would be careful what to do, if I was given a girl to get married to, if I couldn't get married for a long time." And he used to force somebody to go and get him, get Willie wherever he was. He'd say, "Go and look for him!" He used to talk so loud. Well, sometimes they would bring him back, but sometimes they couldn't find him. (And she said) when Willie came back after he'd been drinking, he would sleep. She was so tired of that. When she would find out there's some people coming down, some people coming to Rupert House from Nemiscau, she would go over there to see them right away because she knew the people there very well, than she did here.

77

And then when it got closer to the time they had to leave here and go back to Nemiscau, Willie's sister came to see her. Her name is Mary. She brought something for her wrapped up in cloth. And Mary told her that, asked her if she could name the baby after she had her baby. And she told her, "I bring these things for her, for your baby. I have made them already for you." And then she looked at what she brought, the clothes she brought in the bundle. And they were very nice. And she said, "I'll give you a boy's name."

78

Annie: You know, she wanted to name a boy, if she had a boy.

Alice: (So she said) "She was pretty good at guessing what I was going to have. I did have a boy." And I said, "OK, I'll do that for you." I said, "If everything goes OK." (She said) she didn't have any idea what it was going to be like, bringing this child into the world. The name she gave was John and she doesn't remember the second name, she gave her two names. She doesn't remember what she called her second name.

79

So they went up the river again, back to Nemiscau. (And she said) many times she was frightened because there were lots of big rapids where they went when they went up the river. She doesn't remember how many days it took them to go to

Nemiscau. She said quite a few days. They spent quite a few nights on the way. (She said) Willie would never tell her to be careful too, careful she might hurt the baby. She didn't know that she should be careful. 80

Sarah: Maybe he didn't know either?

Alice: I guess so, but he used to stay with people that had children, but I didn't. And then, when they got to Nemiscau they stayed there for a while again. 81

And then they left again in the fall, to the trapline, to go up the river. They still lived with her grandmother, and they also lived with her aunt, her grandmother's daughter. So she was happy because they were staying with her grandmother. (And she said) she was very busy in the fall, after there was just a little bit of snow on the ground. A lot of times she fell down carrying a log on her shoulder, or wood. But her grandmother always told her to be careful. She was working too hard, she was working herself too hard. She thought she might hurt the baby. 82

Then they started to build their winter lodge. It's a teepee and then they split logs and put on top the poles they make, and then moss on top. (And she said) it was already getting cold, very cold. Their tent was already half covered on the outside. 83

Annie: You know how high it is.

Alice: The snow was deep. They still couldn't get into the new one they made for the winter. They didn't get it finished yet. And then her grandmother persuaded everybody to hurry up to finish the teepee because she said she was expecting Alice would have her baby soon. 84

(And then she said) she knew she had pains in the night, but she thought she was sick to her stomach, so she didn't tell anybody about it. It was cold in the night then. And her grandmother knew she was sick because she would go outside often. Her grandmother asked her, "Why are you going outside very often like that?" She said she was sick to her stomach. She had...

she was having pains in her stomach and her grandmother said, "I don't think you have pains in your stomach" and her grandmother told her not to go outside. "You're going to catch cold." And then her grandmother started to talk, and she sounded like she didn't like it, she wasn't happy. She talked like she was really worried, and she told the other people, "Now she is going to have her baby, and it's taking you so long to build the winter teepee, and now she's going to catch cold." (She said) they had lots of snow already because the poles were almost under the ground.

85

Annie: You know the poles you have to tie to pull the tent, you have these strings you pull it on each side, like, to hold the tent open. She said those sticks were almost under the ground because there was so much snow then.

Alice: (She said) she was in labour all night. It was already in the morning when her grandmother asked her why she was going outside so often. That's when she told her that she was sick to her stomach. Her baby was born, maybe, must have been close to noon hour in the daytime. She doesn't know exactly the time, on November 5. When her baby was born she had a boy. The only problem she had was the afterbirth didn't come right away. So that night she didn't sleep all night, and all day the day before, and all day again--for two days and one night now she was very sleepy the next evening.

86

Annie: I guess she was tired.

Sarah: Sure.

Alice: (And then she said) the afterbirth didn't even come when she must have gone to sleep. It hadn't even come yet. When she woke up, it was in the night. When she woke up, she felt the tent very cold. She said when she looked up at the canvas, it was all white frost, cold, and she felt that when she woke up. She felt so cold her teeth were rattling. She was big here, as if she was swollen. She was the same size as before the baby was born. And she didn't know.

87

Annie: She can't tell you what happened. I guess she was unconscious. She doesn't remember.

Alice: (And she said) when she was cold like that, and she was shivering, and her teeth were rattling, when she was looking, she felt like she saw stars.

88

Annie: Maybe she was really sick, she says.

Sarah: Yes. (There is a long discussion in Cree at this point.)

Annie: Well, she didn't remember, but she can tell you what she was told.

Alice: (She said) during the time she didn't remember, they--I guess it was her grandmother's idea--they soaked the rabbit skins in....

Annie: (checks again) This skin wasn't dried, it was raw, eh. And then they put it near the stove to heat it. That's what they put on her. They really burned her skin because from the heat, I guess. And that's when she started to lose her blood. The afterbirth went into pieces, too, because when she saw what she was losing, it looked like cut up liver. It must have gone into pieces in her and then...

Sarah: And then come out?

Annie: Yes. Then come out.

Alice: (And she said) she had clots, those big ones. And her grandmother said she must have caught cold. That's why that happened--her blood went into clots. Her grandmother said maybe the afterbirth went into pieces because of the heat, maybe. If they didn't do that, she didn't know what would have happened to her.

89

Sarah: Then the heat was their method of trying to get the afterbirth to come out?

Annie: Umhum. I guess that's why she was big here. Maybe it was swollen inside her.

Sarah: Yes.

Annie: And then she remembered, after.

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: (She said) she felt very sore here when she woke up. I guess it was from the burn. She doesn't --well I guess they were so worried about her that they didn't even think that they were burning her because she didn't know (what they were doing). (And she said) she was sick for a long time--she didn't feel well. She lost blood for a long time. And they had to take her to Nemiscau. They had to get her bundled up on the toboggan and take her to Nemiscau. And then that's where she stayed the rest of the winter. She didn't go anywhere. And she was feeling better by the time it was getting warmer in the spring--that's when they went up. 90

Sarah: The baby was all right?

Alice: Yes. The baby was OK. So they were out in the bush. (Then she said) she knew the baby--she had problems with the baby--there was something wrong with the baby. It was constipated, off and on. It didn't have his bowel movements regularly. But he looked well. And he looked healthy. There was only one thing wrong with the baby. (She said) she used to count the days, how many days he wouldn't have a bowel movement. Sometimes it was seven days. 91

Sarah: Oh my!

Annie: Poor baby.

Alice: (She said) she was breast feeding the baby. Sometime in May they started to come down, I guess, after breakup, to come back to Nemiscau. She doesn't remember how many nights they spent. They stayed with another family. There was two families together. And one night the baby cried all night. She didn't know what was wrong. And then the baby didn't stop crying until, when it was morning. And the baby was sweating. And she didn't know very much about babies, (and she said) I didn't know that my baby was very sick. And I thought that the baby would get better eventually. That the baby wouldn't be sick long. And the other woman they lived with, she never had any children. She wasn't able to tell her what to do. And then he cried all night that night, and then the next day, in the middle of the day, he died. (Long pause on tape) 92

Annie: After the baby died, it sort of had a bowel movement, I guess I can say, and the colour of the bowel movement was green, dark green.

Sarah: Oh? Hum.

Alice: So we lost our baby in the bush. We weren't back in Nemiscau yet.

Sarah: There must have been something wrong with the baby's insides.

Alice: (She said) that's what she used to think after, when she thought about it. (So she said) after knowing--after having--when she was having another one after, she really thought about it. They lost the baby on May 8. And she thought that was very hard, to lose the baby like that. 93

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: Because I was breastfeeding the baby.

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: (She said) she really had sore breasts after the baby was gone, and they were swollen up. And then when they were portaging, they have to go through the portage, her breasts would be dripping, you know. She would all get wet--here. And she felt a burden so much on her chest, and then she felt like her breasts were so heavy, too. It hurt her to see them like that because it reminded her that the baby--that she didn't have the baby any more. 94

(She said) she was almost down, to the end of the portage, going through the woods, she was walking, and she only had one bag on her back, where they put blankets. That's the day they left. Where they buried the baby, this is the same day they left that place. This is what she did. She took the bag off her back, and she just put it on the ground, and she sort of kneeled against it and put her face down on it. 95

Annie: I guess she must have fallen asleep.

Alice: She said she was sure she was crying when she was lying like that--she was crying because her

breasts were so sore and it reminded her that she didn't have her baby any more. (She said) it reminded her about that because many times she would have her--her breasts would be running and then she would just take her baby and feed him, and they would stop running like that. She must have cried when she started to lay there. Then she fell--she must have fallen asleep right there.

96

She thinks she had a dream. She said she heard somebody talk to her, and this person said, "Don't cry!" This person, the voice she heard told her, "You are going to have another baby." And she woke up soon, and she remembered what she thought she dreamed. (And then she said) she really began to think about what she thought she heard this person tell her. And then, when they got back to Nemiscau again, it was hard for her because of her foster mother, when she saw her foster mother. She thinks that she was very hurt. She was hurt because she--when she saw her she was--she acted like she was very hurt. Because (you know) she just loved the baby when she saw him.

97

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: (Then she said) every time she saw a baby she was reminded of her loss, when she was back in Nemiscau. She was--it made her feel very sad to hear a baby cry, for a long time. Her foster mother had brought up a boy, but this boy had already married, and they were having children, too. In the night the baby would cry. It really hurt her hard to hear the baby cry. And then she started to cry, too, in the night. Because it reminded her to hear the baby cry, about her own baby that she lost. So she told her foster mother to tell the other couple not to let the baby cry like that because it really hurt her, it hurt her to hear the baby cry like that. And her foster mother told them that they should build a place of their own to live. That they could move out of that house. And then--so they moved out from there.

98

(So she said) she doesn't know if she was pregnant at that time, in June, but

Annie: I guess she was because she never had her periods since her baby was born...

Alice: (And then) she got pregnant again without having her periods. And her second baby was born in January...10th. (Alice and Annie discuss the material already recorded.)

99

Annie: She told you that, that other tape, I think. Remember, that's the one she told you about, that baby.

Sarah: Oh? OK.

Annie: They came for Christmas, remember?

Sarah: I think I do.

Alice: Yes, well, what happened was after, when they came back to Nemiscau that spring, after break-up, in May, and then they came down again to Rupert House.

100

Sarah: Yes?

Alice: (She said) they were here for quite a while that summer. She's sure they were getting wabies in the fall when they left. And all this time she must have been pregnant. And then one time (she said), when they were eating (you know), her and her husband were eating, she felt movements in her tummy. And she told Willie, "You know, I feel movements and it feels like a baby moving inside here." And Willie told her that she looked very fat. (giggles) She didn't know, you know, that she was pregnant again, until she felt the movements inside her. And then she was sure when the baby started moving around a lot. And then she was very careful this time. She tried to be very careful, look after herself. She doesn't know why she was like that because she wasn't like that with the other baby, the first one she had. She thinks it was because the baby didn't live long.

101

Sarah: Yes.

Alice: And then when they went up the river to go back to Nemiscau and Willie was very careful what she did, too. But he wasn't like that when she was carrying the first baby. And then, when they

were going through these portages, going up the river, Willie didn't want her to carry anything. And when they got to Nemiscau, they stayed there for quite a while again. And her foster mother asked, "What did you eat? You're so fat!" (giggles) When they were leaving to go up the river to the trapline, she told her. She told her, "I'm going to have a baby, Maggie." (She said) her foster mother never told her to be careful while she was carrying her first baby. She was really amazed that she didn't because when she told her this time, that she was going to have a baby, she really talked to her (you know), telling her to be careful, telling her what not to do and what to do. So she wasn't too happy to see them go--go out to the trapline. 102

Then she told her foster mother also that she didn't know when she would have this baby. She told her foster mother that she didn't have her periods since she had her first baby. So they went out that fall, to go out to the trapline. 103

Annie: That's the one she told you about.

Alice: She said they came for Christmas here, to Nemiscau. That's the baby she was carrying when she had. But apparently she didn't have another baby again that soon. And her daughter (Eva) was six years old. That's when she had another after. After six years she had another one. (She said) she was really amazed what happened. She was (Eva) six years old and she was growing tall before she had another one. 104

Sarah: Maybe her body was just letting her have a rest.

Annie: Hum.

Alice: (She said) what happened was when she had a baby she didn't have her periods for--until after 13 months. When the baby was one year old and one more month after that. 105

Sarah: Oh.

Alice: (She said) she would have her period, every time she was pregnant, except the first time. After that she was like that all the time. Every time she had a child, this happened. She wouldn't have her period until after the baby is over a

year old. But that was the only time she didn't have a baby for six years, after Eva. So, her baby is 12 years old. Coming on to 13. This year he'll be 13 in December. But she said since she had her last child, she's had her periods now every month. But now it's different. She's not having her periods every month. She misses. (You know) sort of every 2 months, she has a period. She's asking you what do you think is the... (tape is unclear....) 106

Annie: She says she'll tell you a short story.

Sarah: It may not last. We are near the end of the tape.

Alice: (She said) during the time she had a baby, they were out on the trapline. They were in a canoe. They were paddling. They went to check these beaver traps. And Willie's trap was missing. The beaver must have gone away with the trap. It must have--the beaver with the trap must have gone inside the beaver lodge. You know how a beaver lodge looks like? 107

Sarah: Yes.

Alice: (She said) Willie was sure the beaver was inside the lodge. And Willie started to cut up the beaver lodge, on top. It took him quite a while to break it up with an axe. (And then she said) Willie told her to go inside the lodge, to crawl inside. When she looked inside, it was very dark in there. She wasn't really looking forward to going inside there. (giggles) Then she told Willie, "What (why) do you ask me to go in there when I'm pregnant?" And Willie told her, "You're smaller than I am." (giggles) Well (she said), I guess he was bigger, before he got older. (Annie is giggling, too.) So she went into the beaver lodge, crawled in. She didn't like to get inside there, after she got inside. She heard this noise with the water splashing. (End of side 1) (side 2 recorded July 10). 108

Then she got inside the lodge. Willie told her to feel around with her hand where she heard the water splashing. It was so dark in there. And he said, "Feel around with your hand where the water's splashing." And she said, "Is he gonna

bite me?" And he said, "No! He's no gonna bite you." And then she felt around with her hand and she touched the tail. (giggles) The tail was very big. And she said, "I can't get a hold of the tail, it's too big to hold with my hand." So Willie was outside and he was talking to her, and he was talking very loud. And he told her, "Feel around for the beaver's foot and you can catch him, you can get a hold of him by the foot." So that's what she did. She took hold of the beaver's foot. After she touched the hind paw (giggles), she could feel all over her body that she didn't like it. And Willie told her to move backwards and try to pull the beaver out with her as she moved backwards.

109

Annie: And the beaver is strong, too.

Sarah: Uh huh.

Alice: Because the beaver also had on that trap was sinker for the trap, a stone, eh?

Sarah: Uh huh.

Alice: Also on the trap there's this pole. He had chewed the pole.

Sarah: Good heavens!

Annie: And it was not very long.

Sarah: Yes.

Alice: (And then) after she got out of the hole, and all she got (had) in the hole was her hand. Then Willie started to get a hold of it, and after he got his grip on it. And then he told her to move out of the way, to make way for him. So she started to get out of the way (she said). She was quite a way away. And he pulled the beaver out. It was a very big beaver. And then he hit it with an axe on the back. It was already a week before that he caught that beaver in the trap, but apparently it just caught about half way on his arm, and he broke his arm off.

110

Sarah: Oh?

Alice: (She said) it was really very far up the arm because he ate that, that front paw that he caught.

111

Sarah: That was a very determined beaver.

Alice: Umhum. This time he got caught in the other arm. That's the one he got, finally caught it.

112

Sarah: And they got back to get him before he ate the other arm off, I guess.

Annie: Umhum.

Alice: The arm wasn't even healed on that side that he broke off.

Sarah: Good heavens!

Alice: So Willie was satisfied that he got that beaver, and they went home.

## ANALYSIS:

In this section of the narrative Alice examines the transition from childhood to adult responsibility as it took place in her life. She recalled several events just before and just after her marriage which reflect this transition. With reference to competent social interaction, the ability to maintain a balance between ideal and action, the focus would seem to be an examination and recognition of the importance of well-informed decisions and actions based upon the knowledge of experience, as opposed to those made in ignorance, or without sufficient experience. Secondly, Alice is indicating that authority lies with the older generation whose decisions and actions are assumed to reflect wisdom and knowledge based upon experience.

The apparent redundancies of this section, i.e., the repetition of the basic idea from several perspectives, are a means to emphasize the importance of knowledge and the recognition of the consequences of a lack of knowledge. Alice related several examples of her own behaviour which lacked mature competence and she attributed this lack to inexperience in these situations. In each example but one the result of inexperience was not very serious. In the final example, however, it is apparent that insufficient understanding in some situations may have tragic consequences.

Alice's foster mother and her maternal grandmother arranged her marriage, assuming responsibility for making

decisions about Alice's future which they thought she was too young to make. Along with assuming this responsibility, the two old ladies were exerting the authority of the older generation. Alice recalled, "I don't know when Willie asked if he could marry me ... I didn't know until the old lady I lived with told me about it" (3:56). When she objected, saying, "He's too old," she was told, "You shouldn't try to boss over yourself. You can't make up your own mind by yourself because you're not old enough" (3:56). Alice ignored and to some extent defied the decision, indicating she would prefer to marry another, younger person. "I went around with this boy that winter. I would rather have gotten married to this boy." But her grandmother and her foster mother told her, "We're related to that boy you're going around with" (3:58).

Alice and the young boy were not allowed to marry; he instead married her friend. When they asked Alice to be their bridesmaid, she felt "shy", although she finally agreed to their request. Feelings of shyness suggest an understanding on Alice's part of the possibility of difficulties in the relationship between herself and her two friends. It would be difficult to be a bridesmaid when one had hoped to be the bride, but by asking Alice to be a part of their wedding and by accepting their request, the three young people maintained and confirmed the closeness of their relationship.

Alice's feelings of shyness also suggest a growing awareness that decisions made by inexperienced youngsters may not necessarily be appropriate. This example, as well as others in this section of the narrative, would seem to indicate that a younger person with less experience and therefore less understanding may make poorly-informed decisions which have the potential for problematic results. It is assumed that the authoritative decisions of the older generation reflect the wisdom and knowledge of experience. The exercise of authority includes defining the social universe and its order. The older people knew the kinship relationships and therefore knew who Alice could marry.

Although this exertion of authority on the part of the older women might be understood as an interference with Alice's autonomy, their decision was based on information Alice did not have and it would be considered an expression of social responsibility. On the other hand, Alice's initial defiance was an expression of autonomy which was tolerated but would not be considered responsible action.

Alice referred jokingly to her lack of experience when she recalled the trip to Rupert House where her marriage took place. She said, "When we got here by canoe, they got me ready, they made my dress. I felt better when I saw how nice my dress was looking" (3:64). This comment was quite funny to both Alice and Annie. Alice did not especially want to marry, but when she saw her dress, she felt better,

clearly not a very adequate reason for feeling better about her situation, and one that reflected her immaturity.

Alice also recalled her own inexperience and therefore lack of knowledge as she and Willie were about to start their first winter together. She said,

"We were going up the river to where we were going to hunt and trap. I wasn't very happy to go. I didn't want to go away from my foster parents. And my foster mother told me, 'You can't look after us any more because you're married now and you have to go where your husband goes.' So we left Nemiscau. I can't say I knew everything what a woman does after she's married. Willie was able to tell me what to do. And I was wondering what I was going to do when he made his snowshoes, about the lacing. And I worried that I have to make his mittens and his moccasins. My grandmother was there and she helped a lot. If there was anything I didn't know, I would ask my grandmother." (3:68)

In the above excerpt Alice remembered her reluctance to leave the security of her foster parents' home, as well as her apprehension about an unknown situation. She was no longer a child now that she was married; she was a woman and must assume the responsibilities of a woman. Her grandmother understood that she did not yet have the experience and knowledge of the skills expected of a woman. Alice began the transition from child to adult, learning the skills of a hunter's wife with help from her grandmother. The older woman had made the decision about Alice's future, that she must marry Willie. She also assumed the responsibility for

that decision, supporting and helping Alice learn the tasks associated with her new role.

Alice emphasized her childishness and insecurity in the next excerpt. She explained that she had always worn her sock and Willie had never seen her injured foot, which still bothered her, especially when they were travelling and walking all day on snowshoes. Willie wanted to know why she was unwilling to let him see her foot. He told her, "I'm sure you are not the only one that has a sort of deformed foot like that" (3:71). Alice remembered feeling lonely and homesick for her foster parents, and she remembered feeling frightened that she might be left alone. When Willie threatened to leave her behind she showed him her foot. These are the feelings and response of the child who had not adjusted to her new situation.

Willie's insistence that he be allowed to see Alice's foot was in some sense an interference with her autonomy; however, the result of the experience was that both Alice and Willie began to gain some understanding of each other. They began the process of maturing together. Alice explained,

"Then after he saw my foot, he seemed to feel different toward me, to sort of pity me, feel sorry for me maybe. After he saw it I was less embarrassed anymore that he would see it." (3:72)

This experience may be considered to be a repetition, for Alice, of an earlier experience; that of having her stepfather see her foot when it was first frozen. Willie's

attitude toward Alice began to change after he saw her foot, just as her stepfather began to change years before. In each case the change may have been in response to the recognition that Alice's physical limitations were the result of irresponsible action which could have been avoided.

Alice portrayed herself as a shy, somewhat frightened girl, learning to cope with a new life. One can assume on the basis of ideal behaviour, that the interaction between Willie and herself was reserved, self-protective, and reticent (Preston, 1976). She overcame her reticence and exposed herself to Willie, baring not only her foot, but also her physical and emotional weaknesses. Growth involves personal risk in some situations. In this case Alice risked self-exposure out of fear. Later in the narrative she discussed carefully considered risk in a different context.

One gains competence in social relationships as one begins to understand and give meaning to the actions of others. Within the context of a marriage relationship, this understanding supports the development of a bond between the two individuals involved. They learn to become a pair, a partnership, in which each member is responsible for specific tasks but each supports the other in performing those tasks. They learn to work together to maintain a balance between individual autonomy and social responsibility. Alice

recognized that she did not have the skills to carry out her share of the tasks when she worried about making Willie's moccasins and snowshoes.

Making snowshoes with their wooden frames and babiche laces symbolizes, in an obvious manner, this working relationship. The man begins with a tree, carving and working the wood until it is the size, shape and form that he wants. When he has finished the frames it is the woman's task to finish the snowshoes. She begins with a moosehide which she has cut into many feet of fine narrow strips, called babiche. The babiche is stored dry, but is soaked in water for suppleness while lacing into the firm webbing which makes the snowshoe strong. A family cannot travel many miles without good snowshoes and, ideally, a man and a woman work as a unit to produce them.

Alice began to discuss her first pregnancy, explaining, "I didn't know anything about having a baby then. I didn't even know how to take care of myself" (3:74). She also recalled that while visiting her mother during this pregnancy, her mother expressed her disapproval of the marriage, saying, "Couldn't they find somebody older that you could marry?" (3:75) Alice's response to her mother was, "Maybe I was in worse condition when I was smaller" (3:75).

Alice may or may not have considered her youth and inexperience as shortcomings, at that time, but her response to her mother's criticism indicates that she did recognize

that her relationship with Willie was not as difficult as it could have been. Although she may have considered the conditions of her life as a young wife better than they had been as a child, life was not easy.

While she was pregnant they travelled often and she had to help carry their belongings over slippery portages. When she fell, Willie never told her she should be careful, that she might hurt the baby, and she did not know this herself. While travelling they visited Rupert House, where Willie ignored Alice, leaving her until a brother-in-law would send someone to find him, saying,

"Go and look for Willie, where he is. Why does he bring this girl here, just to be mean to her? I would be careful what to do, if I was given a girl to get married to, if I couldn't get married for a long time." (3:77)

Alice previously focused on her own lack of maturity. Although she indicated that life with Willie was not as difficult as it might have been, she also provided some insight into Willie's immaturity and lack of competence. His lack of concern for Alice would indicate that he had no more knowledge about her condition than she did. His neglect while at Rupert House was considered irresponsible by his brother-in-law, whose comments, directed at others, were intended for Willie. Charlie was reminding Willie of his responsibility to Alice.

Alice continued to recall the events surrounding the birth of her first child, describing an occasion which could

be considered, mistakenly, to have little meaning. This ordinary interaction between Alice and her sister-in-law, however, reflects another's concern for Alice and the coming child. Alice explained,

"Willie's sister came to see me. Her name is Mary. She brought something for me wrapped up in cloth. And Mary asked if she could name the baby. And she told me, 'I bring these things for you, for your baby. I have made them already for you.' And I looked at the clothes she brought in the bundle." (3:78)

Alice agreed that Mary could name the baby and Mary gave her a boy's name. Naming the baby places the person giving the name in a god-parent relationship to the child. Mary had volunteered to assume that special relationship and responsibility for Alice's child. Alice has illustrated the contrast between mature behaviour expressing concern and responsibility and behaviour lacking concern and responsibility in the contrasts between her own and Willie's actions and that of her brother-in-law and sister-in-law.

Before this first child was born, Alice and Willie returned to the trapping area with Alice's grandmother. Alice recalled her grandmother's comments reminding her that she should take care of herself and her baby. This was in sharp contrast to Alice's own lack of concern about her actions or physical condition. The older woman's knowledge and authority were demonstrated several times in the events which took place that fall, yet even her knowledge could not

entirely prevent accidents.

She encouraged the group to finish building the winter residence because she thought the baby would arrive soon. When Alice began her labour, mistaking her contractions for nausea, her grandmother recognized what was happening and scolded the others for not completing the winter teepee. She worried that Alice would catch cold. When the baby boy was born and the afterbirth did not follow, Alice became unconscious. Her grandmother applied hot compresses to precipitate the passage of the afterbirth, which was successful, but which burned Alice because she did not realize the compresses were hot. Alice's grandmother's behaviour was a demonstration of responsible action and an expression of her concern for Alice. She made every effort to be prepared for the coming birth and managed an unusual situation to the best of her ability. Although Alice remained ill for several months, it was assumed this was due to exposure and catching cold. This portion of the narrative suggests that one must act with competence and responsibility, even though one may only partially influence or predict the outcome of events.

The difficulty with the birth only preceeded events which became a greater tragedy. Although the baby looked healthy, something was seriously wrong; his bowels did not function properly. Eventually he became very ill. Alice recalled his illness saying,

"I didn't know that my baby was very sick. And I thought that the baby would get better eventually, that the baby wouldn't be sick long. The other woman we lived with, she never had children. She wasn't able to tell me what to do. And then he cried all night that night, and then the next day in the middle of the day, he died." (3:92)

Alice made her own assumptions clear throughout the narrative; if she had known more about how to look after herself and the baby, the tragedy might have been avoided. She also made it clear throughout the narrative that experience is the basis of knowledge. She remembered the physical pain and mental anguish of this loss, and once again her will to live was returned to her in a dream (3:97). Both her foster mother and Willie tried to help her through this crisis. Although she did not mention it, we may assume the loss was painful for Willie also. This shared experience must have had some effect on the development of the bond between them. Alice recalled that later, when she knew she was pregnant for the second time, both she and Willie made the effort to be careful about what she did.

Alice ended this section of the narrative recalling a humorous occasion which demonstrates the partnership developing with Willie. She had to get into a beaver house to retrieve a beaver which Willie could not reach. She expressed her revulsion at the idea, but did it anyway. She recalled asking Willie, "Why do you ask me to go in there when I'm pregnant?" (3:108) Willie answered, "You're smaller

than I am" (3:108). At this point in the narrative Alice explained, "I guess he was bigger, before he got older" (3:108). Both Alice and Annie laughed at the idea of a small pregnant Alice and a large Willie. The humorous aspect is that Willie is smaller now than he was at that time.

This humour relieved the tension which had developed while Alice remembered the birth and death of her first baby. It is a technique to keep one's thoughts from dwelling too long on the loss. Whether death is a past or a current event, it is considered unhealthy to dwell upon the loss. These thoughts can lead to depression which may lead to loss of emotional control. By withdrawing into oneself in a state of depression, one may be avoiding the responsibilities of one's relationships to others.

This description of the difficult delivery and eventual death of the baby makes the same statement as that made in the previous section of the narrative through the description of the events surrounding the freezing of Alice's foot. Both provide examples of the degree to which behaviour lacking competence can lead to tragic results. In one example, Alice examined the inadequacies of other members of her family and the effect they had on her. In the second example, she examined her own incompetence, which was compounded by Willie's lack of knowledge and understanding. It is clear that Alice assumes that the loss of the first baby was the

result of their combined inexperience.

Through repetition Alice emphasized one of the major dimensions of competence, namely that it develops throughout one's life. One must become aware of one's actions in relation to others, and make the effort to maintain an acceptable balance between autonomy and responsibility. In order to maintain an acceptable balance one must have some understanding of what the consequences of one's actions are likely to be. This ability is developed gradually through experience as one matures. Within the context of hunting, the hunter has an understanding of the animals with whom he will interact and an awareness of the results of his actions (Preston, 1975: 216, Tanner, 1979: 136ff). So too, mature men and women should have an understanding and awareness of others with whom they share a social universe. Competent social interaction expresses this understanding, developing from childhood, through youth and maturity in marriage, to old age and wisdom.

## CHAPTER FOUR

NARRATIVE, RECORDED July 12, 1978, PART I

Alice: Since I got married, we were always in the bush on the trapline. And when we came back from the trapline, we always used to move in to the house with my foster parents. And then the old man was the first one that died. And a few more years later the old lady died too. And they didn't want anybody living in that house any more because it was an old house. And they broke the house down. So we used to live in a tent all the time. And then the people in Nemiscau got houses. They made cabins for themselves. And I thought, we thought we were going to get a house, too. And we asked if we were going to get one, too. And they told, we were told that we weren't going to get a house because Willie didn't belong to the Nemaska Band. So we knew that we wouldn't get a house there. And then Willie said he was going to come back to Rupert House. I wasn't too happy to hear that.

113

Then he would persuade me to go. He would tell me, "This is what I'll buy for you if we go, if you are willing to come back to Rupert House with me." One thing he named was a radio. And my oldest children didn't like it either. You know, they didn't want to come to Rupert House. And then, he kept persuading me to go. And then finally I just didn't say anything more. I thought I'd let him be the boss. And he told me too, "What are you going to do if you stay here and I go back? You can't make a living for the children here." So I stopped telling him I don't want to go. And then he left first. He went out on the plane to Rupert House. He said when he left, "I will be looking for work right away." Then he said, "As soon as I have enough money to pay your fare, I will let you know, and tell you so you can come to Rupert House, too."

114

So we stayed there at Nemiscau. He was gone for quite a while. And Eva was working for the Hudson's Bay manager there (in Nemiscau). And

the manager told Eva that there was a message for you. They want you in Rupert House. I didn't want to go, right away even then, after I got the message. The other people were talking, too, about that. They were saying, "I guess that's what Willie wanted to do, why he wanted to get a girl to marry here in Nemiscau." And then it made me feel worse when I heard them talk like that. And the manager told us he was going to try and help us all he can. And then one day the plane came with the children that had been going to school in Moose Factory, they came home for the summer. And the manager told us that we didn't have to pay if we went on that charter.

115

So we came back on that plane. We got here in Rupert House. And the money that Willie had saved for our fare, we got our money back. And we lived with John Blackned and his family. We lived upstairs in his house. And that house used to rattle a lot when it's windy, especially at night. I was pregnant at the time and when there was a storm at night, I would come downstairs. I didn't like to stay upstairs (chuckles). And now I remember when I go down to the store. I see that building still standing there.

116

Then we moved to stay in the tent again. We stayed where there were trees and used a wigwam. Willie made a wigwam, that's where we stayed. We didn't have very much in our tent. The plane we came on when we came back from Nemiscau was a Beaver, but the plane wasn't even full with stuff. We didn't have very much like clothing or something to bring with us when we came.

117

And then it started to get cold. Our wigwam was very cold. Johnny Wiestchee had a tent beside our wigwam, and he told us, "You can stay in our tent. Maybe it will be warmer in there than it is in the wigwam." So we moved into Johnny Wiestchee's tent. And then we put boughs on top of the canvas to keep it warm. And early in the fall, I told Willie we should go out in the bush to live with John Blackned and his family. I told Willie, "Harriet can be my nurse when I have the baby." But Willie didn't want that, he didn't like that.

118

And the nurse, she liked to look after me when I was pregnant. She used to give me check-ups, and she used to tell me when to come back again. And then she told me that when the time came near

that I would have the baby, "You come to the nursing station as soon as you know you have labour pains." Even if it's in the night, she said. And then about midnight one night, I woke up and had labour pains. But I didn't want to go to the nursing station right away. And Willie persuaded me to go sooner than I wanted to because he said I would catch cold if the baby came fast, and I couldn't go to the nursing station. And then I went to the nursing station around 2 o'clock at night. And I was so sure that I would have the baby, you know, that the pains wouldn't stop when I went into the nursing station. Not very long after I went into the nursing station, my pains just stopped. And then I went to sleep. I had a good sleep that night. The next morning, the nurse told me, "Maybe you had false labour." I didn't say anything to her when she said that to me. And the girl that was translating told me, "Maybe you're tired." And then I told them, "Maybe it's because I'm in different surroundings, why that happened because I was sure I would have had that baby when I came last night." And then it was close to dinner hour, and I still didn't have any pain. And then the man (the nurse's husband) told me, "After you have your lunch, at dinner hour, you can go home at 1 o'clock." And then he said, "When you go home at your house, if you begin having pains again, you can come back to the nursing station." And then, when I was lying on my bed, I could hear them making noise in the kitchen. I guess they were getting the lunch ready. And that girl started bringing in the dishes for me to have lunch. Then all of a sudden I felt like the baby moving very hard. And the pain was very--it was a big pain. The pain stayed long. It didn't go away right away. I didn't say anything. And Margaret came back.

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Annie: That was the girl that was working at the nursing station.

Alice: She brought some more dishes for me, and she put my table close to the bed. And then Margaret said, "Now you can have your lunch. And after you have your lunch, in a little while after you can get dressed so you can go home." And I told Margaret, "You know, I had pains again. I'm sure that I will have my baby soon." And Margaret told me, "You know, the nurse says you're not going to

have your baby soon. I'm sure you don't know more than the nurse," she told me, "because the nurse said when she checked you, she couldn't even feel the head down, yet." So I told Margaret, "This is the seventh child, baby I'm going to have this baby." So I told Margaret, "Go and tell the nurse I'm going to have the baby." I felt like, I knew I was going to have this baby from the pains, and I just pushed my lunch away. I was so sure I'm going to have the baby right soon. The pain hardly stopped. And then I just could feel the discharge, the baby with the discharge, after the water broke. And then Margaret left, went out of the room, and I guess she told the nurse, and then I heard the nurse laughing like that, (Alice demonstrates loud raucous laugh), and it's not long that I knew that the head is showing already, the head is out already. I called Margaret, and I said, "Margaret, come here, the baby's going to be born." And Margaret came (into my room). She was laughing, she laughed at me. And I couldn't talk very much right away because I knew the baby was already halfway through. And then I told Margaret, "Hurry up, pull that blanket over me and look for yourself." And as soon as she took the cover off me, she saw the baby, and then she started to run out of the room. And the nurse came running in. She just grabbed all of my blankets and threw them on the floor. Well, she looked like she was very startled, or very excited, I guess, and her face changed, too, you know, when I looked at her. And she called her husband in, too. And then after they got the baby all--after they fixed the baby up. Then right after the baby was born, the afterbirth came, too. I thought, you know, I went through that very well. You know it wasn't a hard birth at all.

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But later on, a few days after, I wasn't too happy what happened. I blamed them for what happened. Two days after my baby was born--the blood when I lost it--I was losing the blood--it was all in clots, but I didn't have any pain. And one night, that evening, two days after he was born, the baby was crying. And the nurse was looking after Bertie (the baby), fixing him up. And the man came and sort of fixed me up. And then he came with three tablets for me to take, those tablets were 222s. And then I said when I took those

pills in my hand, I said, "I'm going to choke on these pills, the size of them." So I didn't take those pills right away. And then he smashed them up. And he sort of forced me to take them. He gave me the water and said, "Hurry up and take them." And then I chewed them like candy before I swallowed them. And then after that, they told me that I should go to bed, and they turned the lights off, and they went upstairs, too. (At this time the nurse's living quarters were upstairs over the infirmary section of the nursing station.) And then they had a bell beside my bed, and they told me, "If you take it and shake it, it will ring." And then she told me if I couldn't get my baby to stop crying, the baby was crying, I should ring that bell for her. Not too long after I went to bed, I started to feel different in my body. I felt very hot, as if it was very hot inside the room. I didn't know what to do. I felt really hot. And I couldn't sleep because I felt hot. I don't know how long I stayed awake. Maybe it was after midnight. (And then) I felt like my breathing was, I was breathing very fast. (And then) I guess I finally fell asleep. (And then) I don't remember how many hours I slept. (And then) I woke up. Right away I noticed I felt very different. And my breathing was worse than it was before I fell asleep. And I, you know, short of breath, like. I knew there was something wrong with my face, I could feel it, my hands, too. Then I managed to pull the table closer to me, so I could look in the mirror they had in the table. Then I looked at myself in the mirror, and I looked very different here, my face. And then I just opened up my top here, and I looked here and it was like I was burnt (burned). I was red all over with like a rash. I knew I wasn't losing any more blood. I used to check everytime I woke up if I had soiled the pad. I knew I wasn't losing any more blood. I had stopped bleeding. So I was very amazed. I wondered what happened because I didn't feel like that in the daytime, before I (--took it--) even I didn't feel like that. And then I reached for the bell that she had given me. I took it. And when I looked at the windows, I knew it was dawn because there was light from the window. And then I started to ring the bell, and a little while later, I heard someone

coming down the stairs. Then he came inside the room and came up to me. (And then she said) you could hear my breathing, as if it was hard for me to breath. And then he stood by my bed and looked at me, at my face. He was amazed. He acted like he was amazed at what I looked like. And then he left. He didn't say anything, he just left and went out. He touched me on my face, and then he went back upstairs. And then he came back with his wife. And as soon as the lady looked at me, she acted like she was very worried. And the man said I had a cold. I didn't even know I had a cold myself. I don't think they went back to bed again. I think they got up. And I knew that the woman was very worried. I didn't know what was wrong with me, but I blamed that medication they gave me for what happened. And I guess I would have been able to tell them, this is the first time this happened when I had a baby, if I was able to talk to them. And I would soak this towel in cold water and I would put this compress on my face. And then later on, in that day, right away she took the baby and she told me I couldn't breastfeed it. And she said, "I'll feed the baby," and she gave my baby the bottle.

And then Eva came to see me that morning. As soon as she looked at me, she turned her face away so I couldn't see her face. And I knew from her face that she was, I knew she was crying. She couldn't look at me when I tried to talk to her and I knew I didn't sound right when I tried to talk. She went home soon. And Willie told me later that he was outside cutting wood. (This is what Willie said to Alice later.) "When she was still far away from me (Willie) (he told her to go and see how her mother is) and she was quite far from me, and she started to talk right away. And I stopped and I asked her, 'What did you say?' She said, 'Daddy, mother looks very bad.'" So that made Willie very anxious and worried to hear that because I was OK when he saw me the day before. And then he just left, Willie just left what he was doing and he came. "And I told Eva to look after the children inside the tent," he said. And then when Willie came, he knocked

on the door first. And then that man went to the door to open the door for him. I guess he didn't know it was Willie. I guess that man saw Willie coming, and he came back very fast. And he called his wife. His wife was doing something, I don't know what she was doing. And then when that girl, Margaret, came to work that morning, she asked me right away, "What happened to you? Why do you look like that?" And I told her, when she asked me that, "I don't know why I look like this. That man gave me some pills to take." And Willie came into the room. And that man and his wife sort of were standing in Willie's way so he wouldn't see me, how I looked, something like that.

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Annie: They were trying to hide her from him.

Alice: And as soon as Willie saw how I looked, he said he thinks that that wasn't right, and he acted as if he was mad to see how I looked. And he said, "Where's Margaret?" You know, that girl that was here. And Margaret came into the room. And then Willie asked the man and his wife, "What's wrong with her? Why does she look like that?" He told them, "This is the first time I have seen my wife like that when she just had a baby." And the man told Willie, "Your wife has a cold, and it's all in her chest." And then I told Willie, when I heard that man say that, "I didn't know--I don't think I have a cold. I didn't even know I had a cold." And then I told Willie, "That man gave me some pills when I went to bed. I'm sure that's why--that's the reaction to the pills." And then Willie told that man, "I don't think you know very much about nursing. Why did you have to give her that, any medicine, any medication?" And then Willie told that man, "She's had babies in the bush, but she never used to take medicine. But I think it's your fault that she's like that now." And the man kept saying, "No. She's got a cold." And so I told Willie, "Never mind, Willie, don't talk so much about it. You see what happens now that you didn't do as I said. I told you that we should go out in the bush." And then Willie went out and went home.

123

And then I started to have nose bleeds. And I never had any more discharge after that. It stopped altogether. And I told that nurse

that I wasn't bleeding any more. I wasn't losing any more blood. And Margaret was translating for her, and she told the nurse, "This is the first time this happens, I only bleed for two days after I had a baby." And the nurse told me, "Don't worry about it. As soon as you move around you're going to start losing blood again." I didn't believe what she said. I knew it was the medicine that they gave me was why I was like that.

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And they kept me at the nursing station for seven days. And the swollen hands started to go down, all over. And then after the swelling was down, my skin peeled, all over my arms, too, and on my face and all over. And then I went home. They told me I could go home. We went back to the tent.

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And then it was--I pitied Willie many times because he couldn't sleep at night because I used to sweat every night. He had to stay up and keep the fire going. I didn't feel well at all. I wasn't rested. I couldn't sleep at all when I was sweating like that. I got very tired. I used to change my clothes, but still I couldn't sleep.

126

One day I started to think to myself, "I should give somebody my baby to take, somebody to take care of him" because I wasn't able to take care of him because he was crying in the night. And the baby, Bertie, was born December 2, 1965. And then I didn't see the doctor until in February. The baby was already two months old.

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And one day when Willie was down at the Bay, Isiah Salt asked Willie, "What's wrong with your wife? I never see your wife any more. I heard that everything went very well when she had the baby," Isiah said this to Willie. So Willie decided to tell Isiah all of what happened after the baby was born. And the manager saw Isiah talking to Willie, and Isiah told the manager, too, what Willie told him, what happened. So the manager and Isiah started to talk about me, and they said, "It's better for her to go and see the doctor, to be sent out to Moose (Factory Hospital) to the doctor there. He can give her a check up to see what's wrong

with her. She must be sick, why she can't go outside now." And then Isiah got a letter written that decided that I should go and see the doctor, and he sent a letter with her. 128

So I went out one day, and I took my baby with me. And when I got to Moose Factory, and I went in the hospital, they acted like they didn't want to bother with me. 129

Annie: Usually the nurses send down a message when they send a patient out and they didn't do that with Alice this time.

Alice: I guess that's why they didn't even know over there that I had the baby. The nurse didn't even tell them at the hospital that I had the baby. They asked her why she was waiting in the waiting room in the hospital. "Who do you want to see? The nurse or who's sick, you or the baby?" And then I told them, "I have a letter with me." So the nurse took the letter. She went out and I don't know where she took the letter. And then she came back, and she took my baby, and then she took me with her. And then after I got upstairs, I took my clothes off. They took my baby, too, to another ward. I don't know what they did, but they brought him back to my room again. And the doctor came. 130

The first thing the doctor asked me was, "When was your baby born? He's a big baby." And I said the baby was born December 2, and the doctor was very amazed to hear that. So the doctor asked, "Can you tell me exactly what happened?" So I decided to tell him everything that happened. And then the doctor told me, "They never told us anything about this. It looks like," he said, "that they were hiding this from us because they almost killed you." I wasn't even finished telling him everything what happened that he got mad. He got very angry. And he was very angry. He didn't even want to listen to all what I told him. The doctor told me, "I don't want anybody to call those people nurse or doctor. They are only there to look after the nursing station, and they're supposed to call and tell whenever a person is sick." So he said, "I am very amazed, and I don't know why they didn't notify anybody about you at the hospital." 131

The next day they started to do some tests on me. They couldn't tell me I wasn't telling the truth because the nurses were always there, watching me when I was sleeping. I still had the sweats there when I was in the hospital. The nurses would check on me and what I wore at night would be all soaked. And what they did was they took a lot of blood. And the doctor told me, "If you had kept on feeding your baby when that happened, you could have killed the baby." That's what the doctor told me. He was really mad. And they kept me there for quite a while at the hospital. The doctor told me, "When you took those pills when you were still losing blood like that, all the blood stopped coming, and it went all over your body. That's why you are swollen," he told me. "It's because of the blood in your body." "That's why you are having nose bleeds," he said. "It's coming out. You're losing it through your nose, like, when you have nose bleeds." And he said, "A woman that just had a new baby, it's not right for her to take a lot of medication." And he said, he only mentioned, one little small tablet was all they should have given me.

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I believed him when he said that because I had one of my babies at Moose Factory Hospital. They only gave me a needle. They gave me a needle after the baby was born. And then after, they gave me a needle again because, I guess, it was my blood, I had pain here--and they gave me small little tablets. And then they sent me home.

133

When I came home from the hospital, at the hospital they gave me a letter to bring home to these people who were looking after the nursing station. And I came home and I took the letter to the nursing station. When I gave that letter to the lady, she opened it right away. When she read the letter, I just sat there and waited for her. She started to cry when she read the letter. Well, I only think that the doctor must have said something to them, and then that's why she cried when she read the letter. I guess they got caught, you know. They didn't tell them when the patient there got sick. And then that girl (Margaret) that was with me at the hospital (nursing station) said, "They got caught." And then she said, "They won't be

staying, because of that." She said, "The nurse is hiding that letter."

134

Annie: Because she didn't want Margaret to see it, I guess, that girl that was working there.

Alice: A while later I was back in my tent. And then that lady came back to see me. She came to our tent. Eva was able to talk a little bit of English. She came to ask me if I would like to take birth control pills. Then I told her, "I don't want any more pills. I'm not taking any more pills. I'm not taking any more pills from you." (chuckles) She didn't force those pills on me. She didn't bring them to me. That's what she did. After that happened I never thought of having another baby. I thought I'm never having another baby again. Because I was very unhappy about what happened. And the doctor at Moose Factory told me, "Even if you live for a while longer, you're always going to be sick because of what happened." I believe that because I have the problem like when I came close to my period, I would start to, my hands, I would swell up again. And then I would sweat, too, in the night. So I wasn't able to go out on the trapline any more. But Willie used to go out to trap by himself with somebody else to trap with.

135

Sometimes I used to cry, thinking about this, what happened to me because I wasn't able to do all the work I used to do, and it sort of made me feel sad I couldn't do that any more. I wasn't even able to go outside in the winter-time when it was cold. I'm sure many of the people here knew that I couldn't do that. That was because I couldn't go outside because when I was sweating like that, and I went outside, I feel very cold with my wet clothes on. I wasn't well. I used to have headaches all the time, too. And I'm very happy today that I'm still living. And I thank God for that. I'm sure He's the one that's looking after me.

136

## ANALYSIS

The need for an understanding and awareness of others with whom one shares a social environment is again demonstrated in this third section of the narrative. Here, in chronological order Alice recalled two events which illustrate social competence from very different perspectives.

The aspects of competent social interaction illustrated in this section of the narrative include, as in previous sections, social responsibility. The particular emphasis of this section however, is the recognition of individual autonomy and the ethic of non-interference. Non-interference refers to self-expression and interaction with others which avoids an imposition on others. Aggressive or defensive behaviour which becomes an imposition on the personal autonomy of others is considered to be irresponsible and lacking in social competence.

The ethic of non-interference is illustrated in two distinct events; the family move from Nemiscau to Rupert House and Alice's illness after the birth of her last child.

In recalling the family move, Alice illustrates the importance of individual autonomy and the means by which one appropriately influences the actions of another. The interaction between Alice and Willie in this portion of the narrative is a demonstration of quiet self-control which avoids aggression or direct interference with the other, while responding to the subtle cues of social interaction.

The importance of self-control and non-interference in the actions of another is restated, and therefore emphasized, as Alice recalls her illness shortly after the move to Rupert House. Quiet self-control is in direct contrast to the behaviour of the staff at the Rupert House nursing station.

In this portion of the narrative Alice examined, from a third prospective, the problem of the tragic consequences of incompetence. She recalled a serious illness which was the result of incompetence on the part of the nursing staff. As in the previous sections, the intent is to lead the listener to an understanding of competent social interaction by contrasting it with action lacking social responsibility. The previous examples have focused on the interactions between Cree, indicating that with knowledge and understanding negative behaviour is modified, and competence develops.

This example focuses on the interaction between EuroCanadians and Cree and reveals that, in this case, the EuroCanadians were intent upon maintaining a self-protective facade, rather than acknowledging incompetence. Alice refrained from generalizing about EuroCanadians on the basis of this experience; however, it is just such situations that include different expectations in social interaction as well as difficulty in communication that lead to misunderstandings between EuroCanadians and Native people.

Alice and Willie moved, permanently, to Rupert House in 1965. Before that time their community residence (as

opposed to bush residence) had been in Nemiscau. They had shared a house with Alice's foster parents which was torn down when the old couple died. Alice, Willie and their children then made their home in a tent; a canvas-covered frame dwelling, fashioned after the traditional dome-shaped skin/moss covered dwellings.

About the same time that Alice's foster parents died, Nemaska Band families began to receive government assistance to build new houses. Alice and Willie learned they were not eligible for assistance because Willie was not a member of the Nemaska Band. Rather than remain in Nemiscau and continue to live in a tent, Willie decided they should move to Rupert House where he is a band member and where they would be approved for government assisted housing.<sup>1</sup> Raising a family in a tent is certainly possible but not necessarily ideal, even in a Cree Community where canvas-covered tent frames are commonplace. These tent dwellings are hot in summer, drafty in winter, and a constant fire hazard. But the prospect of a house did not make the move any easier for Alice.

Preston has pointed out that,

"Individual freedom in Cree culture is regularly mediated by a strong sense of social practicality. The balance between individual autonomy and social practicality or responsibility is very difficult to grasp during fieldwork, or to define accurately in writing."

(Preston, 1975:18)

The decision to move to Rupert House provides an excellent example of the relationship between individual autonomy and social responsibility. Willie made the initial decision to move to Rupert House, encouraging Alice to move with him, but never aggressively interfering with her decision. It would seem that Alice made the decision to move independently from Willie; however, as she recalled, each was concerned for the other.

Willie did his best to persuade Alice to move, but neither she nor their children wanted to leave their home. Alice recalled, "He kept persuading me to go. And then finally I just didn't say anything more. I thought I'd let him be the boss. He told me too, 'What are you going to do if you stay here and I go back? You can't make a living for the children here.' So I stopped telling him I don't want to go. And then he left first" (4: 114). If one attempts to understand this exchange in terms of the maturation of social competence, as well as in terms of a mutual bond developing over the years together, it becomes clear that Willie was not just threatening to leave Alice behind and Alice was not just succumbing in fear to that threat.

Although he tried to persuade her through offering to buy luxury items<sup>2</sup> Willie never demanded that Alice move. His statements indicate that he had decided to move and he wanted her to move also, but they do not indicate that he had assumed an authoritarian role, telling her she had to move.

Instead, it would seem that he was concerned about what might happen to her and their children if she decided to stay. When Alice realized that Willie had definitely made up his mind to move, she said, "I didn't say anything more. I thought I'd let him be the boss" (4: 114). The implication of this statement is very different from an earlier one in which she told her mother she wasn't able to boss over herself when her grandmother and foster mother made the decision that she should marry Willie. This time Alice was capable of making her own decision and she knew what the outcome of her decision would be.

If she stayed behind, she would become responsible for their children by herself. She may have been a competent individual at that time, but it is extremely difficult for anyone, whether male or female, to subsist alone in a bush environment. Furthermore, a decision to stay behind could be interpreted as a break-up of the marriage, an event almost unheard of among the James Bay Cree. Although a man may leave his home to locate employment elsewhere, it is with the understanding that he will return. There seems to be no such underlying assumption in Willie's decision, which was motivated by the possibility of better housing in Rupert House.

Alice's decision to move seems to be based on her concern for Willie and her relationship with him, more than it is based on a concern for herself. She said, "I didn't want to go right away, after I got the message (that Willie

could pay the airfare to Rupert House). The other people were talking too, about that. They were saying, 'I guess that's what Willie wanted to do, why he wanted to get a girl to marry here in Nemiscau.' And then it made me feel worse when I heard them talk like that. And the manager told us he was going to try and help us all he can" (4: 115).

The implication in the neighbours' gossip was that Willie married a Nemiscau girl in order to avoid acting responsibly toward her if he wished to do so. The underlying assumption is that he might feel free to ignore any social sanctions against leaving his wife because he was an "outsider". Alice felt unhappy about the move and these feelings were intensified by the lack of sympathy for her and lack of understanding exhibited in her neighbours' idle gossip about the relationship she had established with Willie. Willie may have come to Nemiscau for a wife because none were available in Rupert House, but after at least fifteen years of marriage and the development of a working relationship with Willie, Alice was upset by gossip she knew to be unfounded, and she decided to follow him.

It can be argued that Willie never interfered with Alice's decision to move. He did however, exert subtle pressure, which did not constitute direct aggression, yet was intended to influence Alice. An ideal expression of individual autonomy mediated by social responsibility would include a balanced consideration of another's individuality.

This balance was not evident in this decision. Alice had no choice, except to move.

Social interaction may be influenced by ideals, but behaviour is rarely ideal. Although Alice and Willie each made the decision to move independently and both decisions reflected a consideration of social responsibility, the decision-making process itself suggests a tolerance for some level of imbalance between individual autonomy and social responsibility. Willie made use of his own autonomy to manipulate Alice, creating an imbalance which does not seem to go beyond the limits of tolerance. That there is a limit to the level of tolerance for imbalance between individual autonomy and social responsibility was expressed by the community of Nemiscau, which exerted pressure on Alice to avoid breaking up her family. (The transgression of this limit is the focus of the second portion of this section of the narrative.) Alice decided to move because she understood that she and Willie were a unit, together responsible for each other and their children. She thus avoided the negative consequences that would have taken place had she decided not to move, and if she had considered only herself.

At the time of the move to Rupert House, Alice was expecting a baby. That fall she wanted to go with another family to their winter hunting camp so the woman, her sister-in-law, could be the midwife when the baby arrived. Instead, Willie wanted her to stay at Rupert House to have the baby at

the nursing station under the care of the nurse, and Alice agreed. Willie's insistence that Alice remain at Rupert House to have the baby parallels his insistence on the move, and like that occasion was motivated in part by social concern.

Alice went regularly to see the nurse for pre-natal check-ups, a feature of EuroCanadian medical practice which is not part of Cree practice. A Cree woman rarely discusses her pregnancy even with the women in her family. It is assumed that her condition is obvious to others and does not need discussion. As Alice indicated in her account of her first and second pregnancies, a woman is expected to learn to look after herself in this situation.

When Alice knew she was in labour she wanted to put off going to the nursing station until the last minute, following the usual Cree practice of keeping the knowledge of the labour to oneself until the birth is imminent. Again Willie persuaded her to follow the EuroCanadian practice and go to the nurse early to avoid exposure to cold if the baby arrived at home. Shortly after her arrival at the nursing station, her labour stopped. The nurse assumed she had false labour, but Alice knew differently, and she told the nurse, "Maybe it's because I'm in different surroundings, why that happened, because I was sure I would have that baby when I came last night" (4: 119).

Rather than assuming that Alice's interpretation of the situation might be correct, and considering what effect

the unfamiliar surroundings might have, the nurse assumed Alice did not understand what had happened and prepared to send her home. In the midst of this misunderstanding, with Alice trying to say, 'I feel uncomfortable here' and the nurse saying, 'You don't know what you're talking about,' the baby arrived. That it was a misunderstanding arising from the nurse's incompetence is clear from Alice's imitation of the nurse's raucous laughter, as she recalled the response when she asked the interpreter, Margaret, to tell the nurse the baby was coming. Mimicry, like teasing, is a means of social sanction, often defining behaviour as particularly offensive (Preston, 1976: 462). The nurse was unwilling to acknowledge that Alice might know more than she did about what was happening; an all too common response of whites to Indians.

Alice's actions at this time are characteristic of a Cree woman, of her generation, during childbirth; however, the unfamiliar surroundings of the nursing station and the inadequacies of the nurse distort the events. Childbirth in a Cree context includes withholding from the midwife information about the birth until it is actually taking place. This action is primarily to maintain self-reliance and to avoid interference with another until the last moment. It also helps to avoid panic on the part of the midwife, who must then act quickly to help the mother and infant.

It would seem that Alice's labour had ceased, but from previous experience she knew the baby was about to be

born. When she told the interpreter and the nurse the baby was arriving, instead of coming to her assistance immediately, they laughed. When they did come the baby had been born and they panicked, another manifestation, in the Cree view, of the nurse's lack of competence. Although the interpreter's actions lacked competence also, this was less serious. She was a young Cree woman, in some sense marginal to the Cree community (she never married) and employed by the staff at the nursing station as housekeeper/interpreter. She was neither midwife nor assistant to the nurse and was not in a position to help. Alice remembered this experience and the behaviour of the two women, she said, "You know, I thought I went through that very well" (4:120), indicating that in spite of the women's irresponsibility her own knowledge was sufficient to meet the crisis.

Later, however, she was unable to avoid a crisis growing out of the incompetent actions of the nurse's husband. She recalled, "But later on, a few days after, I wasn't too happy what happened. I blamed them for what happened" (4:121). As they were preparing for the evening the nurse's husband gave Alice tablets which he said were 222's. Although Alice did not want to take them, he forced them on her, saying, "Hurry up and take them" (4:121). A Cree would interpret this insistence to comply with a request as direct interference with personal autonomy. As Alice demonstrated in her account of the move to Rupert House, although one may very much want

to influence the actions of another, one does not insist. Not wishing to compound the situation, by refusing to do as requested, Alice took the tablets.

As a result, she had a severe reaction, which, when discovered by the nurse and her husband, was denied by them. Although they recognized Alice's condition was serious, and told her not to nurse the baby, they were unwilling to assume responsibility for their actions.

Alice recalled her daughter's distress when Eva saw her mother's swollen, rash-covered face. Eva knew her mother was very ill and went to get her father, Willie. After he arrived, the nurse and her husband did not want him to see Alice, and tried to block his way, again interfering with personal autonomy. When asked what was wrong, they replied, "Your wife has a cold and it's all in her chest" (4:123). Then Alice told Willie, "I don't think I have a cold ... that man gave me some pills when I went to bed. I'm sure that's the reaction to the pills" (4:123).

Alice knew her condition was a reaction to the pills. She had never had medication of this sort after childbirth nor had she ever experienced the swelling and rash. Although Willie confronted the nurse with Alice's explanation, she (the nurse) and her husband continued to deny any responsibility, insisting that Alice had a cold. This is the second example in which it was clearly demonstrated that these two EuroCanadians were unwilling to take Alice's knowledge of

herself into account.

That these two outsiders completely lacked social or medical competence and were unwilling to acknowledge this lack, preferring to attempt to maintain a self-protective facade, was finally revealed when Alice was sent by Willie and the Hudson Bay Company manager to Moose Factory Hospital two months after the birth. Here it was learned that the nurse not only neglected to register the birth and the illness, but also, that she and her husband were not medical personnel at all. Their actions, considered gross negligence from the point of view of the EuroCanadian medical staff as well as the Cree community, were compounded from a Cree perspective because they continued to disclaim responsibility for Alice's illness even after their dismissal from the nursing station.

As Alice has previously indicated, social competence from a Cree perspective, includes the ability to recognize the consequences of incompetent, negligent actions, actions assumed to be the result of ignorance or inexperience, and to begin to alter one's behaviour based on that recognition. The two EuroCanadians in this account in no way acknowledged or demonstrated any recognition that their behaviour lacked competence. Although the "nurse" cried when their incompetence was exposed, it would be difficult to say if those tears were an indication of regret about the effects their actions had for Alice or whether they were an indication of

her regret for herself, that her incompetence had been exposed, because she continued to act as if she were a nurse, trying to dispense birth control pills.

Alice contrasts the behaviour of the "nurse" and her husband with that of the Hudson Bay Company manager and the doctor at Moose Factory Hospital, also EuroCanadian. When the manager learned of Alice's illness, he immediately made the appropriate arrangements to send her to the hospital. Air travel in and out of Rupert House in 1965 was limited to the occasional bush plane. Although Willie and Alice could have made travel arrangements, for Alice to be seen by the doctor, or admitted to the hospital at Moose Factory, some form of communication from the nursing staff was required. As Annie explained, "Usually the nurses send down a message when they send a patient out and they didn't do that with Alice this time" (4: 129ff). The post manager assumed this responsibility and wrote the letter which Alice needed to take with her to the hospital. He, like the doctor who read the letter, never questioned Alice's integrity, as had the "nurse" and her husband.

Alice, with her baby and her letter, arrived at the hospital. The doctor who interviewed her confirmed her diagnoses of her condition and told her, "It looks like they were hiding this from us because they almost killed you" (4: 131). She recalled his reaction to her story,

"I wasn't even finished telling him everything that happened when he got mad. He got angry. He didn't even want to listen to all what I told him. The doctor told me, 'I don't want anybody to call these people nurse or doctor. They are only there to look after the nursing station, and they're supposed to call and tell whenever a person is sick.' So he said, 'I'm amazed, and I don't know why they didn't notify anybody about you at the hospital.'" (4:131)

The doctor's angry reaction to Alice's account interrupted her efforts to explain what had happened, but at the same time validated her assessment of her experience at the Rupert House nursing station. Alice understood that even though his actions did not reflect Cree social competence, they did reflect social responsibility. The doctor told her,

"When you took those pills, when you were still losing blood like that, all the blood stopped coming, and it went all over your body. That's why you are swollen. That's why you are having nose bleeds, it's coming out. A woman that just had a new baby, it's not right for her to take a lot of medication." (4:132)

Alice accepted the doctor's explanation, saying, "I believed him when he said that because I had one of my babies at Moose Factory Hospital. They only gave me a needle after the baby was born" (4:133).

The juxtaposition of the behaviour of the "nurse" and her husband with the behaviour of the post manager and the doctor serves to highlight just how incompetent "nurse" and husband were. Their behaviour was an interference with the autonomy of another and was not balanced by any acknowledgement of social responsibility. In contrast, the post manager and the doctor acted responsibly, recognizing a problem and attempting to correct it. Although their actions did not conform to a Cree style of non-interference, they expressed social responsibility and may be interpreted as an attempt to remedy the outcome of another's shortcomings, rather than an interference with personal autonomy.

Within the Cree community, an awareness of others, and the recognition of the personal autonomy of others is expressed in interactions which avoid imposing on others, or non-interference. Aggressive and/or defensive behaviour which interferes with the personal autonomy of others, such as the behaviour exhibited by the "nurses", lacks social competence. The expression of individual freedom must be balanced by social responsibility. The importance of non-interference in relation to the maintenance of this balance was illustrated by Alice, first as she recalled an example of decision-making which was somewhat off balance, but which avoided interference and reflected an awareness of others. The importance of non-interference is repeated, and therefore emphasized, as Alice

recalled the "nurse's" actions, which must be compared to the decision-making process she had just described, as well as to the actions of the post manager and the doctor. Through the events described in this portion of the narrative Alice explored the acceptable limits of personal autonomy in relation to broader social responsibility. It would appear that without social responsibility, personal autonomy is unacceptable.

## CHAPTER FIVE

NARRATIVE, RECORDED JULY 12, 1978, PART II

Alice: My foster mother used to do this to me when she taught me how to do something. She just tell me once what to do, so I try to do what she told me. And when I finish, I show her, and if she thinks I didn't do very well she would tell me, "It's not done correctly. You try to do it again." And she would talk very loud to me, and then I was very afraid of her when she did this, when she talked very loud to me. She taught me many things. She taught me how to make my clothes. I used to wear a dress all the time. She would have a skirt sometimes and then she would make her top. And then they told me how to do the chores, like a boy's work. And I used to go with my foster father to trap.

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And I remember one thing I couldn't do at all that they tried to teach me to do. And today I still can't do that because I got mad when they were trying to teach me to do it (Alice giggles), to do bead work. They couldn't teach me how to do it. I tried to do what she said but it never came out right. My foster mother would tell me to undo it again, take the beads off and try again, but I didn't have any more patience. I got mad when she told me to do that. And then she didn't teach me any more. She was really good doing beadwork herself. And she was really good at sewing, too. She did silk work, too, on moose hide, embroidery. And sometimes we would go setting rabbit snares. And then we would go--he would teach me how to set beaver traps. (Alice chuckles). I knew how to set the trap because I used to help Willie set traps, and I used to catch beaver in the traps, setting them myself. Both of my foster parents taught me how to do these things.

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(She said) near the time when my foster father would die, I knew about that. I really loved him like a father. I only had one child then,

when he died. And he was blind. After he was blind they used to put a string all the way to the toilet from the house, and that's what he would hold onto to go to the toilet. And we were at the settlement at the time, and we were living in our own tent.

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And one evening, I went to see him. It was later than this now (after 9:00 pm). He knew I came into the house because he heard me talking. He could tell from my voice. He was sitting in a chair like this, and he said to me--he used to sit in a chair like this with his eyes closed--and he told me, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Nothing, I just came by, dropped in for a while." And he said, "How's my grandchild?" I told him, "I already put her to bed." At that time Willie was gone. He went out with somebody to check on traps. And he told me, "Take care of my granddaughter all the time. Take good care of her." And he said, "I'm almost falling off from my chair." And he said, "That's all I can sit here. I'm very tired," he said, "It's quite a while since I was blind," and he said, "I really love you because we brought you up." And then he said, "I always stopped Maggie from beating you up or spanking you. I am very happy we never hurt you," he said.

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And then I said to him, "Why are you talking like this to me?" I felt something, I felt in my heart there was something I didn't like, the way he was talking to me. And also, I felt like crying when he said all this to me. And his wife (Maggie) said something to him. "Don't talk that way," she said. Then he said, "I wanted to tell you so you would be ready." (And she said) I never even sat down. I was standing when he was talking to me. So I decided to go outside because I was wondering about what he said to me. And then when I started to go out, I told him, "I'm leaving now." I said good-night to him. He said, "I love you, my child," and then when I went home, I stayed at our place for a while.

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As soon as I went out from their house, he started to sing one hymn from the hymn book. He sang the hymn in English and he stood up while he was singing the hymn. Then he felt for the

string and started walking while he was singing. Then he finished that song he sang, he sang all of it. After he finished singing, he asked for his suit coat. He had a suit. And then his wife asked him, "Why do you carry on like this?" He acted very different. He didn't tell his wife why. Then he went to the bed, and he lay down on the bed with his suit on. Then, my foster mother thought he had gone to sleep.

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My foster mother went to bed, too, and when she touched him on the bed, she thought she couldn't hear him breathing. And there was another old woman there with them, my foster mother's sister. Then she made sure, she looked at him and watched him to see if he was already gone. He wasn't breathing any more. And my foster mother told her sister, "Go and get Alice." Then when I got there (she said), I checked the pulse where they were and he had no pulse. So I believed that what he told me.

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And her foster mother started like this, she was fighting her. She was in shock, and it was because her husband died very suddenly like that. Well, it was, I guess, she went into shock and she was--this was very sudden for her. It was a blow to her, too. She acted like she couldn't remember what she was doing. I told her, "I knew from the way he talked that he wasn't going to live long, that he was coming to the end. Didn't you hear him?" I told her. And then that's when she told me that he had sung that hymn. She lived on quite a few years. We used to take her out to the trapline with us, and she used to live with us in our tent.

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Then one summer, Willie and I and the family went to Mistassini. And apparently my foster mother was sick while we were over there in Mistassini. When she was sick, they took her out to the hospital at Moose Factory. She got very sick, she kept calling and calling, she wanted to see me, and she kept calling, "Alice, Alice, I want to see Alice." So I wasn't able to see her because I was too far away, and I didn't know, even though she was (--?--). And she used to say "I'm sure Alice will never see my face again." It was during the same time we were in Mistassini we heard that she had passed away. It's not very long

ago, it's fourteen years. My son Jimmy was the baby then. And then when I came back from Mistassini, I really missed my foster mother. The sisters of my foster mother sort of were hurt when they saw me. 145

Annie: I guess she brought memories about their sister.

Alice: She died in hospital, at Moose Factory. They buried her over there, too, in Moose Factory.

Sarah: Oh, they didn't bring her back?

Alice: They never used to do that before, they just started to do that not too long ago. Maybe they thought there was something wrong, and they wanted to bury her right away. 146

Sarah: Oh, maybe so.

Alice: And then I felt like it was really my own parent, my real parent that I lost.

Sarah: I'm sure, yes.

Alice: And my children, too, used to call for grandmother all the time. They missed her and they talked about her, their grandmother. She was very good to us. She felt very proud of us if we didn't see her for quite a while, and we came back again and we saw her. When I didn't have food, like meat, I could always go and see her, and I would ask her if she have some to give us. She was really good working at, everything she did, she did very well. She used to make good bread, too. 147

Sarah: It must have been really hard not to have been able to see her.

Alice: Yes. I was really sad because I wasn't able to see her. I was sorry to hear the people were telling me that she used to call for me all the time when she was really sick. (She said) my foster mother taught me how to deliver a baby, too. She just sat there and watched me, the first baby I delivered. Then she would tell me what to do. I was very frightened, I was shaking as if I were cold. My foster mother knew that and then she used to tell me, "It's your turn now, you're going to do that now." 148

One time I was watching a woman drinking. And I only had one child that time, that was Eva. My foster mother's foster son's daughter was in labour. And that woman was expecting a baby. And this woman, I was watching drinking, they gave me a little bit to drink in a cup. Homebrew they were drinking. So I took what they gave me. I drink that. I drink up that what they offered me. And my foster mother was really unhappy to see me stay around where people were drinking. I never used to help them, or drink with them, I still watched them. I used to run over there, and just listen to them talking sometimes. And she used to tell me, "Don't go away, don't leave your children." And then one time when I was there watching these women drinking, and somebody came and told me, "Maggie wants you to come." So I thought, I guess she knows I'm over here watching these women drink, and I didn't go home. And the other women told me, "Don't go home." They sort of wanted me to stay, I guess, with them. And then they said, "She's coming." 149

And then I went outside. I didn't want her to see me inside the tent and I had this cup, too, in my hand. And then I went outside and then I met her. She was coming. And she told me, "What are you doing?" I said, "I was watching those women drink." And she said, "Are you drinking, too?" I said, "No." I lied to her when I told her that. I had a drink already, one cup. Then I said, "What do you want? What do you want to do? Why did you come looking for me when I went over there?" I asked her. And she told me, "Sidney's wife is in labour." So I asked her, "What's the matter, is she really going to have the baby? Is this the month she was expecting to have the baby?" And she said, "Yes." She said she was going to have the baby. And she told me, "I told you already that I can't deliver any more babies." And I told her "I can't deliver that baby either, I'm afraid." And then she told me "Don't be afraid, I'll come and sit with you." 150

(And she said) she already sat with her when she delivered a baby before, but I didn't, I don't know everything she did, I didn't know how. When I just sat there with her, to watch

her, I never used to look too much, when she used to work on the woman, where the birth channel, on the woman. She just asked me to help, like, to bring her something. She asked me to get something for her. (And then she said) I never watched the woman give birth to a child, really watched it, you know, come. It's only after I heard the baby cry that I would look, and the baby would be already born then. And I asked her, "Who will look after my little girl for me?" And she told me, "Willie can look after her." And I told her, "Willie's going to drink." 151

And then, she kept telling me to go. So I did what she said. And we went in the tent. And then I told her, "Maybe she won't like me because she never used to come to see me." And I stood at the door. She told her foster daughter-in-law, "Alice is going to come and sit with you to deliver the baby. I told you already that I can't do that for you any more." And the woman never said anything. And I heard her, you know, she was moaning with the pains, and she was laying there--and then she called, "Come here, Alice." (And) I went to where she was lying. She was very strange when she had her babies. She sort of had her babies sort of a strange way. That's not the first time I would see her have her baby. When she used to have her babies, when she was in labour, when she had a pain, she used to throw up. I used to think, "I wonder why she's like that, she would throw up when she would have the pain?" 152

We got ready and my foster mother was sitting there, too. And I told her, "Sit closer to her and I will sit next to you." And she told me, "No! You're the one who's going to deliver this baby." She had the scissors ready, too, to cut the cord. When the baby was born--she had already told me where to cut the cord. And when I started to cut the cord with the scissors --and as I was halfway through cutting it--I put the scissors down. And that old lady started to shout at me. "Don't do that! Take that scissors and cut the cord!" she said. I was very frightened when I saw how far the blood was bleeding, how much it was bleeding. (And then) I thought I was hurting the baby, too. I thought the baby would bleed and bleed to death. That's what I was afraid of. While we were doing this I was coughing and I was sweating, maybe because I was frightened. 153

## ANALYSIS:

The structure of this section of the narrative is different from the previous sections and from the final section. This section was a response to the suggestion that Alice recall and explain the tasks and skills she had learned from her foster parents. She was, of course, reminded of both foster parents by this suggestion and quickly passed over an initial listing of specific skills to an account of the death of each. Then she returned to the request, recalling one of her first efforts at learning to be a midwife. Because she was responding to a request, she may or may not have deliberately focused on competence, or the lack of it; however, the death of her foster father could be considered as an expression of the ideal; self-control and competence in death as in life. The ideal may be what one hopes for, and strives for, but it may not necessarily happen, as we are reminded by Alice's memories of her foster mother's death. No matter how competent, ultimately, one has little control over circumstances and events. It may be the rare individual who has the opportunity to fulfill self-awareness and understanding, self-control and competence to the extent demonstrated in the old man's death.

The example of competence within the context of death is bracketed by examples of the aspects of competence related to learning specific skills. Alice began this section of the narrative by recalling that her foster parents

encouraged her to learn many things, including sewing, setting rabbit snares, trapping, and a boy's chores. She also recalled one skill she never learned, explaining,

"And today I still can't do that because I got mad when they were trying to teach me to do it, to do beadwork. They couldn't teach me how to do it. I tried to do what she said, but it never came out right. My foster mother would tell me to do it again, take the beads off and try again, but I didn't have any more patience. I got mad when she told me to do that. And then she didn't teach me anymore." (5:138)

This statement suggests the need for emotional control not only as an aspect of learning beadwork,<sup>1</sup> but as an aspect of learning in general. Without patience, it would seem, one cannot learn.

Perhaps the problem was not entirely Alice's. Her foster mother may have been skillful, "She was really good doing beadwork herself. And she was really good at sewing too." (5:138), but she may have been a hard teacher: "...if she thinks I didn't do very well she would tell me, 'It's not done correctly. You try to do it again.' And she would talk very loud to me, and then I was very afraid of her when she did this, when she talked loud to me" (5:137). Later in the narrative, Alice recalled her foster father's words, "I always stopped Maggie (her foster mother) from beating you up, or spanking you" (5:140). It may be that patience and emotional control are required not only for learning, they are required also for teaching.

The lack of skill in beading has probably not seriously affected Alice's life experience, but as she has previously indicated, (Chapter Three: Analysis) there were other skills she did not learn which were of concern to her. The fact that she did learn "many things" serves to demonstrate her own capabilities as well as the intent of the older couple, to encourage within Alice the development of autonomy and self-reliance.

It is the adults' responsibility not only to provide for the physical and emotional security of the child, but also to provide the opportunity for learning the skills necessary for survival within the Cree world. It is then the child's responsibility to engage with that opportunity; it is up to the child to learn. Perhaps Alice was not always as careful to pay close attention as she might have when skills were being demonstrated, and perhaps her foster mother responded to this inattention with impatience. Whatever the reason, it would seem that Alice learned more readily from her foster father than from her foster mother. Except for the sewing, she recalled specifically the skills she might have learned from the old man and recalled both her own and Maggie's impatience when trying to learn from her.

Following this brief account of teaching, learning, and the need for patience, Alice recalled the circumstances of her foster father's death. On one level, memories of her relationship with her foster father may have been a motivating

factor in recalling his death, one memory simply followed the other. On another level, her account of his death provides an example of patience and emotional control which is in sharp contrast to the lack of patience she had just described. In the account of Alice's foster father's death, any distinction between ideal and manifest behaviour is overcome in the delicate balance achieved by the old man, who was both aware of himself and his situation and also aware of others. The outcome of his actions reflect this knowledge, and his competence; his death was the conclusion of his preparation for departure.

Although he was very old, Alice's foster father was encouraged and supported by his family in efforts to remain as self-reliant as possible. "After he was blind, they used to put a string all the way to the toilet from the house, and that's what he would hold onto to go to the toilet" (5:139). He was aware of others, "And one evening I went to see him ... He knew I came into the house because he heard me talking. He could tell from my voice" (5:140). And he was aware of himself, "I'm almost falling off from my chair. That's all I can sit here. I'm very tired. It's quite awhile since I was blind" (5:140).

I do not think the old man meant, literally, that he was so tired he was falling from his chair. Instead, he was stating indirectly that his death was near. When he prepared himself and his family for a leave-taking, Alice

questioned him, saying, "Why are you talking like this to me" (5:141)? And his wife told him, "Don't talk that way" (5:141). He replied, "I wanted to tell you so you would be ready" (5:141). After Alice left, he completed his preparation "He sang a hymn in English and he stood up while he was singing...after he finished singing, he asked for his suit coat...then he went to bed, and he lay down on the bed with his suit on" (5:142). This was not only a preparation to leave his family and the present behind, it was also a preparation to meet the future.

Jimmy Moar understood his situation, he knew his death was imminent, and he consciously chose to create a disciplined experience. He expressed his respect and concern for those persons closest to him. He said goodbye to his family, he reminded Alice of his love for her and for her children, and he admonished her to continue to love and care for his grandchildren. He expressed his respect as well for those persons he might be expected to meet, who may or may not have been known to him, through his song and through dressing in his best clothes, his suit coat. He went with great equanimity, meeting death as one should meet life. His words understated his emotions, his actions were deliberate. Both were mediated by a quiet reticence and expressed as a strong sense of emotional control, as well as an acute awareness of self and others.

While trying to understand the implications in this account of death, I have felt a strong sense of connection between the image of love and security found in Alice's childhood dream and the image of personal strength and competence manifest in the old man's dying. Alice never indicated in any way that she herself thought there might be a relationship between the man in her dream and her foster father, and there may not be. However, her foster father's words, "I really love you because we brought you up. I always stopped Maggie from beating you up or spanking you. I am very happy we never hurt you ... I love you, my child" (140,141) reflect the image of love and security the child Alice encountered in her dream. Her foster father's words restate the cultural ideal embodied in the dream person. If her dream provided for her the will to live, it can be said that her foster father tried to provide for her the example of how to live.

It is difficult to know whether Alice's foster mother was aware of the implications in her husband's words and actions at the time of his death. She may have been aware of the cues and decided for her own reasons to ignore them; perhaps she was not as ready for the transition as the old man was. But perhaps she simply was not sensitive enough to the old man's words and actions to understand what was about to happen. In either case, she missed her opportunity to say farewell. He was gone before she realized it.

For the Cree, it is important to say farewell to those who are departing on a journey of some distance or duration. Because one cannot know the future, one does not know when or if departing loved ones may be seen again. Saying farewell serves as a statement of affirmation of relationship, and it is important for those who are dying as well as those who are living to be able to make that statement.

Alice seemed to understand the message in her foster father's words, although she did not directly acknowledge this understanding to herself or to the old man. She said,

"I never even sat down. I was standing when he was talking to me, so I decided to go outside because I was wondering about what he said to me. And then when I started to go out I told him, 'I'm leaving now.'" (5:141)

His death later confirmed her understanding of his words. She told her foster mother, "I knew from the way he talked that he wasn't going to live long" (5:144).

Recalling her foster father's death may have precipitated memories of her foster mother's death, which took place some years later, under very different circumstances. The circumstances of the old man's death may have been ideal. He was able to express his sense of autonomy and social responsibility with dignity in his final actions. The old woman, on the other hand, was not so fortunate. She

became ill and was taken to Moose Factory Hospital at a time when Willie and Alice were away. She may or may not have been alone at death, that is not clear from the narrative. What is clear is that she wanted to see Alice but was unable to. Her death, in unfamiliar surroundings, was particularly poignant because she had not only missed the implication in her husband's last words, and therefore missed the opportunity for a final farewell with him, she also missed a final farewell with her daughter. She was not able to make a final statement of affirmation of her relationship either to her husband or to Alice.

Alice's comments about her foster mother's death are probably not a statement about competence or the lack of it, but simply a statement of cultural ideals and differing opportunities for actualization. To be able to end life where one has lived, surrounded by loved ones and to be able to acknowledge the relationship one has had with those one will leave behind is preferable to a departure isolated from familiar people and things.

Alice returned to the original request and completed this portion of the narrative by recalling an experience which occurred after her foster mother began to teach her to be a midwife. In this way she was able to redirect attention away from the image of an unsettling death, back to a positive image of her foster mother as an active, skillful woman. However, the image she created of herself in this context was

one of a young woman somewhat less skillful and quite reluctant to assume the responsibilities of midwife. This image of herself as one who is incompetent is in stark contrast to the image of herself which emerges in the final section of the narrative.

CHAPTER SIX

NARRATIVE, RECORDED July 15, 1978

Annie: Did she finish that story about that child?

Sarah: I can't remember.

Alice: (And then she said) that's the summer time that she delivered that baby.

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: And then they moved to the trapline. They were going out from Nemiscau. They stayed with another family, so two families stayed together. She said she never paid that much attention to that other woman. Apparently she was pregnant. When they were working together, after they got out on the trapline, she was able to tell Alice that she was expecting. "She told me that she is going to have a baby." And I asked her, "What are you going to do when it comes near the time when your're going to have this baby? Are you going to go to Nemiscau, to the settlement?" And she said, "No, I'll need your help then." Then I told her, "I'm afraid," and she said, "I will try to help you." Sometimes when she thinks about it now, she thinks maybe she was afraid because she didn't have anybody to think about, to hope in, to help her. 154

Annie: Like, she means that she didn't have hope in God for help at that time.

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: And then one day they were together--this woman's name was Kitty--they were working together, like getting wood, or picking boughs together. It was already turning warmer in the spring, and she was already big with the child. When we went out in the fall, like, to our trapline, we never came back to the settlement until May, after breakup. They were on the lake--they went across the lake to pick boughs. There was water on the lake, about ankle deep. But it wasn't like that all over the lake, but on some places there was water. They would break a little bit through the ice, like, just a little bit frozen, then there was water underneath.

They were trying to hurry up to finish what they were doing because they had other things to do at home. And then, when they came back with the boughs, they brought the boughs home, they carried them on their backs, wrapped up in blankets, these boughs (Alice chuckles). They used to do that all the time. They used to change the boughs inside the tent, you know, at the same time. So all the floor of the tent was--had new boughs at the same time. So it looked better like that. If she changed it, and somebody else changed it at a different time, it wouldn't look the same on both sides of the tent.

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And her husband was out--he had gone out that day. And then when they came back, when they brought the boughs back, she started to put them down in the tent, to change the boughs. But she was busy changing her clothes and changing her socks. She didn't pay very much attention to what she was doing. And after she changed the boughs, she was going to stretch the beaver skins. Then she saw her just sitting there and she thought maybe she's resting because she was tired. And then her husband came back. He had been out hunting. As she was sitting there working, she saw Kitty talk to her husband, whispering, as if she was trying to tell him something in secret.

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In the past she always used to wonder to herself, "I wonder what I would do if ever there was a chance for me to be alone delivering a baby?" And then she heard that man telling his wife, "Never mind changing the boughs now." From that she could tell something was happening. But she didn't tell her, tell her she was in labour, or anything yet.

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Then the man told her that his wife was in labour. He said, "If she didn't hurt herself some way." So that man said, "Why did you have to go pick boughs so far away from the camp?" So I said, "Lots of nice ones over there." And I asked the lady, the other woman, if it was time for her to have her baby now, her date is now? And she said, "Yes, it's time for me to have my baby." I couldn't go across to where the other lady was right away.

So that man told me, "Go to your friend, and try to help her out, try to help her." And Willie wasn't home. So I did what the man said. She went over to see this other lady and she's (--?--) She could hear her making noises like she had pains. She was just sitting there. She wasn't even trying to get herself ready, to make up her bed to lie down. So I told her, "Why didn't you make up your bed, and fix it up where you are going to lie down before the pains got too bad?" And she said, "I'm already losing the baby's water." So I told her "It won't be right if you just sit there and have your baby on the boughs, on the floor, on the boughs. When the baby comes, they might cut the skin, might cut the baby's skin on the boughs or something."

158

So she told that man to come and help her fix up the bed for her. She said, "I can't do it alone, you have to try and help me." So after they put the mattress down, they moved her to where the mattress was slowly. And not too much, not very long after they moved her, she had the baby and Alice had the baby in her hands. But the only problem was, the baby didn't breathe for quite a while. (And then) the man knew that the baby wasn't breathing (she said) and he sort of grabbed the baby out of her hands. So the woman told her husband, "Don't take the baby away from her, just watch what she's going to do to it." And Alice's foster mother was a midwife so she had told Alice what to do when this would happen to a baby. There wasn't just one way, but several ways she told her what to do to try and get the baby to breathe.

159

(She said) when the baby is born with the face up, that's what happens, it doesn't breathe right away. She thought it would be flooded with the fluid inside the mouth. And then by putting the head down and slapping the bottom sort of brings the breath back on the baby. And then after you try that and it doesn't work, you can do breathing, put your mouth to the nostrils and breath, try to bring the breathing like that. And then she did that and the first part she tried, it didn't work. Then she put a cloth in there. She was able to get out some mucous, fluid out of its mouth, and she started to do that breathing through the mouth, through the nose like or the mouth. And

then the baby sort of burst breathing, crying. 160

(She said) she was frightened, but the man was worse. He was just shaking with fright. (Alice chuckles) Yes, (she said) then after the baby was able to breath, she cleaned up the baby and washed the baby and then fixed the baby with a diaper. Before she was finished with that, the afterbirth was already there. She didn't have problems at all. Everything went well with the birth. She had a boy. And then they stayed there only one month, after the baby was born. 161

And then they moved, they travelled to another area, place. It was nice going, the snow was hard already, when they were walking. It was almost spring. At that time, I only had one child, and that was Eva. She wasn't very old yet. She was still young, and I still used to tie her with a string so she wouldn't run outside and get cold. I tied Eva for a long time. She was big before I stopped tying her. She was old enough to know that she could look for a knife and cut herself loose from the string. There was a river there, that's where they moved. The other woman that they stayed with had quite a few children. They didn't have very much food because the men had got all their quota, all the beaver they had to catch. 162

There was a river there, where we moved, and we camped on the bank of that river. The men said they would go to the settlement to get supplies when it was already very bad in the spring. There was only the two men there at the camp with us. We had boys, but the boys weren't very big yet, they couldn't do very much work. The other family had a girl, too, that was the oldest one. She was bigger and able to help with the work. The men left and then we ran short of food completely. The woman was breast-feeding her baby, and I remember seeing her crying, because, I guess, the baby wasn't getting anything, even though he was sucking. 163

I went out to set rabbit snares, but there was very few rabbits around where we were camping. When I went to check those snares, the only thing I caught was two squirrels. But we ate

those squirrels. There came a time when I started to get worried, too, because we didn't have anything to eat. The time I started to get worried was when I saw the ice breaking up on the river. I was worried that the men maybe had an accident or that they went through the ice and nobody would know what happened. The people in the settlement won't know what happened and then we'll just have to stay here and starve. I felt very pitiful to see that women because she had more children than I did.

164

Where we left our canoes in the fall, if a person would go over there, they had to stop once to drink tea, and then go on before they reached these canoes. I thought of the canoes because the river was breaking up and our canoe was not very big. It was an 18-foot canoe. The other canoe was bigger than ours. So I asked that other woman if she would allow me to go over there and get that canoe. I asked her if I can take her daughter with me so we can both paddle the canoe back to the camp. All we had to do was follow the river up, there was no river going this way we couldn't walk across.

165

I knew the other woman was worried about me because, I guess, she thought I couldn't lift the canoe by myself, that it would be too heavy for me. I told this woman, "I tried to lift our canoe by myself, and I managed to walk quite a distance with it on my back." I said to her, "If we manage to come back with the canoe, we'll be able to set nets and get fish because this is a good place to catch fish." I was really worried, and I wasn't happy to see her cry all the time. Maybe it was because her baby wasn't getting enough to eat. And I guess her children were putting pressure on her because they kept asking her for something to eat, and she didn't have anything to give them. It hurt her to hear them ask for things she couldn't give them. They had nothing at all, not even tea or sugar.

166

So, finally she told me, "Try to go and try to get the canoe." I took her little girl with me and we started off. I wasn't going to take my daughter Eva with me, and she really cried but

I didn't want to let that hold me from going to get the canoe. I told that lady to try and keep Eva quiet after I was gone, not to let her cry too long. The little girl was about 11 or 12 years old. She couldn't really paddle the canoe, she was just learning. This slowed us down when we got to the canoe because we were going upstream.

167

We left the camp early in the morning and when we got to the canoe it was afternoon already. The bush was very thick, and it was hard walking, especially for the little girl. We went very slowly because she couldn't walk as fast as I could. Maybe she was tired, too, because she would fall down and she would cry. I started talking to her and she felt better after I told her, "If we can't go for the canoe and then we don't have any food, your little brother can't live without any milk from your mother."

168

When we got to the canoes, I told her, "Go down ahead of me. I might hurt you if I fall down and hit you with the canoe. Wait for me down the bank. Go the way we used to go to the river." I was afraid she would get hit by the canoe if I should fall or if something happened to the canoe on my back, I would hit her if she was close by. I put lots of things on top, here, on my back, so it wouldn't hurt where I had to carry it. I was almost down to the bank when I had to stop and put it down for a while because I was too tired to go on. And I was afraid to go down. The bank was quite steep going down to the river (Alice chuckles). Then I couldn't get it on my back again. I couldn't manage to stand up under it with the weight on top of me. It was easier when it was on the cache. I could pick it up standing up. It was harder to pick it up sitting, from right off the ground. So I called the girl to help me. We had to sort of drag it along to the bank. We didn't drag it very far, and we managed to get it to the river.

169

We got in the canoe and I told her, "Try and paddle, hard as you can." Right after breakup the current is swift and fast. The ice was still on the river but there were some places,

open water, and that's where we were paddling. It was almost dark when we got home and I was very tired. I guess it was from paddling. I wasn't that old yet, I was still young and strong at that time. I told the other lady, "While we're gone today, before we come back, make sure you get one net ready to be set. It doesn't matter how late we come back, I'm going to try and get that net in the water." We set the net near where we came ashore. The girl came with me to set the net, but she couldn't even manage to paddle the canoe so I could put the net in as we went along. So the net was kind of crooked in the water, we couldn't put it straight (chuckles). It was already dark when we finished putting the net in. When we got back to the tent, the woman already had all her children in bed. Then, that night it was snowing a little bit, and we were in a teepee, one family on each side of the teepee. 170

I got up early in the morning and I started to clear the snow from the doorway. All of them were still sleeping, and I went to the other side of the teepee where that family was. I sort of shook the little girl awake and asked her, "Can you come out to help me, I'll go and check the net?" She didn't want to get up to go with me and her mother said, "Come on, get up and go with Alice to check the net." So, she got up. As she dressed, I told her, "It won't take us long to go and check the net because it's very close to our place." 171

As I was going down, I could see the net. When we had finished setting the net I could see all the floats sticking out, but when we looked this time, that morning going down, two of the floats were missing. So I thought to myself, "I guess they were pushed off by the ice, a piece of ice must have floated over the net." We got in the canoe and when we got to the net, I started to pull the net up. I started from the shore, pulling the net up. Then, my two floats that didn't show started to show up. I was already half through my net and we still didn't catch any fish. I was so sure I caught something there where those two floats didn't show (laughter). They were under water (still laughing). I was so hungry, but still I could laugh. And then when I got to those floats that

didn't show, I noticed something that looked like a piece of wood in the net (still laughing). I couldn't recognize what it was, and I told the little girl, "I'm sure there is a big piece of wood floating here, I'm sure it's in my net." I lifted up the net very slowly, and the fish started to move (laughter). It was a big pike, and then farther on the net was a pickerel, a big one.

172

I told the girl to sit right down in the canoe and try not to move. I was afraid the canoe would tip if the fish move because they were very big. I managed to get it in the canoe with the net, still in the net (more laughter). I had a hard time getting it out of the net because it was all tangled (chuckles). So I was working on it inside the canoe, to get it out of the net. I took a stick of wood along with me to hit the fish, if I should get one, and I was hitting this fish with this wood I had taken along. After I got the pike out of the net, I tried to get the pickerel out, too. The fish in the bay here are smaller, when you get inland, it's bigger. So that morning I got two fish out of the net. If I had known then, at that time, that I was supposed to give thanks to God, I'm sure that I would have thanked God for that morning. I'm so sure when I think about it now, I'm sure God was looking after us. This wouldn't have happened if God wasn't taking care of us and watching over us. I'm sure he helped me to be able to do that even though I was a woman.

173

We didn't even make a fire when we left to check the net. As we came back we knew the other woman had already made the fire because we saw smoke coming out of the stovepipe. The fish was very big, I couldn't even lift it (chuckles) and after we got ashore I had to drag it along. The other woman was very happy that morning. I'm so sure when I think about it now, I'm sure God was looking after us. To me, the other woman was more active than she was, when she knew we had food to eat. We cooked half the fish that morning, we boiled it, and drank the gravy, for our tea. And then I felt so happy for the children; after they ate, they went to sleep.

174

The next morning I cooked the other half of that fish. We checked the net again, but we didn't catch anything. The third day, after we'd eaten all the fish, two dogs came into our camp in the evening. This made our worry worse, when we saw the dogs because the men could have had an accident and fallen through the ice. And then the men came back. They pulled toboggans when they left, and now they only carried something on their backs. From joy and relief, I guess, we all started to cry, even the men, too, were crying, the children, too.

175

The men said it had been a very hard trip and they were glad to be back. It sounded like it seemed so impossible for them to be able to make the trip back. They were worried about the children, too, because they knew they didn't have anything to eat by that time. It had taken them quite a while to come back. The man kept saying, "I'm very thankful to you." But I don't think he should have been thanking me, I didn't deserve the thanks. He should have been thanking God instead. I guess he was the same as with me because he didn't know he was supposed to thank God for working things out for us like that, that He was caring for us. I was the same way that time. He told me that I had saved his family and his children. He was really worried about his children. They thought for sure the children were starved.

176

Annie: So I guess it made him really feel thankful to Alice that she was able to go and get the canoe and he knew how far the canoe was from the camp.

Alice: So we stayed there, camped there for quite a while. Then we started to catch more fish and get some more food after the river, all the ice had gone out. We started to get some birds, too, ducks.

177

Annie: They got lots of fish, sturgeon, too, and she was drying sturgeon on top of the things they make, something like a cache, that's where they make a fire under it and then they cook the fish flat on there. Sort of a barbeque.

Sarah: Oh, yes.

Alice: Then the men started to go out after to set traps and they went out to spend the night out, and so the children and the women were left behind again at the camp. Sometimes they would stay out two nights, three nights sometimes, just to set traps for otter and muskrat.

178

So I had to look after the nets while the men were gone. It was so funny one time, we were laughing about it. One evening it was a very nice evening. I was outside cooking these fish on the fire. And that other woman was inside the tent and the children were outside playing. There was no more snow left on the ground. Those children were glad the snow was gone. They were playing on the ground. It was nice and dry where we were camping. Those children would have fun after the snow was gone and it wasn't cold any more.

179

The river was right beside the camp and it was very calm that evening. It looked very nice on the river. The men weren't catching any more beaver. They had already finished trapping that spring, before breakup. As I was looking on the river, now and then, one time I looked up and I saw somebody in the water, swimming in the water. I recognized it, it was a beaver. I told the children, "Get that woman inside the tent." I told that woman, "Let's go and shoot that beaver, I think there's a beaver out there. Tell your little girl to look after the little ones." Then I said, "We could get a kick out of this. We can laugh after, see what happens if we shoot it." I told her, "We don't have to go very far. We will hear her if she calls." And I had a gun I could use. So I told her, "Get the canoe." I got the gun inside the canoe and I told her to be behind and I'll be at the front. So I told her, "I'll shoot it, I'll shoot the beaver."

180

The beaver was going very fast down the river and we couldn't catch up. We had a hard time catching up to it. I was really, sometimes laughing about something, what we'd do. So I told her to stop paddling so the canoe won't move. I said, "I'll shoot it now. I'm sure I'll be able to shoot it from here," you know, it was that close. So I shot the beaver

and then it started to move around in the water. And then we were laughing. I told her, "I got it." (everyone giggles)

181

We were just doing this for fun, we weren't sure we were going to get it. So I told her, "You go round the other side and you can hit it with your paddle and then it's yours. I got it for you." But she said, "I'm not going to take it. My husband's got already his quota of beaver." So she told her, "I'll get it, because I want to eat another kind of meat besides fish." So I just hit the beaver with my paddle. It was moving, still moving in the water. When I caught a hold of it, I threw it in the canoe where she was sitting (giggles). We were laughing when we did this. Then we started saying, "I'm sure we're going to get caught for what we did." Nobody was allowed to get more than their quota. They weren't supposed to catch any more than that. So I told the other lady, "I'm not going, we're not going to tell about it. We're going to keep it a secret." (giggles)

182

When we got ashore, the children started calling. They said, "The fish are burning!" (laughter and giggles). We only laughed. So we went back. I was behind her. She was ahead of me and I was holding the beaver. When we got inside the tent, I said, "I throw the beaver in where you are sitting." I said, "I mean it when I said it was for you. I killed it for you." (Alice chuckles) Now she's going to get frightened of what she was trying to be funny about. So I went back outside to check on my fish. And then after they were finished cooking, my fish were done, we ate those fish. They were still hot from being cooked just fresh. I ate them like that. They used to go to bed very early, she said, like after the sun set, we'd go to bed, everybody. And the beaver just sat there. She didn't touch that beaver. She didn't do anything.

183

And the next day when I got up, I started to do my work. And I checked the net. That little girl came with me. She used to come with me all the time when I go out to check the net. I didn't have very much work inside to do because

I only had one child. So she had more children than I did, so she had more work to do inside than I did. She has to get her little ones dressed up, too.

184

Then it was later on in the day that she still didn't try to do, to fix up that beaver. And then when I went inside the tent one time, I pulled that beaver away where she was sitting, I took the beaver. I told my friend, "Even if we live together longer, and if we live together and we live longer, I don't think I'll ever give you something that I kill again." (giggles) She just laughed at me when I said that to her. And I took that beaver outside. I made a big fire and I singed that beaver. The beaver was a little bit fat. And after I singed it, I cooked it. Something else funny happened after we ate that beaver.

185

(She said) she doesn't eat very much, you know, something that you singe like that. That winter apparently I had problems with pains in my intestines all the time. The day I cooked that beaver, the men were supposed to be home that day. So I asked the other--my friend, "I'm going to save some of this meat for my husband, are you going to do that, too?" And she said, "Yes."

186

Not too long after we ate the beaver, I started to get sick in my intestines. And so I went over there because I was so sick to my stomach. I had to sit down somewhere because I was so sick (she said). I had diarrhea you know, one time I went to the toilet. I'm sure I had a worm inside me because I can see it in the stool when I went. And the beaver that was singed must have killed it, must have killed the worm and then I was able to pass it out.

187

Alice: Did you ever see the worms on fish. They're kind of white, something like elastic.

Sarah: No.

Annie: It doesn't--it looks awful. It's white and awful.

Alice: Anyway in my stool that I saw, it looked like macaroni that had been cooked. And so I went to tell this other woman what happened. She

wanted to know what was wrong with me, that I was gone long. And then I told her that I was very sick to my stomach and having diarrhea. So I told her, "Come with me, I'll show you something." And then she went and when she saw the worm, I guess, she was really laughing at me (Alice and Annie laughing). My friend told me, "You did cure yourself, it was a good thing you killed that beaver, or your worm would still be inside you" (laughing). We really laughed about it, she said. Sometimes she seemed worried about me and she said, "That could have killed you, if you didn't kill it that way!"

188

And then the men came home. So I guess they weren't expecting anything, what, you know, that we would give them to eat. And then her husband who was older than Willie, I guess, this other woman's husband, so he was really praising her for that beaver, when she got that beaver (all chuckling now). And she had to tell on me. She told her husband, "It's Alice that got the beaver." And then she told him, "After Alice ate that beaver, she managed to kill her worm." The man said, "She sure did a good cure on herself!" (giggles). I didn't know that I had the worm. The only problem was, I always was sick in my intestines. And then soon after that we went to the settlement by canoe.

189

(She said) this time the story won't be as funny as the one I just told. I won't be able to laugh that much. I'm even sorry I have to tell about this story. The last year we were in Nemiscau, in the summer, we were moving to Rupert House. There was another woman in Nemiscau that I really loved, she was my friend.

190

When she got married, she didn't have a child right away, you know. Maybe, I don't know how many years later, she had a baby. And then, that was the winter she had a baby, the last winter I was in Nemiscau. And that girl was very nice. She looked nice. We were out in the bush in the fall and we came to Nemiscau around January. So we stayed there at the settlement that spring. So that's why, because we had stayed there, that's why I was able to see this, what happened in this story.

191

We had a feast. We were eating beaver at the feast. That other woman, my friend, didn't live close to our tent. She was quite a ways off. They had their tent farther from our tent. We really had fun and she used to laugh at me a lot when I joked about something. (And then) I saw her, not very often, I would see her close, and then one time I saw her at this feast. We started to talk to each other as if we were very glad to see each other. She was very big with carrying her baby. When I was looking at her, I was thinking to myself, "I'm sure she will have a very nice baby," and she looked nice herself. We were eating the beaver tail and we were sort of exchanging it between ourselves.

192

Annie: I guess they were just doing this because they were trying to be funny.

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: So after she went home, I didn't see her again for a long time. Then I heard that she was in labour, she was going to have her baby. So I kept listening for news, you know, that she already had, the baby was already born. It was already one night since I heard that she was in labour. I saw girls coming from over there. Then I asked about her. Her name was Janie, and I said, "How was Janie?" They told me she didn't have the baby yet. Then I asked them, "Is she having pains all the time?" And they said, "No." And I said, "I'm sure she will get tired." And then one morning the girls came into our tent. I'm sure they will say something by the looks on their faces. They told me, "You are wanted over--they want you to come." "My grandmother wants you," they said. Then I asked them, "How's Janie?" And they said, "Janie doesn't know." So I asked them, "Is that why they want me?" And they said, "Maybe." I told them, "I'm not very happy about this. You come and ask me to come, and Janie doesn't know now."

193

So anyway, I went over there. And then when I got there, she didn't know anybody. The older couple that were the in-laws, this girl was their daughter-in-law. Then as soon as I got inside the door, when the old lady saw me she

started to cry. She said, "I really thought about you last night. I told them to go and get you, but nobody would go and tell you to come," she said. "That's why I thought about you," she said, "because I see my other grandchildren growing up, the ones you have delivered." One of her daughters, I delivered three of her babies. Another one of her daughters, I delivered two of her babies. And one of her daughters-in-law, I delivered six of her grandchildren.

194

Annie: So that old lady must have been very grateful to her for that because she saw her grandchildren well. After Alice delivered, everything went well.

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: So I told her, "Why didn't you come and get me, even though I don't think I can help her very much? I'm very sorry she doesn't know anymore." So she said, "Go and see her, where she is lying." So I went to see her where she was lying on the bed. There was a string across the room like that, and they'd had the baby's clothes on it.

195

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: So I was very sorry now to see that; what was happening. (She said) when I checked her, I knew the baby was already dead. And I told one of the women that was there inside the tent. And the other woman asked me, "Do you know which position the baby is lying now?" So I said, "I think it's better for you to know, I'm sure the baby is not alive, is not living anymore." I told them, "Don't think that the baby's still living." I could feel from here that the baby is just like fallen, it's not fighting anymore, it's not moving.

196

Sarah: Umhum.

Alice: So I told them, "You better take those baby clothes back." I tried to talk to the woman and then she didn't, there was no response. She kept her eyes closed all the time. I was there almost all day. (She said) the only time I went from there was to go and feed my baby. So I went back again. She didn't lose

anything, no water or any discharge. Just a little bit. It looks like water mixed with blood. And then that evening, later on, very late that evening, she opened her eyes and she sort of looked around. And that man right away went to his wife when he saw her open her eyes. Then he kissed his wife and called her, "Janie, Janie," called her name. She didn't say anything. I did the same thing, I got near to her and touched her and started talking to her. She didn't know them. It's not long that she kept her eyes open, then she closed them again. And then in just a little while her face started to change. You knew right there that she was very close to death.

197

But it was very amazing what we saw, everybody saw, inside the tent. Then the girl was lying on her back and they put some pillows for support under her legs. (And she said) we were sure she was drawing her last breath, that she was going to pass away. And the older couple was in the next room there, and we told them that, "Your daughter-in-law is going to leave us." So they came and looked for themselves and they started to make a lot of noise, you know, they cried out. And the man, too. I couldn't even look at that man.

198

And at the last there, when somebody dies, they sort of take a long deep breath, a hard deep breath. And then just before she died, she sort of took two last deep breaths. Stop. Then it's done. Her breathing stopped completely. And then they didn't touch it. It stayed like that for a while. The father-in-law, he was an old man, he went to where she was lying, and then he started to comb her hair and he was talking and he was crying at the same time. He said, "My daughter-in-law never mocked me. She was very good to me, more than my children did. And he said, "I'm going to give up my life because my grandchild wasn't even born from the mother."

199

And the man was there. And he started to straighten the legs and then I told him to check and see where the birth channel is, to see what had happened. (And then) she was checking, as long as she was sitting there she kept checking. She said the child was only

half-way out, through, and the mother was already dead. I'm sure that's when the child was born, when taking those last two breaths at the end there, just before she passed away. And then everyone of us in the room, in the house, saw that. So they told the father-in-law about it. And he said, "Make it come out. Pull it out. But," he said, "Don't break it, try to do it slowly so you won't break the little body."

200

(And then she said) after the body was released from the mother's body, that's when I really was upset. And then I started to cry myself. Nobody would cut the cord. Nobody wanted to do it. And I guess everybody was so sympathetic, and they didn't have the heart to do it. I really had wondered--to think a lot about this because all the children I had were girls. And the father-in-law took me by the hand and he took me there. He said, the father-in-law is crying, and he gave me the scissors--"Cut the cord from my grandchild," he said. So I did it. I did it. I cut the cord. And then the father-in-law said take the baby. So I took the baby. The baby was crippled, you know, it didn't grow right. It was deformed. One arm was like this, straight. And one leg was bent, like this. Maybe that's why it couldn't be born right.

201

Sarah: Yes, maybe.

Annie: That sort of blocked the birth.

Alice: The child looked healthy, and growing. It was a girl. But the only thing wrong, it was deformed. I couldn't forget that for a long time, what happened, and I never wanted to deliver another baby after that.

202

Annie: She would never want to go through that again, she said.

Sarah: I can understand that.

Alice: Yes. And then when they buried her, they buried the baby with her. They put her--they put the baby in the coffin with her when they buried the woman. They only had one coffin.

203

Annie: Oh, I'm sorry. I made a mistake there.

Alice: They didn't have one coffin. They had two coffins but they only dig one grave in the graveyard. They put the two in there. So they buried that woman and her baby. So, I think it was, things turned out very well when the baby was able to--come out of the mother--it was born--because I'm sure the father-in-law felt better. So we were very amazed, too. And then just as the baby came out--nothing, no discharge.

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You know, after, later on, they--before the funeral--they dressed up the girl--changed clothes, and fix it up, still no discharge. So I guess, you know, we were amazed because you know how it is when a child is born, there's lots of fluid and blood come out, but nothing came. So when we put the clothes on, there was nothing wrong. Nothing had come out, no discharge at all and I was very amazed about that.

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And they handled it very slowly. They tried to move it as slow as they could. And that's what that old man, the father-in-law said--told the men how to handle it, to be very careful when they moved it. And then they buried it. They managed to go and bury it without nothing coming out of the body, like. I was very amazed, too, when I saw that.

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Sarah: Wonder if that would have been part of the problem?

Annie: I don't know. (Annie and Alice discuss question in Cree.) She's not sure which month, she thinks it might be April or March, around there.

Alice: And the manager really tried to get a plane in there to send the woman out to the hospital, but the weather was very bad, completely out, they had a very bad storm at that time. So he tried to get a plane in there to them, but he couldn't.

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Sarah: So she really--they really don't know what was the reason for that.

Alice: I don't know about why that happened, but I was really amazed about what happened.

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Annie: Sounds very queer.

Sarah: Yes.

Annie: Sounds like there was nothing there to come out after the baby was born.

Alice: The only problem they could see why the baby couldn't be born right is because it was deformed. I think, you know, the baby kept turning and turning around because it couldn't come.

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Sarah: Oh, yes.

Alice: Then it was very tired and it died. The baby didn't come out right from the mother. Some liquid was on the baby and that's all the discharge, nothing more. The only thing they saw must have happened is the blood must have gone into clots after the woman died and the flow, too, maybe. So it didn't discharge.

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Sarah: Oh, probably.

Annie: Probably, that's what they thought.

Sarah: That's very strange.

Alice: Umhum.

Annie: She said she was very sorry to see that happen.

Sarah: Yes.

Annie: It was very sad to see.

Alice: I was sorry to see with my eyes that the child had apparently grown very--looked very healthy except for the deformed leg. It was hard for us to watch the grandparents. They each, each of them, took hold of the little baby and they kissed the baby, and then the other one took it, and she did the same thing. And they were crying and they started to kiss their daughter, and she was already dead. And the man was even worse than the older couple when they showed the body of the baby to him. I'm sure that man was very sorry about what happened to his wife because he didn't get married for a long time

again. He was still young. He could have got married again soon after that but he just, he didn't get married. (She said) when I went to visit in Mistassini this spring, I saw that man, and he's married again to another woman. He's not married to a young girl, he's married to an older woman. I feel sorry for him. I was thinking about what happened when I saw him sitting with his wife.

## ANALYSIS

In the previous sections of the narrative the primary focus has been the action of others, the extent to which competence was reflected in those actions, and the consequences they had for Alice. In the final section of the narrative, which includes four events, Alice changed the focus from the actions of others to her own actions. Within the context of these four events she provides an insight into her own competence and social responsibility. Three of the four events occurred during the course of one spring; the fourth several years later. Together they illustrate Alice's social, physical and mental competence. The four episodes suggest that Alice's competence encompasses both male and female roles as well as an ability to act in diverse situations, including those over which one has no control.

With the change in focus from others to herself, there is also a change in the focus on competence. Through her descriptions of the actions of others Alice has illustrated many of the aspects of social competence. When she changed to a description of her own actions, she changed her focus from aspects of competence to levels of competence. Alice's actions demonstrate the development of competence from responsible wife, to responsible midwife, to leader, provider, hunter, curer, and beyond competence to love; a demonstration of social, physical, and mental competence. Her willingness and ability to share her life experience with others through

narrative add another dimension to Alice's demonstration of competence. All these accomplishments are an indication that Alice is an exceptionally capable individual.

The ability to maintain a balance between individual autonomy and social responsibility, I have argued, constitutes Cree competence. To what extent is this ability similar to Black's concept of Ojibway "power-control"? Black writes, "So far we have found the Ojibway idea of 'power' tempered with that of autonomy or 'not being controlled' by outside forces, and the idea of controlling tempered by the inference of 'responsibility'" (1977:146). "For the Ojibway, power is a relation between a person and his environment" (1977:147).

It would seem that one could substitute "ability" or "competence" for "power". Black also states,

"A participant in an ongoing interaction is often not sure how much power the other may have to affect his decisions and ultimate fate. For the individual, a major goal is to be in control-in control of himself and of his destiny and self-determination. Stated another way, the ideal is not to be controlled by one's environment-'environment' including other people as well as other natural beings or forces that could affect one's outcomes and render one helpless.... Interference with the self-determination of any of the 'living things' may have unpleasant consequences and is to be avoided" (1977:145).

(emphasis original)

Black seems to infer that Ojibway consider interaction from a negative perspective, that of avoiding control from outside

oneself, as well as avoiding an interference with others. I suggest that Cree consider interaction from a more positive perspective, that of demonstrating social competence, which includes non-interference. Keeping this difference in mind, it is possible to argue that Alice's demonstration of social competence is an indication of personal "power", as Black defines it for the Ojibway; however, "power" seems to imply an ability to exert force, either to control or to avoid being controlled. Force, in either case could imply interference with the affairs of another, and would under most circumstances imply incompetent rather than competent action in a Cree community.

In his discussion of dreaming among Cree hunters, Tanner states, "Power which remains with an individual is sometimes thought to arrive in dreams ..." (1979:126). He adds, "They (dreams) can also be used to signify that particular individuals have spiritual power" (ibid). Alice's demonstration of social competence may also be an indication of personal "power" from a Cree perspective, but it is "spiritual power" received through dreaming, rather than power existing in and through control. "Spiritual power" has provided her with strength and ability to cope with hardship, to maintain autonomy, and to demonstrate social responsibility, but not to control others, nor to exercise a decisive control of her environment. This is demonstrated in the four examples of competence described in this section of the narrative.

## ALICE AS MIDWIFE:

Alice began to elaborate upon her own actions in relation to others by describing what may have been her first experience as midwife without her foster mother's supervision. She was not an experienced midwife, and she seemed to emphasize that inexperience through her comments about events on the day of the birth. She recalled that her friend, the expectant mother, continued her normal activities, including collecting boughs for new flooring in the teepee. She also recalled that she paid little attention to the woman, going about her own activities replacing the flooring and preparing to stretch skins. Alice was not aware that Kitty's labour had begun, perhaps because Kitty remained self-reliant and reticent about the birth, but also because Alice was a young woman and she had not had the experience necessary for the recognition and understanding of another's condition.

Although Alice had paid only slight attention to Kitty's condition and was not aware the labour had begun, "she saw her just sitting there and she thought maybe she's resting because she's tired" (6:156), she was not unconcerned. Alice recalled her initial concern when she had been told her help would be needed. She had said to Kitty, "I'm afraid" (6:154), and Kitty had reassured her, saying, "I will try to help you" (6:154). Alice also remembered another concern, "I wonder what I would do if ever there was a chance for me to be alone delivering a baby?" (6:157)

Perhaps she remembered her panic and near mistake when she was trying to learn to be a midwife (5:153) and wondered if she would be able to assume the responsibility for others, as expected of a midwife. Her statement to Kitty, "I'm afraid" (6:154) repeats the statement she had made several months earlier to her foster mother, just prior to that experience of panic (5:150).

Alice learned when Kitty's husband returned to their camp that Kitty was not just resting, but that her labour was well along. It would seem that Alice and Kitty together made the decision about the choice of place to cut boughs; however, Kitty's husband criticized Alice for that choice, indicating not only his concern for his wife, but also his dissatisfaction with Alice. By the time Alice understood the situation, and had been asked to help, Kitty was unable to help either herself or Alice. "She was just sitting there. She wasn't even trying to get herself ready, to make up her bed to lie down" (6:158). Asked why she did not help, Kitty answered, "I'm already losing the baby's water" (6:158). Faced with the reality of a situation she had only wondered about, and faced with Kitty's inability to help, Alice acted and those actions expressed her competence.

Alice's initial reluctance to assume the responsibility of midwife, "she couldn't go across to where the other lady was right away" (6:158), indicates reticent behaviour which may have been appropriate for that particular situation.

Preston suggests that reticent behaviour allows for the maintainance of autonomy (1976:451) in the particularly intimate relationships which are characteristic of Cree communities, and he defines reticence as "that area of self-control that directly affects personal exposure or self-expression" (1976:468ff). Alice's hesitation suggests that she did not wish to express overtly her anxiety, that she was giving consideration to their situation, and to what her actions in that situation would have to be.

Although Alice was learning to be a midwife, she was not entirely confident. She was not the mature, experienced person one usually expects a midwife to be. Because she was younger than Kitty and her husband, and because Willie was not there, her reticence may also have been an expression of deference to the older couple's decision making. Alice waited until she was asked to assume responsibility, rather than acting to assume it independently, and risking the possibility of interfering unnecessarily with others. When asked for her assistance by Kitty's husband, "Go to your friend and try to help her out, try to help her" (6:158), she responded with knowledge and leadership.

When Alice assumed the role of midwife, she assumed responsibility for Kitty's life and for the life of the arriving infant. She expressed this responsibility in her words and her actions. She told Kitty, "It won't be right if you just sit there and have your baby on the boughs, on the

floor. When the baby comes they might cut the skin" (6:158). And she told Kitty's husband "to come and help her fix the bed for her. She said, 'I can't do it alone, you have to try and help me'" (6:159).

The baby was slow to begin breathing, which frightened the father, "he sort of grabbed the baby out of her hands," (6:159) but Kitty had confidence in Alice's knowledge and ability. She told her husband, "Don't take the baby away from her, just watch what she's going to do to it" (6:159). Alice remembered her foster mother's remedies for such circumstances and quickly had the baby breathing.

"Then she put a cloth in there. She was able to get out some mucous, fluid out of its mouth, and she started to do that breathing through the mouth, through the nose like or the mouth. And then the baby sort of burst breathing, crying. She was frightened, but the man was worse. He was just shaking with fright." (6:160,161)

Through the mutual support of father, mother, and midwife, the infant arrived safely into this world. "She (the mother) didn't have problems at all. Everything went well with the birth" (6:161). Alice may have been reluctant to assume responsibility, and she may have been frightened, but she successfully demonstrated for herself and for others that she had learned to be a competent midwife.

## ALICE AS LEADER AND PROVIDER:

As Alice indicated in the previous section of the narrative, one aspect of social competence is the ability to recognize and assume responsibility for others when the need arises, while at the same time avoiding interference with another. A second aspect of social competence is assuming responsibility for one's own actions. In order to accomplish either of these an individual must have some awareness of his/her actions in relation to others, and some understanding of the consequences those actions may have.

Alice recalled the hardships of starvation she and Kitty experienced shortly after the baby's birth. Her decisions and actions at that time indicate an awareness of herself and her situation and an awareness of her relationship to others. Her actions were a demonstration of her increasing ability to balance the expression of individual autonomy with the assumption of social responsibility.

After the birth of the baby, the two families moved to another location and the men returned to the settlement for supplies. While the men were gone, Alice set rabbit snares to provide meat for Kitty, herself and their children, but she had very poor luck. Eventually they were completely out of food. Alice remembered her concern about their situation saying:

"There came a time when I started to get worried, too, because we didn't have anything to eat. The time I

started to get worried was when I saw the ice breaking up on the river." (6:164)

She also recalled her concern about the men:

"I was worried that the men maybe had an accident or that they went through the ice and nobody would know what happened." (6:164)

And she realized the people in the village would not know if the men were lost, nor would they know if the women and children were alone and starving.

"The people in the settlement won't know what happened and then we'll just have to stay here and starve." (6:164)

Alice was not only aware of herself and her situation as these comments indicate, she was also very much aware of and concerned about Kitty and her children, particularly the new baby. She said:

"The woman was breastfeeding her baby, and I remember seeing her crying, because, I guess, the baby wasn't getting anything, even though he was sucking...I felt very pitiful to see that woman because she had more children than I did." (6:163,164)

This image of herself as one who was aware of and who understood the circumstances of the situation she was in, suggests a more mature individual. As Alice began to take initiative which, ordinarily, the older woman would have taken, the reluctant, fearful midwife became a confident, active leader of a group of women and children. To what extent did the positive experience of the successful delivery

of the baby contribute to Alice's recognition of her potential for competence and to her change in self-image?

Although she continued to defer to the older woman, requesting permission both to try to get their canoe, and to take Kitty's daughter along with her, clearly she had decided to do something other than "stay here and starve". This request to take the girl and try to get the canoe,

"So I asked that other woman if she would allow me to go over there and get that canoe. I asked her if I can take her daughter with me so we can both paddle the canoe back to the camp." (6:165)

serves to illustrate several aspects to Alice's developing competence. She knew if she could get the canoe, she could set nets, catch fish and avoid the impending tragedy. She also knew that if she did not return with the canoe, Kitty would be alone with several children and no means to provide for them.

Alice's request was made not only in deference to Kitty's seniority, it was also an expression of her recognition that her responsibility to Kitty and the children was more important than her own autonomy. As an individual Alice had decided what she thought the best action would be, but as an individual responsible for others, she did not act without agreement; would not take Kitty's daughter and pursue an isolated goal. Although Kitty was worried about the outcome, Alice convinced her that she would be successful.

Kitty had expressed her confidence in Alice's abilities at the time of the childbirth and she reconfirmed that confidence when she agreed to let Alice take her oldest child along to help with the canoe. The day's walk to the canoe storage was difficult for the child, but Alice encouraged her, explaining why they must succeed in their efforts.

Alice laughed as she explained that she had to put the canoe down before she could get it to the river. She then had difficulty picking it up; she was not as strong as she had so confidently assumed. This could have been a serious miscalculation, but with the young girl's help, she got the canoe to the river. Alice laughed again as she thought about their attempt to set the fishing net. The image of a net that was not straight in the water was amusing. Under normal circumstances a crooked net might indicate incompetence; perhaps neglect, or disinterest on the part of the one setting it. This net may have been crooked, but it carried with it hope, not neglect.

On the following morning, when they checked the net, Alice's hope and anticipation were so strong that she made the effort to maintain her composure by assuming the ice had washed the floats away, and that she had caught only a piece of wood in her net. Her life and the lives of others depended upon that net, but they also depended upon her composure. Alice was aware that loss of emotional control in this situation would not be responsible, competent action.

Within the context of relating the narrative, laughter which included Alice, Annie and myself relieved the tension which developed as the narrative progressed. On several other occasions laughter was an indication of Alice's recognition that she managed successfully to accomplish what she set out to do, even though her actions were not always as competent as she might have wanted them to be.

The humour in this narrative does not diminish the seriousness of the situation, instead, it expresses a positive means of relating to the memory of adversity. Dwelling on the hardship as simply traumatic would narrow and misrepresent the experience. The humour helps to divert the attention of the audience away from the trauma and toward a recognition that positive responsible action is the alternative to being propelled by events, or having "to stay here and starve".

Alice's ability to assess her situation, to organize and to execute successfully a plan of action, as described in this portion of the narrative, is a further demonstration of her competence. A somewhat less obvious demonstration of her competence was her assumption that she had assistance from a greater power.

"I'm so sure when I think about it now, I'm sure God was looking after us. This wouldn't have happened, if God wasn't taking care of us and watching over us. I'm sure he helped me to be able to do that even though I was a woman." (6:173)

Although she may have felt personal pride in her achievement, her words indicated appropriate reticence as she deflected the credit given to her, to that power.

"I didn't deserve the thanks. He should have been thanking God instead." (6:176)

ALICE AS HUNTER:

Two of the four events recalled for this section of the narrative indicate that Alice had become a competent midwife and successful leader. She continued to reflect upon her own competence, recalling an amusing beaver hunt and an accidental cure. Perhaps she related these humorous events as means of providing an understanding of her life from a perspective other than that found in her hardship tales. Her use of humour seems to indicate that life can be exuberant as well as difficult.

Although the subarctic environment may present frequent adversity, to those for whom it is home it is beautiful and is the source of joy in life and well as hardship. Alice recalled the beauty of a spring evening, saying,

"One evening it was a very nice evening. It was nice and dry where we are camping. Those children would have fun after the snow was gone and it wasn't cold anymore. The river was right beside the camp and it was very calm that evening. It looked nice on the river." (6:179, 180)

She also recalled that the opportunity to have some fun presented itself in the form of a beaver swimming by on that calm spring evening. She told her friend, Kitty,

"Lets go and shoot that beaver... We could get a kick out of this. We can laugh after, see what happens if we shoot it... I was really laughing about something, what we'd do." (6:180, 181)

The women set out to catch the beaver, but because it was not a necessity, they were no longer starving, and because they considered it illegal, the quota of beaver had already been taken,<sup>1</sup> their hunt was more playful than it was serious. Alice remembered, "We were just doing this for fun, we weren't sure we were going to get it"(6:182). But as this story indicates, even in play one's actions should express competence.

Alice continued her humourous approach to the hunt when they did get the beaver, and gave it to Kitty as a husband would give the kill to his wife. Kitty, however, was not willing to carry on with their play. She seemed concerned that they would be caught with more than their quota of beaver. She refused to prepare the beaver, but she did not refuse to eat any once it has been prepared.

The beaver sat overnight without adequate preparation and attention. Alice's teasing, "Even if we live together longer and if we live together and we live longer, I don't think I'll ever give you something that I kill again" (6:185), suggests that she may have considered Kitty's behaviour, ignoring the beaver, inappropriate. She was indicating that one should maintain and demonstrate respect for animal persons (Preston, 1975), whether a hunt begins in jest or not. Kitty laughed at Alice's comments, accepting them in good humour.

Alice reclaimed the beaver, prepared it, ate it, and cured herself of an intestinal parasite. She solved the problem of exceeding the quota by singeing the beaver fur off before cooking the animal. Singeing not only destroys the pelt but is the traditional way of cooking beaver for a feast, which expresses thanks for the gift of an animal from God and the animal spirits. Alice indicated this parallel to a feast when she said they ate only a little bit, as is done when an animal is singed before cooking.<sup>2</sup>

Eating the beaver may or may not have caused the expulsion of Alice's worm; however, its passing was cause for more teasing, now directed at Alice.

"You did cure yourself, it was a good thing you killed that beaver, or your worm would still be inside you. That could have killed you, if you didn't kill it that way!" (6:188)

In the previous episodes Alice described herself as both a competent midwife and a successful leader/provider. The hunting and curing episodes added to her image of herself as a competent individual. Although the events she recalled were amusing, her parody of the hunter is an indication of her understanding of appropriate hunting behaviour and ritual. The unexpected consequences of her parody, the expulsion of her worm, might be an indication of an unrealized ability at curing. It reinforces the assumption that even in play action should remain competent. In any circumstance, one does not control events, one can only control one's action. Success

or failure is given more than it is controlled. The beaver and the cure were unexpected, unlike the fish, which was deeply hoped for and sought after.

## ALICE AND THE DEATH OF HER FRIEND:

Throughout most of her narrative Alice recalled the hardship of her life. As noted previously, as long as the focus remains on the hardship, one risks misunderstanding the intent. Perhaps Alice realized this as she approached her conclusion. Whether she consciously added the story of the beaver hunt and the accidental cure as a counter-balance to the hardship stories, is of little importance. What may be important to note however, is that the one light-hearted, humorous story immediately precedes what may be the most profound account in the narrative. The humorous hunting and curing story separates Alice's memories of the death of her friend from the rest of the narrative. She indirectly drew attention to the last events she recalled by stating:

"This time the story won't be as funny as the one I just told. I won't be able to laugh that much. I'm even sorry I have to tell about this story." (6:190)

It would seem that she would have preferred not to record this story. Because her narrative is not a complete life history and we can assume that she deliberately chose what she would or would not record, we should consider why she chose to record what may remain a very painful memory.

I have shown that Alice's intent was to provide some insight into social competence. I have assumed also that the various aspects of social competence might be isolated by clarifying the meaning inherent in the events Alice described.

Through her memories of the loss of her friend, Janie, Alice leads us beyond competence to love and to the recognition that ultimately man has very little control over the course of events. There are times when competence will not be enough.

Alice expressed the depth of her feelings for Janie in her description of the feast where they shared food. Food is not normally shared except among family members, and only communally shared at feasts. Exchanging the beaver tail between them may have been in fun, as Annie suggested, (6:192ff) but it must also indicate a very close friendship.

Alice and Janie did not see each other again until Alice was called to be her friend's midwife. Alice had heard that the labour had begun and she waited for news that the baby had arrived. Instead she received news that Janie's mother-in-law wanted her to come - Janie was unconscious. How much the expression of reticence and a concern not to interfere in the affairs of another contributed to the waiting on the part of Alice, Janie and Janie's mother-in-law is difficult to know. How much Janie's inexperience contributed also is unknown. Alice does explain, however, that the old woman understood, late in the night, long after the labour began, that there was a problem.

As I have explained in my discussion of previous sections of the narrative, when one assumes the responsibility of midwife, one assumes responsibility for the lives of both mother and infant. This is, of course, also true in Euro-

Canadian medical practice, but it is much less crucial for the EuroCanadian mother and doctor. Not only are there more elaborate facilities available for assistance when a problem does arise, but neither mother nor doctor must go against an expected standard of behaviour at any time. Although current EuroCanadian birthing practice includes returning much of the responsibility to the mother, throughout her labour and at the birth itself the EuroCanadian mother expects and receives assistance and support from husband, nurse, and doctor or midwife. This behaviour is in conformity with social expectations and is supported by cultural values. It is appropriate both to expect and to rely upon assistance from others as well as appropriate to administer assistance. Neither is considered an interference with another.

In contrast to this expectation of assistance, the Cree mother-to-be continues her daily activities for as long as possible after her labour begins, maintaining her self-reliance, telling neither husband nor midwife and receiving no assistance until moments before the birth. The value of self-reliance and non-interference in the affairs of others has already been demonstrated in the course of this analysis. At the moment of birth, a Cree mother must relinquish her self-reliance and depend upon the midwife. The midwife must assume responsibility and act for the mother. Each in some sense is interfering with the autonomy of the other, a behaviour which in ordinary circumstances is markedly contrary to social norms

and expectations. Yet, if each acts responsibly, a suspension of these norms can be negotiated with little difficulty and the infant will arrive safely into this world.

When Alice was called to be Janie's midwife, she thought she was to be responsible for life. Instead, she found herself responsible for news of death. Janie's labour had been long and difficult. The baby was already gone when Alice arrived. Janie followed soon after. Alice's description of the events that followed the deaths indicates that every care was taken for responsible action. Although they were all "amazed" at the circumstances of the "birth" of the infant, it was obvious that the deaths could not have been avoided.

The loss was a profound and disturbing experience for all concerned. Alice explained:

"I couldn't forget that for a long time, what happened, and I never wanted to deliver another baby after that. I never wanted to go through that again." (6:202)

Although Alice's competence as a midwife was never questioned, and her actions had nothing to do with these deaths, her distress was so great that she was not prepared to assume that particular responsibility for the life of another person and risk being responsible for news of death, or worse, being responsible for death itself. Through her description of the circumstances surrounding these deaths Alice has demonstrated her understanding that one has very little control over the course of events, even one who is capable of responsible action.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

In my discussion of the life history literature (Chapter One), I pointed out that abstract generalized accounts of culture tend to lose sight of the culture-bearing individual. Therefore my intent in this thesis has been to focus, not on Cree culture itself, but on an individual Cree woman, and to explicate the meanings, both personal and cultural, which may be implicit in her life history narrative. Because an individual is not an isolate within his or her culture, personal meaning must be informed by cultural meaning; however, social structure, social organization, or patterns of behaviour (anthropologists constructs), are not the focus of a life history narrative. Instead, when an individual recalls his or her life experience, what is being narrated or recorded is the memory of that experience and an individual or personal understanding of experience within a cultural context. The culture is the background, not the subject, of a life history narrative. Experience and understanding of experience are the subject.

Burke (1967) has argued that one may locate a set of implicit equations, or connections, within any work of literature, that the writer may be aware of his or her use of imagery to emphasize an idea, but that he or she may be less conscious of interrelationships among these equations.

Through an inductive analysis, an examination of critical points such as beginnings, endings, or shifts in focus, Burke (1967) argues that one may arrive at some insight into that which is implicit in the literary document. An examination and discussion of critical points and an elaboration of cultural context provide the information needed to arrive at a clearer understanding of implicit meaning. Whether a life history narrative is a literary document is not a question considered in this thesis; however, Burke's concept provides a useful and adequate technique for explicating implicit meaning.

Because she was talking about herself, Alice Jacob may well have been aware that she wished to create an image of herself as a mature individual who had experienced a difficult life, as well as one who had learned to cope adequately with hardship. The relationships which are implicit in her narrative and of which she is aware are various aspects of social competence; the ability one develops throughout life, not only to cope with hardship, but to interact appropriately with others on any occasion. I have suggested other connections or relationships about which Alice may be less aware, such as the similarity in feelings evoked by the images of her "dream person" and her foster father.

White has defined competence as "an organism's capacity to interact effectively with its environment" (1963:64) and he argues that this ability to interact with the environment,

particularly in man, "is slowly attained through prolonged feats of learning" (1963:64). The implication to be drawn from Alice's narrative is that Cree social competence is the ability to maintain an acceptable balance between individual autonomy and social responsibility, which allows for effective interaction in one's social, mental, and physical environment. It is an ability based upon experience, developed over a lifetime and it is made evident in an individual's actions and in the result of those actions.

I have shown throughout my analysis of the narrative that Alice's intent was to illustrate competent social interaction. The ability to maintain a balance between individual autonomy and social responsibility is expressed in action, as well as the consequences of action, and constitutes Cree social competence. The ideals of reticence, self-reliance, emotional control, and non-interference in the affairs of others mediate individual action and social responsibility. Although one's action and interaction with others may not always be ideal, the extent to which ideals are reflected in action and responsibility is accepted and fulfilled is the extent to which action will be understood to be competent.

Alice approached the question of social competence through a series of vignettes drawn from her own experience, thus recording her life history while at the same time providing specific examples of the relationship between ideal and action, autonomy and social responsibility. It is clear

that there is an ideal balance between autonomy and responsibility, illustrated both in Alice's childhood dream and in the death of her foster father. It is probably the rare individual who can both create and sustain the delicate balance between ideal and action achieved by Alice's foster father at his death.

Alice has indicated that an acceptable degree of imbalance between autonomy and responsibility is not unusual. This imbalance may be judged more or less acceptable on the basis of the results of actions, as well as on the basis of the intentions of the actor. The individual must assess a situation and successfully execute a responsible plan of action for behaviour to be considered competent. Actions which reflect incompetence due to lack of experience, such as those concerned with pre-natal care exhibited by Alice and her husband before the birth of their first child, are not necessarily appropriate, but neither are they completely unacceptable. Their behaviour at that time, like that of Alice's young parents many years before, was a reflection of immaturity and lack of understanding. Clearly Alice assumes that had she known more she would have taken more care, and they might not have lost their first child. In this way she indicates that the lack of concern for herself and her activities did not demonstrate appropriate responsibility toward the expected child, creating an imbalance between ideal and action.

Although Alice assumes they lost the child due to inexperience and lack of understanding, it is possible that he suffered some physical illness which knowledge and experience could not have altered. In either case, Alice and Willie's actions were less unacceptable than those of Alice's parents.

Alice and Willie immediately altered their behaviour. Through sad experience they had learned one aspect of social responsibility. In contrast, Alice's stepfather's feelings toward her led him to ignore responsibility for Alice over a long period of time. The prolonged neglect of social responsibility and its severe consequences create an imbalance between ideal and action which is more unacceptable than an imbalance which is recognized and altered as soon as possible.

Willie's efforts to persuade Alice to move from Nemiscau to Rupert House provide another example of the imbalance between ideal and action. Ideally, a major decision would be made with mutual consideration for the individuals involved. Although one could argue that Willie's intentions, that of providing adequate housing for his family, were responsible, Alice had little choice but to accept his decision. This seemingly independent action was not a severe interference with Alice's autonomy, but it was distressing to her. This lack of balance between ideal and action would be considered acceptable not only because of Willie's intentions, but because of later events as well as immediate consequences. Shortly

after their move, the Hudson Bay Company post at Nemiscau closed and Nemiska Band dispersed to several other communities. The move was inevitable, but by that time, Alice and Willie were already settled at Rupert House and they did eventually receive government housing there. The outcome of Willie's insistence was positive rather than negative or damaging.

The point at which the imbalance between ideal and action becomes incompetence is illustrated clearly in Alice's stepfather's neglect of his responsibility toward her. Alice began her narrative recalling what she had been told about the circumstances surrounding her birth. Without directly stating the particulars of the situation, she provided enough information for her audience to realize that her parents were young and immature and lacking in social competence. Their incompetence was the result of an unwillingness and an inability to maintain an acceptable balance between the expression of individual autonomy and the assumption of social responsibility. The prolonged imbalance between autonomy and responsibility expressed in their behaviour toward Alice, and the damaging consequences of that behaviour, constitute incompetence. The recognition that their actions were irresponsible and their subsequent adjustment in behaviour was an indication of a belated development of social competence.

Alice also examined the lack of balance between autonomy and responsibility, and an instance of incompetence, in the context of interaction with EuroCanadians. The aggressive,

interfering behaviour and the refusal to acknowledge responsibility for action as expressed by "nursing" staff at Rupert House constitutes social incompetence which is unacceptable. On the other hand, the initiative exhibited by the post manager in Rupert House and the doctor in Moose Factory constitute imbalances between autonomy and responsibility which are acceptable because they reflect an understanding of social responsibility. Their interventions on Alice's behalf were not mediated by reticence or emotional control, and may not demonstrate an understanding of the appropriate style of interaction from Alice's or a Cree point of view, but because they did demonstrate social responsibility they could be considered competent actions.

In judging the actions of others, whether Cree or EuroCanadian, Cree apply the same standards; however, the assessment may differ in degree rather than kind. A somewhat less critical standard may be applied to the actions of Euro-Canadians on the basis that outsiders cannot be expected to be as capable as Cree. Gross incompetence on the part of individuals who should know better, such as that exhibited by Rupert House "nursing" staff, receives little acceptance.

Throughout the majority of the narrative Alice described the actions of others, both Cree and EuroCanadian and the consequences those actions had for her. The final section of the narrative includes four episodes which are statements about Alice's own development of competence, her ability to express

ideals in action, her recognition and assumption of responsibility, and her ability to lighten the uncertainties of life with humour.

The events of the final episode in the narrative take Alice beyond competence. As she recalled those events she said, "I'm even sorry I have to tell you this story." The narrative ends with an account of death, tragic because of abnormal circumstances, over which there was no control. Competence may be an expression of desired ideals, and it may seem that through competent action one has some control over events; however, as Alice demonstrated with the story of the death of her friend, there are times when competence may be all one has to rely upon and it is not enough.

Alice created an image of herself which gradually changes as the narrative progresses. The images are representative of changes which have taken place within her as she has grown and matured. It could be argued that this was an appropriately reticent means to arrive at an image of herself as a competent adult. Alice first described herself as an unwanted, insecure child, then as an impatient, defiant teenager, a fearful and inexperienced wife and finally as a responsible, mature individual. Each self-image was developed through a description of the actions of others. Finally, through an examination of her own actions and the consequences her actions had for others, Alice expands and clarifies the image of herself as an individual capable of competent,

responsible action.

Alice began to develop the image of herself as a competent adult by recalling her first experience as a midwife without supervision from her foster mother. Although she was reluctant to accept the responsibility, she did so successfully, demonstrating for herself and those around her that she could be a competent midwife. Following this demonstration of competence Alice and her companion, with whom she shared a hunting camp, suffered near starvation while the men were away replenishing their supplies. Alice successfully assumed the role of leader and provider when it became evident that the older woman could not assume this responsibility. She retrieved a canoe from its winter storage, caught fish in the nets she was then able to set, and averted tragedy by her actions.

Through these two vignettes Alice established her image of herself as one who is capable of recognizing and assuming responsibility for others as well as one who is capable of independent action. In the episode that followed she broadened that image, demonstrating her ability at hunting and her understanding of the hunter through parody of the hunter's role. An unexpected consequence of her parody suggests an unrealized ability at curing. Finally, Alice's experience goes beyond competence, to a recognition that although one must balance autonomy with social responsibility in order to maintain community, one must accept that even the most competent individual cannot always alter the course of events. One may

encounter many circumstance which transcend competence, a fragile but necessary tool.

Alice ended her narrative with a story she said she would have preferred not to tell - and perhaps she did prefer not to recall what must have been an emotionally taxing experience. But I, in the enthusiasm and misunderstanding of a fledgling anthropologist, assumed there would be more. After all, how is it possible to collapse nearly fifty years of living into just a few hours of story telling? From other people I had learned more about Alice than she had chosen to tell me, and I hoped she would fill in the "omissions". When in 1979 I asked if she would continue, she replied, "It's time to let the past go."

It was not until I began to study her narrative and began to see her connections, which were not all clear to me as she told me her stories, that I began to understand why it was time to let the past go. If, as I have argued, Alice's intention was to illustrate social competence from a Cree perspective, then she was aware, if I was not, that she had provided enough detail to accomplish that intention. Interesting though additions may have been for me, perhaps Alice understood they would not have added to the already clear and complete account of one individual's development of social competence.

## CHAPTER ONE

## NOTES

1. For an excellent example of this use of technique see, *Life History and Understanding Personal Meanings*, Little, K. 1979. MA Thesis. McMaster University.
2. Burke argues that every literary work contains a set of implicit equations and that the motivation out of which an individual writes is "synonymous with the structural way in which he puts events and values together when he writes" (1967:20). He also argues that a writer may be conscious of creating a particular imagery in order to reinforce a particular mood; however he, (the writer), is less likely to be conscious of the interrelationships among these equations. For Burke, "symbolic analysis" is the disclosure of these relationships through an inductive examination of the work.

The narrator of a life history may or may not be a literary artist, however, he/she may be very much aware of attempting to create a particular image. In her narrative, Alice Jacob develops the image of a socially competent individual from several perspectives. How conscious she is of the interrelationships among the images she creates in each vignette is not known. The effort to clarify the meaning inherent in her narrative includes a discussion of these interrelationships as I understand them.

## CHAPTER TWO

## NOTES

1. Notation in this style (1:2) throughout the analysis refers to chapter and paragraph of the narrative.
2. See Preston, S. Competent Social Behaviour Within the Context of Childbirth: A Cree Example. Proceedings of the Thirteenth Algonquian Conference. 1982.
3. Tanner explains the spacial organization of a Cree household:

"Within the space occupied by the whole commensal family, both in the case of single-family tent, and in the communal lodge, there is a second all-important division of space, that between area of the males and of the females. In this case we can speak of a sharp dividing line, which runs from the front to the rear of the dwelling space. All the males of the family, with the possible exception of small infants, remain on the male side, and women stay on the female side. In a demographically normal family this results in the division of space into two halves, or sides" (1979:77).  
"The same division between male and female sides and materials also applies to the commensal families' living space, within the communal lodge" (1979:78).

Each family and each person has his/her own place within the dwelling. Individuals rarely enter the space of another. When Alice's grandmother takes Alice to her place in the teepee, at least three aspects of interaction are involved. Her behaviour is a manifestation of the authority of the older generation, she is expressing her recognition that the adults upon whom Alice depends have not acted responsibly toward the child, and she is assuming that responsibility. By extension, because Alice's grandfather is the head of the hunting group, he too may now make decisions effecting Alice.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## NOTES

1. Alice and Willie moved to Rupert House in 1965. In 1970 the Hudson's Bay Company closed the post at Nemiscau Lake, leaving the community without any commercial enterprise. At that time all Nemaska families moved either to Rupert House or to Mistassini. In 1977 when many of the Nemaska families rejoined and established a new community at Champion Lake, Alice and Willie remained at Rupert House.
2. At that time a radio would have been a luxury. Alice recalled that when they did move, they had very few things to bring with them. Alice, their children and their possessions did not fill a Beaver, a small bush plane.
3. This style of intervention, as opposed to interference, was first discussed by Alice early in the narrative when she recalled her grandmother removing her from her stepfather's household. Clearly, there are limits to social autonomy. Alice's stepfather ignored those limits with his disregard for social responsibility. By intervening in the situation which developed as a result of that disregard, Alice's grandmother was exercising social responsibility.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## NOTES

1. Sewing intricate bead decoration on moccasins and mitts, household or ritual objects is an exacting skill requiring time and great patience. This technique for artistic expression developed from silk thread embroidery, which was preceded by moosehair embroidery. One learns the technique by observing a skilled artisan and then trying for oneself until the technique is mastered. In the past when the practical matters of everyday living required more time and energy than is presently necessary, artistic expression was left until other, more immediate, tasks were finished. Beading was, primarily, a family oriented skill; it was learned within the family context and was used to decorate items belonging to family members. It was often done in the evening under poor lighting conditions, taxing one's eyes as well as one's patience. Presently there are craft workshops in the James Bay Cree communities where some women are employed, creating handicrafts often beautifully decorated with beads, to be sold to EuroCanadians through the Cree craft outlet in Val d'Or, Quebec.

## CHAPTER SIX

## NOTES

1. By 1930 the beaver in the James Bay district had been severely over-trapped. It was estimated that there were about 25 animals in the Rupert and East Main river drainage areas. In 1930 J.S.C. Watt, then manager of the Hudson Bay post at Rupert House persuaded the men from that area to cease trapping and allow the beaver population to regenerate. Through his efforts the Rupert House Beaver Preserve was established. Controlled trapping began in 1940 and by 1944 the beaver population had increased to approximately 15,000 animals. Trapping quotas were established to avoid both over-population and over-trapping. The Rupert House Beaver Preserve was initiated by Watt and managed by the Hudson Bay Company. Its success prompted the establishment of other preserves around James Bay by the Indian Affairs branch of the federal government (Denmark: 1948). The time to which Alice refers in her narrative was probably between 1948 and 1950. At that time the quota was 20 beaver per married man.
2. Information on beaver ritual received from Dr. Harvey Feit, personal communication.

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