

# Mamowi Kagiikwewin

## SHARING TEACHINGS AND LEARNINGS



*The first in a series of newsletters reporting on-going research on Treaty Three Anishinaabeg's past and present relations with the Ontario child welfare system.*

## Boozhoo. Greetings.

This newsletter is to share information about research I am doing with Anishinaabeg in Treaty #3 territory. The research is about Anishinaabeg and the Ontario child welfare system, past and present. The newsletter is for anyone and everyone who is interested, and wants to know about research going on in Treaty #3 territory. The title of the newsletter shows my appreciation for the knowledge which Anishinaabeg have generously shared with me, and my intention to reciprocate by sharing knowledge about the research project as it progresses. This newsletter is meant to be part of an on-going conversation about the research. I hope you find it interesting and look forward to your feedback!

Krista Maxwell

*Image above: Wabaseemoong children enjoying the Lake of the Woods during Family Fun Day, July 2012.*

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*All photos used with permission including authorization from Adolphus Cameron, Executive Director of Wabaseemoong Child Welfare Authority.*

## Chi Miigwetch

I am very grateful to the many people who have generously shared advice, teachings and histories. I could not do the research without this help.

First I want to honour the late Elder Joseph Morrison, who generously shared historical knowledge which first inspired me to visit Treaty Three territory.

Very special thanks go to Adolphus Cameron, for valuable guidance and awe-inspiring patience in answering my endless questions, big and small, and to Debbie Lipscombe for welcoming me and helping me make countless important connections with people. Sincere thanks to Theresa Stevens, Executive Director of Anishinaabe Abinooji Family Services, and George Simard, Executive Director of Weechi-it-te-win Family Services, for providing valuable guidance and advice along the way. I am also grateful to the Social Sustainability Chiefs of Treaty #3 (2011) who provided helpful advice in the beginning stage of this research.

This research would not be possible without people sharing their stories. You have been very generous. I am deeply grateful to the Elders and others from Wabaseemoong who have shared oral histories: Margaret Quewezance, George Land, Eli Carpenter, Mabel Kent, George Bunting, Mabel Mandamin, John Paishk, Anthony Henry, Mary Jane Scott, Isaac Mandamin, Cindy Cameron, Audrey Mandamin, Mary Letander, and Olive Cameron. Chi Miigwetch to the Elders from across Treaty #3 territory for sharing their histories and teachings: Sherry Copenace, Bessie Mainville, Madeline Skead, Bessie Tom, Kalvin Ottertail, Gladys Debungie, and George Potsin.

Many people have helped to make my time in Wabaseemoong more enjoyable and productive. Thanks to George Land for taking me to the site of One Man Lake, and to Marilyn McDonald for sharing her interpreting skills and showing me around Wabaseemoong. My appreciation to the staff of Wabishki Makinaakoons Abinooji Niwiidabimaa (Wabaseemoong Child Welfare Authority) for your help during my visits. Many thanks to Cindy Cameron and Adolphus Cameron for hosting me in their home.

Colin Wasacase and Reuben Wasacase enlightened me on the important history of Ojibwe Tribal and Family Services. Many thanks to Bonnie Rimstad for helping me to unravel changing child welfare policies and procedures, and navigate the Kenora Children's Aid Society archives, as well as sharing her own historical knowledge. Bill Leonard and Vik Nowak generously provided access to records of the former Kenora and Rainy River Children's Aid Societies, respectively. Thanks also to Louise Centena, Colleen Sandy, Jack Martin, Tom Dawyduk and Vik Nowak for their histories of child welfare practice.

Chi Miigwetch to Clarence White, Mary Letander and Adolphus Cameron for assistance in translation and interpretation between Anishinaabemowin and English.

Last but my no means least, thanks for the hospitality and friendship: Cindy & Harold Piche in Wauzhushk Onigum, Bev Williamson in Kenora, Bea McMillan and Michelle Mihichuk in Fort Frances.

## In a Nutshell: Brief Overview of the Research

I intend for this research to contribute to changing the child welfare system and social relations which have allowed for so many Anishinaabe children to be taken from their families in communities over the past half-century. The research tries to answer three big questions, focusing on social change during the period from the 1950s until the present.

These three questions are:

1. How have Anishinaabeg resisted the Ontario child welfare system and how have they changed it?
2. How has the child welfare system changed Anishinaabe family and community relations, including relations between different communities?
3. How have understandings of how children should be raised and kept safe changed, in Anishinaabe communities and in the field of child welfare?

I am trying to answer these questions by gathering knowledge in several different ways:

1. **Listening to elders:** Collecting oral histories from elders, focused on child-raising, the child welfare system, and social change more generally.
2. **Learning from people's shared experiences:** Listening to community members discuss their past and recent experiences with the child welfare system, including people who were removed as children, parents who lost children, and people who have provided customary care or foster care.
3. **Learning from past and present child welfare workers:** Talking with Anishinaabe and white child welfare workers and directors who have worked in Treaty #3 communities.
4. **Taking part in events:** Attending meetings and events related to child welfare, such as conferences, Family Fun Days, and Annual General Meetings of child welfare agencies.
5. **Studying written records:** Reviewing files in the archives of the Children's Aid Societies (in future, I may also look at provincial, federal and church archives).
6. **Studying child welfare policy and its effects:** Reviewing past and current provincial child welfare policy documents, and learning from community members, and child welfare managers and workers, about how these policies affected and continue to affect Treaty Three families and communities.

## Anishinaabeg of Wabaseemoong Independent Nations: Sharing Local Histories

In September 2011 I visited Wabaseemoong / Whitedog for the first time. I met with then Chief Eric Fisher; Adolphus Cameron, Executive Director of the then newly established Wabishki Makinaakoons Abinooji Niwiidabimaa (Wabaseemoong Child Welfare Authority); Elder Margaret Qewezance; Audrey Mandamin, and other community members. I offered each person tobacco, and asked if they would share some of their community history, including the history of relations with the child welfare system.

Adolphus shared a brief overview of the history of the community from the signing of Treaty 3 in 1873, explaining how community and family life has been disrupted by outside interventions including the flooding and forced relocation of One Man Lake and Swan Lake communities, and how Wabaseemoong has struggled to regain control of child welfare since the early

1990s. He finished up by noting that even though there are many challenges, the situation is currently hopeful.

Margaret shared history of family life in One Man Lake and Wabaseemoong from the 1940s, including the role of extended family and community in caring for children, families travelling together to pursue livelihoods including blueberry picking, wild rice harvesting, hunting and fishing. She remembered the first suicide in the community in 1959, the negative impact of welfare payments from the 1960s, and how people stopped going to their traplines.

Audrey Mandamin told me about her experience as an adoptive parent in the community's first traditional adoption to be conducted alongside the mainstream system.

I came to understand that the Anishinaabeg at Wabaseemoong have suffered a long history of having their



*Anthony Henry, one of the oral historians contributing to this project.*

children forcibly removed, and also that they have made many efforts to resist the removal of their children, and to change the system which has allowed for so many children to be taken. These histories are important in helping us to understand the present, and deserve to be more widely shared.

Since this first meeting I have been back to Wabaseemoong several times. Workers at Wabishki Makinaakoons Abinooji Niwiidabimaa have shared their knowledge and experiences, and community members, including elders from Wabaseemoong who are now living in Kenora, have shared oral histories. I hope to continue to gather community histories during July 2013 and winter 2014.



*George Land points to the location of the former village at One Man Lake, destroyed by flooding with hydro dam construction in 1958.*



*Anishinaabe children with Jack Copeland and other workers from Kenora Children's Aid Society await transport to Sandy Lake and Deer Lake for adoption. Source: Kenora CAS Archives. Reproduced with permission of Bill Leonard, Executive Director of Kenora-Patricia Child and Family Services.*

## Treaty 3 Children Adopted in Oji-Cree Communities: Archival Research on the “Northern Adoption Project”, 1964-1965

Archival research is a kind of historical research which involves studying documents, photographs, and other records which have been saved in institutions and/ or privately.

When I first visited Treaty 3 territory, I heard stories about how children were taken from Treaty 3 communities in bus-loads in the 1960s, and how some children were flown up north to Oji-Cree communities, where they were handed over at the dock to whoever would take them. It is certainly true that Anishinaabe children from Treaty 3 territory were flown up north to be adopted by Oji-Cree people in Treaty 9 communities. I have not come across

evidence that the CAS used buses to remove Anishinaabe children from reserves. Records I have reviewed show that home studies were done in advance and references taken up for prospective adoptive parents.

The Kenora Children's Aid Society called this mass adoption of Anishinaabe children by Oji-Cree families the “Northern Adoption Project”. The project was developed and carried out by KCAS social worker Jack Copeland in 1964. I was interested to learn from people at Wabaseemoong that Jack Copeland was previously a Hudson Bay Company fur trader, and at one point he owned a store at Wabaseemoong.

The idea of placing Anishinaabe children from Treaty 3 territory with families in the north seems to have come from an Oblate missionary, Father Eugene Benoit, who was based in Red Lake. At that time, 80% of crown wards under the Kenora CAS—about 150 children—were Anishinaabeg, and Copeland noted a shortage of white and Native adoptive homes. He also expressed doubt about whether white families could provide the best homes for Native children. In 1965 he wrote, “An Indian child who is brought up in a white home in a good deal of cases becomes a lost soul when he reaches his teens”.

Copeland first visited Sandy Lake to meet with Chief and Council and conduct home studies in July 1964. Between September 1964 and September 1965, at least sixty-four Anishinaabe children were flown to northern reserve communities where they were placed for adoption. The communities were Sandy Lake, Pikangikum, Round Lake, Deer Lake, Trout Lake, Bearskin, Sachigo Lake, and Cat Lake.

There are many questions about these mass adoptions, which I hope this research can begin to answer. Why were these children apprehended? What was the role of the church and Christianity in making these adoptions? Why did the child welfare workers pick those particular communities and families as homes for these children? Were the differences of language and ethno-national identity (Anishinaabe and Oji-Cree) considered to be important? How did the children adapt to their new

homes and communities? Did any of the children maintain or re-establish contact with their birth families or communities?

As I progress with the research I hope to visit one or more of these northern communities and to meet with some of those who were adopted as children, the adoptive families and other community members to learn about their perspectives on the history of these adoptions. I also hope to hear from families in Treaty Three territory whose children were adopted into northern communities. I recognise that this is often a difficult and painful issue for people to talk about. I am very grateful for anyone who is willing to share their story, and I will be glad to answer any questions you might have before deciding to contribute to this research.



*Rosanna Cowley of Naotkamegwanning/ Whitefish Bay, long-time customary care parent, with Maggie at the Wabaseemoong Family Fun Day, July 2012.*

## Social Histories of Child Welfare in Southern Treaty 3 Territory: Learning from Elders

Despite major hardships including widespread hunger, tuberculosis, and forced residential school attendance, grandparents and grandchildren were close in Anishinaabe communities through the middle decades of the 20th century. This was one of the main messages I took away from discussions with four Elders in the southern part of Treaty 3 territory over four days in September 2011. Gladys Debungie (Big Island and Rainy River), Bessie Mainville (Manitou and Couchiching), Calvin Ottetail (Lac La Croix) and Bessie Tom (Big Island and Big Grassy), all members of Weechiitewin's Elders Council, shared oral histories from their respective communities.

Anishinaabe child-rearing practices during

this period included the involvement of all community members, not just parents, in supervising children's behaviour. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and neighbours played important roles in teaching values and skills. Children participated in community labour, learning by example: Calvin Ottetail recalled carrying pails with a harness during maple syrup harvesting, and learning about the process through helping. Bessie Mainville spoke about how people maintained their ceremonies by practicing in the bush. Ceremony and parenting are connected, because attending ceremonies helps people to be good parents.

People often think that Children's Aid Societies began apprehending children

from reserves in the 1960s, but Calvin Ottetail described children from Lac La Croix apprehended as early as the 1950s. Records from the former Fort Frances/ Rainy River Children's Aid Society indicate that in 1957, the federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration signed an agreement with authorised that CAS to "give the same service to the Treaty Indians as to the other citizens", for which they would be reimbursed by the Department of Indian Affairs, via the provincial Department of Public Welfare. Even earlier than 1957, the Rainy River CAS did occasionally apprehend status children: they "dealt with the Indian population strictly on an emergency basis; apprehending children when the need arose".



Ronald with father Ronnie Cameron Sr. at the Wabaseemoong Family Fun Day, July 2012.

## What Will This Research Do? What Will This Research Lead to?

The knowledge I gather will eventually be shared with different groups of people in many ways, including: presentations to community groups, social workers, and academics; written papers and books for different audiences; and online resources. I hope to work with Anishinaabeg communities and leadership to identify priorities for how this research should be shared, and with whom.

I hope that the research will be useful for education and training in different settings, including community colleges and universities; for discussions about Anishinaabe child welfare policy and practice with Canadian government agencies; and for larger public discussions about relations between indigenous peoples and the Canadian state.

### A short book?

As identified in their strategic plan, the leadership of Wabaseemoong's **Wabishki Makinaakoons Abinooji Niwiidabimaa** are interested in sharing knowledge about local history, including the history of child welfare, with families currently involved with the child welfare system, young people, and the community. One outcome of the research may be a short book, written in plain English, with photographs and illustrations, which could support this goal. This could be done in the style of the recent publication [Bakaan Nake'ii Ngii-izhi-gakinoo'amaagoomin: We Were Taught Differently](#). The Indian Residential School Experience, about residential schools in the Treaty Three

area. Local historical knowledge could also be made available via a multimedia internet site, or an exhibit in a public space such as the Lake of the Woods Museum in Kenora.

### Training resources for social workers?

Many people have told me that social workers (including Anishinaabe, non-Anishinaabe and non-Native) need to understand more about the social history of Anishinaabeg's experience with child welfare system: people's stories about their experiences can provide a powerful education. To share this knowledge with social workers, I will be presenting the research at social work conferences, and publishing papers in professional journals read by social workers. I also hope to share the research with people involved in training child welfare workers and other social workers, including 7 Generations Institute, and university social work departments in Ontario and beyond.

### Tools for changing child welfare policy?

Anishinaabeg from Treaty Three territory have been meeting with policy makers for many decades to insist that their rights to self-determination in child welfare should be respected. I hope that this research will also support this continuing process.

I will continue to ask for advice about how the knowledge I gather should be shared, and look forward to hearing people's ideas.

## History of This Research: Why and How I Came to This Project

I first became interested in the social history of Anishinaabeg in Treaty 3 territory in 2009. I was doing research on the history of Native healing in Ontario cities for my PhD. Sylvia Maracle (from the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres) told me about her experience of visiting Kenora during the Anicinabe Park occupation in July 1974, about how Donald Morrison and others established the Lake of the Woods Powwow Club, and about the founding of NeeChee Friendship Centre and the Kenora Street Patrol. Sylvia introduced me to the late Joseph Morrison, who was kind enough to share extensive oral history during several meetings in 2009 and 2010. (I have written a paper drawing on Joseph's oral history which is available online – see links below.)

After I finished my PhD research, I wanted to learn more about the history of Native peoples' relationship with the Canadian child welfare system. I had learned that child welfare workers removed many children from their families and communities from the 1960s onwards, that many Anishinaabeg in Treaty Three territory lost large numbers of children, and that many of these children ended up in institutions, or fostered and adopted by white families, often very far away from their home communities. I wanted to learn more about why and how this had happened, whether it was continuing to happen, how families and communities

were affected, and how to stop it from ever happening again. I decided to start a new research project to try to begin to answer some of these questions.

I first visited Treaty 3 territory in May and June of 2011. Because I only had enough funds to spend a few weeks in Treaty 3 territory, I was hoping to do a small project talking to retired Anishinaabe and white social workers about their experiences of working in child welfare during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. I met with several people to share my ideas, and ask for help and advice: Debbie Lipscombe, Theresa Stevens, George Simard, Madeline Skead, Louise Centena, Bonnie Rimstad, Bill Leonard, and others. I was fortunate to receive very good advice. Some of this advice was that, as Debbie Lipscombe put it, "There are many stories that need to be told". Theresa Stevens also advised me that I should not only talk to former child welfare workers, but also the wider community.

After talking to many people, I decided that it would be good to try to do a bigger research project, and to invite more people with different experiences of the child welfare system to share their stories. In January 2012, I applied for funding from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for a three-year project. In July 2012 I learned that this application for funding was approved. I now have funding



*Girls from Wabaseemoong on their way to the Family Fun Day at Anicinawbe Park, July 2012.*

until May 2015. This means I can spend several more months over the next couple of years meeting with people in Treaty Three territory, and also have some funds to put towards sharing the knowledge from this research more widely, such as organising gatherings and producing teaching resources.



Krista Maxwell

## Introducing the Researcher

My name is Krista Maxwell, and I was born in Mi'kmaw territory / Nova Scotia. My father's family were from Ireland and Scotland and settled in Nova Scotia several generations ago. My mother's family were English and Danish and settled in Alberta in the 1950s. I left Nova Scotia in 1985, and lived, studied and worked in Britain and Nigeria for about 15 years. Eleven years ago I returned to Canada and settled in Toronto, where I now live with my partner, 10 year old son, and two cats.

My academic training is in anthropology, history, and public health. I completed my PhD in 2011, and am currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Toronto, where I teach and conduct research. Most of the time I love my work. When I'm not working, I enjoy spending time with my family, reading novels, swimming, cycling, meditating, skating, working in my garden, and listening to and playing music. I've recently started learning to fish...so far I haven't caught anything (but my son has caught several).

### *Calling Young Anishinaabe Artists, Designers, Photographers*

Would you like to contribute original artwork, graphics, or photos to a future edition of this newsletter?

Contact me at [krista.maxwell@utoronto.ca](mailto:krista.maxwell@utoronto.ca).

### *Work by Krista Maxwell Available Online*

Some of my previous research is available online to read and download at:

<http://utoronto.academia.edu/KristaMaxwell>

Ojibwe Activism, Harm-reduction and Healing in 1970s Kenora, Ontario: A Micro-History of Canadian Settler-Colonialism

Making History Heal: Settler-colonialism and urban indigenous healing in Ontario, 1970s-2010 (PhD thesis)

*Chi miigwetch! Thank you for reading this newsletter. I look forward to hearing your feedback. You can contact me by email at: [krista.maxwell@utoronto.ca](mailto:krista.maxwell@utoronto.ca), or by telephone at 807-407-4571 (when I'm in Treaty 3 territory) or 416-473-0484 (when I'm in Toronto).*

*I'll be in Kenora, Wabasemoong, and Treaty 3 territory from mid-June until the end of July 2013, and again in winter 2014.*