

WEAVING CULTURE IN SAMBAA K'E

By

ROBERTA D. MCGREGOR

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

Copyright by Roberta D. McGregor, June 15, 2009

WEAVING CULTURE IN SAMBAA K'E

MASTER OF ARTS (2009)  
(Anthropology)

McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE:

WEAVING CULTURE IN SAMBAA K'E

AUTHOR:

Roberta D. McGregor, B.A.  
(McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR:

Dr. Richard J. Preston

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 98

## ABSTRACT

This thesis uses a metaphor of “weaving” to analyze ongoing culture formation processes in the isolated Dene community of Samba K'e, located in the Dehcho Region of the Northwest Territories. The weaving of spruce root baskets is a skill that had been forgotten but has recently been retrieved by the Dene of this community, which is committed to maintaining traditions within its evolving lifestyle. The primary evidence for this process is the material in the two editions of a “community book”, *Samba K'e Then and Now* (1998); references to the second edition are from the 2006 version of the manuscript, soon to be printed. The research and production process for the two editions, along with the contents, are part of the evidence for the community's creativity in weaving traditional knowledge and practices with modern ones. I have engaged with these Dene people over more than two decades, and have gained awareness of their values, developing lifestyle, and practical ways of weaving the old and the new. I theorize that their tendency to creative resilience is an outcome of historical and current survival in the “spiritual domain” of the subarctic ecosystem (Preston 1998, 50). There seems to be a general acceptance among anthropologists of the concept “culture as a verb”; this thesis provides evidence for how this plays out dynamically in the everyday lives of people in this community. These Dene, in their stories, art, and photos, as well as in their collaboration in developing the book, offer personal witness to the unfolding details of the culture weaving process within their community. This thesis offers evidence from the larger collection of material in the book itself, and from my observations of community process, of how this subarctic Dene group is weaving its culture in a continuous, pragmatic and creative formation process.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My main acknowledgement is to the Smbaa K'e Got'ine, the people of Smbaa K'e (Trout Lake), Northwest Territories. Many have been great friends over the years during which I have had the privilege of stepping out of a plane from time to time onto their gravel airstrip. They have welcomed me every time, as a partner in pursuing their goals, and it has changed my life in many ways. "Mahsi cho!" (Thank you very much!)

Next, I thank my committee members, beginning with Dr. Preston: a remarkable teacher, thinker and Quaker friend. His northern experience and writings, spiritual knowledge, encouragement, skills, advice and supervision have meant a great deal and have made so much possible. Dr. Bill Lee also has, over my rather protracted academic career, offered encouragement, good-natured advice regarding fieldwork in native communities, access to print resources, and the long supervisory commitment regarding this thesis. Dr. Ellen Badone entered into the process more recently, and has provided energetic interest and support when my spirits have been flagging. She agreed to join in the committee and the defense process exactly at the time when this was needed, for which I am most grateful. I also thank Dr. Wayne Warry for much that I learned from him when I was a full time student; I thank him for agreeing to be a committee member for a time, and for his clear perceptions.

Other faculty and staff in the Anthropology Department at McMaster deserve thanks. I have learned a great deal as a student, preparing me for my work in native communities. Over the years when I was a part-time student, then in the Masters program before the circumstances that necessitated my withdrawal, many professors inspired me, were willing to answer my questions and expressed energizing interest in my activities. Staff members have always been magnificent: patient, pleasant and helpful.

Finally, I thank my family and friends, who have patiently endured my preoccupations and absences over the years of juggling studies, work, northern projects, research and writing. My children (Karen, Kathy, David and Alex) and my grandchildren most especially deserve thanks for their forbearance and encouragement. My brothers, Douglas and Cameron McGregor, and their wives have been unfailingly encouraging and supportive. My parents, Delia and Rob Roy ("Bob") McGregor, provided lifelong examples of adventuring, faith, responsible living, and global awareness. There are too many others to name, and I thank every one of you; you know your contributions, and deserve to share the joy of this completion.

## CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	
▪Thesis Topic and Focus .....	1
▪My Background, Philosophy and Experience.....	3
▪Basket Weaving: A Metaphor .....	7
▪Where Do the Strands Lead?.....	8
<b>CHAPTER TWO: SOURCES AND DEFINITIONS</b>	
▪Sources .....	10
▪Concepts and Terms .....	15
<b>CHAPTER THREE: CONTEXT</b>	
▪Physical Environment .....	21
▪The Traditional Seasonal Round and Culture of the Dene.....	23
▪Historical Background .....	25
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: WEAVING THE BASKET</b>	
▪General Approach.....	42
▪Methods and Procedures.....	43
▪Outcomes .....	51
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: PATTERNS IN THE WEAVE</b>	
▪Representation in Sambaa K'e .....	53
▪Patterns in the Weave: Health.....	55
▪Patterns in the Weave: Learning and Schooling.....	66
<b>ANALYSIS</b>	79
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	87
<b>REFERENCES</b>	89

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### THESIS TOPIC AND FOCUS

“A readiness to adapt to new environments, to use different resources, to seize new technical advantages has always been at the heart of Athapaskan culture” (Brody 1981: 86).

When I was in the Dene community of Sambia K'e in 2005 (then with about one hundred residents), I was aware that the Band had recently obtained wireless Internet. One day, I was staggered by the realization that the women were using stone and bone tools to work their moose hides. Partly, I was amazed that I had not realized this during previous visits to the community, but mainly it was the juxtaposition of these two levels of technology that really set me aback. It clearly symbolized the community's constant combining of traditional and new elements. No wonder they chose in 1997 to title their book about themselves “Sambia K'e Then and Now”; “then” certainly was different from “now” in many important respects, but aspects of “now” and “then” coexist and play off each other in surprising ways. (Note that I will refer in citations to both editions of the book using SKDB for “Sambia K'e Dene Band”).

I use a metaphor of basket-weaving to explore and represent the creative ways in which the Slavey Dene people of Sambia K'e have continuously woven elements of past and present. A prime example is the way they have, in recent decades, represented their process in the two editions of *Sambia K'e Then and Now* (SKDB 1998; and the manuscript SKDB 2006). How did a small Dene community with an oral tradition do this?

Cultural resiliency is recognized in Brody's words above - the ability of the larger Athapaskan group, to which the Slavey Dene belong, to respond creatively to change and challenges (1981: 28). I maintain that this is an outcome of their background in a millenia-long hunting economy in the subarctic ecosystem. I find backing for this stance also in Preston's descriptions of competencies required for contingencies embedded in the bush life of subarctic hunters, necessitating a combination of finely tuned observational powers, self-control, competent use of traditional skills, and improvisational abilities in meeting these challenges (Preston 2002: 206-7, 235-6). It seems to me that the fine-tuning of their observation and responses is part and parcel of spiritual apprehensions of reality in the meditative quiet of the bush; it would be wrong-minded indeed to discuss the Dene without a recognition of the spirituality within which they have been weaving their culture. Since the building of cabins at the current settlement site about 1960, this weaving has involved imaginative and active dynamics, as discussed by Preston quoting Appadurai (1996: 7): “The imagination is today a staging ground for action . . .” (Preston 2008: 48). The imagining of advantages to be obtained from “settling” and the communal efforts to bring a physical settlement to reality are described in personal observations and stories contributed to the community book by community members.

Regarding transformations the Slavey Dene lived through in prehistory, little can be proven. Honigmann, stating that “of the long-term history of the Slave nothing is known”, seemed to imply unchanging culture in referring to one small informal dig in the Lower Mackenzie area which found “. . . no remains indicative of a culture that was ever different from what exists in the area today”, but also made it clear that no in-depth archaeological work had been done (1946: 29). Glenn MacKay of the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre has confirmed, during a 1997 telephone communication, that the same was true in the Sambaa K’e area, until recent archaeological activity by himself with participation by community members, in the last few summers. I prefer to set aside arguments about prehistory to focus on the period between the early fur trade and the present, as described in the elders' reports in the community book and in other sources.

One of these is Brody; he states, regarding the Athapaskan Beaver and Slavey, “The people were much influenced by the presence of Europeans and European trade goods, but in their response . . . they remained in close touch with their own worlds. Like many other hunting groups, the Athapaskans quickly demonstrated the great flexibility of their cultures” (1981: 23). The necessary combining of tradition and improvisation within their spiritual world of the bush has enabled the Dene culture in Sambaa K’e to continue in its most essential values, meanings and practices while responding with resilience to successive challenges, also described in their community book: contact with early traders, missionaries, and non-native entrepreneurs; the policies of the Canadian government; epidemics; painful experiences in residential schooling; economic and political impacts from world events and processes; and most recently, the values and forces of the global electronic age. I believe that the Sambaa K’e Dene, who have adopted and adapted new technologies and habits while retaining many ancient ones, present an example of this ability to combine flexibility and continuity. I do not intend to ignore the seriousness of the challenges they are facing in the current situation, but see cultural adaptability that gives hope for the future.

Sambaa K’e reveals many examples of creative processes, both past and present, in the two editions of its book. The production of these books was carried out as two community development projects by community members, with my collaboration as a familiar outsider. Both times, the process involved was itself a creative weaving of insider/outsider knowledge, motivations and skills. The creation of a book by and about themselves, both to represent their past and present to the outside world and to use as an internal resource, is a surprising goal and achievement. This result and the process of creating it can be understood in light of Dene flexibility, using the weaving metaphor.



## **MY BACKGROUND, PHILOSOPHY AND EXPERIENCE**

### **Background**

I address my background here because it includes a number of factors which have led to the commitments and activities that underlie this thesis. My early years were spent in an isolated community in the “parkland” north of the Saskatchewan prairie. A love of nature, small communities, and the north has come naturally. My father being a clergyman, our family life and values were strongly slanted in the direction of social responsibility; this orientation was frequently demonstrated by my parents, responding to the dependence of the hamlet's people on them in the absence of regular health, fire, social or police services. Reciprocally, we depended on the kindness of others who paid with donated eggs, chickens, produce and other items in lieu of salary. When we moved to less isolated locations, we children learned to observe and adapt to life in a variety of communities, and to live with the constant observation by others that is an everyday reality for “preachers' kids”. These experiences were excellent preparation for being drawn naturally to the north, community work and anthropology.

### **Philosophy**

In my teen years, an intense experience with a religious group having (in my experience) many cult-like characteristics, taught me some negative lessons that led me later into the simplicity and humanistic values of Quakerism. I have strong values around personal responsibility and autonomy, collaboration, grassroots social movements, community development and participatory approaches. One powerful positive influence on my philosophy and values around “community” was our family's friendly involvement with a group of Quakers who were part of the early prairie cooperative movement, sharing communal pastures and engaging in other cooperative practices. Considering the spiritual foundation of this, I recall the peaceful hour of “First Day” silent meditation, sitting on a parent's lap in the Wake family living room: so similar to times of silence, sitting with Dene staff of the Fort Simpson “hostel” (school residence).

Both personally and as a teacher, I came to be fascinated by notions of cooperation and transformation. One influence on my philosophy of action was Paolo Freire's radically democratic methods in literacy and community development, as was the example of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's educational approaches, rooted in children's own cultures (Freire 1973; Ashton-Warner 1963).

While I was fascinated by my readings in philosophy, psychology, spirituality, personal development and social movements, it was in the applications of these in relationships and in society that most powerfully moved me. I find “culture as a verb”, a dynamic approach to culture, most compelling. It

is difficult to find the term's original usage, but it is noted by Richard Schechner as having been expressed in the ideas of Victor Turner in 1980, further articulated by Conquergood in 1991 as “. . . culture as a verb instead of a noun, process instead of product” (Schechner 2007: 9-12). It was with these values and commitments that I went north for undergraduate fieldwork in the Dehcho Region of the Northwest Territories in 1987.

## **Experience**

My experience with community development began in 1970, when I initiated Canada's first domestic recycling initiative with a community-based women's group. We began with research in our local community in Burlington, followed by experimental collections of domestic “waste”. Our group, Citizens' Committee for Pollution Control, rapidly grew to almost one thousand participants as we did volunteer-based recycling, actively researched recycling possibilities and other environmental concerns, developed educational materials, and wrote position papers to promote our ideas to governmental agencies. After many years of citizen action, the practice of municipal recycling of home-based materials developed and spread across the country (DiGregorio 1992).

In 1974, I was hired as Professor and Life Skills Coach in a new Mohawk College employment program, Basic Job Readiness Training, for disadvantaged unemployed adults. Thirteen of our first thirty students were functionally illiterate, and we had no materials or detailed curriculum. I gathered the group with literacy issues and, with those participants, entered into a creative experiment in community-based learning which was to be a highlight in the lives of many of us. We used the participants' own experiences, needs and goals to shape the materials and activities, including a student initiative in development and management of a food cooperative: an approach based on values and characteristics of participatory research and community development. Job Readiness Training grew into a large employment-readiness program with a very high employment success rate (McGregor 1987b).

After seven years with the literacy-focused groups, I continued at Mohawk in other programs, including Native Job Readiness Program. This was a growth experience for me, providing learning about urban and reserve-based aboriginal organizations and resources. (Michael Dwyer, Associate Dean, Mohawk College, personal communication 2009). The program included expressions of spiritual ethics and values: useful preparation for my contact with Dene people when the time came for anthropology fieldwork.

By 1981 I was pursuing a part-time anthropology and social work degree at McMaster University, and had opportunities to interview, research and write in several areas of interest, gaining further experience in fieldwork and qualitative research. I was influenced by Dr. Richard Preston, who conveyed both deep respect and in-depth knowledge of the subarctic Cree. He was encouraging and

helpful when I was engaged in undergraduate fieldwork. Dr. Bill Lee, of the School of Social Work, taught me a great deal about cross-cultural communications with aboriginal people, sensitivity to cultural assumptions, effective community development approaches, and resources that helped me to modify my communication habits and expectations during fieldwork. As a result of my increasing involvement with anthropology, I switched my program to Honours Anthropology to increase my chances of acceptance into that Masters program.

In 1987 I did undergraduate fieldwork in the Dehcho Region of the Northwest Territories, a Dene area. One of my brothers who had lived and worked in the region helped me make contacts for undergraduate fieldwork. The result was a challenging experience, as I was on my own for four and a half months, engaged in two projects: one in the Dehcho Region west of the Mackenzie River, and one in the communities around the mouth of the Mackenzie and as far as Cambridge Bay in Inuit country. Dr. Preston received copies of my field notes to ensure that they would survive any mishap, and was available for telephone consultation. The first project was the most meaningful to me: a grassroots participatory research project sponsored by the Dehcho Regional Council of chiefs, focused on an assessment of the wellbeing of students in the school residence ("hostel") in Fort Simpson. There, Dene children from the isolated communities of the region were housed to attend the regional school; at that time, the youngest child in residence was seven years old, and the oldest was completing Grade 12.

On the flight into Fort Simpson, I was re-reading materials loaned to me by Bill Lee and visualizing the use of a less intrusive, hurried way of communicating while "living in" with the students for the last three weeks of the school year. On arrival, I met with the director, then all of the staff and students, administrators, teachers, former residents, and community members of "Simpson". In addition to holding group meetings, I consulted with individuals and had opportunities for casual and recreational contacts. The results of all group consultations were posted on the walls of the lounge, to provide continuous feedback and opportunities for comments and suggestions. One day, this use of the walls was applied to me when three of the senior boys taped up a piece of paper and began teaching me, making diagrams with a set of markers! At the end of the school year, I flew or drove to most of the tiny, "fly-in" home communities to visit students in their family settings and to meet with community leaders. The result was a report to the Regional Council and the closure of the hostel operation (McGregor 1987c).

The second project, for Health and Welfare Canada (NNADAP), involved development of the draft of a community-development workbook and an accompanying video to support native addiction workers in the communities along the lower Mackenzie River and the Arctic coast (McGregor 1987a). It was that project that took me to the communities around the mouth of the Mackenzie

and to Cambridge Bay. The resulting workbook, mini-booklet and video are titled *Community Organizing* (McGregor 1987a). During this project, I reconnected with some adults who had been students at the hostel in 1987.

Afterward, I hoped for years for a return to the north to do community-based work, and in late 1996 I was hired by Aurora College (based in Fort Smith) to do qualitative research in the isolated Dene communities of the Dehcho. I jumped at this opportunity to revisit settlements and reconnect with people I had met during the Fort Simpson hostel project in 1987. Two of them who I remembered well were Violet (Jumbo) Sanguéz and Ralph Sanguéz; Ralph was from Jean Marie River and had married Violet. They were living in Sambaa K'e, and had a house which I stayed in during later visits to the community. I flew in small planes into eight communities for a week in each (including Sambaa K'e), to ascertain what community members wanted from the college in the way of adult education. The report focused on the interest of the people in "community education" that would bring all ages and groups together. The subsequent report is titled *Small Steps Together* (McGregor 1997d).

In 1997-8, I obtained two semesters of employment with Aurora College as the Adult Educator in Sambaa K'e (Trout Lake), the community I was most familiar with. Initially, I encouraged my adult students to practice their interviewing and writing skills through projects they were interested in. Several of them decided to interview elders to learn more about the history of Sambaa K'e, then to collect the information to share with the community. When other community members learned of this, the idea of creating a "community book" developed. Several of them said that residents of Sambaa K'e had been upset for a long time by negative comments about the community written by Dick Turner in his book, *Nahanni* (1975: 250-252); they were eager to tell about Sambaa K'e in their own words, to negate those negative impressions. The elders were consulted and, at a community feast, gave approval for a book to be developed as a community project with my participation and full community involvement. All materials would be reviewed and approved by the contributors before being placed in a draft binder, available for review as the book was created.

The resulting book includes photos, art, history, elders' life histories, legends, and accounts of memorable people and events. There were sixty-two band members living in the community, and four other adults: a missionary couple, the school teacher and myself. All adults except for three who opted out, as well as all of the school children, wrote or told stories or else helped in other ways such as contributing photos or art work. The youngest participant was age five, and the oldest was Frank Tetcho, at the approximate age of one hundred and fifteen. Various changes were made, following advice and suggestions by participants, and one hundred copies of the completed draft were printed in 1998. There has been a continuing demand for copies, which the Band has been unable to respond to, due to the small print run.

After retirement in the spring of 2005, I was able to return to Smbaa K'e for up-to-date field experience which would enable me, finally, to write my Masters thesis. (The very expensive air fare was covered by Mohawk College in 2005; a Quaker friend, Rex Barger, made an unsolicited donation of the same amount to enable me to return in 2006 for completion of the project.) I got a "thumbs-up" from the Band to engage in a community project, being asked to work on a second edition of *Smbaa K'e, Then and Now*, using the same participatory research approach as was used for the first edition. I was pleased to be told by Chief Dennis Deneron that the first edition had been a useful resource for the community school's Traditional Skills Training program, and that a second edition would extend its value. At that time, the population had grown to ninety-eight individuals; Frank Tetcho was then deceased, but this number included sixteen elders, seven school children and thirteen preschoolers. Again, all adults and schoolchildren took part in the project, except for one person who declined. The preschoolers were included through photos donated by their families. The draft of the new edition is now complete, with a large collection of photos, and professional book design. There have been many delays in the completion and editing, but the community has completed the final checking of the draft manuscript. With a few suggested changes, it should be printed this fall (2009).

I have been privileged to be able to pursue my passion for community-based projects and participatory research. Every project has been a challenge, and has taught me about myself, my own culture and that of the Dene; these have been rich experiences of collaboration and shared learning, also in a "weaving" mode. I have endeavoured to hold to my principles and ethics while intuiting my way through encounters, interactions and tasks. Although I have a strong action orientation, I am not uninformed by theories or guiding principles. Stuart Hall refers to "discursive practice", or the practice of producing meaning" (1992: 291-2). From my childhood days of attraction to the spirituality of Quakerism, I have been seeking "sense" in the midst of experiences focused on personal and social change. In my work and in this thesis, I continue that seeking.

### **BASKET WEAVING: A METAPHOR**

In considering ongoing community processes, including the development of the book that represents these, the unifying thread of a basket weaving metaphor seems suitable to a community in which strong efforts are being made to weave valued traditions with modern ways, including the use of up-to-date technology. The metaphor came to mind through the realization that the women of the community have been actively relearning and practicing the skills of weaving spruce root baskets, after having lost that tradition. The story of this revitalization is told in a beautiful monograph published by the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Marie and Thompson 2002). This is just one example of very deliberately teaching, learning and putting into practice many traditional skills, in this community which also embraces the most up to date electronic technology.

In 1999 a young woman named Suzan Marie noticed photographs of coiled spruce root baskets originating in the Trout Lake area in the early 1800's. Examples are also to be found in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., the British Museum in London and the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh, Scotland. Suzan enquired in Sambaa K'e, and found that the women did not remember a tradition of making this type of basket, although they are active basket-makers using other materials: primarily birch bark, with lacings of split willow, split root or sinew, and decorative elements in porcupine quills.

Significantly, these craftswomen had retained the knowledge and skill of selecting, digging, splitting and preparing lengths of spruce root for the binding of bark baskets and for other applications; they were then able to weave this retained tradition with the relearning of the old basketmaking skills. Because the making of coiled spruce root baskets was now a lost tradition, Suzan Marie invited an aboriginal basket maker, Mandy Brown, from Lytton, B.C., to teach these techniques to the people of Sambaa K'e in a week-long workshop. Many Sambaa K'e residents of varying ages participated enthusiastically in relearning the skills involved in creating these traditional baskets; now they are made in the community and, as rarities, fetch high prices in the handicraft market. A fine example made by the oldest person in the community, Angele Jumbo, is on display at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, along with another beautiful basket made by Margaret Jumbo. Now people in other Dene communities are also regaining this once-lost skill (Marie and Thompson 2002).

The substance of these baskets consists of lengths of split white spruce root, gathered as the women of Sambaa K'e had been doing all along, with great effort and care not to damage the trees. The roots are cleaned and split, then the pieces are consecutively overlapped in a stitching process that is not supported by radiating vertical pieces as in most baskets, but spirals from the centre, stitch by stitch, row upon continuous row. The tool used, an awl usually made from caribou shin-bone, is also traditional (Marie and Thompson 2002: 32-33). The result is an exceptionally beautiful basket, woven tightly enough to hold water. Such baskets were used in earlier times as cooking pots, filled with water heated by hot stones, as described by Honigmann (1946: 54) and Mason (1946: 19). These baskets are links with earlier times, and have symbolic value, utility value, and economic value in the present. The baskets themselves and the processes involved in producing them provide a meaningful metaphor for the weaving of past and present that has been, and continues to be, integral in the lives of the Sambaa K'e Got'ine.

## **WHERE DO THE STRANDS LEAD?**

I will describe the natural and historical context of the Sambaa K'e people; then the "weaving" process involved in producing the community book; then the resulting "basket" (two editions of Sambaa K'e Then and Now); and the representational patterns the people of Sambaa K'e have chosen to weave into it,

in the form of stories, photos, crafts, poetry, legends and art. Because the book (in its two editions) consists of so much varied material, I will focus on only two aspects of community life: health and education. Finally, I will conclude by discussing the evidence for my position that the Dene have, all along, been engaged in weaving their way creatively through successive changes and challenges.

## CHAPTER TWO: SOURCES AND DEFINITIONS

### SOURCES

#### Pre-Fieldwork Sources

I have already mentioned the influences of Paolo Freire and Sylvia Ashton-Warner. In the mid-1970s, these shaped my participatory research methods in the pioneering program at Mohawk College for multiply-disadvantaged illiterate adults.

In addition to these readings and subsequent on-the-ground experiences, my fieldwork approaches and ethics have been informed and supported by my studies in anthropology. Both Dr. Richard Preston and Dr. Bill Lee of McMaster's school of social work offered valuable practical advice before my undergraduate fieldwork project in the Dehcho "Big River" Region in 1987. I had taken relevant courses with both; an early edition of Lee's *Pragmatics of Community Organization* (available now in a 1999 edition) provided solid instruction about community development, locus of power, and organizational approaches. Dr. Preston provided academic background, support and advice, and loaned me a copy of *Why Don't you? A Look at Attitudes Toward Indians* (Muller 1974), a pertinent reading on non-native attitudes that can interfere with cross-cultural communications: very much to the point for a beginner in ethnographic fieldwork. I have had lots of occasions since then to remind myself of its wisdom.

#### Community-Based and Dene Sources

My primary source on the Dene, particularly the "Sambaa K'e Got'ine", is the collection of elders' life histories and materials in the two editions of their community book, *Sambaa K'e Then and Now* (SKDB 1998; SKDB 2006). Note that I cite the manuscript of the second edition as "SKDB 2006": the version prepared in the community before editing and addition of photos. My participation in the community development projects for both editions will be explained below. This representation of themselves and their way of life is the baseline around which to weave other printed information directly pertaining to Sambaa K'e, literature from other Dene sources, my own observations between 1987 and 2006, and anthropological perspectives.

Other than the community book, three other documents have particular value as community based sources from the Dehcho Region: *Dene Spruce Root Basketry: Revival of a Tradition* (Marie and Thompson 2002); *Traditional Knowledge Overview of the South and North Mbehgaah Areas* (Redvers 2004); and *Nahecho Keh: Our Elders* (Thom and Blondin-Townsend 1987). The first is the monograph by the Museum of Civilization, mentioned above, documenting the reconnection of the Sambaa K'e community with the lost craft of making spruce root baskets. The second, a Sambaa K'e Dene Band report on the band's



Traditional Environment Knowledge project, is an impressive documentation, not only of the land with its multitude of resources (including sacred places), but of this tiny community's ability to marshal the energy and commitment to gather and make use of complex data. *Nahecho K'e: Our Elders* is a collection of life histories and photographs of Dene elders in the Fort Providence area, another Dene group in the Dehcho region. The people of these isolated communities have many family and friendship connections and similar experiences, so these elders' stories reinforce the life histories of the Smbaa K'e elders.

Other Dene sources relate to their broader experience: Stephen Kakfui's forward in Fumoleau's *Denendeh: A Dene Celebration* (1984: 7-46) conveys a Dene perspective on the long time line of culture and development, the subgroups of the Northwest Territories Dene, traditional culture and values, and an account of growing political unity and power attained by collective actions of a handful of scattered Dene groups in the mid-twentieth century. Also, Martha Johnson's information, on the interplay between Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) and standard scientific approaches, offers an excellent analysis of the characteristics of aboriginal (in this case, Dene) approaches to environmental knowledge, including deep observation and knowledge of ecosystems (1992: 7-9). This speaks to the value of the Band's 2004 *Traditional Knowledge Overview of the South and North Mbehgaah Areas*.

### **Ethnographic and Fieldwork Sources**

Details of the oldest Smbaa K'e elders' stories can be compared with data in early twentieth-century ethnographies. Both Honigmann's and Mason's writings bear on aspects of Dene lifestyle in the fur trading period and the early twentieth century. Honigmann's ethnographic paper, *Ethnography of the Fort Nelson Slave* (1946), provides a thorough cultural inventory focused on part of the Slavey Dene group whose territory adjoins the Smbaa K'e area. He mentions the early use of spruce root baskets for cooking (54) – as mentioned, a forgotten craft in Smbaa K'e until its recent revival. His information also corroborates the memory of the very old Smbaa K'e elder, Frank Tetcho, of Frank's sighting of the first White man in the Smbaa K'e territory (32). In addition, Honigmann wrote a section on the Slavey Dene, Expressive Aspects of Subarctic Indian Culture in the *Handbook of North American Indians*, with information on expression of such aspects as spiritual power, values, ceremonial meanings, and social personality (1981: 718-738). I am interested in some continuation of these patterns in the modern community. Also in the year 1946, Mason wrote an article on his 1913 ethnographic work on *The Indians of Great Slave Lake Area*. Despite his admitted difficulty in gathering information mainly from a single Slavey source and having it translated, some of his information is consistent with stories told by Smbaa K'e elders; it also includes the reported use of spruce root baskets for cooking, and the use of logs rather than brush for shelters in his study area (Mason 1946: 3-26).

There are various later anthropological sources on the Dene and other Athapaskan groups. I have found the following to be of particular value: Michael Asch, who wrote Dene Economy in *Dene Nation: The Colony Within* (Watkins 1980); June Helm, who as editor of volume six of *Handbook of North American Indians* (1981) wrote the *Introduction* and the *Introduction to Native Settlements in the Territories* in this volume, as well as *People of Denendeh: Ethnohistory of the Indians of Canada's Northwest Territories* (2000). Also pertinent to some aspects of Slavey Dene culture are Hugh Brody's *Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier* (1981); Jean-Guy Goulet's *Ways of Knowing, Experience, Knowledge and Power Among the Dene Tha* (1998); and Robin Ridington's *Trail to Heaven: Knowledge and Narrative in a Northern Native Community* (1988). Dick Preston, whose area of research is Cree culture, has provided perspectives on life in the subarctic: *Cree Narrative: Expressing the Personal Meanings of Events* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (2002); and his chapter, Twentieth-Century Transformations of Native Identity, Citizenship, Power and Authority in *Renegotiating Community: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Global Contexts* (Brydon and Coleman, eds. 2008). Two of his papers provide additional perspectives: *Cultural Causality, Cumulative Change and Personal Choices* (1990) and *James Bay Cree Culture, Malnutrition, Infectious and Degenerative Diseases* (2001).

As an example of the relevance of the above, Asch's work (1977) includes a historical outline of developments in Dene economy in the Dehcho Region, including the perspective that the Dene continued their attachment to bush life throughout the changes they experienced in the twentieth century. Brody has inspired me with his documentation of subarctic native peoples as essentially creative and flexible in their response to interference and change, while retaining the most valued aspects of their cultural and spiritual lives.

June Helm, writing about early Dene "foraging bands", recognizes the "mutability" of bands, relationships and territories, and states, "In the subarctic biome of the prehistoric as well as the historical era the 'constant' has been patchiness and flux. . . ." (2000: 18). This book also provides many details of the mid-1900s lifestyle in a Dogrib Dene community closer to the Mackenzie River than Sambaa K'e, but culturally very similar; the Dogrib people there have intermarried with the people of Sambaa K'e. Her chapter on native settlements in the *Handbook* (664-665) pertains to the conditions of many who left the traditional bush life to live in communities generally clustered around former trading posts (an interesting contrast with the situation of Sambaa K'e inhabitants, who chose to remain as close as possible to their campsites and bush activities).

Goulet and Ridington both provide glimpses into the spiritual lives of the subarctic Beaver who are part of the Dene group, and Goulet mentions the "fire-feeding ceremony" of the Dene (1998: 234). I note that this spiritual ceremony is current, not only in the community of Sambaa K'e, but in Dehcho regional processes; it was discussed and performed during a land-use conference in 2004

(Norwegian 2004: 1-8). While the Sambia K'e Got'ine have directly revealed only a little about spiritual elements in their culture, the material in the two editions of the community book helped me recall subtle statements for which I had little context at the time. These observations reinforce my sense that their traditional practices are far more based in spiritual sensitivities and practices than have been overtly revealed to me. There are hints of this spirituality (though unexplained) in a list of traditional customs in the community book (SKDB 2006: 101-103), articles about healing and in elders' life histories. While I did not pursue information about this aspect of community life in Sambia K'e, these hints and allusions by community members reveal spirituality as a continuing strand in the culture of the Sambia K'e Dene.

Dick Preston's writings focus on the Cree, who share with the Dene a subarctic hunting lifestyle and many cultural elements including the threatening cannibal figure in legends. His exploration of the psychology of these subarctic hunters makes excellent sense of the observable self-control, avoidance of open conflict, reticence and the almost meditative quietness of demeanor of northern natives. I also find compelling his perspective on the "contingent" nature of life on the land in the subarctic: a deep shaping influence on attitudes. This perspective is in line with my belief that these requirements for survival in the subarctic bush have produced combined capabilities of creative improvisation and competency in using traditional practices: weaving the traditional and the novel.

Dick Preston's two papers listed above have also broadened my perspective on Sambia K'e. I have been aware of the drift of some Dene individuals and families into trading post towns such as Forts Liard and Simpson, especially after the depression that partially resulted from collapse of the fur trade in the 1920's (Dickason 1993: 377). There was a rapid increase in this movement of families around 1960 when regional schools were established and children were forced to attend. Many moved to towns to keep their children at home while attending school and to receive family benefits (Asch 1977: 53-55). I noted the recency of the commencement of cabin construction in 1960 to form a settlement at the current location of Sambia K'e (SKDB 2006: 16). Preston surprised me with a more global perspective, pointing out a global pattern in which aboriginal groups around the world were gathered, under more or less governmental pressure, into settled communities after World War II (Preston 1990). Also, noticing that not much information was offered by community members about the impact of epidemics, but a great deal about the current health situation, I was interested not only in Helm's chapter on epidemics (2002), but also in Preston's 2001 paper exploring some of the factors regarding infectious disease patterns and "Whiteman" assessments of these.

### **Post-fieldwork Sources**

Up-to-date readings in Qualitative Research have been valuable as I have considered and reconsidered the two development projects for *Sambia K'e Then*

*and Now* and the contents of this thesis. During this post-fieldwork phase, I have given a lot of thought to the community's development and my relationship with the people. The huge *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) has been a source of thought-provoking perspectives on social researchers and research: an opportunity to check and test my experiences against those of others.

A number of recent anthropological readings have been pertinent, especially Preston's chapter, "Twentieth-Century Transformations of Native Identity, Citizenship, Power and Authority" in *Renegotiating Community: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Global Contexts* (Brydon and Coleman 2008). This chapter describes and explores how the people of a subarctic Cree settlement took part in a visioning process which has shaped subsequent changes and growth in their community, in a formation process that transformed the people's sense of identity and citizenship. His ideas are in agreement with Appadurai's, focusing on a group's imagining as "a staging ground for action" in community building (Appadurai 1996: 7).

James Clifford, in an introduction to *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and in his article, "Rarticulating Anthropology" in *Unwrapping the Sacred Bundle: Reflections on the Disciplining of Anthropology* (Segal and Yanagisako 2005), emphasizes complexities, contingencies and changing notions of culture itself that must be taken into consideration in ethnography and its analysis. Rappaport and Overing describe Boas's early concept of culture as a creative process (2000: 94), mentioning the dynamic concept of "culture as a verb" (97).

I have also been challenged by some background readings. Having noticed ways in which the quite isolated communities of the Dehcho region have been indirectly and directly affected by global events, I value Appadurai's explorations of globalization, with its impacts on the lives of community members and the histories of local communities. (1996: 46-63). Considering the many kinds of stories told in *Sambaa K'e Then and Now*, there is thought-provoking material pertaining to life histories, narrative and discourse in ethnography: Edward Bruner's *Ethnography as Narrative* (1986: 1-33); Jerome Bruner's "Life as Narrative" (1987: 11-42); and Ken Plummer's *The Call of Life Stories* in *Ethnographic Research* (2001: 396-406). These works have stimulated my reflections on the various aspects of Sambaa K'e's collective life as represented in the community book, and on my actions and understandings as an outsider inside the community.

## CONCEPTS AND TERMS

### *“Community”*

(I should note at the outset that Sambia K'e is not a reserve community, and is located in a large territory.) I am aware of layers of conscious and unconscious connotations attached to concepts of “community”, such as my culture-bound, unconscious tendency to visualize a community as a collection of inhabitants and their physical structures within a boundary. That is not the perspective of the Sambia K'e people. I have been reminded in words such as those of Margaret Jumbo: “The community isn't just what you see here, you know! We use the lake and all of the land that's around it. We lived on all of it for thousands of years and only came here (this settlement site) a short time ago. It's all important to us.” Her claim is demonstrably true, in the constant flow back and forth between the settlement site and various locations on the lake and the land, for traditional activities. The whole settlement closes its office, school and single store several times a year, for a week or more at a time, to allow full participation in seasonal community “camps” in the bush. Between these organized occasions, individuals can frequently be observed taking off for the bush, surprising non-natives who are unaccustomed to these purposeful disappearances for purposes such as hunting, wood gathering, or other activities for which the time is right. I have gradually experienced consciousness-building about a sense of the community much broader and deeper than my original one.

The Dictionary of Anthropology (Barfield 1997) did not provide a definition of “community”; perhaps it is a word with such a multiplicity of meanings that a single definition would be of little use. One meaning is referred to by Susan Jacobs (2001: 305), referring to Blythe, Brizinski and Sarah Preston. She points out “. . . fluid concepts of 'family' and 'community' to describe affiliations between people and responsibilities according to those relationships . . . overlapping rather than exclusive. . . .” (1985: 150). The notions of fluidity, network, and reciprocal ties between family and community ring true for Sambia K'e. Hedda Schuurman states, “The word is laden with cultural assumptions, making universal definition difficult. . . . For the purposes of this chapter, 'community' refers to a conscious bond uniting people who share common cultural traditions, life experiences, language(s) and /or religious sentiments. . . .”, and continues,

'Community' is something of an anthropological construct. . . . In the late 1960's when the Innu first began to live year-round in the settlement . . . a distinct community consciousness did not automatically result. . . . Traditional perceptions of geographic and social boundaries were fluid (Schuurman 2001: 379).

Dr. Bill Lee, in his *“Pragmatics of Community Organization”*, offers a simple definition: “A community is a group of people” (1999: 15). He then identifies two major manifestations of communities: first, community as interface, mediating between personal and institutional levels of society, existing in three types: “geographic”, “function” or “attribute”, and “interest” (15-18). Secondly, he describes community as a political entity, with crosscutting elements such as diversity, globalization and technological innovation (18-22). It is important for outsiders attempting to work in a community to become aware of its many facets; Samba K'e actually fits all of these in different ways.

It is gratifying to come upon Brydon and Coleman's processual statement in *Renegotiating Community*: “Rather than conceiving of community as an object to be identified and defined, we focus here on community as a process under situated and constant renegotiation” (2008: 249). Just as important are the struggles, explored in Brydon and Coleman's first chapter, between the poles of “self” and “globalization”, between developing and sometimes contradictory senses of the word (2008: 1-30).

Preston's chapter in Brydon and Coleman (2008) tends to bypass the contradictions and the host of definitions in all of the above with depth and sensitivity. I am moved by Preston's humane, insightful linking of “the spirit of 'community' and 'locus of home'” with personal and family identity and community belonging, linked within “nested” contexts in a globalizing world. He writes, “I would suggest . . . that the spirit of community is a pragmatic and ideological combination that goes beyond, or perhaps even underlines, the various contemporary religious practices. The challenging phrase “spirit of community” came to me in a letter from Albert Diamond . . .” (59). His perspective gives recognition to continuing spiritual attachments in aboriginal communities (47-56). The Nemaska experience does not exactly mirror the development of Samba K'e, but there are many commonalities, to which I will return below, along with some exploration of 'locus of home' (61).

In this thesis, I use “community” in all of these rich, varied and short-hand senses, relying on the context of use to indicate whether it refers to the group of people living at the settlement site, a clustering of humans with a shared history, spiritual and social values, interests and political connections, or the larger sense of interrelationship with the whole land, including the lake, traditional trails and trap lines, family camps, sacred places, and the many places on the landscape named for happenings in legendary and remembered history.

### ***“Community Development”***

I use this term in the sense used in Paolo Freire's writings and projects: work based in the goals, needs and aspirations of a community or community group, using deeply democratic approaches such as participatory research to identify goals, and to plan and carry out the work with ownership of the enterprise

remaining clearly with the community itself. In this type of community development, outsiders often contribute important skill sets, but are partners and collaborators rather than directors. Ideally, everyone is both a contributor and a learner in this type of community development.

### ***“Culture”***

As I have stated, my orientation is toward dynamic, processual anthropological concepts of culture, rather than toward earlier static views. Ontological realism was one of these now outmoded ideas, which viewed “. . . tradition as something real, to be found outside the minds of individuals, and objectified in the form of a collection of objects, techniques, values, beliefs, practices and institutions that the individuals of a culture share” (Rappaport and Overing 2000: 94). I note Rappaport and Overing's statement that Boas himself, though better known for other aspects of his work, held to a position that “culture itself is an ongoing creative process through which people continually incorporate and transform new and foreign elements” (2000: 94). This is consistent with newer attitudes described by Clifford, who refers to “. . . the inventive cultural survival of supposedly doomed tribal peoples” (2005: 42), and declares, “We ground things, now, on a moving earth. . . . Mountains are in constant motion. So are islands: for one cannot occupy, unambiguously, a bounded cultural world from which to journey out and study other cultures. . . . Cultural analysis is always enmeshed in global movements of difference and power” (22). These ideas are consistent with my position that the Dene of Samba K'e have been actively “weaving” culture, combining aspects of their traditional ways with novel ones as they have been encountered. This approach was demonstrated in the process of developing their book, and in its representational details.

As Clifford states, “Cultures do not hold still for their portraits” (1986: 10). That is one reason why I find the creation of a second edition of Samba K'e's community book important, representing what was happening in the community about a decade after the first one was developed. The “portrait” in both editions is more like a video shot of people's lives, or as Wagner phrases it, in “. . . a constant flux of continual re-creation” (1986: 129).

### ***“Dene”***

The word simply means “the people” (Erasmus 1980:178), and refers to an Athapaskan aboriginal group consisting of a number of subgroups that occupied a very large subarctic area of North America west of Hudson Bay, as far as the Pacific Ocean, before the arrival of Europeans. These people refer to themselves as “Dene”. The part of this large territory that is in the western part of the current Northwest Territories is called Denendeh, “the land of the people”, and since 1978 has been politically organized as the Dene Nation, as explained by Steve Kakfui (1984: 9-38).

## “Discourse”

A definition of discourse is included in *A Glossary of Anti-Oppressive Policy and Practice*: “A set of topics for discussion and a way of talking about those topics that is continued over time by a number of participants. Discourse includes not only language, but also . . . is a framework of thought, meaning and action . . . “ (Lee, Sammon, Dumbrill 2007). The weaving of the large amount of material that constitutes *Sambaa K'e Then and Now* could be considered a long discourse about the nature of the community, between its members and between the Sambaa K'e community and external organizations.

This discourse is ongoing, and also reaches back into the early discourse between the Dene families about dealing with the presence and actions of non-natives. The life histories of elders, including those of Charles Tetcho and Angele Jumbo (both now deceased) are a counterpoint collection of individual memories of similar events, conditions and family stories from the earliest days in living memory. There are reports of dealings with the presence and actions of non-native traders, government representatives and other outsiders. For instance, there was a story about the people in fur trade times changing traders because they realized that the alcohol being offered was an attempt to trick them. Also there was an account of discussion among the families about a perception that one trader was cheating them (possibly at the time when money was introduced) (SKDB 2006: 20, 107).

The same names of people, and the natural rhythms of the seasonal round of on-the-land activities recur in the elders' stories, yet each is a unique life experience within the larger group experience. In one case, there was conflicting information recounted about the entry of one individual into the community – and so on, triangulating the realities as recounted, of times past and perceptions about the present. While life stories were individual, there were common themes; many of the elders shared similar concerns about the younger generations. Most of the youth were less verbal, sharing little of their personal thoughts and opinions, but speaking through their actions.

The *Glossary of Anti-Oppressive Policy and Practice* points out the concept of a dominant discourse being a common phenomenon in ongoing discourse, with a potential to produce oppression. Certainly the Dene encountered oppression in their experiences in the twentieth century, and part of their story is how they have dealt with those oppressive forces. In terms of the community's internal discourse and what its characteristics are, it is important for an external researcher not to overlay an interpretation from one's own dominant culture's viewpoint, but to attend to the actual discourse by community members. In doing this, the essentially egalitarian element in Dene society must be kept in mind as a counterpoint, and possibly an explanatory thread in the fabric.



### ***“Got'ine”***

This term refers to the people of a particular sub-group of the Dene. The Slavey as a group are referred to as the *Deh Gah Got'ine*, and the people of Sambaa K'e refer to themselves as the *Sambaa K'e Got'ine* (SKDB 2006: 15).

### ***“Life Histories/ Testimonio”***

Some social research literature refers to “testimonio”, which strikes me as a good description of the elders' stories in *Sambaa K'e Then and Now*, in both editions. There is a type within the testimonio genre that is a “first-person political text told by a narrator who is the protagonist in, or witness to, the events that are reported upon” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 374). I believe that the term could rightly be applied to the life histories of the elders, as well as other personal accounts in *Sambaa K'e Then and Now*; these are testimonials, not just to one particular event, but to a way of life, historic moments and a set of values and practices to which the narrators have been witnesses and participants.

### ***“Participatory Research”***

My project in Sambaa K'e involved participatory research, in the sense that I was engaging, alongside community members, in a multiplicity of activities in search of multiple strands of knowledge about the nature of the community. The participants were researchers, as they delved into their own history and aspects of their current lives together, to be woven into their story. Virginia Olesen, in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, states, “In a certain sense, participants are always 'doing' research, for they, along with researchers, construct the meanings that become 'data' for interpretation. . . .” (Oleson 2000: 234).

### ***“Qualitative Research”***

The *Handbook of Qualitative Research* resists too narrow a definition of qualitative research, but offers the following: “It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. . . . They turn the world into a series of representations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 3). In Sambaa K'e, the natural setting is the land - the context of the social lives of its inhabitants. The stories of past and present times, legends, opinions, descriptions, commentary, and other offerings are all expressions of what makes meaning to this group, woven into a representation of the community that has, itself, been continuously weaving tradition with new elements.

### ***“Slavey”/ “Slave”***

Steve Kakfui, a former President of the Dene Nation, describes the various Dene groups as follows:

*Deh Gah Got'ine* (Slavey) traditionally have lived in the area south and west of *Tucho* (Great Slave Lake) and along *Dehcho* (Mackenzie River) and *Nachaa Dehe* (Liard River), and in the mountains to the west of Dehcho Valley. Their language consists of a number of dialects, which are understood by most Dene today (1984: 9,10)

He continues, “In modern local usage, the name Slavey applies also to *K'asho't'ine* (Hareskin), *Sahtu Got'ine* (Bearlake) and *Shihta Got'ine* (Mountain) people” (1984: 9-10). The Slavey group of the Dene, and their territory, have been defined differently by various researchers, including Osgood (1936:17); Jenness (1932: 389); and Honigmann (1946: 23). Asch states, “Thus, as it seems clear that the 'Slavey' Indians never formed a single tribal unit, the term Slavey is defined here as applying to those Athapaskans who, in the twentieth century, accept this label, at least when speaking English” (1981: 338). With all of this uncertainty, I accept Kakfui's description, and have noticed that the people of Samba K'e do not refer to themselves as “Slavey”, but always as “Dene”. However, I have also observed that, at least when talking to non-natives such as myself, they refer to their language as “South Slavey”; I was told by a native informant that the correct term is “*Denehelege*” (Anonymous conversation 2009).

### ***“Weaving”***

I use this term as a metaphor for processes within Dene communities such as Samba K'e, in which traditional elements and more modern ones are not just continued or rejected in total, but in which the most valued aspects of traditional elements are retained in creative combinations with newer ones. This process is not usually one in which conscious, consensual decisions are made, but one which proceeds gradually in the everyday day lives of individuals and the group as a whole, engaged in dealing with emerging contingencies in an evolving ecosystem, ever more complex political and economic challenges and global influences.

***“Whites”***: I use this informal term occasionally, as many northerners do, referring to non-native people in the north, who have almost all been of European origin or ancestry.

## CHAPTER THREE: CONTEXT

### PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

It is important to realize that the *Sambaa K'e Got'ine*, like almost all of the aboriginal groups north of the sixtieth parallel, live in a large traditional area rather than in a reservation community. There is only one reservation in the Northwest Territories, established near the town of Hay River in 1974 (Frideres 1988: 88*n*). The resources of large territories are available to the Dene of the Northwest Territories to an extent that most southerners might find surprising. It appears that their stewardship and regular use of the resources of large extents of land give them more opportunities than are available to many southern aboriginal groups.

The Athapaskan Dene historically inhabited lands ranging from Alaska and the Yukon to the lands of the Chipewyan near Hudson Bay, and they have cultural and family links south into the lowlands of north-eastern British Columbia, where they share many cultural similarities with subarctic Native groups (Kakfui 1984: 7-10). The so-called Slavey Dene have inhabited the lowlands south and west of Great Slave Lake and along the upper MacKenzie River east of the Rocky Mountains. Surprisingly, they also have an ancient connection with the Navajo in the American southwest, who refer to themselves as the *Dine*: "Navajo Nation is the name of a sovereign North American nation established by the . . . of Athabaskan origin and are believed to have migrated from northwestern Canada" (Navajo Nation 2005). Sapir identifies this connection between the Navajo and Apache of the American southwest and the northern Dene (Sapir 1936: 224-35).

Specifically, the *Sambaa K'e Got'ine* occupy the southwest corner of the present Northwest Territories, in a bend of the Liard River, as it flows in a course parallel to the line of the Rockies then east into the Mackenzie. Their lowland territory is bounded on the east by the Mackenzie. On the south, there is no geographic barrier between its lowlands and those of northern Alberta and British Columbia. This is shown by a map in Dick Turner's book (Turner 1976: 8). The range of the territory is described in the community book: "Traditionally, the *Sambaa K'e Got'ine* roamed freely throughout a wide territory stretching from the Mackenzie River in the north to Bischo Lake and the Petitot River in the South, and from . . . Tatlina Lake in the east to the Liard River in the west." (SKDB 2006: 16). In ancient times, this area was part of a tropical sea in which grew corals and other warm water creatures; numerous fossils providing evidence of that can be found on the beaches of today's cold, fresh-water lake.

Personal observation from the small planes that convey visitors in and out of *Sambaa K'e* reveals a land of lakes, rivers and muskeg. All of this surface water drains toward the mighty Mackenzie and into the Arctic Ocean. It can be seen that some of this northern lowland has been scored by ancient glaciers; water lies in

grooves gouged between parallel dry ridges tracing the former path of the ice. It is not tundra country, as southerners usually visualize the north; the air traveller can observe the vegetative cover: boreal forest on the ridges and around lakes and rivers, with the rest composed of muskeg. Throughout, there are rivers, swamps, streams and a myriad of lakes. Woodland creatures such as moose, woodland caribou, beaver and fish share the land with the Dene, as frequently mentioned by the *Sambaa K'e Got'ine* in their book.

*Sambaa K'e* (“Trout Lake”), for which the area and the community itself have been named, is a central element in the lives of the people who inhabit the surrounding territory. There is literal belief in legends and stories about it and smaller lakes nearby, and discomfort in the community when visitors fail to “pay respects” to the lake, and bad weather follows. There are many rules pertaining to behaviour on and near the lake, and legends about what is under the surface of its waters (SKDB 2006: 101-104). It is a constant presence; its waters shine quietly and reflect the clouds on windless days, growl and roar onto the beaches when the wind blows, mutter under the forming ice in the fall with sounds like people conversing, and sing with harplike sounds during freezeup; in winter, its ice allows travel, while the water continues to provide fish caught by nets through holes in the ice. Nowhere in the settlement is the lake farther away than a five minute walk.

The settlement is completely surrounded by “bush”: the typical subarctic surface cover of trees, swamps and other waterways. The land does not support much grass; this was a barrier to European traders and missionaries who attempted to introduce domestic horses and sheep into the territory (Angelique Lomen, in a 2005 womens' meeting; SKDB 1998: 125-128). As anomalies, there are a few isolated areas of fertile land, such as a small floodplain near the mouth of the Island River where former Chiefs Joseph Jumbo and Dennis Deneron initiated community gardens (SKDB 1998: 127). It has, in some years, produced vegetables for sale to tourists; in 1997 it produced giant cabbages that were not welcomed by the cooks of the community. In 2005-2006 it continued as a strawberry patch, providing berries to supplement the tiny wild ones.

The nearest communities with road connections to the rest of Canada are Fort Liard to the west, about eighty-five miles distant, and Fort Simpson, about 100 miles to the northeast as the crow flies (Simpson Air office, telephone conversation 2009). In former times, there was a network of traditional trails, including the one for walking or sledding to Fort Simpson; it can still be traced by elder Angelique Lomen, who remembers it well from her days of living alone in the bush with her baby (SKDB 2006: 19). There is now a road connecting the two major communities, but bypassing *Sambaa K'e*. As described to me by Acting Chief Dolphus Jumbo and others, in winter a rough “winter road” is bulldozed through the bush; when the snow is deep enough to cover tree stumps and rocks, it connects for just two or three months with the highway. This provides a means for trucks to enter and leave the community to deliver building supplies and fuel for

the year, and for families to leave for shopping trips and visiting. Of course, snowmobiles can get to Fort Liard and Fort Simpson, as dog sleds and humans on foot used to in former times. For the safety of travelers, there is a survival cabin on the winter road.

It might not occur to southerners that harsh winter conditions offer great opportunities, when the frozen condition of the surrounding lakes, rivers and muskeg allows for freedom of movement impossible in other seasons, and enables hunting and trapping. In other seasons of the year people usually enter or leave the community only by air; there is a gravel airstrip for chartered aircraft and emergency “medivacs” (medical evacuations). Some river travel is possible within the Smbaa K'e territory. It has seemed that no one could get all the way to either Fort Liard or Fort Simpson by boat (SKDB 2006: 29), but recently, community members have circumvented rapids to make the challenging journey to Fort Simpson on the Trout River (Victor Jumbo, personal communication 2009).

## **THE TRADITIONAL SEASONAL ROUND AND CULTURE OF THE DENE**

Hugh Brody referred to

...Beaver, Cree and Slavey country . . . where Indian bands used all of the land, traveling from camp to camp in a seasonal round. The round varied from year to year and some territories were left fallow for several seasons – depending on the hunters' and trapper' assessments of a resource (1981: 87).

The traditional way of life, as described by the Smbaa K'e elders, was based primarily on the hunting of large game, as well as small game, fish and birds, as families and hunting parties moved about the land in this seasonal round of activities. These movements were accomplished on foot or by canoes in summer, and on snowshoes in winter - or by dog sleds, after the introduction of large dogs, run with tandem line-hitch harnesses (Helm 2000: 52). Shelter was provided by teepees, brush “lean-tos”, or by hides in which a traveler could roll up to pass the night on the ground (SKDB 1998: 42). Among the Dene, there were seasonal locations habitually used by certain families, but also occasions when conditions or location of game required them to move to other parts of the area used collectively by the various families (Asch 1977: 48). Families that ran into each other during these movements would spend some time together visiting and sharing news. Poorer families were helped by those who were better off. Asch writes, “. . . It would seem that the principle of mutual sharing of resources was extended beyond the local group to include all groups in the region” (SKDB 1998: 121-131; Asch 1977: 48). In the summers, most families would gather to fish and socialize by the lake, where the present Trout Lake Lodge now caters to

wilderness tourists and fishers, or on the beach at the current settlement location (SKDB 1998: 112; Victor Jumbo, personal communication 2006).

The survival and well-being of the Dene always depended on their attunement to seasonally-available resources. This connection with the natural rhythms and patterns of their ecosystem was not only based on clear objective observation, but was embedded in spiritual knowledge of the web of interconnections between human beings with their attitudes, the land itself and animal life. A Dehcho Dene elder, Leo Norwegian, stated at a land use meeting, "When we refer to our land we do not mean just the soil that makes the ground; we understand it to include the wind, the water and the ecosystem as a whole as well as the utmost respect of it all" (Norwegian 2004: 5-6). The subtle changes as one season was seen to gradually move toward the next were read by a people educated in the meaning of these shifts, the necessary adjustments needed to accommodate to them, and the benefits to humans of acting respectfully in coordination with them.

Since the settlement of the *Sambaa K'e Got'ine* in the early 1960s, a community camp for each season has become traditional. During each of these, members of all ages go out on the land, sometimes together in one location and sometimes in family groups at customary camp sites, so that young people can learn traditional skills from the more experienced members and the elders. The community empties out almost completely during these camp periods. Aside from the seasonal community camps attended by the community as a whole, individual members frequently leave the settlement for nearby snare lines or fishnets, go a distance for wood supplies and other hunting and trapping activities, or simply spend a few days at a family camp. The school program also includes seasonally appropriate activities like snaring, fire-lighting and safety training, which are carried out on the land nearby, and also away from the settlement (SKDB 2004: 7-8; Margaret Jumbo, personal communication 2005).

The seasonal round is described in detail in the *Traditional Knowledge Survey* (2004) compiled in the Sambaa K'e territory, and is included in the second edition of the community book, paraphrased from the survey report:

Spring is the beginning of the Dene year. In this season, the people begin by harvesting muskrat and beaver, and go on to geese, ducks, rabbit, jackfish, and pickerel spawning in the rivers.

In the summer, the people generally gather around the lake. Fish are caught in nets set in rivers and the lake. These include trout, whitefish, sucker and long-nose sucker, *udaa*, *loche*, and in smaller creeks, grayling. Moose and caribou are easily shot in the summer when they come out of the shelter of the woods into the water for relief from the hordes of insects. Bear is shot by some community members only, when they are getting fat at the end of summer. Loons and various kinds of duck are harvested on the

lake. Berry picking and gathering of plants for remedies take place in this season also.

It used to be the custom to move before the fall or winter, from the summer camps to camp spots in the traditional trapping areas of each family. In recent years, it has been the custom to close the school and Band Office so that everyone in the community can get out on the land for a couple of weeks of "Fall Hunt". The fall is the mating season for moose, and every family hopes to get at least one; families who get lots of meat customarily share their excess. Migratory birds are also harvested as opportunity arises. Porcupine are killed at any time of year for their meat and quills, but fall is the best time because they are fat in this season. Families dry a lot of fish in the fall on drying racks, as "hangfish" or "stickfish" for the dogs. Smokehouses are used to produce tasty "dryfish" for human consumption and sometimes for sale. Berries such as high bush cranberries are eaten fresh, made into jelly or frozen.

In the winter, travel on the land is much easier as the water that lies on most of the landscape freezes, as well as the water on rivers and lakes; it is easy to get around on snow machines. Therefore, hunting and trapping are frequent activities. The animals harvested include fisher, otter, beaver, marten, lynx, wolverine, mink, fox and rabbit (the last, mostly for meat). Wolves are not shot for their fur, but are trapped if an animal is making a nuisance around the community. In addition to various species of grouse (locally called "chicken"), ptarmigan are available in winter (SKDB 2006: 25-26).

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Ancient Connections with the Land**

I have chosen to include this, because there is a "time and place" matrix in which a community weaves its culture. It amazes me, putting together what has been happening in "isolated" Smbaa K'e in time periods when the outer world has either sent waves of influences, or when the outer world has experienced quite different developments and forces. One example of global influences was the impact of the 1918 influenza epidemic, felt even in the remote Canadian northwest (Dickason 1993: 377). In another example, the life stories of several of the elders include their childhood experience of being picked up in 1959 by a government plane and snatched away from their families to attend residential school hundreds of miles away (SKDB 2006). According to Preston, this was part of a world-wide pattern (1990). In that year, I was completing high school near Montreal, completely unaware of such happenings or of similar ones around the world, where governments were following similar policies for the education of

aboriginal children and forced settlement formation for migratory groups (Preston 1990; Canadian Lawyers 2007).

During a series of visits to the community, I noted the sequential introduction of technologies that had long been in use in other parts of Canada. When I was there in 1996, telephone connection had just been made available; I was told that there were some adjustments going on, as bills had arrived in the mail and were affecting family budgets (Ruby Jumbo, personal communication 1996). When I arrived in 1997 as the adult educator, almost every family was installing a satellite dish for the first television reception. I noticed that this quickly changed family dynamics, as elders, along with younger generations, sat in the blue light of Hollywood and international news images; in 2005, there was a new wireless connection behind the old Band Office to serve families who had computers. These local technological advances were rapidly accepted as new norms in this place where stone tools are still in use.

In terms of time and place, the very large area surrounding the lake is regarded as the traditional territory of the *Sambaa K'e Got'ine* for “thousands of years” (Dennis Deneron, personal communication 2005). Stephen Kakfui, former President of the Dene Nation, states, “The Dene Nation is at least 30,000 years old” (1984: 11). Brody states,

There are Indian beliefs about their own origins and the nature of their dispersal over the land...backed by ancient stories and deeply held tradition. . . .” They “. . . also have their own evidence: there are rivers, mountain tops, and rocks scattered on valley sites that owe their existence to dramatic events that occurred at the time humans were formed. . . . (1981: 87)

He refers to “...Indians’ sense of absolute and eternal belonging to particular places. Oral histories mark these as places of origin” (87). Steve Kakfui, a former President of the Dene Nation, makes a parallel statement: “Our land has also been like a history book to us as every hill, creek, lake, bay, and peninsula has a Dene name indicating an event that has happened in that particular place” (1984: 7), and claims 30,000 years of Dene occupancy (5). The 2004 land use study at Sambaa K'e states, “This particular story is literally written on the landscape in the form of traditional place names” (Redvers 2004: 7-8).

Brody theorizes that the Beaver Athapaskan group of northeast British Columbia, related to the Slavey Dene, may have been the original hunting peoples of North America:

The earliest appearance of hunters in North America was almost certainly linked to the Peace and Liard River area. . . . Archaeologists now believe that the Athapaskan cultures, so widespread in and absolutely integral to the history of the entire



Northwest of America (with extensions that include the Navaho of the Southwest United States), have a northern heartland (1981: 20-23).

Anthropologists and historians describe movements of various northern native groups in response to pressure from the Cree, who had acquired guns before the actual arrival of Europeans in the Dehcho Region in the late 1700s and early 1800s (Patterson 1972: 102-103). As the oral tradition of the Smbaa K'e people does not refer to any earlier homeland or any population movement from another area, it seems that this group of the Slavey Dene, located in an enclave between the Liard River, the mountains and the Mackenzie may not have been greatly affected by Cree-instigated territorial pressures. None of the stories I was told by the elders include a tradition of the Smbaa K'e people moving into their territory from anywhere else. My enquiries about this resulted in denial of their having ever lived elsewhere in earlier times. There seems to be no clear evidence that they have not, from very ancient times, lived in their current territory, as current community members believe. The only possible indication (and this would have to be checked in the Slavey version of what Frank Tetcho said, and with the translator who heard him) was his one reference to a time "before people came here" (SKDB 1998: 46). Both native informants and anthropological records do mention some war or fighting (Smbaa K'e Dene Band 1998: 46; Honigmann 1946: 22-23; Helm, Rogers and Smith 1981: 48; Gillespie 1981: 164; Patterson 1972: 102-103). Frank Tetcho, in his life history, mentions stories he had heard about conflict with Cree along the Mackenzie in earlier times (SKDB 1998: 46). However, it has been conceded by Gillespie that these conflicts did not usually result in territorial changes, but were more along the lines of short "excursions".

The elders' stories describe their families moving around on the land in search of game, and spending summers on the shores of "Trout Lake". Anthropologists have called the traditional family groups "local groups" and sometimes estimate that these might have consisted of as many as 20 to 30 people (Asch 1977: 47). The elders refer to families, or sometimes a couple of families, living and traveling together. As mentioned in the Handbook of North American Indians (1981: 24), some early anthropologists surmised that in ancient times before the invention of snowshoes, subarctic native people must have lived permanently around large "fish lakes" for a year-round source of food (G. Hatt 1916; K. Birket-Smith 1929). Whether or not this was the case, I am not dealing with such very ancient history as a time before the use of snowshoes and, as already mentioned, there is little archaeological evidence yet that could prove anything about these matters.

But what is the Dene sense of connection with the land? Aside from the legalistic matter of how long the *Smbaa K'e Got'ine* have inhabited their bit of geography, in a European-based "real estate" perspective, I wish to bring that issue into the spiritual sphere, where I believe it resides in the cultural perspective

of the people themselves. As I have mentioned, Dick Preston used the term “spiritual domain” for the attachment of a Cree elder to the “old ways” on the land (2008: 50). Various people in Samba K'e have expressed the belief that all aspects of the land have been given to the people to care for and to live on with respect. Steve Kakfui expressed a Dene attitude to “the land” that has little to do with legal ownership or boundaries:

This land, consisting of mountains, tundra and forests, has supported us, and the climate dictates that our people must be wily and strong, innovative and resourceful. Centuries of experience have given us intimate knowledge of our land and of her resources. We believe our land is a living person, often called 'mother', and we love her as we would a most generous parent (1981: 7).

### **Fur Trade Times**

The first trading post in the Mackenzie District was reportedly established in 1796: the short-lived “Livingstone's Fort”. After a period of competition between the Northwest Company, XY Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, the Hudson's Bay in 1821 became dominant and re-established trading posts at Fort Simpson and Fort Liard, roughly east and west of Samba K'e (Asch 1981: 345). Asch states that prior to 1821-1850, the trading companies were not aggressively developing the fur trade in the Mackenzie River area; the traders were mainly bartering for food provisions at that time (Asch 1977: 49). It is interesting to speculate on why the trading companies wanted to have traders in the northwest, if not to focus on obtaining furs. It may simply have been a transitional stage, as the traders waited out the process of the Dene adjusting from a pattern of total subsistence hunting to one that included a focus on trapping for the fur trade.

In any case, early contacts between the Dene and Whites were with fur traders and the missionaries who followed. The oldest informant in Samba K'e in the winter of 1997-1998 was Frank Tetcho, said to be 115 years old. Frank, who demonstrated razor-sharp alertness and memory, describes his first sight of White men: some priests traveling through the Samba K'e territory on their way to Fort Liard, then to Fort Nelson, when Frank was about ten years old (SKDB 1998: 47). Honigmann writes that the first White man seen in the Trout Lake area was one Father LeGuen, who was on his way to Fort Nelson; Honigmann's information narrows the year of this trip to 1897, which closely matches my estimate from details of Frank's life (SKDB 1998: 47; Honigmann 1946: 32). It is an interesting coincidence that “LeGuen” means “white” in the Breton language (Badone, personal communication 2009).

There is a question about what it means to talk about those encounters “in the Trout Lake area”, since it is documented that both Fort Liard and Fort Simpson were established by White men before Father LeGuen passed through. It seems that Fort Liard became the main trading centre for the Sambia K'e people, as it is very frequently mentioned as the destination of long walks by men or family groups, for the purpose of trading. It seems likely that it was chosen because of being closer, combined with the disadvantage of traveling over ridges on the way to Simpson, as I was told by Margaret Jumbo (telephone communication 2009).

There is evidence that Fort Liard was a “provisioning fort” for Fort Simpson at some point in the early days (Bromley 1986: 12-13). There is an intriguing bit of information in one of the life histories in the community book, pertaining to the days when traders depended on the local native groups for their subsistence. In her life history, Angele Jumbo, recently deceased, mentions her father telling stories about trading food for goods at the trading posts, which fits with Asch's description of early provisioning practices (SKDB 1998: 59). Interestingly, she says her father told her the people followed the Trout River to Jean Marie River, then south to a Hudson's Bay post with food and items like moose grease. As far as I can see by looking at maps, they would have been heading away from the nearest trading posts, toward Fort Providence, which was established in 1819 (Asch 1981: 345; SKDB 1998: 59). Angele was probably born about 1915, so her father would have been born in the mid to late 1800s. He may have been describing the experience of his forebears making trips to Fort Providence before Fort Liard and Fort Simpson were permanently re-established by the Hudson's Bay Company, or of traveling more easily by water (one way at least) to “Providence” rather than taking the bush trail to Fort Liard. Perhaps the trip against the flow of the Mackenzie, by “tracking” the canoes with rope, a technique mentioned by Helm (1981: 155), proved more arduous than a long walk overland to and from Fort Liard in the company of family members. Of course, the Sambia K'e people may have provisioned more than one post simultaneously.

However, this analysis does not clarify why it was stated that Fr. LeGuen was the first White man to be seen in the territory of the Sambia K'e people; some of the Dene certainly had been dealing with White traders on the periphery before that. Perhaps the apparent contradiction really isn't one, and is just a matter of the forts on the edges of the territory not being considered part of the actual territory of the Sambia K'e group.

Sambia K'e, like most of the Dene communities, was religiously influenced most strongly by the Roman Catholic Oblate missionaries (Choquette 1995). Oblate priests traveling between missions sometimes crossed the Sambia K'e territory and were sometimes guided, fed and given shelter by Sambia K'e families, within the memories of their oldest members (Marie Deneron, SKDB 2006: 106). It is interesting that the Band is said to have been the last of the Dehcho groups to be converted to Christianity, in 1902. Glenn MacKay at the

Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre shared the following information with me about this in an email that refers to missionizing in "Trout Lake" by the same Father LeGuen: "The first missionary to visit Trout Lake was a Fr. LeGuen, according to the book, *Mid Snow and Ice – The Apostles of the North-West*, written by Fr. Pieire Duchaussois OMI (1937). Fr. LeGuen was among them early in December 1902'. There is a brief narrative about this visit including, 'F. Petitot also attended . . .'" (MacKay, G, email Feb.13, 2009). My information on this work is that it was first published in 1932. The late date of this missionizing adds to the impression that the Sambia K'e people were relatively isolated, compared with groups centred on major rivers and lakes or closer to trading posts. They were located around the inland lake, where traffic on the Liard and the Mackenzie Rivers could easily pass them by without any contact.

However, while the families were moving around their territory within the traditional seasonal round, the economic and political agendas of the outside world were having some effect in northern areas. Dickason declares, ". . . The appearance of whites did not at first radically alter subsistence patterns . . . She notes, referring to the introduction of trade goods, "Even as they traded for these items, which in effect were tools of production, Amerindians retained a large degree of self-sufficiency" (1992: 367).

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1899), Treaty 8 was signed at Lesser Slave Lake (Dickason 1993: 375). It seems that the government was concerned about starvation among some native groups, due to interference with native hunting, trapping and other use of the land by Whites who increasingly found their way north on steamships that had begun to ply major rivers, connecting with new trails and railroads making access to the north much easier. Some of these newcomers were gold-seekers in the Klondike gold rush; there are reports that some Native chiefs requested protection by the government in these circumstances. I have noticed that the Sambia K'e people did not mention starvation or severe hunger, although many elders of Fort Providence did, describing deaths from disease during their childhoods. Helm, Rogers and Smith (1981: 152) state, "Even among the Athapaskans of the Mackenzie drainage *where the traditional food base was unimpaired*, (my emphasis) effective trapping was best done by these small groups." This strongly suggests that the area along the Mackenzie did not experience such extreme shortages of game – at least in some parts; Fort Providence is also in the drainage, but is much closer to Great Slave Lake, and may have been in a different situation regarding availability of game animals. That area may also have been more severely affected by the epidemics, being less isolated than the Sambia K'e area. Common sense suggests that disease would tend to contribute to starvation, as sick people would be unable to engage in food procurement.

In any case, the commissioners and the chiefs who signed the treaty reportedly had quite different understandings of the meaning and implications of the document. Dickason writes, "The government considered that the treaty not

only extinguished Indian title, it also provided that native usufructuary right would be 'subject to such regulation as may from time to time be made by the Government, and excepting such tracts as may be required for settlement, mining, lumbering, trading, or other purposes.'" She describes various aspects of the aboriginal understandings of the treaty, including ". . . health care and social services, including care of the aged. The Indians believe they had been assured of these, but they are not mentioned in the written document" (Dickason 1993: 375). Kakfui writes, "Treaty 8 officially recognized that we are a nation and that we have aboriginal rights but, at the same time, it tried to extinguish our rights over our homeland. Our ancestors and the chiefs understood that the treaty was to protect our way of life and to guarantee our control of our traditional land" (1984: 17). I have found no indication that the Sambaa K'e people were involved in the signing of Treaty 8. They would reluctantly sign Treaty 11 in the 1920s.

### **Early Twentieth Century**

As a background to the twentieth century, it should be noted that in spite of the presence of non-natives and the introduction of basic trade goods, it seems clear that most Dene of the Dehcho Region continued in their nomadic bush lifestyle and cooperative sharing economy into the early decades of the twentieth century:

The internal organization of the economy did not change greatly. The primary economic unit for most natives still remained the local group which, in most cases, still wintered at fish lakes. . . . Some changes in production resulted from the introduction of the rifle and the steel trap. . . . But aboriginal hunting techniques were still employed in collecting most game, including the big game animals . . . (Asch 1977: 51).

It is interesting that the steel trap seems to have been introduced in 1900, just after the influx of non-native gold prospectors and trappers at the time of the 1899 Klondike gold rush (Dene Nation 2006) which added to the frequency of contacts between Dene and Whites. Kakfui declares that initially the presence of non-natives not greatly disturb the people: "When non-Dene came to our land, we saw them as curious – strangers who had come to visit; we shared with them and helped them to survive." Kakfui writes, "In 1973 an old Dene, Antoine Beaulieu, was asked if the Dene did not like the coming of more White people in 1900. He replied, 'We didn't mind. We didn't suppose they would bother us'" (16).

Asch points out some changes in the trading system that led to noticeable changes: "The Bay changed its standard of trade by doubling the exchange value of furs to that of provisions" and made money rather than furs 'the medium of exchange', which spelled the end of bartering as the basis of trade; a radical change for the Dene, who had never dealt with money transactions" (Dickason 1993: 377).

Even so, there was continuity; game was still obtained by the traditional methods, and the basic social organization continued to be the mobile family groups living on the land at seasonal locations as before (Asch: 51). The changes that did occur seem to have been in the patterns of movement within the territory; a hunter or group of hunters tending trap lines for fur bearing animals might not always be able to have the whole family involved. The building of a few cabins around the lake in the 1930s may have been an extension of increasingly stable family campsites in which mothers and children would stay while men were out on the traplines. This analysis is supported by Asch (51).

A somewhat contrasting experience in Sambaa K'e is offered in the life history of one of the female elders, Mrs. Sarah Jumbo, who always uses the name "Mrs. Sarah". Her life history suggests that even with established campsites, the families were still pretty mobile in the early decades of the twentieth century, when she was a child. (Note that the translator is Mrs. Sarah's daughter who sometimes refers to her mother's family as 'they', alternated with direct translations, using "we"). Mrs. Sarah says,

There were three cabins: ours, Mary and her family's, and my grandparents. Away before the cabins, the family used to live in the bush around Tetcho Lake in a tent. They stayed all through the winter there in two tents. They lived there till spring then traveled down Tetcho River by canoe. Even in winter Dad used to shoot caribou. . . . They had a wood stove in there. I don't remember back to the days before canvas tents. My father used to tell us about those days. In the bush we had a tent and wood stove. Only in the spring, when there was no snow, we would travel around and sleep outside with a tarp over our heads, just in spring and fall time. We used to stay out in the fall till Christmas, then go back out till spring.

She also describes walking over eighty miles with her family to Fort Liard.

We didn't rush; we camped along the way. It was the same thing on the way back. Sometimes Joseph and them in the bush would all come together with my father, go to Liard on foot with furs from the hunt. It was hard to pack those furs, too. On the way back, we got fish at Bouvie Lake . . . They were small compared to the fish here, the whitefish on Bouvie Lake. We'd make them into dryfish, then bring them back. We didn't rush back; we took our time, set snares, shot moose, made drymeat and waited till the meat dried. The snares were for rabbit for the dogs to eat. Some people, Joseph and others, shot beaver (SKDB 2006: 128-129).

The life that Mrs. Sarah describes is evidently both seasonally patterned and quite varied, with family activities still involving lots of mobility, using various modes of travel and shelter in different seasons. After a cabin had been built, the family would presumably live in it rather than in a tent or lean-to when their movements on the land brought them to that location. This would have provided greater comfort for the family in the winter, when men like her father would have been out on the trap lines at least part of the time. There are multiple references by Sambia K'e people to their continuing custom of obtaining, drying and caching as much moose meat as possible during the fall hunt (SKDB 1988), and in a pattern similar to the one described by Mrs. Sarah, obtaining game while moving from place to place. I assume that some hunting was done by trappers when out on the trap lines, and there are many reports (including Mrs. Sarah's) of women and children obtaining small game, such as fish and rabbits, as part of daily activities wherever they were located (SKDB 1998; MS 2006).

There was a severe flu epidemic in 1918 that, according to Dickason, affected the north-west, but I have no specific information on its impact in Sambia K'e territory (Dickason 1993: 377).

### **(1920s and 1930s)**

Asch and Dickason focus differently on changes in these decades than Kakfui does; Asch focuses on the native economy, which was by this time dependent on forces in the world at large, especially the high demand for furs. He mentions that in the 1920s, when many Whites entered the northwest to trap and prospect, there tended to be instability in the availability of furs, but that the economy was balanced for some time by an equity between fur prices and the value of goods the natives traded for (Asch: 52). Dickason mentions international instability, the frequent cheating of natives who were not used to dealing in a monetary system, the results of the 1918 flu epidemic, and a peak in fur prices followed by a crash in 1920 as factors in the collapse of the fur trade in the 1930s global depression (Dickason 1993: 377).

Kakfui describes how the discovery of oil at Norman Wells on the Mackenzie River in 1920 led to oil-related development and an influx of White people that resulted in major social disruption among nearby Dene. Treaty 11 was signed in 1921 (Dickason 1993: 588). The combination of all of these changes must have been a major cultural overload for the Dene groups. Kakfui states that “. . . the 1920s and 1930s were decades of desperation for the Dene.” There was also a serious epidemic of flu in 1928 that, according to Kakfui, killed one-sixth of the Dene (Kakfui 1984: 17; Helm 2000: 306). Mrs. Sarah Jumbo speaks of Sambia K'e people going all the way around the shores of the lake to see which families were affected by the flu, and finding no one alive at some campsites (personal communication 2006. Transl. Yvonne Jumbo). Angelique Lomen says, “There used to be a lot of people around Trout Lake, before the epidemic, but a lot

of elders and people perished. (SKDB 2006: 146). Numerous Dene elders in the Fort Providence area who told their stories in *Nahecho Ke: Our Elders* described being orphaned or losing a parent during the epidemic (1987).

With regard to Treaty 11, Dickason writes,

With Treaty Eleven, as with Treaty 8, Amerindians agreed to sign only after they had been assured of complete freedom to hunt, trap, and fish, and they had been reassured by Bishop Breynat that the government's word was good. They remember that they were told that the 'land shall be as it is, you shall keep on living on it as before'. For the Dene, the treaty was one of peace and friendship. . . (378).

Kakfui states,

Treaty Commissioner Henry A. Conroy was sent to negotiate Indian Treaty Number 11 with the Dene, but at the same time, he had been ordered not to change any word in the text of the treaty which he brought prepared from Ottawa. In every village we asserted our rights to control our resources and our land. . . . However, neither Treaty 8 nor treaty 11 did protect our rights (17).

There is a report of reluctant involvement by Sambaa K'e men in the Treaty Eleven process. Elder Marie Deneron speaks of her grandfather Charles Tetcho and other Sambaa K'e hunters becoming involved in a signing procedure in Fort Simpson:

I remember Grandpa Charles had told us that the year I was born, the Treaty was signed. Every springtime all the men from here gathered together to sell their furs from their spring catch and the minute they arrived in Fort Simpson for their annual summer supplies a lot of White people went and visited them and told them they had to attend a meeting. They all went with the White people. When they arrived there, the White people asked the natives to sign the paper, but Grandpa Charles was the one who wanted to know why the White people wanted them to sign the paper. He said, "We have to know why you want us to sign the paper." The natives said, "If you do not explain, we can't sign anything." The Whites told the natives from here, Simpson and Nahanni and Jean Marie River, 'If you don't sign the paper you will all live very poor and we will not give you any more groceries and you will not buy from our store. They



said, 'The reason why we want you to sign the paper is we promise to supply you with the supplies you need.' The natives disagreed, but they were a force and they put a misunderstanding on the natives. They told us that we would be supplied with groceries. The natives disagreed because they wanted to keep their land, but the Whites were strong headed, so we had no choice but to sign the paper" (SKDB 1998: 67).

Kakfui presents the perspective that the effort to get Treaty Eleven into place was motivated by the discovery of oil at Fort Norman in 1920. Adding to the desperation of the Dene was the fact that Treaties 8 and 11, which promised the protection of Dene rights on their traditional lands, proved not to do so when the influx of Whites led to interference with native trapping and the use of land for resource development (Kakfui: 17).

### **(1940s)**

The 1940s brought their own problems. Asch states that after World War II, fur values continued to decline; simultaneously, there was a rise in costs of the consumer goods to which native people had become accustomed and were dependent on. The Canadian government introduced support for Canadian families and the elderly in the 1940s. This was available to aboriginal people, but many native families continued to struggle without being able to support themselves fully through the fur trade (Asch 1977: 52-53). It is my opinion that this situation must have affected those living in towns much more than those who continued a more traditional life on the land. My opinion is buttressed by Asch's description of the circumstances of town-based native people who found it harder and harder to access bush resources to support their families (1977: 55). Also in the 1940s, the World War impinged on the Dehcho, when after Pearl Harbour, the American military was worried about invasion of North America via Alaska. As part of a plan to defend against this possibility, American soldiers in large numbers spent three years till 1945 in pushing an oil pipeline across the rugged landscape connecting Fort Norman and Whitehorse, Yukon. They left environmental and social destruction in their wake (Kakfui 1984: 18). A group of soldiers reportedly camped on the Sambaa K'e lakeshore and left material that was cleaned up by the Dene (SKDB 1998: 51).

### **(1950s)**

In 1951, Dick Turner, the same northern entrepreneur who wrote negatively about the Sambaa K'e Dene in his book, built Trout Lake Lodge (Victor Jumbo, personal communication 2006). This later was purchased by the Band, and has provided summer employment for many people in the years since. Kakfui mentions the value of the cooperative business movement in helping the Dene learn to organize profitable projects that could succeed in the new circumstances in the north, and to work together toward common goals in

Denendeh (Kakfui 1984: 20). In the Dehcho Region and all of Denendeh, there was a beginning of political development that eventually led to the Dene gaining recognition of their aboriginal rights. Kakfui writes that in the mid-'50s oil and gas exploration in the north raised government concerns about land rights. The Nelson Commission traveled around the Dehcho settlements to discuss the treaties and the idea of establishing reserves. There seems to have been universal opposition to this among the Dene, and Kakfui states that neither the government nor the Dene accepted the Commission recommendations (17).

In 1956, the Territorial Council took note of the fact that the fur trade was not rebounding and that many aboriginal northerners they observed in the towns were living in poverty. The Council made a request to the federal government for some action to deal with the situation (Asch 1977: 52). Asch points out that the Canadian government's plan to deal with what was interpreted as native unemployment due to low education levels led to the institution of the "New Education Program" of 1959 (Asch 1977: 53). This was supposedly a community development approach, but played out as an educational initiative based on the questionable theory that young natives who were educated would more easily find employment in the towns of the north, thereby alleviating problems of native poverty.

In Samba K'e, 1959 was the year when the ripple effect of the New Education policy was felt. Young Dolphus Jumbo, who is currently Acting Chief, was able to escape into the bush when he saw six other children being caught and put into the government plane for removal to the residential school in Fort Providence (SKDB 2006: 120).

### **(1960s)**

The 1960s brought rapid education-related changes to Denendeh. I just note here that separation from their children, or the threat of it, caused many families who had been living the traditional lifestyle to relocate into towns where the regional schools were located, beginning in 1960. The first grade school was built in Samba K'e in 1972 (SKDB: 8), but children needing high school education still had to be away from their families, in residential schools.

Under the New Education Program, residences called "hostels" were promptly built at the regional schools in the major towns, and community elementary schools were gradually constructed in the scattered settlements. In 1960 there was a large movement of Dene families from their bush territories into the towns to keep their children at home while attending the regional schools. With their children in school, they could also receive family benefits. This was important, because native people living in towns had increasing problems in obtaining game and other bush resources. Asch writes, ". . . Voluntarily or not, most people, at least in the Fort Simpson and Fort Wrigley regions, moved into town within one year of the opening of the winter-term school" (53). Obviously,

this did not include the families that have remained in the Sambaa K'e area, but I notice that some local families have relatives in Fort Simpson, possibly due to that 1960 diaspora. In 1960, when two "hostels", one Anglican and one Roman Catholic, were completed in Fort Simpson (Anglican Church 2008), Dolphus's father agreed for a time to have his children get some English education there. As a result, Dolphus got some schooling (SKDB 2006: 120).

1960-1961 was a turning point for the people of Sambaa K'e. The members of nine families had evidently chosen to remain in their seasonally ordered life in their traditional territory. It is now clear that a collective imagining took place at a meeting on the beach near Joe Punch's current home on Treaty Day, probably in 1961. The Indian Agent, Bob Styra, spoke to the gathered people about building cabins to form a settlement. The discussion evidently led them to a clear decision. In order to obtain the advantages of two offers made by the government (the building of a community school, and better medical services, in return for these families gathering into cabins to form a settlement), the decision was made (Dolphus Jumbo, telephone conversation 1990).

The story does not make clear whether they decided on the location at that meeting or later, but the settlement was built near the mouth of the Island River, where float planes could land with medical people. This is one of three reasons I have been given for the decision to locate at that spot; Joe Punch says it was because the land was flatter there, and Mrs. Sarah Jumbo gives a reason related to the availability of game animals. Probably a combination of these led to the decision to build the new community at the current site. There were already three cabins nearby, and several at scattered locations on the land. These include one built by the revered elder, Joseph Jumbo, which still exists as a ruin that is visited occasionally by community members (SKDB: 8). In 1961, Frank Tetcho acted on the community decision for settlement by building the first cabin at the chosen site. The others followed, with the men of the community helping each other with construction of each cabin in turn, as described in many elders' stories (SKDB 1998).

It should be pointed out that having cabins clustered at one location brought about changes, but did not eliminate the seasonal orientation of the Sambaa K'e people. As mentioned above, they have continued in many ways to weave life in cabins (and now houses) with continued connection to the seasonal round and frequent mobility. They are not pinned down within the boundaries of the settlement; the whole expanse of their large territory is there for the usual on-the-land pursuits. The main difference is that no one these days is living on the land year-round, away from the settlement. The longest time groups or individuals stay out hunting or for seasonal camps seems to be about three weeks at a time, but there is a high frequency of excursions for on-the-land activities between longer camp-outs. Children have lots of experience in the bush, but don't experience life on the land on a daily basis, year-round.

In 1963, a priest named Father Mary designed and built an unusual log church with the help of community members, in which he could conduct services and reside during his visits to the community (SKDB 1998: 8). An often-told story of the early settlement days is about the building of the gravel airstrip as a three-year communal effort, starting about 1966, by everyone in the community, to enable planes to land for doctors' visits and "medivacs". It seems that this project, carried out without professional guidance and using only home-made tools, was a pivotal moment of pride and community-building by a group of families who had never before had the experience of living in such constant close proximity with each other. They were weaving a new lifestyle in the process (SKDB 1998; SKDB 2006). In spite of this positive communal effort, made in trust that construction of a school would result, the first log school was not built until 1972 attached to a band office and community hall (SKDB 1998: 8).

In the mid-1960s, the Dene leaders of the scattered bands, many still engaged in the hunting economy, met at intervals to talk about the changes their people had to deal with. They joined politically for the first time, forming several native organizations as part of what Kakfui refers to as the "Dene revival" (Kakfui 1984: 20). The leaders shared growing frustration over their lack of control over development decisions on Dene lands, and manipulation by government bodies. They gradually developed strategies to deal with these problems; for instance, they made a decision in 1969 never to send one chief to a meeting, but always to send a group equal to the number of non-native attendees (24). In 1968, for the first time since the signing of the Treaty 8 (1899) and Treaty 11 (1921), the Dene people received the wording of these, in written form and translated, and were shocked to realize what had been signed decades before (21). This seems to have been a pivotal year, with the beginnings of a unification movement among the various Dene organizations, which led to the formation of the Native Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories, soon to re-form as the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories (22-24).

### **(1970s)**

In 1971 the Band took over Trout Lake Lodge as a wilderness fishing lodge, and in the mid to late nineteen seventies the Band separated from the Fort Liard Band, of which the Sambaa K'e Band had been regarded as a subsidiary band with a "sub chief"(SKBD 2006: 138). The 1970s were a time of growing unity, autonomy and successful political strategy among the Dene leaders who formed the Indian Brotherhood in 1970 (Kakfui: 24). When there was a proposal to build an oil pipeline through the Dehcho before the land rights issues had been resolved, the Berger Commission (1975) conducted by Justice Thomas Berger traveled throughout the northwest where he heard many representations in the Dene communities. A report of Chief Edward Jumbo's words at the Trout Lake hearing of August 23 and 24, 1975, printed in the Native Press, is included in the book's first edition (SKDB 1998: 9). Native groups were strongly against the pipeline being developed before land rights were clarified with due regard for

aboriginal rights. Berger's recommendation was for a ten year period when no pipeline construction would be done, to allow time for land rights to be addressed and legislated (Dickason 1993: 406). The growing political strength of the Dene culminated in the Dene Declaration of July 19, 1975 (Watkins 1980: 3): an impressively eloquent, confident and powerful statement.

I have wondered how the scattered groups of Dene hunters could have achieved the growth in power that resulted in their success with the Berger report, the Dene Declaration, a representation to the Canadian Parliament, the filing of a Caveat claiming about half the lands in the Northwest Territories and, finally, the submission of their case to the Supreme Court of Canada (Dickason 1993: 378). One clue is Kakfui's report of an aeroplane being purchased in 1971 through a grant from Oxfam for the purchase of a Cessna 185. Elder Wally Firth traveled in it to keep news and other communications flowing between native organizations (1984: 25).

I think also that there were established patterns of communication between the native groups, which are known to have been linked by intermarriage and crosscut with friendships and other family ties. The distances were great, but that does not seem to have deterred Dene individuals from visiting other groups and, presumably, bringing back news from those they had visited. For example, at a band level, Frank Tetcho mentioned that groups of people moving about on the land would stop and visit when they encountered members of other families. Also, there were reports, in stories contributed to the book project, of summer gatherings by the beaches at today's Trout Lake Lodge or at the current settlement site. At those times, anyone who had information, concerns or news would easily be able to share those with others. In a wider perspective, I was told that Joseph Jumbo used to walk a long traditional trail from Sambaa K'e to Kakisa (which looks about two hundred miles away on a map) to visit relatives (Nahecho Keh, 1987: 6-7). A map of the region's traditional trails that I saw in the Sambaa K'e Band Office showed a surprisingly dense spider web pattern of trails linking and cross-linking the whole Dehcho region. We should not underestimate the multiple connections between the groups, as mentioned above by Helm, or the effectiveness of aboriginal methods of communication.

### **(1980s)**

The 1980s opened with a political defeat and two positive events; The Dene Nation leaders fought hard (and lost) against the passage of federal Bill C-48, December 1981, which Kakfui states, “. . . gave the federal minister of energy exclusive control on all Canada's lands over oil and gas exploration, productivity, delivery, pricing, revenue sharing, and taxation” (1984: 38). However, the same year brought success with regard to Canada's Constitution; after strong representations by aboriginal groups, the government introduced a clause into the Constitution that recognized “aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada . . .” (38). Also, Dickason states that the name “Denendeh” was

adopted by the Dene in 1981 as the name of their traditional lands (1993: 414).

In 1982 there was a decision, based on a northern plebiscite, that a new territory would be carved off from the eastern Northwest Territories, to be named "Nunavut". Two forums were set up to plan the division; the Dene, along with the Metis Association, were involved in that process as members of the Western Forum. The new recognition and respect that the Dene nation was earning was symbolized with their participation with the Prime Minister and provincial leaders in the 1983 "first Canadian constitutional conference on aboriginal rights" (Kakfui 1984: 43).

The "hostel" in Fort Simpson, which had been the school residence for the children attending the regional school, was closed following the report on the wellbeing of native children in the hostel (McGregor 1987c). The children were then housed in "foster homes" in Fort Simpson, an arrangement that seems to have been unsatisfactory, until the establishment of two group homes (one for girls and one for boys, with house parents in charge). As far as I know, this new arrangement has not been researched, but I have not heard any complaints about it from parents in Sambaa K'e (personal communications, anonymous). The late 1980s saw the acceptance of electricity in the community, with the power being produced by a community generator (Ruby Jumbo, telephone communication 2009).

### **(1990s)**

In 1994, a missionary couple from NCEM (Northern Christian Evangelical Missions) arrived on the first of a number of lengthy visits to the community (SKDB 1998: 102-103). Although the residents had a Roman Catholic religious orientation, many attended the Protestant church services, listening quietly. When I was last in the community, in 2005 and 2005, a few women were getting together on Sunday mornings for informal Bible reading, hymn singing, prayer and discussion. A Catholic priest visits on request. 1995 was the year when a fire at Christmas destroyed the original log "complex" of band office, classroom, small store and community hall, along with most of the band's records. When I was in the community in 1996, there was a new complex with an office, recreation area, mini-gym and a bright new classroom. Telephone service had recently become available. In the winter of 1997-1998, the community book project was completed and went to the printer.

### **(2000s)**

On my arrival in 2005, I noticed that the old log "Learning Centre" was no more; a large new Band Office had been built on the site. There was a large wireless receiver behind the old complex. There was a Development Corporation ("Devcorp") office in a trailer that had been Ruby Jumbo's home. Ruby explained that the Band had had two companies (the store and the Trout Lake Lodge), and

was advised to incorporate one; the Lodge operation was incorporated as Sambia K'e Development Corporation to deal with economic development and employment. The fall of 2005 and the spring of 2006 saw the development project for the second edition of *Sambia K'e Then and Now* completed in the community.

## CHAPTER FOUR: WEAVING THE BASKET

### GENERAL APPROACH

The book project in Samba K'e was a community development project in a participatory research mode, with an unstructured, open-ended, "weaving" approach to the research and decision-making. At the time of embarking on it in 1997, we did not have a detailed plan, though I did have experience with qualitative research and community development approaches. The book development commenced within a framework of shared understandings of the goals, ethics and general procedures of the project.

Each interview situation was approached in the best way for that particular moment and interviewee, as the participants and I informally shared the pursuit of the stories and information that would constitute the book. Jack Douglas describes creative interviewing: "...Unstructured interviews take place in largely situational everyday worlds of members of society. Thus, interviewing and interviewers must necessarily be creative, forget how-to rules and adapt themselves to the ever-changing situations they face" (Douglas 1985: 657). I recall making notes after a conversation with a friend, during which we sat on a log in the sunshine where she was having a smoke after hanging a winter supply of "stick fish" on a rack outside her house. On another occasion, after I had found an opportune moment to check the draft of an article with one of the elders, he spontaneously began talking about his concerns and visions for the Dene communities in that region; I was able to make notes as he spoke. Young adults conducted a number of interviews. For example, an adult daughter of one female elder interviewed her and wrote up the interview in English; I did a follow up interview to clarify some details that, as a non-Dene, I did not understand, and to take photos of some very old family mementos at the request of the elder. Sometimes I prearranged interviews with community members or groups; such encounters often had to be rescheduled, or led to conversations about quite different topics. In other words, the interviewing was variable and open-ended in every way, except occasionally when there were some necessary formalities such as arranging for translation.

Becker writes, "The qualitative researcher as *bricoleur* or maker of quilts uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand" (1998, 2). Day by day, the project unfolded according to how people felt and thought, and how they interacted with each other, with myself and with the idea of the book. It was made up as we went along, especially in the first edition; in the second edition, the last half of the book ended up being structured around established community goals that were posted on the Band Office walls, providing a framework for the weaving in of material contributed in the same spontaneous way as in the first edition.



Every time I returned to Smbaa K'e, I felt that I had a deeper understanding of its people and culture, but inevitably, during the two book projects, there were a few occasions when some idea I had was "off" in light of aboriginal, local perceptions. In these cases, I deferred to local choices. I feel that the community, in spite of my occasional demonstrations of "*mola*" (White person) ignorance, realized my commitment to its ownership of the project, as I was careful to relinquish my inappropriate suggestions when they became evident. I believe that the project would not have been able to proceed if I had not been generally trusted; my experience with Dene people has been that they do not act or stay involved unless they trust the person and the process.

This is not to say that there were never internal tensions, disagreements or rivalries within the community. Indeed, there were, from time to time. In any community, especially a small one, there are personalities, families, and community politics; Smbaa K'e is no exception. On occasion, I became aware of walking a tightrope between individuals who were not getting along, or of receiving a strong opinion that I could not deal with alone. In cases that I could not resolve easily, or that seemed embedded in inter-family stresses, I sought advice from one or more elders, and also consulted Dennis Deneron, the Chief, and/or Ruby Jumbo, the Band Manager. Several of the elders were particularly helpful in those kinds of situations. In the long run, it was possible to meet all of those challenges, to continue and complete the creative process together.

## **METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

### **Teamwork**

In many senses, the whole community was a team or working group; however, in the project to develop the second edition, some special technical ability was called for. From the beginning of that project, there was a lot of enthusiasm for using photos from the Band's extensive collection, and I had neither a familiarity with the photo collection and the events the photos represented, nor the skills required for working with them. Therefore, Phoebe Punch was assigned to work with me, primarily on the photos. She was already employed to do part time work in the Band Office, and agreed to extend her hours to do the photo-related tasks. It was good to have someone consistently at hand to consult about other matters as well. Norma Jumbo, the Home Care Worker, soon joined us. She did her record-keeping in the same area of the Band Office, and spontaneously entered into our discussions. Norma was practicing her South Slavey language skills while interacting with elders in the course of her duties, and had a strong commitment to keeping that generation up to date on the project. Therefore we were a core group, but this was not exclusive; there was a lively weaving of interactions between us, office staff, and people arriving and departing. Sometimes the community fabric of individuals involved with the project extended beyond the regular inhabitants. For example, one day Violet Jumbo, who is a band member living in Fort Simpson, was visiting the

community with a Dene co-worker, and both took a focused interest in the draft. They checked it carefully, making valuable suggestions about contents, details, and the use of a special "Slavey font" program to produce South Slavey terms in the Roman Orthography that is taught in the school.

### **Project Work Space**

In Samba K'e there is a wide, straight road more or less at right angles to the new gravel airstrip; the road is, in fact, the original airstrip built by community members in the 1960s. When I arrived in 1996, following the fire that had burned the old log Band Office Complex, there was a new Band Office "complex" directly across the road from the attractive log "Learning Centre" that had been the community classroom for some time. In 1997 the Centre accommodated the adult education program. It was also used some evenings by the Sewing Circle, and on Sundays by the Protestant missionary for church services. The work of writing up elder interviews began there, where there was ample shelving, space and furniture. In the evenings, when office staff members were off duty, I was able to use the Band Office computer and other office equipment; those were convenient times to print pages and put them in the draft binder.

There came a time when several of the students became nervous about a spirit in the Learning Centre, apparently because of an unconsecrated burial nearby. Several people who consulted a healer were advised to stay away. Because of this, we shifted the adult learning activities to the Band Office, which necessitated holding classes only in the evenings. This space was small, with no room for bookshelves, supplies or filing space, but provided a sort of crowded comfort as we all gathered around the council table. There was also a sense of energetic connection with other community members hanging around the recreation area just outside the office door. The new location made it easier for me to get more use of the computer to keep the draft binder current. Even after the move, I kept the Learning Centre open one afternoon a week, with coffee and cookies, for people to bring personal craft projects and sit around socializing while working together. During these gatherings, suggestions were sometimes made about the book as a natural part of conversational flow. Of course, a lot of interviewing and discussion with individuals took place not just in our new "classroom" or the Learning Centre, but in private homes or the recreation area. There was also lots of walking time spent in going to and fro from home to home, and back to the Band Office, weaving the creation of the book in snowy footpaths.

All aspects of the project continued in this manner at the time of the second project, in the fall of 2005 and spring of 2006. I was lucky to be able to live in Ralph and Violet Sanguetz's house, which was not occupied at that time. The Band Office had been moved to a new building on the site of the former Learning Centre, leaving the recreation and schoolroom functions of the Complex continuing across the road. For this visit, I had brought a computer and printer, and did a lot of my own work at "home" in the evenings. During work hours at

the new Band Office, Phoebe, Norma and I did most of our work at the long council table which was also available for socializing and occasional meetings. Since the office was a social gathering place as well as an administrative centre where individuals came for assistance with problems, there was a natural flow of people of all ages who could and did get involved in discussions, and could check the progress of the draft material in the binder

The open-concept design of the Office facilitated communication. Everything that happened could be seen and overheard by the Reception staff, Manager and Chief, bystanders, socializers, and people like Phoebe and Norma, whose regular work was done behind a partial room divider next to the table. When meetings were in progress, the three of us would shift to Norma and Phoebe's work space behind the divider. As in the earlier project, there was also a lot of footwork involved, as any or all of us visited homes to do interviews, seek advice and get information, pick up material, or deliver some that needed to be checked by contributors.

### **Interviewing, Language and Translation**

In 1997, many of the first interviews were done by the adult students as part of their Aurora College communications program. Because the students understood the South Slavey language spoken by the elders, and some of them spoke it as well, it was not too difficult for them to translate interview reports for use in the book. As time went on, I did an increasing proportion of the interviewing. With elders, this often required having a translator, usually one of my students or a relative of the elder. The interviews were not taped, as the elders were quite set against this; one, in particular, Angelique Lomen, expressed a strong opinion about the necessity of using the oral tradition for traditional knowledge. Even in 2005-2006, this position was adhered to. The female elders listened to a young translator's account of a man in Fort Liard who had told his life story on tape just a week before he died; she expressed the opinion that it was good that he had had his story taped so that future generations could hear him with his own voice and words. Some of the women nodded their heads, but none of them changed their minds about taping.

In 1998, it was ironic that when it was decided to print all of the elders' stories in both English and South Slavey, it was necessary to translate all of the stories (written in English) back into South Slavey for a special section of the book. No one in the community wanted to do the translation, so it was done by a Dene woman in another community; due to dialect differences, the translations were then redone by community member Violet Sanguéz (nee Jumbo), who had become qualified as a Language Specialist (Ruby Jumbo, personal communication 1998). These stories, written in both languages, became a valuable resource in the school's traditional skills program. There was a double irony; the Slavey translations had been printed in Roman Orthography, rather than in syllabics. I was unaware that most of the elders could not read Roman

Orthography, and was truly shocked in 2005 when the female elders told me that they had not been able to read their own stories. When I asked what they would like to do about that in the new edition, they said that they would like to try to do some writing in syllabics. They had not used syllabics for years, but were ready to make the attempt.

This set off a series of social gatherings of the women, myself and a translator, during which we drank tea and chatted, while getting most of the elders' names and brief versions of a few life stories written in syllabics. It was a struggle, but they seemed very pleased when the old literacy skills began to be regained. Smiles and laughter broke out during the writing. One of them dropped out due to family stress, and one felt that she was too old to write but was always invited to join us. A young man, Tony Jumbo, became interested, as he was learning syllabics. He assisted in writing the names of elders who were not in the tea-party group, if they gave permission. There was a memorable moment when one elder, Mary, usually quite taciturn, came excitedly into the Band Office where a few community members were socializing. She put a paper with syllabics on the table, and used her finger as she read from it; then she smiled broadly and said something. It was translated to me: "She says that she's 76 years old, and she can still read and write". The reaction among her listeners conveyed pride and pleasure in Mary's accomplishment.

### **Ideas and Topics**

Ideas and topics for the books were generated in a variety of ways as we went along. As mentioned, we began in 1997 by interviewing elders. One of the adult students, who was illiterate and did not speak English, drew a picture of a moose which later was miniaturized to accompany every page number in the book. I asked several of the school children what they would like to do for the project. Some contributed diary entries written during the fall hunt; one wrote a poem, while another wrote about a plane crash that had occurred in the fall. One little boy wanted his photo included, wearing his father's childhood moccasins and "gauntlets" that his mother had made for him. We also used a photo of a miniature snowmobile his older brother had made for him, making tracks in the snow just like a real one. Three of the students and young people contributed art work. As a few people loaned photos for the book, others got the idea and more were made available. Although most of the Band's records and photos had been lost in the 1995 fire, it was pointed out that there was still a collection of photos carefully stored in the office, and some of these were included.

I contacted the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (the museum for the Northwest Territories), requesting the oldest photos they had from the "Trout Lake" area, and they generously sent some. Tom Kotchea, who had married into the community, told me that he had come with a "Mountie" patrol as a Special Constable. He did not have any photos from those patrols, but suggested that I contact the R.C.M.P. to see if they had any. They did not, but sent a series of

patrol reports, some of which were included in the book (SKDB 1998: 113-118). As people outside the community became aware of the project, a number of interesting items were sent; letters from former teachers; the story of a missionary who had been saved by community members after crashing his small plane on the lake in a blizzard; copies of newspaper reports; a priest's letter following the tragic death of a much-loved teacher and her family who had died one Christmas vacation in another plane crash; and a newspaper article about the community's representation at the Berger Inquiry in 1975 (SKDB 1988: 8-9).

The more material that was collected, the more ideas were generated. Lists of teachers, previous chiefs, community trading posts and stores, and place names in both English and South Slavey were assembled. Stories of the old days were included, along with several legends; a personal story by Andrew Lomen, who had been raised on the land by his mother, Angelique; various stories and poems; information on Trout Lake Lodge, police and health services; and church activities. Various people wrote about education in the community, including personal stories about residential school. There were several accounts of disasters of various kinds, including a plane crash at the end of the 1997 fall hunt. Chief Dennis Deneron amusingly described some community experiments with farm animals, gardening and other novel procedures, and also some of the political pressures and developments during his long years as chief, beginning at age eighteen. The same sort of process was typical of the second-edition project as well. With more material and photos to deal with, a decision was made to organize it according to the six community goals. These goals had been developed previously in community workshops, and posted at the Band Office. They provided a democratic framework upon which to weave disparate details into the pattern of community life and aspirations.

### **Keeping Everyone “In the Loop”**

Everyone had access to the draft binder; there was lots of discussion leading to corrections on photos, articles, and other contents of the draft. Some individuals did not come into the office often, were away for periods of time, or were not physically able to visit the office unless they had urgent business. Therefore, we did our best to keep everyone informed by printing a “Weekly Update” poster, and putting it up in places where it would likely be noticed. When there was something urgent, I tried unsuccessfully to make information sheets available by putting them in the individual notice boxes in the Office; however, it became obvious that most of them were rarely cleared. Then Bettilyn Jumbo, the store clerk, came up with a better strategy, on her own initiative: putting them into peoples' grocery bags. Even so, we knew we were missing the non-readers and non-English speakers, so Norma personally notified people we knew couldn't read notices.

## **Reviewing and Revising**

In both projects, material was word-processed and photos placed experimentally on draft pages, which were checked with contributors before being put into the large draft binder which was always on the Band Office table. As people flipped through it, comments and suggestions were made. For instance, I was told not to continue working on a set of family trees, and to crop one photo to eliminate the image of a deceased child in a group of little ones. Sometimes it was necessary to develop consensus when there was a difference of opinion. In the second project, because we were working in the open-concept office, discussions could end up including many others. One day, several young women got into a lively discussion about why there are so many rules for the behaviour of women; the conclusion seemed to be that it was because women have so much "power", which I take to be a reference to spiritual power. On sensitive matters, Phoebe and Norma together carried material to the elders for consultation. For example, after it was suggested that we include a list of traditional customs, Phoebe and Norma asked all of the elders for information to develop the list. When a draft copy was completed and shown to the elders, it became clear that they were uncomfortable with including all of it; the explanation was that they did not want outsiders to think that they were "superstitious people". The list was carefully reduced before inclusion in the draft.

## **Distance Communication**

After completion of the draft, there was a problem when a set of CDs that was to convey photos and images to the book designer was apparently corrupted. Many photos, selected carefully from the band collection and donated by individuals, were available on my jump drives, but a great deal of time was spent in retrieving the selected images or finding substitute ones. In the process, I have received lists of missing images from Elaine, the Book Designer, and have phoned persons in the community who might be able to locate, possibly re-scan, and email the images back to Elaine. Some late material (photos and the Joseph Jumbo story) had to be dealt with sensitively. Joseph's story was paraphrased from a transcript of an interview and typed; then it was faxed to Yvonne Jumbo, daughter of Edward Jumbo, for checking. This part of the development has been difficult and time-consuming, but was finally completed by February 2009. The entire draft manuscript, pre-printed, was sent to the community for checking: in full colour, pages printed back to back, in CD form and in hard copy placed in a binder for easy reading and checking.

We are lucky to have had Brenda Jumbo as Book Manager at this stage. She has all of the abilities and qualities necessary, and is committed to making a contribution to the community in this way. She established the procedures for community checking of the manuscript, in consultation with Acting Chief Dolphus Jumbo and Band Manager Ruby Jumbo, and it is now finished.

## Ethics

Regarding research ethics, I made a strong case when preparing for the ethics review for this research. Normally, in preparing to do research, consent forms are designed and a commitment is made to use them. However, because of my previous involvement in Sambia K'e, and the nature of this specific community and project, I strongly believed that the use of formal consent forms would be alienating to the natural communication patterns in the community. At best, it would be regarded as a foreign and peculiar practice, with implications of lack of trust – at worst, it could be taken as an insulting intrusion of academic practice into a community whose members were the agents of their own group representation, within which ethical frameworks had already been established according to their cultural norms. I was struck by a pertinent comment by Lykes about the negative effect of using consent forms with a particular research group: “The informed consent form which I introduced as a mechanism for ‘protecting the subjects’ of the research project, was instead a barrier . . . .” (1989: 178). Another relevant anecdote is also offered by Fine *et al*: “The (apparent) rapport that Mun had with respondents seemed to unravel whenever he presented the consent form. . . . These respondents . . . are constantly required to read bureaucratic forms that are convoluted and technical, and are told to sign off on others’ responsibilities while signing on to their own” (2000: 113). I recognize that most research projects clearly call for the use of consent forms, but believe strongly that it would have been culturally inappropriate to use them in this particular collaborative one. I spoke to the Band Manager to check out my conviction on this, and she agreed with my perspective (Ruby Jumbo, personal communication 2006).

Several elements in my working relationship with the community could explain how consent was “manifest” in the absence of a formal process. First, there was an overarching community decision in 1997, approved by the elders at the commencement of the work on the first edition. In Sambia K'e and, I expect, in other traditional aboriginal communities, a decision by the elders is taken to represent a consensual decision of the community (Deneron, personal communication 1997). Second, every person at the initial feast was assured, in understandable, translated language, that the material for the book would be available for everyone to look over in case changes were needed, and that individuals could remove their own contributions at any time, if they wished to do so. Third, at an individual level, I was careful and consistent when requesting individual input on the project, making it clear that it was that person's decision, and that his or her contribution would be brought back for checking and for a final decision on whether it was all right to include it. In dealing with elders who could not speak English, the completed draft was reviewed with them by Slavey-speaking community members.

In the case of material that seemed personally sensitive, I reminded individuals that it would eventually appear in print form where anyone could read

it, in order to ensure that this exposure had been considered. In one case, a contributor waffled about including an item; each time the subject came up, I mentioned that it was completely up to the contributor whether to do so or not. When I was leaving, I asked for a final decision, as the draft was soon going into editors' hands. The decision was made to include the item. In another case, an elder avoided me for a while, and when I got the message from a relative that it would not be possible to get a life story, I ceased my attempts to get one: eventually, it was agreed to use two photos in place of a story. Fourth, in such a small community, there are few secrets; everyone seems to be aware of everything that goes on. This is an ethical safety factor for an outside researcher such as myself, as I am sure that everyone in Sambaa K'e would have heard about it if I had gone against my word by including an item against someone's wishes. The outcome of that, I am certain, would have been lack of participation by other participants, which would have brought the project to a halt.

In the production of both editions, we engaged together in the tasks of searching for, examining, considering, discussing, evaluating, and weaving together the elements that would represent the community to the world, and would constitute its internal document for the younger generations. One strand after another about past and present lives of the people revealed itself in life histories, art, poetry and other elements woven into the final product: their "community book".

All of this activity constituted a process of weaving a shared fabric out of the threads of tradition and change. In Sambaa K'e, there is a noticeable commitment to maintaining traditions. There were a number of occasions when it was explained to me that some item of traditional cultural practice needed to be included in the book to inform younger people about it. For example, crossing the lake is now done in boats rather than in canoes, but it is still recommended by the elders that women, especially in their "moon time" (menstruation), keep the boat close to the shore rather than crossing directly (SKDB 2006: 101-104). This traditional practice seems to resonate with cultural cautions against women stepping over the bodies of other people (various informants; Helm 2000: 277; Dene Nation Traditional Protocol 2008). Thus, strands of new practices and ancient tradition are woven in the common event of lake crossing.

Girls are no longer isolated at the start of menstruation, but are expected to follow certain prohibitions, even if they sometimes leave their homes for paid employment. I had an amusing education about this tradition, when I noticed several people laughing a bit about my habit of carrying my own regular coffee cup to avoid sharing germs. Finally, one person said, "You seem to be pretty old to be carrying a cup like that." I was quite puzzled, and a female friend explained that young women in their "moon time" carry their own cups even to work, so that they will not risk using a cup that a man might use. This combining of a modern practice with traditional belief would prevent such a problem from occurring and would be a signal to all of the woman's "dangerous" condition.



## **OUTCOMES**

### **The First Edition in Print**

Only one hundred copies of the first edition were printed, at a cost of fifteen thousand dollars. This was expensive per copy, but no one paid for family copies. Information about the book got onto the Internet, and still tourists and other visitors ask for copies. All families received one, and copies were given to contributing agencies, to the territorial library and education resource library, and to me. The last one in the Band Office was accidentally given away, and it seems that someone took the school copy. Only the family copies remain in the community, and there are many more families now, as the children of 1998 have begun having children and establishing families themselves. Some of them have not seen the book, as many parents had put their single copy carefully in storage. I have promised to donate photocopied versions of the first edition to the classroom and the Band.

### **Production of the Second Edition**

In 2005, when I called Chief Dennis Deneron to explore the idea of returning to Samba K'e to participate in a community project, he promptly said that the community really needed a second edition of the book. I was delighted to hear that the book had been a valuable resource until the last school copy disappeared. Classroom use had not been part of the original purposes for producing the book, so it was a pleasant surprise to know how valued it had been.

One of the difficulties in the research phase of the second-edition project was that I could not remain in Samba K'e for longer than seven weeks, as I had to teach my final semester for Mohawk College. When the seven weeks proved to be too short for completion of the work on the draft, we planned for continuing in my absence, selecting a "working group" of people who would communicate with each other, and with me, by fax, email and telephone. This simply did not work; I was distracted by teaching three new courses, and somehow the electronic connections just didn't "cut it" – then the Fall Hunt, Christmas and the New Year disrupted the community focus. There were also problems about photos being transmitted on CDs and jump drives. This certainly was a case of learning by mistakes. I was becoming quite desperate about how to get back to Samba K'e to complete the project, when I was given a generous unsolicited gift by my Quaker friend, Rex Barger, to cover my expensive return air fare: many thanks, Rex! Then I was able to stay another month, until the draft was assembled.

Aboriginal Day (spring solstice) was about ten days before I was to leave for home. We decided to pass the word around the community that we would have the entire draft available for everyone to see at the Aboriginal Day feast. We worked hard to prepare all of the pages, each in a plastic protector, then to tape them all up at eye level around the four walls of the gymnasium where the feast

was being prepared. Two school children volunteered to help with the task. It was a very rewarding time at the feast, watching people moving around the walls, in groups or alone, commenting on what they saw. The Band Manager thanked me for my work, and seemed very pleased. We then had a few days to do further proofreading and additions before my departure.

The more professional look of this second edition should add to its commercial value, and, I imagine, will be a source of pride for the Sambia K'e people. The second edition will have about 140 photographs; it should be an attractive and marketable product. Of course, the appearance of the book will be a less critical feature to the people of Sambia K'e than the more in-depth historic and cultural contents, which they hope to use as a teaching tool for current and future generations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: PATTERNS IN THE WEAVE**

### **REPRESENTATION IN SAMBAA K'E**

Recalling the commencement of the first project in 1997, the first aim of the adult students was simply to record the memories of the elders about the history of the community, and to share this resource with the rest of the community: an internal representation by the elders, facilitated by the students. The second aim was to develop a book to represent the community and its people to the outside world, as a corrective to negative impressions about them in Turner's book. The first aim became subsumed in the second, as the goal developed into a community project with a focus on representing Sambaa K'e and its people to a reading public outside the community.

The community's representation of itself was available to the public through the agencies which received copies of the first edition. An originally unintended internal representation in the classroom was later seen as an essential one. Here the history, legends, and tales of community and personal events were available to enrich the children's awareness of their own place and culture. The elders' life stories, legends and advice were available in both English and South Slavey, providing generational transmission of the elders' words along with language enrichment for the students. This enrichment is accomplished by formal teaching and by elders' visits to the classroom to tell their stories and legends, and to teach Dene values and skills.

The classroom application connected the first and second projects; the main stated aim for the production of a second edition of the book in 2005 was to provide an updated version of the first edition for classroom use. At this point, production of an attractive, marketable book seemed to be important, but was secondary to the goal of transmitting traditional information and values to the youth of the community. We had moved in motivation from the original goal of internal representation of elders' stories to the audience of the whole community, then to the goal of representation to outsiders, and back to a focus on the internal audience of the school children, with representation to the outside world being desirable but not the primary aim.

The overall community goals, established during prior community workshops and used as an organizing framework for the material that would represent the community in the book's second edition, are listed below. Following the list of goals is a partial list of some dimensions of community life that were organized according to these goals to structure the second edition.

### **Community Goals**

1. Increased sobriety and healing
2. Continued use and respect for traditions and language
3. Self-government on traditional lands – based on strong, effective leadership
4. Well-educated and well-trained community members, especially youth and...
5. Increased opportunities for employment and economic developments in a variety of areas.
6. Protection and sustainable use of the land, water and wildlife

(Permission of Smbaa K'e Dene Band, 2005)

### **Aspects Included in the Book**

- The seasonal round and community camps
- Events and cultural practices in the early history of the Smbaa K'e Got'ine
- More recent events and cultural practices
- Values, issues, concerns and advice
- Photo and art images of many aspects of community life in the settlement and on the land
- Crafts, skills, art, humour and poetry
- Records of past chiefs; teachers; stores and trading posts
- Environmental resources documented by community members
- Lives of various groups: elders, young mothers, newcomers, children and youth
- Retention of specific traditional skills
- Housing and travel
- Education, employment, health and social support
- Language
- Residential school experiences, mental health and addiction issues
- Technology and services
- Travel, trade and shopping
- Political and economic change

Describing all of these, and how the weaving of past and present is represented in the two editions, is beyond the scope of this thesis; therefore, in the next section, “Patterns in the Weave”, I detail just two of them, using material from both editions as examples of the weaving process in Smbaa K'e. The two I have chosen are Health and Education. I have chosen the topic of Health because it pertains so closely to the processes and wellbeing of the people of the community, and includes many dimensions of past and present community life; the topic of Education is similarly broad and deep and is, in fact, interwoven with health issues.

## **PATTERNS IN THE WEAVE: HEALTH**

### **Health and Susceptibility**

In dealing with this topic, I have in mind the World Health Organization's definition of health: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organization 1946: 160). When thinking about the health of any early aboriginal group, the confusing and contradictory subject of epidemics comes to mind. Waldram, Herring and Young are clear about the difficulties involved in untangling differing information and interpretations in this area, stating, "Demographic change and encounters with new pathogens of European origin involved a complicated, multifactorial process located in the particular social histories and interaction networks of specific communities" (2007: 56). I am making every effort not to make assumptions about the *Sambaa K'e Got'ine*, but to approach early reports about conditions regarding food sufficiency, hardship and disease, as well as elders' stories, with both understanding and objectivity.

In prehistoric times, the Dene obviously had to depend upon natural remedies from the flora and fauna around them, whatever spiritual and social practices could help with mental or emotional problems, and their own shared lore, skills and ingenuity. Their diets also consisted entirely of natural substances, unlike the often over-processed and chemically adulterated food now available in the community store at high prices, and they were constantly engaged in physical activities in the outdoors. The other resource that probably was important prehistorically was the social one of "healers"; this is still the case (SKDB 2006: 95). These healers may have been regular members of the *Sambaa K'e Got'ine* society of scattered families, or may (as now) have been spiritually knowledgeable individuals who served related groups within one or more territories.

It should be pointed out that anthropologists studying the early Dene note a traditional focus on spiritual "power" (Mason 1946: 40; Honigmann 1946: 76-82, 131-132; Helm 2000: 271-283). For the traditional Dene, the human-animal universe was one of moral dimensions, with animals having power to offer or withhold their gifts when humans were living good or bad lives, following or not following prescriptions and proscriptions with respect and competence. Human wellbeing depended on right relations with the animal world (Honigmann 1946: 76-77, 132). Frank Tetcho stated in the first edition, "The animals and the humans used to be equal and it should be like that. That's the reason the animals are against people now and you have to have a gun if you want to go further from the community" (SKDB 2006: 49). Joseph Jumbo said, "Some animals can tell when you're good or bad. . . . Some people are not good, because when they go hunting, they don't shoot anything, or when they see chickens, the chickens fly away. . . . The animals don't like them. They take off from them" (Kritsch 1990: 2). This is a further dimension of discourse, in which the Dene communicate, not just with

each other and the outside world, but with the animal persons aware of their states of mind and morality.

Similarly, some humans have had spiritual power to hurt or to help each other, and illness or misfortune in the hunt were often attributed to malevolent or out-of-control spiritual power (Mason 1946: 39). There are hints of these beliefs in the stories and legends recounted by the elders, and it seems likely that they are carried over from earlier times through oral tradition. Dealing with very problematic situations must have required the intervention of recognized healers, whose power could assist in putting right this sort of thing. Such services in former times would have been a resource supplementing the everyday healing skills of knowledgeable individuals in the family groups; this is today a female role, typically of elders with a lifetime of experience. A section of the 2006 edition is devoted to natural remedies and their uses (SKDB: 96-98). I noticed, in these lists and descriptions, that there are multiple remedies for each illness. It struck me that this would have developed as a practical strategy in a mobile lifestyle where an individual could become ill and need a remedy in any season or in any part of the landscape; if one plant or type of bark could not be found in a swampy area, for instance, perhaps a different one could be found there.

What do we know about health and disease among subarctic groups in early contact and fur trade days? Dick Preston states, regarding diseases among early subarctic Cree, "A severe shortage of food animals coincided with these diseases" (Preston 2001, 1), and speaks of difficulties in interpreting Whitemen's reports about the condition of Crees. These reports generally were not based on longterm or in-depth observation of Native groups and their situations. Preston also mentions the tendency for academics to give undue credit to written information on the subject (1-2). Waldram, Herring and Young also mention the unreliability of information about aboriginal populations and epidemic statistics. They state what I believe common sense suggests: "The important relationship between diet and disease is well known. Malnutrition and undernutrition can occur for many reasons, but whatever the cause, they increase susceptibility to infectious disease" (2006: 68). Even in situations of abundant game, sick hunters would not be able to obtain food for themselves and their families, and in situations where there had been a decline in game, this would have been even worse; the reverse would likely also be true. In areas where natural cycles, the fur trade or white intruders had interfered with the availability of game, starving or undernourished hunters would have been more susceptible to diseases.

Another consideration is offered by Dick Preston, regarding the stories about disease, hunger and hardship told by Crees. The James Bay Cree are a subarctic group, as are the Dene; there might be similar patterns in Dene stories in the Sambia K'e book. Preston notes that the number of stories told about disease by Crees is much less than the number told about hardship, and hypothesizes that "Perhaps stories are not so often made or repeated when there is no known way of coping with the hardship of diseases" (2001: 1) Keeping this in mind, I have

noticed some similarities and differences between the Cree and the Dene. The stories told by the Sambaa K'e elders are clearly intended for consumption by the young people of the community; many of them emphasize hard work, hardships and "making the sacrifice of living that life" (SKDB 2006: 105). This seems to be intended as a contrast with young people's soft modern lifestyle: a challenge to the young to live like "real Dene" (Dene/Cree Elderspeak 2004). Here the ideals of the Dene way are central to the generational discourse. There are relatively few mentions of disease and epidemics, compared with the stories of Dene elders in the Fort Providence book, *Our Elders* (Thom, Blondin-Townsend 1977). The Sambaa K'e people who mentioned these problems in every case spoke briefly, with little overt emotion, so that I had not consciously noticed how many of these situations there were until I reviewed all of the elders' stories to look for them.

Dick Preston focuses on the cultural, social and emotional disruptive factors that seemed to make individuals susceptible to infection by TB in particular; in my opinion, this would apply somewhat to other infectious diseases (2001: 7-10). Waldram, Herring and Young similarly state, "The social circumstances surrounding the encounter with pathogens are of paramount importance. . . The social history of each Aboriginal community must be evaluated to determine the extent to which infectious disease debilitated and depleted it" (2007: 71).

### **The Dene and the Sambaa K'e Health Situation**

It seems that until the introduction of European diseases, some changes in hunting patterns due to the fur trade, and disruptive activities of non-native trappers, the Dene generally did well despite the harsh climate. One sign of the stability of the seasonally-based aboriginal economy is the apparent lack of interest in trapping in the earliest days of the fur trade; the traders seem to have had difficulty in the earliest days in getting natives involved in trapping. There are many reports of enticements offered to attract them, such as alcohol, prizes for productivity, and gifts to "trade chiefs" (Ray 1974: 142-3; Helm 2000: 173-175). Robert McVicar, a trader at Fort Resolution, commented on the self-sufficiency of the Chipewyan group of Dene: "The abundance in which the Indians live . . . render the Chipewyans fond of revisiting hither (*viz*: to their hunting grounds) . . . and to live independently of European supplies" and, "A few of the Indians . . . observed that their forefathers lived well and happy on their lands before the White man came among them, and they could still do the same" (Kakfui 1984: 13).

Regarding the issue of hunger, which was a problem in many areas, it seems that the Sambaa K'e Dene did not have severe problems. Their territory is large, with a variety of natural areas providing different resources. In the past, when an essential game animal became scarce in one area, mobile family groups moved to different locations: an essential survival strategy already mentioned. When large game, the mainstay of the meat diet, was not obtainable, smaller game

could usually suffice: beaver, muskrat, porcupines, rabbit, birds and fish. As a more recent example, Mary Deneron mentions in the book that her mother, following the death of Mary and Marie's father, did a good job of supplying the family by means of these resources, with some help from her uncle Frank Tetcho (SKDB 2006: 106).

The large territory and these strategies may have been common among all of the Dene groups; the particular advantage the Sambia K'e group may have had was their geographic location. I interpret it as an enclave, with the major rivers flowing around it, their territory more centred on the inland lake than on the rivers. In fur trade times, other groups may have had more contact with Whites who had their trading posts and travel routes along the Liard and Mackenzie.

Various elders mentioned that the people used to be healthier than they are now: Frank, aged about 115, states,

Older people used to be active and were used to living off the land. They were active till they were very old. Even older people, in winter, removed snow and put spruce boughs down and slept by the open fire. They were used to it, so it was just normal for them. (SKDB 2006: 46).

He continues, "During my childhood and until my adult age, I only saw . . . deaths three or four years apart. Nowadays people die easily and at a younger age" (54). Mrs. Sarah Jumbo mentioned her grandmother's health: "My grandmother used to walk around with no arthritis. . . . In the old days people used to travel around all the time" (SKDB 2006: 131).

The exception to the elders' reports of general wellbeing in the Sambia K'e group is the evidence of social impacts due to epidemics and non-epidemic diseases. Following the arrival of fur traders in the early 1800s, Roman Catholic missionaries entered the Northwest, soon followed by the Anglicans (Bromley 1986: 4). The presence of non-natives had powerful effects on the health of the Dene and other aboriginal groups, leading to epidemics and non-epidemic illnesses. The "great epidemic" of 1928 had a devastating effect on the Dene in and near Fort Simpson (Helm 2000: 40, 207; Ray 1976: 48-51). Mission hospitals and residential schools had been established near the trading posts, initially caring for orphans of the epidemics. In the Mackenzie District, the Roman Catholics prevailed, and these institutions were run by church administration and staff (Bromley 1986: 14; Choquette 1995: 1974-78).

Although there was little mention of hunger (but lots about other kinds of hardship) in the elders' stories, there were certainly a lot of elders in the community whose lives had been affected by disease and epidemics, especially the 1928 epidemic (Helm 2000: 306). Frank Tetcho mentioned that his mother died of disease, but did not give any details; he said his father died of old age.



Angelique Jumbo said that she was born in 1928 and had a little sister who died in the epidemic. Her mother died of a cold and pneumonia (flu?) when Angelique was a teenager and had lost her father three years before. She stayed with the Grey Nuns in Fort Simpson for a couple of years, then joined her adopted brothers in the bush (the brothers' parents had died in the epidemic (SKDB 2006: 145). It has already been mentioned that relatives of Mrs. Sarah and Emily Jumbo walked all the way around the lake during an epidemic, and at some camps found no one alive. Angele Jumbo said, "My parents both died out there in the bush. Other relatives took us in and raised us out in the bush. . . . I had a lot of uncles at Trout Lake. . . . They all died one after the other" (SKDB 1998: 57-58). Mary and Marie Deneron's father died in hospital in Edmonton when they were young. (SKDB 1998: 66). Joe Punch was not born in Sambia K'e; he was orphaned when he was a young child (probably in the 1928 epidemic), and he was raised in the residential school at Fort Providence till he was a teenager. He was related to the Sambia K'e people and came to the community after encountering some of the Sambia K'e men in Fort Simpson (SKDB 1998: 51-56).

One of Joe's children had TB as a young child and was in the hospital in Fort Simpson for a long time before being sent to residential school. That was the only direct information I encountered about TB among the Sambia K'e people, but there likely were other cases that were not mentioned. It is interesting that some of the residential schools in Canada were incubators of disease. Dickason mentions the Sarcee Boarding School, in which over a quarter of the children had died between 1894 and 1908. That statistic is shocking in itself, but most of these children had died, away from their families, of TB. This was not in the Northwest Territories, nor in the time period when the Sambia K'e children were in residential school, but it illustrates one of the many possible risks to aboriginal children in residential care (Dickason 1993: 334-335).

A look at the health of Dene groups in that time period cannot ignore the impact of influenza and tuberculosis on the population. Large numbers of people, sometimes whole communities, died and left children orphaned. As described above, many of the elders in the region were raised by relatives or others due to the death of their parents and other family members (Thom and Blondin-Townsend 1997). As already mentioned by Kakfui, the 1920s were a particularly difficult time due to these impacts, and the actions of White trappers interfering with established trap lines in native territories; the treaties which promised to protect the hunting and trapping rights of the Dene on their own land proved to be a disappointment. Disease and discouragement debilitated the population, until the Dene gained more control in their own lands (Kakfui 1984: 17).

### **Settlement Days**

The Dene were able to mobilize politically to protect their territories and rights, even at a time before they were gathered in settlements. I was told by a Dene First Nations administrator in 1987 that in the 1970s, the school residences

were put under the administration of regional councils of chiefs rather than that of the churches. (personal communication 1987). There continued to be problems with the wellbeing of children in the school hostels; after the closing of the Fort Simpson hostel (McGregor 1987c ), better arrangements evolved by stages for the housing of schoolchildren far from their homes. The community schools have slowly included higher grades so that children can stay at home longer in their communities. The government health services seem now to be encouraging the retention of traditional healing practices in the absence of resident doctors and nurses in the small communities. A combination of improvements, based on an increase in political control of their territories has brought about a gradual increase in general wellbeing (Kakfui 1984: 44).

There was a close connection between the movement of Dene groups into settlements and the entrance of large numbers of Dene children into residential schools. These schools were supported by the Canadian government with a stated purpose: the assimilation of Indians (Dickason 1993: 333). The Christian missionaries who ran these schools on behalf of the government regarded much in native culture as evil. There is clear documentation of aboriginal peoples being forbidden to continue their traditional dances, drumming, songs, and spiritual rituals; even the language was forbidden in residential schools (Dickason 1993: 336). The result for many Dene who had been hospitalized or attended residential schools was a deep sense of shame about traditional expressions of their culture. According to Victor Jumbo, "The nuns would say, ' . . . You're not allowed to speak Slavey'. But they would talk . . . in French and not one knew what they were talking about. When they got the new school in Simpson, we went there and the same nuns were there: my worst nightmare" (SKDB 2006: 136). Victor also described beatings, the death of one of his cousins, and a number of nightmarish experiences which still disturb him (SKDB 2006: 137). Experiences like these left lifelong psychological scars, resulting for many people in alcoholism and personal instability which has had intergenerational effects on private and family lives and the social health of the whole community (Dolphus Jumbo and Margaret Jumbo, personal communications 2006; CBC June 13, 2008).

For the families in the settlement itself, health matters have been dealt with through a weaving of traditional approaches and whatever modern medicine is available. In Sambaa K'e in 1997, I noticed the medicinal smell of simmering Labrador Tea in Frank Tetcho's home, where he was bedridden but still strong in intellect. When I inquired about it, I was told that the government was encouraging the people to use the traditional remedies. In many homes in the community, I saw rat root and other medicinal substances, on hand to be used when needed. In 1987, I had been told about the Dene "feeding the fire" ceremony for community prayer. Edward Jumbo indicates that the ceremony had been used for various purposes, including praying for people who were ill:

I remember my grandfather; used to go out on the land. He taught me about 'feeding the fire'; later I asked questions about what it's

for and what the purpose is. I learned that it's really important for us Dene. The purpose is to go on the land, to hunt; back then, it was really hard to hunt an animal. We would get a moose by offering something to the fire, praying and asking the Creator for something, like asking for good luck. It's true; they did the prayer for Angele and Angelique when they were sick. Even though they have relatives far away, they do that when they're sick, including the fire ceremony prayer. If they're living a life that pleases the Creator, their prayer will be answered (SKDB 2006: 123).

The healer, Modest Pierre, follows a slightly different procedure in the ceremony from that used by the Sambaa K'e people, but this seems to be acceptable. Edward Jumbo says,

I heard, when I was young, what my grandpa used to share with my dad. When you do the fire-feeding, you use some of the leaves that fell in the autumn. You have to cut them up and include them with the tobacco. You collect some of the leaves that fall and keep enough for three or four fire-feedings, included with the tobacco. It's said that when Modest does it, he usually uses tobacco and moose fat, and pours it over the tobacco in the fire, and never includes the leaves. Maybe he just does it as it's done in his hometown (SKDB 2006: 122-124).

I have observed various other ways in which wellbeing is maintained and health problems dealt with in Sambaa K'e: the large amount of time that is spent in the bush by the community as a whole during seasonal camps, family and individual trips to favourite places on the land, and forays to obtain bush resources; community feasts and celebrations which sometimes include traditional drumming, singing and dancing; humour; cultural emphasis on maintaining traditional practices, skills and values; and dependency on wild meat as a large dietary component. In addition to the health service provision that is available, there remain various traditional practices such as the use of natural remedies and reliance on spiritual healing.

Drumming and singing reportedly had stopped in the community (possibly as part of the cessation of drumming in Fort Simpson as a "mourning tribute" to the victims of the 1928 epidemic, mentioned by Helm (2000: 306). In 1997-1998 drumming and singing were being re-learned and performed again by a mixed-age group of men (personal communication, anonymous); a photo in the community book shows women and girls dancing in a circle to drumming and singing by the male drumming group at a "tea dance" in the school gym. I include this under the heading of Health as a sign of continuing connection with the drum, drum songs and dancing; the drum is a traditional spiritual symbol for the Dene, therefore playing a part in wellbeing. Dickason writes, in describing the return of traditional ceremonials after government interference with them ceased, "As anthropologist

Michael Asch has pointed out for the Dene of the Northwest, dances in their various forms with their accompanying songs symbolically emphasized reciprocity and co-operation, fundamental for creating a sense of community” (1993: 327; Asch 1988: 89-97). Dolphus has mentioned to me, after the deaths of two young men recently, that the community is losing its drummers, but he had received an offer from another community to do some drum teaching with young men in the community (Dolphus Jumbo, personal communication 2009).

One of the promises given to the Sambaa K'e people in the early 1960s, to help persuade them to gather into a settlement, was that they would receive better medical care. Joe Punch, one of the elders, provided information about health provision immediately after the first formation of the settlement in 1961. He says that health services were at first handled by “Lay Dispensers”. Joe was the first one in the community; he trained in Inuvik and handled the job for a decade. He recalls preparing the old airstrip for medivacs by going up and down the whole length and width of it on snowshoes, “fifteen minutes each way”. He says that visiting doctors began coming to Sambaa K'e in the early 1960s. The Health Centre was built in 1979 or 1980. Babies were generally delivered in Fort Simpson, with high-risk pregnancies delivered in Yellowknife. Joe mentions two young women selected to attend an orientation and training program for Dehcho Health and Social Services Board Members: “The goal is for 'people of the Dehcho to fully control and manage their health care’”, and the training was to include “ways that the Dene people cared for themselves and dealt with illnesses before western medicine came into the North” (Joe Punch, personal communication 1998).

For many decades, a doctor and a nurse or two have flown in for a day once a month, and the dentist every year or two. A Community Health Worker has provided first aid, had a telephone contact with a doctor, and could call in a “medivac” in case of a serious emergency. A Home Care Worker has supported the elderly or ill in their homes. For emotional issues, there has been a counsellor available by phone from Fort Liard, who has visited once a month or so, but males and females have declined to consult any counselor of the opposite gender. The community has hosted healing workshops intermittently.

### **The Current Health Situation**

Although modern medications are available, many people still depend on traditional remedies, and only turn to the Health Centre for medically prescribed medicines when the traditional ones do not bring about a cure. The female elders are sharing their knowledge of healing materials from nature. In many homes, rat root, fungus and other natural healing substances can be seen on windowsills or shelves. The older women of the community were enthusiastic contributors to the section in the second edition of the community book, which lists and describes various natural remedies (SKDB 2006: 95-98). I have already mentioned the variety of leaves, bark, fungus and grease used for common ailments. Spiritual

healing also continues. Modest Pierre, the healer, is still practicing and available to serve the population. When he is at home in Meander River, he can be consulted over the phone, but he is now often in Sambia K'e to visit his daughter and grandchildren.

In my observation, most people continue to rely on wild meat as the major dietary component; people are very active in daily fishing, checking of rabbit snares, and obtaining other game. The mainstay is moose, supplemented by many smaller game animals, birds and fish; spruce grouse are referred to as "chicken" in local parlance. In 1997-1998, when I was there for almost eight months, I was sometimes included in meat sharing when an animal was killed. Since the ecosystem does not provide any starchy foods except wild carrot (SKDB 1998: 6), and the people historically had to depend almost entirely on meat, it is significant that an all-meat diet based on wild game apparently offers all the nutrients needed (personal communication with an anonymous northern nurse 2006; Alaska Fish and Wildlife 2007).

There is some very expensive junk food, mostly chips and cookies, in the log cabin community store, along with frozen meat and both frozen and canned vegetables. Judging by the low quantities available for sale, it does not seem that a lot of vegetables are being eaten; a lot of what is there ends up in a large soup pot when there is a feast. Bannock, home-made from white flour, is now considered a traditional food, and always appears at feasts, but I am not sure how regularly it is eaten in homes; I have not seen bannock on people's tables, but have often seen drymeat and cooked meat. However, this casual observation is not a reliable measure. I was interested to find that there was no candy at the store just before Hallowe'en 2005; I baked cookies for kids at the door, and a supply of candy came in by plane with Ruby Jumbo, arriving during the community celebration in the mini-gym. A very popular non-traditional food was fruit pie or tarts, which are invariably made for feasts, as money-raisers by enterprising cooks, and sometimes as evening snacks at the recreation program. Another surprising item is excellent pizza, produced pretty often at the recreation kitchen. Again, I don't know if these items are frequently cooked in home kitchens.

The situation in terms of general physical health does not seem to have changed much over recent decades. Health professionals still visit only on the schedule that I noted in 1997-1998 and, as in most isolated communities, emergencies and severe illness still must be dealt with at hospitals reached by "medivacs". Various elders continue to express concern about a deterioration in health among those who rely on "store food." They blame an increase in arthritis, tooth decay and poor eyesight on this, and a number of them say that they continue to rely on a traditional diet (SKDB 2006: 108; Angelique Lomen, personal communication 2006). In 2006 there were 16 elders alive out of a population of about one hundred, and all but one seemed active and in good general health; I observed many of them chopping wood, carrying water, preparing dry fish, setting snares, and some are still actively fishing, hunting and

trapping. There is a high birth rate, and almost all of the children appear physically healthy, though some have fetal alcohol syndrome (anonymous personal communication 1998).

The level of medical service provision does not seem to have changed since my 1998 visit. People who are unwell can visit the Health Centre, where the Community Health Worker does her job five days a week; she is also available at any time in cases of emergency. If medical problems are beyond her scope, a doctor is consulted by phone, and prescription medications are either dispensed out of a local supply or are sent on the next flight into the community. Acting Chief Dolphus Jumbo is one who, despite painful experiences in residential school, has gained emotional health and healing (Dolphus Jumbo, personal communication 2005). He and Yvonne Jumbo are the two adults providing informal counseling and support in the community to supplement professional counselors' services as volunteer counsellors and mentors, and in my opinion are performing an extremely critical function, especially with regard to young people.

Unless things have greatly changed, the dental service is disgracefully inadequate. I have been told that a person with a toothache may still have to wait as long as two years to have it attended to (Norma Jumbo, personal communication 2006). I had my own experience with it when a filling fell out, fortunately on the day before the dentist's visit. I had heard many stories about the dentist; the most common complaint was that fillings fell out, to which I had listened with some cynicism. My attitude changed quickly; the dentist had told me that his filling would last me for years, but it fell out just as I heard his plane taking off from the runway a few hours later. Fortunately, it seems that people who eat a diet very close to the traditional one, such as most of the elders who rely almost entirely on wild meat, appear to have their own strong-looking teeth.

Because of the residential school experience and its generational effects, there has been a weak strand in the community fabric: addiction. Two recent alcohol-related deaths may be a turning point for the community, as it has been already for several individuals; if this loss can turn people away from the dangers of addiction and toward the strong and positive spiritual strands of Dene tradition, this weakness in the weave may become a healthy and functional one. Dolphus Jumbo, who has had excellent recovery from his own residential school issues, states,

The problem is that we have to deal with the fear that was instilled in us in the residential schools. We were so punished and dealt with so harshly, that we missed the love and encouragement of our parents, and no one gave that back to us; they gave us this fear that if we do anything wrong we will be punished and lose out. Because we always had to be obedient, we think we can't say anything against the government or we won't get what we need. And that fear creates a jealousy and negativity between ourselves.

We are so insecure that we try to pull ourselves up by pulling others down, selling each other out; it is really hard on the community. . . . (SKDB 2006: 159).

There remain to this day both problems and improvements. The first is this troubling matter of alcohol and drug use, especially among some of the community's youth. However, I have noticed somewhat more sobriety among middle-aged and older people with each of my visits. Three of the oldest schoolchildren (out of a total of seven at my last visit) have made a pact to support each other in staying away from drugs and alcohol, and they call their little support group *Keeping the Circle Strong* (Tyler Jumbo, personal communication 1997). Healing and addiction workshops have been held in the community. Some people have left Samba K'e for treatment, and others have worked out their personal problems in various ways, such as by consulting elders (Dolphus Jumbo, personal communication 2006). Those who are remaining sober have not formed a group, but there are noticeably more of them than in 1997-1998 (SKDB 2006: 73-75). Each of these is a quiet role model for others on the same path, and recently there has been preparation for forming an Alcoholics Anonymous group for those who are committed to supporting each other in recovery (Brenda Jumbo, personal communication 2009).

Spiritual approaches to healing, including drumming, as well the general health-promoting effects of bush activities, along with counseling and workshops, are all available in Samba K'e. These are important resources for addiction recovery and grief work. Dolphus has mentioned the idea of holding healing and recovery workshops "in the bush" (personal communication 2009). In a general sense, it seems that the amount of time the Samba K'e people spend in the bush, engaging in traditional activities with elders who grew up embedded in the skills and spiritual traditions of Dene life, must be a big part of the resilience I have seen in the community.

The current community grew from the nine families left after epidemics and the departure of others for town life in the 1960s. They have been energetic and creative in weaving important traditional elements of their culture with much that is completely modern. To sum up the health situation in Samba K'e, the Dene residents are pragmatically weaving the uses of natural cures and traditional practices such as "feeding the fire" and the services of a healer, with modern medicine: prescriptions from pharmacies; medical support from the Community Health Worker, the doctor and dentist, and emotional support from volunteer and professional counselors.

All of this is occurring in the broader context of a way of life that is largely out of doors and physically active. Many Dene people have told me over the years that they feel spiritually well when they are "in the bush", pursuing traditional pursuits; getting out on the land seems to be physically and spiritually curative. In Samba K'e, the land, with its rhythms, and the spiritual life

connected with it, seems to be a positive factor in the wellbeing of individuals and the community. Dolphus Jumbo says, "How has it affected peoples' lives? The people who went before our time were abused and some have become abusers themselves. But even with people my age, it is in us, all of the things that happened in school. We never talked about it; some of us have alcohol problems and that's part of it. It bothers you, why these things happened. It takes a long time, changing your whole way of life. For me, it feels good when there's a drum dance; I feel good and have a good night's sleep. . . . The pipe ceremony is good, and sweet grass is really good" (SKDB 1998: 104-105).

## **PATTERNS IN THE WEAVE: LEARNING AND SCHOOLING**

### **Traditional Learning Style**

Traditionally, children were expected to learn by observation, participation, and instruction by older people. This instruction was sometimes by means of the oral tradition of telling stories or legends. Angelique Lomen stated, "The traditional knowledge is supposed to be passed orally; the youth are supposed to listen and remember what was taught to them" (SKDB 2006: 147). Frank Tetcho spoke of some principles of childhood learning, when he was expressing concern about the transmission of drinking patterns: "A child growing up sees everything happening around him. They want to try everything they see and want to test it." and, "Whatever they see you doing, they'll try for themselves" (SKDB 1998: 48). A couple of elders described learning in the context of on-the-land life, including practical skills they had gained in their youth, which made them competent and self-sufficient in adulthood. Angelique, who had urgent need for bush skills while raising her family alone on the land, recalls,

In the earlier years, I had accompanied my father on a lot of moose kills, learned traditional knowledge from him; how to properly cut and process the meat, deal with the guts, sort them out, and make proper moose grease. He even taught me how to kill, skin, flesh it, and cut it up. I learned about setting up rabbit snares, cleaning rabbits and chicken, and setting up fishnets. From my brother Archie, I learned about running a dog team, and how to manage them. My knowledge has passed on to Marilyn and Andrew, and Ernest is learning (SKDB 2006: 147).

Julie Punch says, about living with relatives after her parents died,

I stayed with them till I knew how to get wood and survive in the bush. During my growing up years, they taught me how to make axe handles, the traditional way to make snowshoes, and other skills. When I was old enough, I went out in the bush for chicken, rabbits and things like that. When I needed new snowshoes or axe



handles, I made my own” (SKDB 2006: 151).

Edward Jumbo describes some of his early learning:

We played and one time my grandfather told us, if we continue what we're doing, how are we going to learn what our dad and grandfather are doing? He said, 'Learn at the earliest age, and you won't lose it as long as you live. So we were doing little chores like setting snares, getting wood, and hunting: getting the idea of how to approach a moose and stuff like that (SKDB 2006: 123).

He also learned about spiritual matters like praying with the feeding the fire ceremony. One day, his grandfather fed him some caribou brain, conveying to him what seems to be a message about personal power:

My grandpa told me, when he gave me the bowl of caribou brain, and I was eating it little by little, if I eat it I'll have more knowledge to teach younger people, then I didn't even know I'd finished it. What my grandpa said was true, because when I want to do something, I know how to do it exactly (SKDB 2006: 125).

Adults as well as children are learners. One interesting area of learning related to the first beginnings of the Sambia K'e settlement in 1961 is the transition from brush lean-tos to log cabins. How did these Dene, who traditionally used some moosehide teepees, but seem mainly to have used brush lean-tos, learn the skills required for building log cabins?

One basic fact about both lean-tos and cabins is that the “footprint” on the ground is a rectangular one – a double sized rectangle when a double brush lean-to was constructed to accommodate two families (SKDB 1998: 5). Mason describes and sketches a log lean-to attributed to Dene people (1913, 21). Margaret Jumbo says that the group of Dene she lived with as a child built log lean-tos: “If they didn't have enough moosehide, they would build one of those houses like a lean-to; my stepmother lived in one of those as a child. She says,

They were as warm as the houses we have today. And they were large; the way they made them, two or three families could live in one. To begin making one, they would put two sticks or logs upright, with a long one across the top. Then they split logs to have the bark on one side but flat on the other. Those were laid at an angle from the ground, to rest on the crosspiece. They were pretty big, probably five or six feet high or more, so that people could stand up inside. They also had to have room for a fire inside with a hook in the middle to hang a pot to cook stuff. To make the shelter weatherproof they put wet moss all over the outside, then

spruce boughs, and then when it snowed the snow would help insulate it too. If there were two families, they leaned the wood pieces onto the crosspiece from the other side too, so one family would live on each side of the lean-to. There was a hole in the top for the smoke from the fire to escape. To close off both ends of the shelter, they hung hides (SKDB 1998: 5).

Perhaps the Sambaa K'e people were aware of this style used by other groups not very far from their territory, and it is just possible that the use of logs in Margaret's group might have been based on observation of log cabins at the trading posts, then weaving that idea into the original Dene tradition of brush shelters made on exactly the same ground plan. The Sambaa K'e Got'ine themselves must have observed log cabins at the fur trading centers; of necessity as hunters, they were observant and accustomed to learning by observation, but there are no reports in the Sambaa K'e territory of a transitional lean-to made of logs. Also, the community book documents the range of woodworking skills involved over centuries with survival on the land, including the making of canoes, shelters, fish traps, sleds, handles for tools and weapons, dead fall traps, and snowshoes.

Material in the community book includes the mention of a few cabins on the land by the 1930s (SKDB 2006: 16), and several elders' stories refer to one or more of them at locations convenient for winter trapping. In the early sixties, when the families decided to go along with the government's persuasion, with hopes of community-based schooling, they had already learned how to build cabins. Presumably, this was a weaving of their wood crafting skills, already used in construction of rectangular-based lean-tos, possible knowledge of the use of logs for building lean-tos by other Dene groups, and their observation of cabins at the trading posts.

### **The Ancient Learning Challenge: Traditional Environmental Knowledge**

Of course, learning is lifelong in any culture; learning about and maintaining a relationship with a complex ecosystem was essential for survival in a hunting/gathering lifestyle. The community has documented a great deal of sophisticated knowledge of their ecosystem, including the results of two summers of "ground truthing" documented in their 2004 report, written and edited by Peter Redvers. Martha Johnson of the Dene Cultural Institute writes about traditional environmental knowledge or "TEK": "Today, a growing body of literature attests not only to the presence of a vast reservoir of information regarding plant and animal behaviour but also to the existence of effective indigenous strategies for ensuring the sustainable use of local natural resources" (Johnson 1993: 3). The subtleties of this knowledge were embedded in practices and in language, transmitting the world view, philosophy and skills involved from generation to generation. Johnson states,

...TEK can generally be defined as a body of knowledge built up by a group of people through generations of living in close contact with nature. It includes a system of classification, a set of empirical observations about the local environment, and a system of self-management that governs resource use, and is both cumulative and dynamic, building upon the experience of earlier generations and adapting to the new technological and socioeconomic changes . . . (1993: 4).

Some of the qualities of TEK are as follows: it

. . . is recorded and transmitted through oral tradition (often through stories); is learned through observation and hands-on experience; is based on the understanding that the elements of matter . . . also have a life force; . . . does not view human life as superior to other animate and inanimate elements; all life-forms have kinship and are interdependent; . . . All elements of matter are viewed as interconnected and cannot be understood in isolation; . . . is intuitive in its mode of thinking...Intuitive thought emphasizes emotional involvement and subjective certainty of understanding; is mainly qualitative . . . is rooted in a social context that sees the world in terms of social and spiritual relations between all life-forms; Relations are based on reciprocity and obligations toward both community members and other life-forms and . . . on shared knowledge and meaning; ...Explanations of environmental phenomena are often spiritual and based on cumulative, collective experience. It is checked, validated, and revised daily and seasonally through the annual cycle of activities 1993; 7, 8).

It is obvious that the sophistication of this approach involved continuous learning, and that all generations were involved in its transmission.

### **Global and Government Impacts on Dene Learning: School Education**

The Dene were forced into a steep learning curve about the power of the federal and then the territorial governments. While a lot of traditional learning continued, along with the ongoing reliance on bush resources, a new situation with regard to learning developed in the early decades of the twentieth century, as world events and intrusions from the outside world began to impact the Dehcho Region. The "Gradual Civilization Act" had been passed in 1857, "to assimilate Indians" (Dickason 1993: 251). Missionaries had been active in parts of the Dehcho Region as early as the 1860s (Asch 1981: 345), and mission schools were established at Fort Providence in 1867 and Fort Resolution in 1903. (Choquette1995: 76-77)

The Fort Providence residential school is of particular interest, being the earliest in the Dehcho region; there were family connections between Sambia K'e and Dene groups in the whole area, which probably gave the Sambia K'e families some knowledge of this school, which, like other early ones, was largely for the care of orphans of the epidemics (Bromley 1975, 14). As mentioned, one community member, Joe Punch, spent his early years there from the age of four, before reportedly being encountered in Fort Simpson in 1946 by the relatives who brought him to live in Sambia K'e. It should be noted that Joe interprets this situation as his decision, rather than one of being rescued. At that time, Joe was apparently the only community member who spoke English (Julie Punch, personal communication). The English that he learned, either at school or at work on the river boats, gave him a unique role in the community. Marie Deneron mentions that the people were beginning to realize that a knowledge of English might be important: "The older men used to trade stuff in Fort Simpson. . . . Some of the men wondered, 'Are they stealing from us? Maybe we should learn to speak English.' They looked into that. . . . That's how they got a residential school in Simpson. . . ." (SKDB 2006: 105).

Marie's comments here seem to connect with a description by Asch (1977: 52-53) of political events leading to school construction and enforcement of school attendance in the Dene areas, already described. Asch states, relating to the construction of regional schools, "This solution was apparently approved of by at least some of the native chiefs. . . ." (53). In Dolphus's story of being sent to school by his father, Joseph, in October 1960, he explains,

Because of the school they were building in Fort Simpson, Lapointe Hall, my father was willing. He was the sort of person who monitors and sees the future, what is going to happen. He saw that we were going to need to speak English. I went to school in 1960-61 for the first time, in October (SKDB 2006: 108).

"On the ground", families were faced with the challenges of weaving their valued traditional learning modes with new political and economic realities, including formal schooling. Joseph, with a sense of what was coming in the future, acted on his perceptions. This time, his children would be in school to learn English, but would be close enough to the Sambia K'e settlement (about one hundred miles) for family visits to be possible.

In another year, due to the death of one of the Jumbo cousins in school at Fort Providence and to upsetting incidents experienced by Victor Jumbo and other Sambia K'e children in Lapointe Hall, Joseph decided to keep his children home, despite being threatened with loss of his family allowance and seizure of his guns. He said to Victor, "If they're going to bugger up your culture, you'll be sick and your belief in your culture will be all shattered" (SKDB 2006: 136). Victor's brother, Dolphus, relates that when Joseph was threatened with loss of his family

allowance, he said to the authorities, "The Family Allowance is only six dollars. I've provided for my family all this time and I can continue to provide for them" (SKDB 2006: 119).

Dolphus and Victor's father was monitoring, learning, and weaving his way between his need to protect his children and to obey authority, as well as between his foresight about the need for his children to learn English and his commitment to teaching them the traditional ways of life in the bush. He was evidently taking one year at a time, one child at a time, and deciding when the time had come when "enough was enough": demonstrating considerable flexibility and autonomy.

As for the general context of life in the Smbaa K'e territory in which these changes were taking place, it seems clear that these Dene were continuing to hunt and trap, even when fur prices began declining and incomes must have been low. (This may have been when the hunters began to wonder if the fur traders were cheating them.) To adapt, they may have been depending less on the unrewarding levels of income from trapping, reportedly low at that time, and more on their traditional subsistence economy; the reports of poverty prior to 1960 seem to be based on the situation of native families living in the established communities, rather than of "bush Indians". This is understandable, when it seems clear that only nine families remained on the land in the Smbaa K'e territory in 1960 (Dehcho Divisional Education Council 2007). This would likely have been a statistically uninteresting number of people for researchers to focus on; during my 1996 visit, there were still only 62 Dene people living in the settlement.

### **Residential School**

As already mentioned, the establishment of the Smbaa K'e settlement, beginning in 1961, was intimately connected with the disruption to the families of the territory caused by the removal of their children to residential schools, beginning in 1959. The federal government, in 1969, devolved responsibility for education to the Northwest Territories' newly-created Department of Education (Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly. 2007). This did not improve the situation; the existence of schools went hand in hand with coercive pressure on children to attend, and on families to ensure attendance under threat of fines or even jail (Asch 1997: 53). Many individuals have described the traumatic event of being taken unexpectedly from their families, when the government plane would land, usually with a priest and an RCMP officer, to pick up any school-age children they could find.

The Smbaa K'e children, taken without warning or parental permission, were removed to locations very far from home, all but one to the residential school at Fort Providence. Arthur Jumbo, for some reason, was shipped very far north to Inuvik, and his siblings suffered great anxiety about his whereabouts; he himself suffered loneliness without their company, and with no idea of how he

would ever reconnect with family. At the end of the school year, he was dropped off by a plane in Fort Liard (not his home community) without any means of getting back to Smbaa K'e. He was extremely lucky to get permission to fly without cost on a plane going to a remote part of the Smbaa K'e lake. There, again by luck, the lone boy waiting far from the end of the huge lake where most families camped happened to be sighted by a relative in a canoe, and was finally conveyed to his family's campsite (SKDB 2006: 114).

### **Weaving of Traditional Learning and School Education**

The harm done to children in residential schools has been well-documented, and the most dysfunctional processes in Smbaa K'e today can be directly traced to personal and intergenerational effects of these experiences. Aside from what happened in the residences, it is important realize also how harmful the southern-style classroom education in the northern schools was for Dene children raised in the traditional ways of their people. Bob Overvold is a Dene who experienced the cultural jolt of that academic environment, and says,

First, traditionally Dene children learned from their parents. In residential school the adult-child relationship was almost non-existent; most, if not all the school and residential staff were non-Dene and thus quite alien to the majority of Dene students. . . . Education over this period was and still is a system imposed on the Dene. Some of its characteristics are: a conditioning of people to respect an authority other than oneself, a conditioning of people to conform and not to question, to minimize one's own ability to make decisions based on one's own understanding of the world, and to become dependent instead on external authority. (Overvold and Kakfui 1997: 146-147).

As one small example of the cultural shift required by these children in a southern-style classroom, I was told that in "Trout Lake" deliberate eye contact between females and males used to be considered a sexual "come on". One little girl was so upset by a male teacher, looking at her directly as he attempted to engage her in classroom activities that she ran crying from the classroom to tell the principal that the teacher was flirting with her. This was also very upsetting to the teacher involved, who was unconsciously using his direct blue eyes as a way to engage a withdrawn child in verbal participation. It has been my impression that little has been done over the years to train teachers in cultural sensitivity about how to engage native children in a learning environment that is foreign to them (anonymous personal communication, 1987). I am certain that the classrooms were a venue of oppression for these kids, in the conflicted discourse between the dominant culture's formal educational approaches and observational, participatory traditional learning modes.

Both classroom and residential experiences were deeply alienating, and in

many cases, traumatic for the Dene children; at the very least, they were deprived of traditional learning experiences in the context of family-based bush activities. In Samba K'e now, the necessary learning related to that is how to gain recovery and regain personal, family and community health. This process is ongoing, as has been discussed under "Health" above.

### **Schooling in the Community**

Although the promise of a community school had been made over a decade earlier, the first one was built in 1972. Deborah Hobbes was a dearly loved teacher in the community, and wrote a short history of the community. According to her, the first schoolroom, called the Trout Lake Territorial School, was attached to the original "complex" of band office, store, and community hall built in 1972, and offered Grades 1-6 (SKDB 1998: 108).

Bettilyn Jumbo, a former student at the school, describes her memories:

Inside the school it was kind of dark, due to small windows. To light the lamp, the teacher had to use a wooden match. . . . The students would use an outdoor washroom known as the outhouse . . . made of logs or boarded walls. For drinking water, the teacher would bring some water with a pail every morning when he came to work. At the old school, the teacher would feed the old long stove. The fire would consist of two or three pieces of wood to keep the school warm. . . . The students would learn new things, . . . also go on field trips to the point, towards the South End, or else go boating out on the lake (SKDB 1998: 110).

Carl Jorgensen, who taught at the school for three years in the 1980s, writes, "Every good thing we did in the school happened because of the help of the community." It is noteworthy that the school curriculum even then included on-the-land activities along with standard academic subjects, and that the parents were involved with the school from an early date (SKDB 1998: 107).

Deborah Hobbes' history of the first two community schools includes the following:

The people of Trout Lake have come to realize the importance of education in their changing culture. A local School Committee with eight members have much to say in the content and structure of the school's programs, and the teacher is a welcome member of the community. Trout Lake is unique in many respects. . . . The residents maintain traditional means of living off the land. All the men trap in winter, spending many nights in the bush along their

traplines. It is one of the few remaining communities without the modern conveniences of electricity, running water, and central heating. . . . It is only in the last ten years that Trout Lake has grown and developed as a permanent community, interacting more with the "outside world". . . . The community and its members are involved in their own economic growth, having developed a tourist lodge, a store, and a contracting business which does slashing contracts and community development projects. Meetings are regular with everyone having a say in the decisions. Despite all these recent changes, there is a great desire to keep alive the old traditions and lifestyles, as well as a respect for their cultural heritage (SKDB 1998: 108).

In 1978, a larger log cabin school, Charles Tetcho School, was built for the growing number of children. It is described by Bettilyn Jumbo:

At the new school, there was more space, and students could work on new things such as typewriters, slides to look at and work on a project. The new school was made of long logs and a board roof. There was more light coming in, because the windows were big. The students were separated into two groups, Grade 7-9, and Kindergarten to grade 6. . . . When the wood stove got too much for the teacher, he asked for a furnace to be put in. The furnace was more convenient than the wood stove because the teacher or janitor didn't have to feed the stove through the cold wintry night. At the new school, for lights the teacher lit the propane lights. . . . After the propane lights were used, electricity came in useful. It was better for the teacher to turn the lights on and off with a switch (SKDB 1998: 110-111).

This building later became the Learning Centre where adult education classes, church services and community workshops were held after construction of a fully modern classroom, part of a new complex. This followed the fire that destroyed the old one at Christmas, 1995 (SKDB 1998: 8). It is possibly a unique school in Canada, combining in-class language learning of both English and South Slavey; teaching of traditional skills and stories by elders (either indoors or in the surrounding bush); on-the-land activities such as hiking, snaring and fire-lighting; participation in the four seasonal camps with families and other community members; and the usual academic curriculum followed in schools across the country (Byron White, personal communication 2006). One day in 1998, I had a wonderful hint of what the students experience; I was waiting to speak to Byron, the teacher, when the seven children burst in with their snowsuits on, falling down and laughing, with their cheeks red from the cold. Behind the group came Byron White, the teacher, looking equally frosty, with his gun over his shoulder. It was needed for safety, because of a wolf hanging about, in and around the community. Whatever the reason for the gun, it certainly seemed like a



unique moment in Canadian education.

The children also may go out with grandparents or other relatives, checking snare lines, traplines or fishnets; spend days or weekends with their families in the bush when the weather is right; participate in traditional hunting and on-the-land activities during the community camps; attend hand-games, tea dances, feasts and feeding-the-fire prayers; and eat wild meat daily. They also have many modern aspects to their lives: television, cameras and video games; junk food; celebrations such as Hallowe'en, Thanksgiving, Easter and Christmas; travel in boats, trucks, planes and on skidoos; and life in warm modern homes. Alcohol and drug use impacts their lives. The drinking began in the fur trade days with alcohol supplied at trading posts, and with home brew (Tetcho 1998, 47), then became both a solace and a problematic addiction for those in emotional pain caused by residential school experiences. Family violence is a problem when drinking is going on; the kids experience and learn it. As mentioned, three of the schoolboys made a pact to support each other in staying away from drugs and alcohol use.

The school program that used to go only to Grade 6 now includes Grade Ten. To complete Grade 12, students must leave the community to live and study in Fort Simpson. There, the boys live in one student house and the girls in another; house parents from the isolated communities seem to be doing a good job of managing this alternative to formal institutional living. Many parents hate to see the kids leave for the school year (returning briefly during the Christmas break and the summer months), but continue to strongly support the value of education for their children (Margaret Jumbo, personal communication 2005).

Margaret Jumbo, who speaks South Slavey with her grand-children, says that her oldest, Edzea, will be going to kindergarten in Fort Simpson this year, because her daughter Carilyn, Edzea's mom, will be taking an adult course given by Aurora College. This little girl will be experiencing town life for the first time. One can imagine the advantages and disadvantages for a little Samba K'e Got'ine. Edzea has been learning both English and South Slavey language, and lives in a family that maintains sobriety and a great deal of the traditional life; the great joy of Margaret and Victor is to be out on the land with the family. Edzea has lived in the bush with her family, and has seen moose and other animals being skinned and butchered. The sound of a hunter's gun is familiar. She watches television and munches on dry meat. She is related to several women in professional roles with the Band and the Dene Nation; her father, grandfather and uncles have been chiefs. Her grandmother and mother are skilled craftswomen and her grandmother is also a District Education Association member; her young uncle is one of the three students who are "keeping the circle strong"; some neighbours cause scary noises at night when they are having drunken parties, but some have learned sobriety. She has seen and experienced things that many little children have not, in other parts of Canada – the traditional and the new are part of her life and learning in the complex fabric of Samba K'e today. I wonder what

learning is ahead of her, and what kind of life she will weave for herself and with her home community.

### **Learning in Leadership**

Another area of learning has been quite different: the arena of political leadership, which in Smbaa K'e, and probably in other Dehcho communities, has usually been combined with the traditional lifestyle. Before looking further at this, it should be noted that the Canadian government had dictated that each band must have a chief and council (Frideres 1988:345). The Dene never had formal "chiefs"; the regional groups, made up of family groups, had an egalitarian structure in which individuals with special competencies would be highly respected; they might have recognized roles, but no formal titles or privileges (Honigmann 1946: 64-65; Dennis Deneron, personal communication 1996).

Joseph Jumbo was one of these: a skilled hunter with insight into the future needs of his people, and sufficient spiritual knowledge that it has been said that he was "like a prophet to us" (Margaret Jumbo, personal communication 1997). These hunters, many of whom did not speak English and were not formally educated, gained insight into the workings of the non-native traders, trappers and government agencies. Their organizations learned the necessity of engaging lawyers and in gaining political power in Denendeh; they conveyed their issues right up to the Supreme Court of Canada (Kakfui 1984: 27). While engaged in the efforts required to do this, many of these leaders continued their hunting and trapping activities rather than becoming career politicians, weaving that traditional lifestyle with an entirely new arena of hunting: for recognition of their aboriginal rights.

Edward Jumbo, oldest son of Joseph Jumbo, is an elder who has spent his life engaged in traditional practices and passing them on to others. He learned a lot of this as a young man, from his father-in-law: "I used to go hunting with Frank Tetcho; we'd go out to Tetcho Lake and go hunting, as soon as the snow fell: in the winter and in the spring. . . .I watched him do everything on the land, and sharing everything he knew, and sharing his knowledge with me" (SKDB 2006: 123). Edward testified at the Berger Inquiry in 1975, concluding his speech with the statement, "The only way to make a living is off the land. This is our reason for us to want the land settlement before the pipeline" (1998: 9). Edward was stating the determination of the Dene to have their land rights defined and protected before the pipeline issue was addressed.

He wove his political life (bringing minutes of meetings back to the community after meetings of chiefs) with his traditional life on the land; he now leads workshops for elders in Fort Simpson, provides community demonstrations of on-the-land skills such as building fish traps, and teaches traditional skills to the school children. There is a photo, in the book's second edition, of Edward and several young men standing in river water while he was supervising the

construction of a traditional fish trap. The caption uses Edward's good natured expression, "A modern way to build a traditional fish trap". The traps used to be made by stripping young trees of their branches so that the trunks could be stacked to make a rectangular trap. The young men who went with him for the demonstration brought chain saws and began cutting planks out of lengths of tree trunk. He could have stopped them, but let them go ahead, and later joked about it, demonstrating his flexible, weaving approach (personal communication 2006; SKDB 2006: 92).

Each generation of chiefs, in different times and circumstances, has learned and adapted differently. Victor Jumbo, Edward's brother and one of the six children taken to residential school in 1959, was chief in the mid-1970s. He became active as a hunter after his father withdrew him from school due to upsetting events at the hostel. Then he worked as an emergency fire fighter. He joined the community effort to build the first airstrip, trained as a Heavy Equipment Mechanic, and returned to the Fort Simpson hostel with his wife Margaret, as Supervisor. Then Margaret said, "What I want for our life is to learn how to live in the bush." Since then, he has woven his activities seasonally: trapping, community college skill training, intermittent employment outside the community and self-employment (in his case, cutting birch boards in the bush, then selling them or using them in the manufacture of traditional sleds).

When he was chief, he provided constructive leadership around structural problems: the community's underdog status as a subsidiary part of the Fort Liard Band, and the interference with native trapping by aggressive White trappers. He gained independence from the Fort Liard Band, and engaged with the community to plan a "group trapping" approach to prevent non-native trappers from interfering with their traplines. He says that now the land is free for anyone to use who will treat the land and animals with respect. Interestingly, he recognized the valuable skill set of a young non-native woman, Alison DePelham, who had married into the Band and had also assisted his father, Edward, in his duties as chief. At a time of change and reorganization, he wove her capabilities with his own for the benefit of the community, and never gave up his commitment to on-the-land activities with his family (SKDB 2006: 134-139; Alison dePelham, personal communication 2009).

Dennis Deneron, who was chosen by the elders as Chief at age 18, had yet another leadership style. In my observation, he has not become a hunter himself, but has encouraged other community members, attending the seasonal camps with camera in hand to film the activities. He stalwartly represented the wishes of the elders regarding environmental threats such as pipeline developments and oil drilling in their territory (SKDB, 1998: 138-140). Some in the community did not agree with this, but he held firm to represent the concerns of the elders. These were heavy matters for a teenager. Dennis, a creative person with a great sense of humour, lightened the load by a series of community experiments: raising goats, domestic fowl, and pigs; planting wild rice down the river; and planting cabbages

and strawberries on the little patch of fertile soil on a floodplain at the curve of the river. Each of these was a new learning experience for the community. He has gained qualifications in many skills such as locksmithing, through correspondence courses. His weaving has been less between bush activities and political leadership, and more between the intersecting strands of regional, national and community cross-purposes in policy and planning.

Now Sambia K'e has Dolphus Jumbo as Acting Chief: the youngest brother in this large family. Dolphus is a role model for others struggling with residential school after-effects; the wisdom he has learned through many painful experiences over the years is shared with community members and the regional chiefs, with whom he acts as an advisor. He teaches traditional skills at seasonal camps, heads the firefighter crew, supervises the yearly construction of the winter road, and has been President of the Sambia K'e "DevCorp". About the modernization of the community, combined with the old ways of doing things, he says, "This is our 'traditional half-and-half' – a modern house and cooking moose meat on an open fire. The bush is just over there! We are still keeping up the seasons to keep the cycle alive". His learning has been ongoing and diverse; at this point it seems focused on how to effectively support sobriety and healing involving all of the generations, and how to save the South Slavey language from extinction (SKDB 2006: 119-122, 159-160; personal communications 2008, 9).

One area of learning for community leaders has been the use of economic power to support their cultural strengths in management and healing. That began in the 1950s with the acquisition of Trout Lake Lodge and several other commercial ventures such as the log community store (jokingly referred to sometimes as "Trout Lake Mall") and a sawmill. In the last few years, their Development Corporation ("DevCorp") has been working on other plans, such as a joint company with several other Dene communities. Some of these relate to the Band's negotiations concerning a natural gas pipeline proposed to run through their territory (SKDB 2006: 169).

In my most recent conversation with Dolphus, he educated me about the different levels at which the band is connected with the world at large. He meets with the other chiefs in the Dehcho Tribal Council, which is part of the Dene Nation. Through this, they are part of the Assembly of First Nations; in turn, this connects them with the United Nations committees on indigenous peoples. This resonates with Dick Preston's description of the "nested" local-to-global connections of the Nemaska Cree community (Preston 2008: 57, 77). The world has unfolded for the people of tiny Sambia K'e, who are simultaneously working on community relations between elders and the young, healing from intergenerational effects resulting from residential school experiences, and engaging with the economics and politics of various levels of organization up to the global workings of the United Nations.

## ANALYSIS

### Discourse

The element of “discourse” deserves some discussion in drawing together the threads of the Smbaa K'e story. I begin with a reminder of the egalitarian social organization of the Dene people, which still exists in a number of aspects of community life. An authoritarian, top-down framework seems foreign to Dene thinking. At a simple level, this is evidenced in the reluctance of individuals to take positions in the community which could be seen as putting themselves above others. Even holding the ongoing position of Clerk at the community store has brought about social “leveling” through gossip that pulls the individual down to the perceived social equality of the group. During the preparation of the book's second edition, there was a vacuum of leadership for several years, because no one was prepared yet to deal with this social phenomenon by accepting the position of Chief. A positive view of this tendency, which obviously presents some difficulties in the modern context, is that it also expresses the readiness of the Dene to accept, as “part of the family”, those who live by Dene values of integrity, sharing and respect (Edward Jumbo, personal communication, 2005).

In the early days when families were living in brush shelters they welcomed and sometimes rescued traveling priests, with compassion for their difficulties with cold and hunger, and admiration for their courage. When White traders, trappers and prospectors entered the territory, the Dene apparently were open to dealing with them, up to the point where some outsiders were disrespectful of the people as a group, or local trappers' traplines. In the 1970s, the Dene joined with the Metis in common political action, without prejudice as far as I can determine. Alison DePelham, the non-native woman who married into the community, was Band Manager for several years and is still welcome in the community. The current population includes a number of young non-native men who have become partners or husbands of young Smbaa K'e women. All of this speaks to the readiness of the Dene to accept, with trust and respect, those newcomers who they see as willing to learn and respectful of Dene ways.

About the “oppression” that sometimes is an aspect of discourse: the Dene historically experienced external oppression, which has been well documented. They reacted creatively by forming networks and organizational structures to demand respect for their aboriginal rights to the use and protection of their land. They have continued to resist oppression, for instance in pipeline developments. How they will deal with this in the current situation remains to be seen, but they continue to be very perceptive of attempts to disadvantage them, and surely will weave their own solutions to crises as they arise.

Within community dynamics, the elders still speak with unity, in concern about their relations with the younger generations, the way the young are dealing with their emotional pain, and how to continue Dene practices and values. The

young who are involved in alcohol and drug use do not verbalize much about these concerns. There seems to be a discontinuity in the discourse, as the elders share their concerns with each other and for printing in the book, while troubled youth have a variety of ways of expressing themselves, mainly non-verbally. They continue to participate in on-the-land activities and seasonal community camps, but some of them engage in substance abuse in the community. Perhaps I am naïve, but I do not see this situation as “oppression” or “dominance” by the elders. The emotional pain of community members is a continuing outcome of past oppression: the intergenerational effects of the residential school days. A current oppression could be seen in the influence of television and other electronic entertainment, which introduces the worst of the outside world's culture directly into the living rooms and minds of young people. A continuing aspect of oppression is the ongoing pressure to allow pipeline and other resource development on their land.

The challenge of weaving elements of modern life with Dene traditions has been handled successfully in the past. Dolphus Jumbo conveys to me that he and other Dene are well aware of the challenges that confront them in the current situation. He did not express panic or despair, but spoke of planning healing workshops to be held in the bush, of finding ways to bring the youth and the elders together for discussions and sharing, of patience, and strength in their spiritual traditions. While global effects cannot be ignored, I believe that the foundational values of Dene life are antithetical to dominance by individuals or organizational forces, and I trust “the people” to do the weaving with their attitude of energetic determination.

### **Weaving Transformations**

One of the problems in analyzing the Samba K'e situation is its multi-layered character. It is typical, in many senses, of the experiences of other aboriginal communities: historical forces such as the influences of the fur trade, missions, diseases, exposure to European material goods, values and behaviours, interference with traditional lifestyle and uses of the land, engagement in fur procurement followed by collapse of the fur economy, the badly understood and disadvantageous treaty process, political forces for assimilation and culture loss, the residential school experience, the addiction response, and the increasing challenge of functioning in the global economic and political nexus.

Simultaneously, there are ways in which the Samba K'e Got'ine experience has not been typical, in my opinion. In the big picture of Canadian aboriginal experience, the Dene of the Northwest Territories were successful in the 1970s in pushing back politically against the threat of territorial loss and political control, avoiding the reservation experience and retaining large traditional territories. In the close-up view, the Samba K'e group lived in a geographic enclave in which some of the more negative effects of historical changes were reduced or delayed, buying them time to respond: food supplies

seem to have remained adequate while many aboriginal groups experienced hunger due to depletion of game. The Sambaa K'e group was affected by disease factors, but was more isolated than groups which were located on the water transportation routes. It seems that they have had somewhat less devastating losses than are described, for instance, in the book *Our Elders* about the Fort Providence Dene.

In 1960, when Asch reports that, within a year, almost all of the other Native people of the region had moved into towns to be near their children in the regional schools, these families, collectively or separately, evidently made a conscious decision to remain on the land and make the best of the new situation. It may be that the Sambaa K'e community is unique in the level of community solidarity following on their community building in the early 1960s. Surely a culture-weaving process has been going on in many Dene communities, but it is impossible at this point to compare the nature and effectiveness of that process in those locations. A few have produced community collections, such as *Our Elders*. However, Sambaa K'e, this little community of people with an oral tradition and a low level of English literacy, is surely untypical in its achievement in producing a community book of the depth and complexity of Sambaa K'e Then and Now.

Probably in and shortly after 1960, when many of the Dene left their life on the land to live in town, to be near their children in school (Asch 1997: 53), the nine families must demonstrably have been those with the clearest motivation to remain in the traditional territory and lifestyle. Dolphus Jumbo recently told me, in a telephone conversation, about the circumstances of the decision to form a community. He said that the people were gathered on the beach where Joe Punch's house is now located on Treaty Day, in 1961 or 1962. Because it is documented that Frank Tetcho built the first house in 1961, I am inclined to think that the meeting would have been in that year. Black tarps had been spread over a framework of branches for x-rays to be taken to check for TB. The Indian Agent, Bob Styra, spoke to the people about the idea of gathering in one place so that the government could provide them with a school and more medical services. The people discussed this, and decided to form a settlement community. There must have been a sense of unity to have generated the smoothly focused actions of helping each other build the cabins over the next few years, and to build an airstrip as a community project. It seems certain that, soon after the occasion when six of their children were removed to residential school, and one of them came close to being lost entirely, the families must have been eager to find ways to gain control of the situation.

I am reminded of Dick Preston's story of Nemaska, the Cree community where there was a visioning process leading to the building of a new town. As mentioned, Preston refers to Appadurai's statement suggesting that imagination is a precursor to action. The decision by the Nemaska people was made as a result of a visioning process facilitated by non-native professionals; Dolphus's account above has recently illuminated what the communication process was among the

Sambaa K'e families, leading to their shared decision to gather in cabins at one place for the first time in their history. I would say that their imagining was not so much one of physical location *per se* as one of buying into a way to meet their social goals: weaving their determination to remain in the traditional seasonal lifestyle with an equal determination to obtain two benefits associated with their new reality - a way for their children to remain in the family group as long as possible while “learning English”, and professional medical service for urgent situations.

Preston also states, “First, I believe that the spirit of community has a labour and materials component . . .” (2008: 59), essential in moving from imagination to making a new reality. I heard from someone during my 1996 travels in the Dehcho Region that the government paid each family five hundred dollars for building a cabin. In any case, the material components for log cabins would not have been hard to procure. Materials were reportedly a more difficult matter in the building of the airstrip. The land they built it on is flat but reportedly was “bushy”, and the people were not supplied with any tools. Part of the pride evidenced as community members tell the airstrip story is around the production of “fred flintstone wheelbarrows”, and the driving of long nails through pieces of wood to make rakes. Joe Punch said that he finally was able to persuade someone in Fort Simpson to “fly in” a tractor with a helicopter to help with pulling stumps, but that seems to have been their only equipment. That this project was successfully completed by a long community effort seems a measure of energetic determination, indeed. The local humour has it that the people, without any guidance, built an airstrip at the correct angle to the prevailing wind, while the professionally designed one has always been a problem for pilots maneuvering in prevailing crosswinds. This situation is not funny when it is actually experienced.

As Dolphus Jumbo said about the airstrip and community start-up, “They didn’t give us any instructions on what direction we should put it; they just told us to make it on a flat spot. We did it with no tools or anything. They thought it would be beneficial to us – *we energetically wanted to build it, and establish a community here*” (My emphasis) “That’s when school and government services were starting to come. . . . they would build a school” (SKDB 2006: 121). This determined and energetic attitude seems to point to community decision-making, rather than just a passive process of drifting in a new direction because of government pressure. Having visited all of the isolated communities of the Dehcho Region, I have formed an impression that Sambaa K'e still retains a unique level of communal energy and determination; perhaps not surprisingly, Dolphus Jumbo agrees with me. He said, “We are so small, but what I am working for is unity and healing in the whole region” (personal communication 2009).

Dick Preston outlines other transformations that followed the Nemaska decision-making. While the process in Sambaa K'e evidently took place in a



different format, and produced a much smaller community, it mirrors some aspects of transformations he saw in Nemaska:

1. *from* a tacit sense of identity as part of their family hunting group *to* an articulated identity that combines family, community and region. 2. *from* power in their competence perform and nurture survival skills and mutual respect relations with animals and other persons in order to hunt and live well *to* power in their competence to perform and nurture skills and relations so as to balance bush, town, and world. 3. *from* authority over their own personal and family affairs *to* wider spheres of authority” (Preston 2008: 57).

Preston, referring to Mulrennan, points out that these spheres of authority are “nested” within their local community; into Cree councils and their regional organization; further into provincial and federal political bodies; and ultimately into the “UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues” (Preston 2008: 57). This nesting of connections is mirrored in Dene developments, as Dolphus described.

### **“Spirit of Community”/ “Locus of Home”**

Regarding the “spirit of community” (Preston 2008: 59), the issue of ongoing community unity arises. I have certainly observed and experienced push-pull forces between Sambia K’e families, some of which had to be delicately dealt with in the production of the book. There is the usual amount of small-community gossip, apparently, sometimes, an attempt at leveling someone who has accepted a job or gained an advantage: somewhat socially risky in an egalitarian culture. However, I see abundant evidence for unity around the community's goals. Primarily there is a shared commitment to retaining as much as possible of traditional Dene skills and values. This is posted on the Band Office wall as one of the community's six goals. Soon after my re-entry into the community in the fall of 2005, I had a meeting with two male elders who, on the surface, have seemed antagonistic. However, one translated for the other, and they seemed to be entirely “on the same page” in their concerns about the environment and the addiction problems of some of the youth. I was startled to be told afterward that the two are actually very good friends. I think that the jealousies are around what jobs the descendants of each one obtain in the community, and some details of personal histories, rather than about the direction the community as a whole takes. Each of these elders has a distinctive way of contributing to community life and unity. I find this a good example of how individuals can conduct themselves with great individualism and even minor conflict, yet be committed and constructive in a group effort to meet overarching goals.

Then we come to “locus of home” (Preston 2008: 61). I return to the reminder offered to me, that the whole territory and everything in it is the

“community” of the Dene. How does a sense of “home” fold into this? I am humourously reminded of a plaque given to me by one of my sons, with the words, “Home is where Mom is”. That is amusing, but points my mind to the Dene family in the old days of wandering in the landscape in search of game. Resting in the evening by a fire, either wrapped in a hide for warmth, or cozily protected under the sloped roof of a brush shelter, the sense of home must have been attached to existence “within the family” (62). Certainly, the families seem to have re-used habitual camping spots that may have dated from prehistoric times, or may have been developed in response to the more predictable patterns of trap lines in fur trading days. But none of them were meant to be year-round locations. In the current community, the houses (the oldest ones still near their precursor cabins) are lived in year round only in one sense.

Dropping our southern ideas of a family home, we discover that the house is a place to return to most of the time, but that a lot of the Smbaa K'e people feel most “at home” in the bush, sometimes at the old family camps and sometimes out looking for moose, beaver, or “chicken”. Margaret Jumbo says, “My mind is out at the island. Our minds are out on the land, doing all those wonderful things that we used to do, but if we want to put bread and butter on the table, we have to be here and working for pay in the community” (SKDB 2006: 36). This sounds as if people cannot get away because of paid work. This is sometimes the case, but her family and many others get out on the land frequently for as long as they can each time. Employment in the community is mostly sporadic and part time, so people find many opportunities to go where their minds are leading: “home within”.

In that sense of spiritual longing for life on the land, home is also “within the individual spirit” as Preston puts it (2008: 62). What about the settlement itself being a locus of home? Remembering that the community for the Dene is “open concept”, encompassing the land in all of its manifestations, we might think that this place is only part of “home”. I think of the tough times that community members have when they're away from Smbaa K'e for studies or medical treatment, missing the feeling of being “within the community group” (2008: 62). With the exception of a few non-Dene people who have married into the community in recent decades, all of the roughly one hundred residents are related by family, marriage or friendships; sometimes it is a troubled group, but its members are at home when they are together, especially in the bush.

### **Weaving Solutions: Patience, Energy, Determination**

If we use the basket metaphor, with the community's cultural fabric being the basket, one weakness in the weave is that not everyone is weaving it right now. There is some discontinuity in generational relations. It seems to be an aspect of the intergenerational effects of the not-so distant past when community members attended residential school. An additional negative factor could be the effects of electronic communication. Evenings in earlier times used to be

occasions for elders to tell stories and legends to the children and young people; I picture a circle with young people facing the elder, who was teaching and mentoring in an entertaining, sociable relationship; I had observed this type of interaction in living rooms during my travels in 1996. In 1997, when almost everyone was installing and adjusting satellite dishes, it seemed that evening entertainment, and generational communications changed quite abruptly. I observed more than one elder facing the TV set with the young ones, observing the images of Hollywood and world news. I'm pretty sure that there had been some problems with the visiting between young people and old people before that, based on Frank Tetcho's story, but the introduction of television seemed to be a sharp cultural turning point.

As for intergenerational effects, Margaret Jumbo has often spoken about ways in which the experiences of her generation in residential school have had trickle-down effects on her children's generation. An obvious one is that the young ones learned the dysfunctions that occur in troubled families, especially the tendency to cope with emotions by using alcohol or drugs. Margaret's brother-in-law, Dolphus, describes some of that effect of residential school abuses: ". . . It keeps us in the grip of addictions and self-interest, because we don't know any other way to deal with our negative feelings. It also goes down the generations, because the young ones have grown up seeing us living that way. We need to deal with it – get counseling, get treatment, get help from role models, and get the healing we need. Then we can deal with the challenges of today" (SKDB 2006: 159).

There are positive elements operating, as well as these negative ones. Not all of the young people are in difficulty; all engage in bush activities, and some are raising families. A few have been in recovery after addiction treatment. The local counselors, Dolphus and Yvonne, are stable and healthy listeners for anyone who is ready to talk. The parents and grandparents who are in recovery continue to be role models of the possibility for change. There are workshops in the community for those who will attend. Until recently, there had been no deaths, but now there have been two in close succession. This could be a turning point for some; I've heard that it has had at least a short term cautionary effect. Dolphus's recovery had a lot to do with connecting with the environment and with the words of elders. He is an elder now, giving hope in this situation as an inspiring, trusted example and role model.

In thinking about all of this, I cast my mind back to problems that the Dene and the Sambia K'e people have dealt with, and what has given them resilience to survive and move on. Not every problem can be dealt with in the same way; I think of three. First, when the group of hunters was forced to sign Treaty Eleven in 1921, they did their best not to, but felt threatened and finally had to give in. They were aware that something was wrong, but did not find out the details until discovering the terms of the treaty decades later. In contrast with this helplessness in 1921, they were later involved with the Berger Commission,

the development of the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories and the subsequent Dene Nation through which land issues were resolved. Second, they were affected by TB and the Great Epidemic (and possibly by earlier epidemics about which we don't have local information). Again, there was little they could do except to absorb orphaned children and young people as community members. Those who were needy were helped in whatever way seemed practical at the time. Joe Punch was accepted into the community, in which he was among relatives; Angele Jumbo, who was orphaned but had uncles in the area, married Joseph Jumbo. Angelique Lomen, who was orphaned but chose to live on the land with a bit of help from her adopted brothers, was a capable adult who courageously raised a baby alone in the bush. She came to the settlement when Andrew was old enough for school; the people built a cabin for her family, which by then included several other adopted or foster children. The pattern was one of including and absorbing people who were alone and in need of community. Third, when the families experienced the fear and loss of having their children taken away to school, they did different things at different times: possibly supporting the request by several chiefs for a school to be built in nearby Fort Simpson, and variously refusing to send children to school, allowing them to go the Fort Simpson school, and withdrawing them. The other major action was the initiation of the settlement and the construction of the airstrip, so that they would get a community school.

I was struck by Dolphus's words, when I inquired anxiously about the time it has taken for the book manuscript to be completely checked then printed. He said, "It will happen when it's ready. When it's the way it needs to be, that's when it will be done. There's no need to be in a rush; Samba K'e isn't going away. Patience, patience is what is needed." I had been elated, and I thanked him. It struck me that patience is one of the qualities that has been part of Dene resilience during hard times. I remember my Native students at Mohawk College working through breaks and lunch hours if they had not completed tasks to their satisfaction; the clock meant nothing.

What I see in the above is a pattern of patience when faced with a difficulty; active involvement with political processes that hold promise of future improvement; a continuing connection with the land and its "spiritual domain"; flexibility in response to new situations, including both active resistance and flexible situation-by-situation changes of policy; community solidarity and determined action in the cause of keeping children as close as possible, while accepting the need for them to be educated. These are pragmatic people, with patience, energy and courage in the face of seeming impossibility. They have strong commitment to their chosen lifestyle, their community and its goals. With these, they have dealt with each difficulty as a stitch in the weave, with great common sense and determination. I dare to expect that these qualities and abilities will enable them to deal with the current difficult point in the weaving that they are engaged in, with "energetic determination."

## CONCLUSIONS

Both a pride in traditions and the energy of improvisation are, in themselves, sources of strength and resilience. In my view, tradition is a stabilizing element and improvisation is an activating one. Together, they have helped the Smbaa K'e people to sustain a continuous weaving of old and new, without completely abandoning the ways of their ancestors for a more European-based lifestyle, or, alternatively, becoming stuck in rigid adherence to the details of old practices. My review of details from the community book has reinforced my belief that the ability to engage in this dynamic process must be a continuation of abilities woven into the culture by the survival challenges of subarctic bush life.

One could question how normal or unusual this resilience is in Dene communities. Of that I am not certain, and I am not trying to make a point that Smbaa K'e is "better" than others. However, I have visited communities in the region where there appeared to be much more serious addiction problems, and one in which I was told that it was a deeply divided community. I have also seen very quiet communities in which not very much seemed to be happening. Of course, a short visit could make an impression completely invalid, and a quiet community life could well be the choice of its members.

Comparison with other groups is not my goal. The point is that the creation of *Smbaa K'e Then and Now* is a surprising achievement, considering community size, oral tradition and low literacy levels; this indicates several things about this group. First, it suggests that an experience of imagined and collective effort (in this case, the building of a settlement and an airstrip) can remain woven into the community fabric of a group long afterward, as a signal experience of realized possibility, providing group confidence for further unified efforts. Second, that the ease with which the community continues to combine elements of old and new points to a lengthy "practice effect". That is where I place my belief that the survival challenges of living on the land created this ability to combine traditional competencies with improvisational skills. The third point involves a list of values that I believe are integral to the group's resilience: respect for Dene traditions wound around the seasonal cycle in the "spiritual domain" of the bush, patience in adversity, unity in communal goals, and action with determined energy and creativity toward their realization.

In terms of community representation, the two editions of the community book provide rich documentation of the history and cultural processes of this group of Dene. They have continued their four-season life on the land through many challenges: contact with non-natives, disruption of traditional territories, death and illness during epidemics, failure of the Canadian government to adhere to treaty agreements, removal of children from their families, efforts by non-natives to take over valuable natural resources, the change to settlement life, a multitude of changes due to technological advances, and intergenerational effects

of residential school abuses. They have survived all of these, and have gone on after each transition, with many of the advantages of the new as well as the essentials of the old, combined in ways that suit their circumstances. Any change tends to result in losses as well as gains, but the Smbaa K'e Dene are continuously choosing, with determination, the elements of old and new to weave together, how to do the weaving and what they want woven into the design of their cultural fabric. This history of creative community life provides hope for their future.

The rich and varied representation of community history and current life in their book provides a mine of information about the hourly and daily stitching of the community "basket": its cultural fabric. The two topics, "Health" and "Learning" are just two of many that can be teased out of the varied submissions in the two editions. The process of working on the two editions has probably reinforced the communal pride and confidence, as various challenges were dealt with patiently and with energetic determination within a respectful and democratic process. The product will undoubtedly be an attractive new edition in which every person can take pride; it speaks in the voices of many individuals and groups within the community, representing their rich cultural life. It is also a historical and social document with editions about a decade apart, providing two historical markers for the future, as well as a resource for the community's youth for many years into the future.

Spoken with a basket maker's attitude, Dolphus Jumbo's words could be applied to the Smbaa K'e Got'ine people's efforts in community building, and their production of the book to represent themselves: "It will happen when it's ready. When it's the way it needs to be, that's when it will be done. There's no need to be in a rush; Smbaa K'e isn't going away. Patience, patience is what is needed."

Roberta McGregor, B.A.

## REFERENCES

- Alaska Fish and Wildlife. 2007. Alaska Fish and Wildlife News, October. *Nutrition of wild game meat*. [http://www.wc.adfg.state.ak.us/index.cfm?adfg=wildlife\\_news.view\\_article&news\\_id=id=31](http://www.wc.adfg.state.ak.us/index.cfm?adfg=wildlife_news.view_article&news_id=id=31) (accessed May 22, 2007).
- Anglican Church of Canada. 2008. General Synod Archives, September 23. *Residential schools: The burning apology*. General Synod Archives. <http://www.anglican.ca/rs/history/schools/ft-simpson-nwt.html> (accessed May 16, 2009).
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Asch, Michael I. 1981. Slavey. In Helm 1981, 338-349.
- . 1977. Dene Economy. In Watkins 1977, 47-61.
- . 1988. *Kinship and the drum dance in a northern Dene community*. Edmonton: Boreal Institute for Northern Studies.
- Ashton-Warner, Sylvia. 1963. *Teacher*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Assembly of First Nations. Residential Schools. <http://www.afn.ca/residentialschools/history.html> (accessed May 16, 2007).
- Atkinson, Paul, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland, Lyn Lofland, eds. 1997. *Handbook of ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Barfield, Thomas, ed. 1997. *Dictionary of anthropology*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Becker, H. S. 2000. *Tricks of the trade: How to think about your research while you're doing it*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Birket-Smith, Kaj. 1929. *The Caribou Eskimos: Material and social life and their cultural position*. Vol.5, Part 1-2, Report of the 5<sup>th</sup> Thule Expedition 1921-24. In Helm 1981, 212-219.
- Blythe, J.M., P.M. Brizinski, and S. Preston. 1985. *I was never idle: Women and work in Moosonee and Moose Factory*. TASO Report No. 21. Hamilton: Research Program for Technology Assessment in Subarctic Ontario, McMaster University. Quoted in Scott 2001, 305.

- Brody, Hugh. 1981. *Maps and dreams*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Bromley, Marianne. 1986. Fur trade in the Northwest Territories from the earliest days to the present time. In Hall 1986, 7-29.
- Bruner, Edward. 1986. Ethnography as narrative. In *Anthropology of experience*, Ed. Victor Turner and Edward Bruner, 139-155. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Bruner, Jerome. 1987. Life as narrative. *Social research* 54 (1): 11-42.
- Brydon, Diana and William D. Coleman, eds. 2008. *Renegotiating community: Interdisciplinary perspectives, global contexts*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Canadian Lawyers for International Human Rights. 2007, Nov. 15.  
<http://www.claihr.ca/projects/AddressingIndianResidential.html>.  
 Accessed May 17, 2009.
- Choquette, Robert. 1995. *Oblate assault on Canada's northwest*. Religions and Beliefs Series, no. 3. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.
- Clifford, James and George E. Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing culture: Poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2005. Rearticulating Anthropology. In Segal and Yanagisako 2005, 24-48.
- Dene/Cree Elderspeak. 2004. *Tales from the heart and spirit*. Updated October. Launched initially by Meadow Lake Tribal Council, 1999.  
<Http://www.horizonzero.ca/elderspeak/dene.html> (accessed May 28, 2009).
- Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. 2000. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dickason, Olive Patricia. 1993. *Canada's first nations: History of founding peoples from earliest times*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
- DiGregorio. 1992. *Local history, environment a natural fit at the Brant Museum*. September 1. Burlington: Burlington Post.
- Douglas, J. D. 1985. *Creative Interviewing*. Beverly Hills. Sage.
- Duchaussois, Fr. Pierre, omi. 1923. *Mid snow and ice – Apostles of the northwest*. Trans. from Aux Glaces Polaires (Crowned by the French Academy) by Fr. Thomas Dawson, omi.



- Erasmus, George. 1977. We the Dene. In Watkins 1977, 177-181.
- Fine, Michelle, Lois Weis, Susan Weseen, Loonmun Wong. 2000. For whom? Qualitative research, representations, and social responsibilities. In Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 107-131.
- Freire, Paolo. 1973. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Trans. Ramos, M.B., New York: Seabury.
- Frideres, James S. 1988. *Native peoples in Canada: Contemporary conflicts*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall.
- Fumoleau, Rene. 1984. *Denendeh: Dene celebration*. Yellowknife: The Dene Nation.
- Goulet, Jean-Guy A. 1998. *Ways of knowing, experience, knowledge and power among the Dene Tha*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Gillespie, Beryl. Territorial groups before 1921: Athapaskans of the Shield and the Mackenzie Drainage. In Helm 1981, 161-168.
- Hall, Ed, ed. 1986. *A way of life*. Department of Renewable Resources, Yellowknife: Government of the Northwest Territories.
- Hall, Stuart and Bram Gieben, eds. 1992. *Formations of modernity*. Open University. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hatt, Gudmund. 1916. Material culture of the Chilcotin Athapaskans of west central British Columbia. In Helm 1981, 24.
- Helm, June. 2000. *People of Denendeh: Ethnohistory of the Indians of Canada's Northwest Territories*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University.
- . ed. 1981. *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 6: Subarctic*. William C. Sturtevant, general ed. Smithsonian Institution. Washington. U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Honigmann, John J. 1981. Expressive aspects of subarctic culture. In Helm 1981, 718-736.
- . 1946. Ethnography and acculturation of the Fort Nelson Slave. Yale University Publications in Anthropology, Number 33. In Osgoode and Rouse 1946, 1-169.

- Jacobs, Susan. 2001. Building a community in the town of Chisasibi. In Scott 2001, 304-315.
- Jenness, Diamond. 1934. *Indians of Canada*. Anthropological Series 15, Ottawa: National Museum of Canada Bulletin 65.
- Johnson, Martha and Robert A. Ruttan. 1993. *Traditional Dene environmental knowledge: A pilot project conducted in Fort Good Hope and Colville Lake, 1998-1993*. Hay River: Dene Cultural Institute.
- Kritsch, Ingrid. 1990. Transcript of interview with Joseph Jumbo. May 24. Transl. Violet Sanguéz. Permission of Sambaa K'e Dene Band.
- Kakfui, Stephen. 1984. Forward; and We the Dene. In Fumoleau 1984, 7-46.
- Lee, Bill. 1999. *Pragmatics of community organization*, 3rd ed. Mississauga, ON: CommonAct Press.
- . 2007. Lee, Bill, Sheila Sammon and Gary Cornelius Dumbrill, eds. 2007. *Glossary of terms for anti-oppressive policy and practice*. Mississauga: CommonAct Press.
- Lykes, M.B. 2000. Dialogue with Guatemalan Indian women: Critical perspectives on constructing collaborative research. In R.K.Unger, ed. *Representations, social constructions of gender*. 167-184. Amityville: Baywood.
- MacKay, Glenn. 2009. Email from Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, Feb. 13, 2009. Yellowknife.
- Marie, Suzan and Judy Thompson. 2002. *Dene ts'ukeghai Tene rehesi; Dene spruce root basketry: Revival of a tradition*. Mercury Series. Canadian Ethnology Service, Paper 138. Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization.
- Mason, J. Alden. 1946. *Notes on the Indians of the Great Slave Lake Area*. Yale University Publications in Anthropology, Number 34. In Osgoode and Rouse 1946, 1-34.
- McGregor, Roberta. 1987a. *Community organizing*. Booklet, Mini-booklet, and video. NNADAP, Health and Welfare Canada. Yellowknife. Collection of R.R.D. McGregor, London ON.
- . 1987b. *Organizational context: Job Readiness Programs, Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology, Hamilton, Ontario*. Unpublished paper for Social Work 3D9. Collection of R.R.D. McGregor, London ON.

- . 1987c. *Report on the hostel review of Dehcho Hall, Fort Simpson, N.W.T.* The Executive Committee, Dehcho Regional Council, Fort Simpson, N.W.T. July 13. Collection of R.R.D. McGregor, London ON.
- . 1997. *Small steps together*. Fort Smith. Dehcho Community Programs, South Slave Research Centre, Thebacha Campus, Aurora College. Collection of R.R.D. McGregor, London ON.
- Muller, Hugo. 1974. *Why don't you?: A look at attitudes towards Indians*. Noranda: Hugo Muller.
- Mulrennan, M. E., and C. H. Scott. 2000. *Mare nullius: Indigenous rights in saltwater environments*. *Development and change* 31 (3): 681-708.
- Nahecho Keh: *Our elders*. 1987. Thom, Margaret and Ethel Blondin-Townsend, eds. Slavey Research Project. Fort Providence: Secretary of State.
- Native Press. 1975. Article on the Berger Inquiry at Trout Lake, September 11. In *Sambaa K'e Dene Band* 1998, 9.
- Navajo Nation. 2005. *Heritage community foundations*. <http://www.economicexpert.com/a/Navajo:Nation.htm>. (accessed December 15, 2008)
- Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly. 2007. *6th Session, Day 4, 15th assembly*. Thursday, May 10. Hansard. [http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/\\_live/documents/documentManagerUpload/HN070510.pdf](http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/_live/documents/documentManagerUpload/HN070510.pdf) (accessed May 29, 2009)
- Norwegian, Leo. 2004. *Dehcho Land use planning committee*. Report compiled by Heidi Weibe. Fort Providence, NT. March 29-April 2. <http://www.Dehcholands.org?decs/reports/revised%20Dene%20nahodie%20workshop%20report.pdf>. (accessed May 12, 2009)
- Oleson, Virginia. 2000. *Feminisms and qualitative research at and into the millenium*. In *Denzin and Lincoln 2000*, 234.
- Osgood, Cornelius. 1936. *Distribution of northern Athabaskan Indians*. New Haven: Yale University Publications in Anthropology 7:3-23.
- . Osgood, Cornelius and Irving Rouse, eds. 1946. *Yale University Publications in Anthropology*, Numbers 33, 34. Yale University Press: New Haven.

Overvold, Bob and Steve Kakfui. 1977. The Schools. In Watkins 1977, 142-148.

Patterson, E. Palmer II. 1972. *Canadian Indian: A history since 1500*. Don Mills: Collier-Macmillan.

Plummer, Ken. 2001. The call of life stories in ethnographic research. In Atkinson, and Coffey and Delamont and Lofland J., and Lofland H., 396-406.

Preston, Richard J. 1990. *Cultural causality, cumulative change, and personal choices*. Paper presented to a Department of Anthropology Colloquium, Hamilton: McMaster University.

—. 2001. *James Bay Cree culture, malnutrition, infectious and degenerative diseases*. In Papers of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Conference on Algonquian Studies. Ed. Nichols, John D. 32; 374-384.

—. 2002. *Cree narrative*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

—. 2008. Twentieth-Century Transformations of Native Identity, Citizenship, Power, and Authority. In Brydon and Coleman 2008, 47-65.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police patrol reports. Jan. 30, 1926 - Dec. 15, 1964. In Samba K'e Dene Band 1998, 113-118.

Rappaport, Nigel and Joanna Overing. 2000. *Social and cultural anthropology: Key concepts*. London: Routledge.

Ray, Arthur J. 1974. *Indians in the fur trade: their role as trappers, hunters, and middlemen in the lands southwest of Hudson Bay 1660-1870*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Redvers, ed. 2004. *Traditional knowledge overview of the South and North Mbehgaah areas*. Samba K'e Dene Band. Hay River: Crosscurrent Associates.

Ridington, Robin. 1988. *Trail to heaven: Knowledge and narrative in a northern Native community*. Vancouver: Douglas.

Rogers and James E.G. Smith. Intercultural relations and cultural change in the Shield and Mackenzie borderlands. In Helm 1981, 146-157.

- Sambaa K'e Dene Band. 1998. *Sambaa K'e then and now*. Community Book Project, Sambaa K'e (Trout Lake, NT). Yellowknife: Outcrop.
- . 2006. *Sambaa K'e then and now 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Community Book Project, Sambaa K'e (Trout Lake, NT). Unpublished MS in preparation for printing.
- Sapir, Edward. 1936. *Internal linguistic evidence of the northern origin of the Navaho*. *American Anthropologist* 38: 224-235.
- Schechner, Richard. 2007, Aug. 3. *What is "performance studies" anyway?* (draft). <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/rs2.dos>. (accessed February 12, 2009).
- Schuurman, Hedda. 2001. The concept of community and the challenge for self-government. In Scott 2001, 379-395.
- Scott, Colin H., ed. 2001. *Aboriginal autonomy and development in northern Quebec and Labrador*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Segal, Daniel Alan and Sylvia Junko Yanagisako. 2005. *Unwrapping the sacred bundle: Reflections on the disciplining of anthropology*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sturtevant, William C. general ed. 1981. *Handbook of North American Indians. Vol. 6: Subarctic*. Smithsonian Institution. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Turner, Dick. 1975. *Nahanni*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Surrey: Hancock House.
- Turner, Victor and Edward Bruner, eds. 1986. *Anthropology of experience*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Wagner, Roy. 1986. *Symbols that stand for themselves*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Waldram, James B., D. Ann Herring, and T. Kue Young. 2007. *Aboriginal health in Canada: Historical, cultural, and epidemiological perspectives 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Warry, Wayne. 2000. *Unfinished dreams: Community healing and the reality of aboriginal self-government*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Watkins, Mel, ed. 1977. *Dene Nation; Colony within*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

World Health Organization. 1946. *Preamble to the constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the international conference, New York*. 19 June – 22 July 1946; signed 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States. (Official records of the World Health Organization, no.2, p. 160. Entered into force 7 April 1948).

Young, David E. and Jean-Guy Goulet, eds. 1994. *Being changed by cross-cultural encounters: Anthropology of extraordinary experience*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.

### See Related Readings below

Borland, K. 1991. That's not what I said: Interpretive conflict in moral narrative research. In Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 107-131.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. 2008. June 13, 2008. News, June 13. *Young people also hurt by residential school legacy, forum hears*. <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/saskatchewan/story/2008/06/13/youth-residential-schools.html> (accessed May 29, 2009).

Dehcho Divisional Education Council. 2002. *Trout Lake community web site*. [http://www.Dehcho.nt.ca/Schools/Schools\\_Charles\\_Tetcho.html](http://www.Dehcho.nt.ca/Schools/Schools_Charles_Tetcho.html) (accessed July 15, 2007).

Dene Nation. 2006. *Dene history*. <http://www.denenation.com/denehistory.html> (accessed May 12, 2009).

Dene Nation. 2008. *Traditional protocol*. Revised March 27. 1  
<http://www.uregina.ca/asc/documents/First%20Nation%20Traditional%20Protocol%20March%2028%202008.doc> (accessed February 11, 2009).

Fontana, Andrea and James H. Frey. 2000. Interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. In Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 645-672.

Friedman, Jonathan. 1994. *Cultural identity and global process*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Heritage Community Foundation. 2005. Alberta Online Encyclopedia. *Elders' voices: the history; the peoples; the voices*. [http://www.abheritage.ca/eldersvoices/peoples/language\\_dene.html](http://www.abheritage.ca/eldersvoices/peoples/language_dene.html). (accessed December 15, 2008).

Young, T. Kue. 1988. *Health care and cultural change: The Indian experience in the central subarctic*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.