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ANISHINAABE PRENATAL OBSERVANCES

By

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ABSTRACT

ANISHINAABE PRENATAL OBSERVANCES

By

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Prenatal observances among the Anishinaabec of Wikwemikong emphasize the connection of both parents to the fetus. The relationship of people to the natural world is also illustrated by the Anishinaabec system of knowledge about pregnancy. The fetus is believed to be affected by the outside world through sights, sounds and events experienced by the mother and the father. Community elders teach cautionary tales about behavior in pregnancy that defines a relationship with the natural and spiritual world, especially with animate members.

Information for this study comes from conversations with community members and with couples who were interviewed together when possible. The birth of a child represents not only the continuation of a given family, but of a way of life. The prenatal observances which guide expectant parents through the experience of pregnancy are deep, meaningful structures of Anishinaabe culture. Despite change, these deep structures remain strong at Wikwemikong.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Care of an Anishinaabe child begins long before the baby is actually born into this world. Among the Anishinaabe, peoples of the Odawa, Ojibwa and Potawatomi tribes, both the expectant mother and father take responsibility for the health and well-being of the fetus. Certain observances are adhered to by the expectant parents throughout the term of pregnancy. The Anishinaabe prenatal observances include food restrictions (food taboos) as well as behavioral observances. I will examine these prenatal observances as they relate to the community's views of the health and well-being of the newborn at Wikwemikong, located on Manitoulin Island in Ontario, Canada. Some of these observances are culture-specific and therefore will be analyzed in relation to Anishinaabe tradition, patterns of socialization, views of life cycle (rites of passage), and daily discourse. Such observances are an integral part of Anishinaabe life and can only be understood by gaining a greater understanding of Anishinaabe social life and broader cultural themes.

Twentieth century accounts offer some of the first writings about Anishinaabe women and issues related to their experiences as women. These are the first records

about Anishinaabe women and their roles that are recorded by women and for this reason offer some insight into the experience of birth, a life cycle event significant to peoples throughout the world. For this reason these documents are very valuable in understanding the Anishinaabe world as a whole. While the process of birth may be universally similar in a physiological sense, it is drastically varied in the ways that it is viewed and carried out (Jordan 1978).

Two anthropologists of this period who dealt with Anishinaabe women's issues are Frances Densmore and Ruth Landes. In her work, Chippewa Customs, Densmore explores issues that relate to women and their roles in the community (Densmore 1979). Densmore lived with the Anishinaabec of Minnesota during the early 1900's. She describes the care of infants, the naming of a child, the "governing" of children, and stories told to children. She also describes the woman's role in child care, food gathering, care of the household, and craft work. However, she does not make note of any prenatal observances that women and their spouses may have followed prior to the actual birth of their children.

In her discussion of the life cycle, she does mention activities related to infant care and describes the behavior of the Anishinaabe family upon the arrival of the newborn. The birth was announced by gunfire, and soon after the announcement a group of non-kin would rush in

and seize the child while members of the father's lineage attempted to ward off the invaders. Eventually this task was achieved by throwing a mixture of flour and water upon the attackers: the infant was then returned to the parents. An Anishinaabe person was to be strong and vigorous, according to one of Densmore's informants. "This was done to make the child brave from hearing so much noise as soon as it was born" (Densmore 1979:48). This act may also serve as a symbolic induction of the infant into the society and reinforce the protective relationship that kin will provide throughout the individual's life.

Like Densmore, Ruth Landes was one of the earliest researchers to focus on Anishinaabe women and issues that fell directly into their realm. Ojibwa Woman, published in 1938, describes the behavior surrounding the birth of a child among the Anishinaabec (Landes 1969). The following account is from a life history recorded by Landes during her stay with the Anishinaabe people of southern Ontario. This particular life history was told to Landes in the early 1930's by Mrs. Maggie Wilson of Emo, Ontario:

> This is the story of a woman named Little Owl, of how she gave birth to her children. Her husband was named Mahween. One spring when they were moving...as the Indians long ago used to move from one place to another...this Little Owl was carrying a child, and as they were walking along she got sick (labor pains). So they stopped and shoveled the snow away and made a brush wigwam, and also put some wild hay in this wigwam. And this was where her little girl was born. She stayed there for two days. The other

> people moved on, only her grandmother stayed with her. Her husband went on ahead to make another wigwam where they were supposed to stop again. This was March and so the snow was (still) hard. After they had been there for two days, she got ready. She put on little snow-shoes and followed the other people. That night she walked about five miles. That day of course she did not carry anything. When they got to the stopping place, her husband had already made a wigwam. He did not stay in the same wigwam because long ago when a woman had a child, she was looked upon the same as a girl who receives her first sickness (i.e., dangerous to men and to other women's babies because of the lochial blood). Her grandmother cared for her and the baby. The next day, Mahween killed a moose, and so they stayed there for a while. Her mother-in-law cooked (for a woman with lochial blood or menstrual discharges can cook only for herself). Little Owl was keeping a box of dried blueberries and also some Indian rice, and these her mother-in-law cooked with meat for a big feast to be held over the newborn baby. There were about five other families moving along with them. Everybody ate except Little Owl (whose close proximity was feared) (Landes 1969:227).

Landes recorded a clear description of the kinds of observances that are followed surrounding the birth of an infant and does describe certain restrictions regarding behavior and eating patterns, but like Densmore she does not note any behavioral observances placed on the parents prior to the birth of their children. She comments on the fact that the woman is seen as "dangerous to the men and to the other women's babies" (Landes 1969:227). She refers to the lochial blood, but does not explain the fact that it is feared because of the power it is believed to give women.

Menstruating women and women who have recently given birth are considered powerful because of their bleeding.

The power, as it has been explained to me, means that a woman is spiritually strong at this time. Many Anishinaabe women have told me that a woman has her own spiritual strength which makes her strong during her menses. This cultural perspective presents women under these conditions as powerful, not dirty and deserving of less privilege. "Ethnocentrism led early Western researchers to interpret erroneously native American menstrual taboos as signs of female defilement and degradation. Yet, in reality, the female reproductive role was highly valued in those societies; a menstruating woman was considered to be at the height of her creative powers" (Browner and Sargent 1990:220).

While Densmore and Landes did attempt to reflect the world of Anishinaabe women by recording various facets of their cultural world, neither of them recorded evidence of prenatal observances. My own data will cover prenatal observances among the Anishinaabec and will add to the existing body of knowledge regarding this group of indigenous peoples.

Prenatal Care In Other Native American Groups

Indigenous peoples throughout North America have prenatal observances that guide them through the experience of pregnancy. Many Native American groups warned pregnant women against mocking a deformed person. Many were instructed not to mock an injured or blind

person for fear that the baby would be born with a similar defect. Elders of many Native American tribes instructed the expectant mother to avoid being in the presence of dying or dead people and animals (Niethammer 1977). The Lummi Indians of the Northwest Coast followed several guidelines regarding food consumption during the term of pregnancy. The Lummi women avoided:

> halibut, which was believed to cause white blotches on the baby's skin; steelhead salmon, which caused weak ankles; trout, which caused harelip; and seagull or crane, which would produce a cry baby. The prospective mother also had to abstain from shad or blue cod, which would induce convulsions in the child; venison, which would lead to absentmindedness; and beaver, which might cause an abnormally large head (Niethammer 1977:4).

Similarly, the Yaqui Indians of the Southwest also follow a set of precautionary measures during the term of pregnancy. It has been recorded that the expectant mother is warned:

> to be careful in her behavior or the child might be born with a birthmark or a more serious deformity. Staying out-of-doors during an eclipse of the moon was dangerous for an expectant mother. If she did stay out, her child might be born without fingers or toes, with a limb missing, a cleft palate, or some other serious disfigurement (Shutler 1977:224).

An anthropologist living among the Yup'ik describes "an elaborate set of dos and don'ts that still accompanies pregnancy and childbirth in the village..."(Fienup-Riordan 1990:44). The researcher was pregnant herself while living and working among the Alaskan Yup'ik. She recalls:

> I was to sleep with my head toward the door. As soon as I got up every morning, I was to run out-

> side as fast as I could. Only then might I come in, sit down, and drink tea. In fact, any time during the day that I left the house I was to do it quickly without stopping in the doorway. If I were to pause in my exiting, the baby was sure to get stuck during delivery (Fienup-Riordan 1990:44).

Prenatal Observances Among Other Ethnic Groups

Prenatal observances are widespread among groups of people throughout the world. Many Latin American and Mexican American women guard themselves against a lunar eclipse, "believing that if a pregnant woman goes out unprotected at such a time, her baby will be born with a cleft palate, with a body part missing, or dead" (Snow, Johnson, and Mayhew 1978:730).

It has been reported that many rural black women fear the harm that can be caused to their unborn children by other members in the community. "Several black patients said that if someone really hated the mother, they could put a curse on her to kill the child (in utero) or 'mark it for death' later in life" (Snow, Johnson and Mayhew 1978:731).

These examples illustrate that people of many cultures have beliefs regarding pregnancy and follow observances that protect the fetus. The particular observance may differ, but the concept that the infant is vulnerable to the outside world is shared by many different cultures. Elements of the natural world are seen as harmful to the fetus and thus must be avoided during pregnancy. Whether this harm comes from a food substance, an animal or a

natural phenomenon, the world is sometimes a dangerous place for the fetus. Prenatal observances found in groups throughout the world protect the fetus from such harmful forces during pregnancy.

Accounts of Prenatal Observances from Minnesota

In the early 1930's a Benedictine Sister in St.Joseph, Minnesota, recorded information regarding the Anishinaabe cultural system, in particular noting the experiences of Anishinaabe women and children. Sister M. Inez Hilger noted various food and behavioral observances that are followed during pregnancy. Although Hilger referred to behavioral restrictions as taboos, I prefer to use the word "observances" to describe this behavior at Wikwemikong.

As was the case with my own field experience, Hilger did note a certain amount of variation in the ways in which prenatal observances directly affected the expectant father. Hilger interviewed individuals who believed that the husband was not "hampered" by food taboos or prescriptions that his wife had to observe during pregnancy. There were exceptions to this rule however. Community members on the Mille Lacs Reserve did claim that a husband was to follow certain food taboos observed by his wife. Hilger interviewed an elder at the Mille Lacs Reserve who said, "Both father and mother must not eat turtle. If they do the baby will stretch all the time just like the turtle stretches all the time, and that

isn't good for the baby. Nor must they eat catfish. I knew a baby who was born with rings of sores encircling its head; the father had eaten catfish. The sores ate into the baby's head and it finally died" (Hilger 1936:8).

At Nett Lake Hilger interviewed a woman who was certain her husband must have eaten seagull eggs because their daughter had been born with freckles, and she herself had avoided the eggs. The violation of these observances affects the physical nature or the personality make-up of the unborn child. Hilger was told that "Eating popped rice caused the baby to have difficulty breathing" (Hilger 1936:7). Another informant explained that the eating of porcupine was forbidden because it caused the baby to have sinus trouble or to be born clumsy, crippled, clubfooted, or pigeon-toed. "I didn't heed the warnings of my mother; I ate porcupine and my boy was born clubfooted" (Hilger 1936:7). Other such restrictions include eating rabbit which would cause the baby to become frightened easily, eating the head of a catfish which would cause the baby's eyes to be too small, and eating woodchuck which caused the baby to shake continuously like the woodchuck does (Hilger 1936).

Among Hilger's informants, the eating of berries was associated with the markings babies were born with such as birthmarks, moles, and other features defined as defects (raised skin etc.). Anishinaabe people told Hilger that raspberries caused red marks, blueberries caused blue

marks on the skin, and blackberries caused black marks. One individual told Hilger that, "I have a blueberry mark; my mother used to say that she ate blueberries while she was carrying me. Once when I was carrying a child, we were moving camp. My mother walked behind me. I took a black raspberry and ate it. She saw me and told me what would happen: when my baby was born, he had a black spot on his leg" (Hilger 1936:7).

Hilger also made note of many "conduct taboos" and prescriptions that needed to be followed if the parents were to secure health and well being for their unborn child. Some informants told Hilger that no restriction was actually placed on hunting activities while others seemed to believe so. One person, however, said that:

> According to the Chippewa (Anishinaabe) traditions, hunting was at no time and in no way considered to be injurious to anyone with one exception. If while an animal was being dressed that had been killed by the husband of a pregnant woman certain bad signs appeared--muscles in certain parts, say in the sides or ribs of the animal, twitched or jerked-- he knew he was seeing a bad omen: stillbirth or death shortly after birth of his unborn child was in the offing (Hilger 1936:8).

Certainly one way to avoid such an occurrence would be to forego hunting activities or slaughter until after the child was born and had time to grow strong.

Many other behavioral observances were also noted by Hilger. An expectant mother was not to look upon a human corpse; the result would be that her child would be born

with dazed or crossed eyes. To look upon a deformed person or animal would certainly result in the deformation of the unborn child. An expectant mother was never to look twice at an unusual object; a second gaze would cause harm to the infant. Many individuals told Hilger that a pregnant woman and her spouse should not look at animals during pregnancy. "It is best not to look at any animal, or to torment any animal, even the smallest ones, such as a fly" (Hilger 1936:8).

Like many Anishinaabe groups, Lac Courte Oreille Reserve individuals told Hilger that an expectant mother should take care not to be startled or surprised while walking. "The child of a mother that had been frightened by a lizard was born with a head shaped like that of a lizard, and with short arms and little legs like that of a lizard" (Hilger 1936:9). It was said that women were also advised to avoid public gatherings such as a feast or a dance (Hilger 1936:8). This material is important because it is one of the only known instances of Anishinaabe prenatal observances being recorded. The observances discussed by Hilger are very similar to those which I have recorded at Wikwemikong.

Anishinaabe Cosmology and World View

In order to understand the significance of Anishinaabe prenatal observances, it is necessary to have some concept of the Anishinaabec and the way that they view the world. The word Anishinaabe is said to translate as "original

man" or "original people."

The Anishinaabe people of Wikwemikong do not conceptualize the world in a dichotomy of natural versus supernatural; instead all things belong to one realm whether seen or unseen. The Anishinaabe language distinguishes between animate and inanimate objects. These categories are not conceptualized as clear distinctions between "living" things and "non-living." Inanimate objects include tables and chairs, but animate objects include everything from a person to a pipe, or a stone (Hallowell 1992). These objects, as it has been explained to me, are animate because of their capability to house a spirit or a life.

Spiritual beings play a prominent role in the Anishinaabe world. There are spirits (manidos) of the water, of the plant world, and the animal world. The Great Spirit, often referred to as the Creator (Gitchi Manido) is prayed to and referred to in many instances as one who protects and guides the Anishinaabe people. There are other spirits such as the Thunder Birds (nimkee) whose presence is known by the sound of thunder, the result of their wings clapping as they circle above.

There are other kinds of beings that inhabit the world and include, but are not limited to, large cannibals and little people. The giant cannibals (windigowok) are horrifying creatures that can be heard screaming as they stalk the night time woods. They are often associated

with attacks on victims that have lived in excess by eating or sleeping too much (Johnston 1976). The little people (bgwodjininiiNsak) are much like other human beings but only stand a few inches tall. They are seldom seen although their paths can be seen leading to and from the woods or through an open field.

There are dangers that come from human forces as well. The bearwalk (mekwamose), as it has been explained to me, is a person who has the ability to change into the shape of a bear or some other animal. This person has learned to use knowledge and power in a way that is considered abusive. Such knowledge or power is sometimes translated as "bad medicine." The bearwalk is known to move about at night as a ball of glowing light or in the form of a fireball making its victims ill or even causing death. There are those known to have such power, but there are also ways to counteract such attacks on community members.

The Anishinaabe strive to have a relationship of mutual cooperation with the animal, plant, and spirit world. This relationship of mutual respect and cooperation can be seen in daily life. I have seen an elder place tobacco on the ground before picking a plant for medicinal purposes. This is an offering and sign of respect for the life and spirit of the plant. An Anishinaabe hunter will make an offering of food or tobacco and pray to the spirit of the deer he has shot. He prays that the spirit of the deer

will understand the need for the killing and that it is not offended by this act.

Human beings, plants, animals and spirits (incorporeal beings) exist in a close relationship to one another. Animals have spirits of their own that are to be recognized and respected by human beings. Animals serve as important symbols (dodems or totems) for kin and clan members. Animals teach and guide human beings throughout life.

Ancestors figure prominently in the daily lives of the Anishinaabec. Each fall a ghost supper or feast of the dead is held to honor the deceased members of a family. A place is set for an ancestor and food is offered into the fire before anyone else at the supper begins to eat. This is not the only time ancestors are present, however. Ancestors are considered present in daily activities and continue to guide the living.

This discussion on Anishinaabe world view is not complete. It is only provided as a frame of reference for understanding the significance of the forthcoming material. It would be, of course, virtually impossible to reflect the Anishinaabe world view in a few pages, and that is not my intent. It is my hope that I have treated these issues in a responsible and respectful manner.

Understanding the cosmology of the Anishinaabec allows us to better understand the prenatal observances found at Wikwemikong. Of specific interest are the relationships

that people have with the animate world and how these relationships determine what expectant parents must be aware of during pregnancy.

CHAPTER II

VIEWS OF PRENATAL CARE AT WIKWEMIKONG

The Community

The Wikwemikong Unceded Reserve is home to the Anishinaabec or the Native Tribes of the Odawa (Ottawa), Ojibwa (Chippewa), and the Potawatomi. The residents of the Wikwemikong Reserve take great pride in the fact that they are unceded. They have not, at any point in history, signed a treaty with the Canadian government. The term Anishinaabec (plural) is the people's word for themselves and is said to be translated to "original man or people." The Anishinaabec also identify themselves as the "people of the three fires."

The Wikwemikong Reserve is located on the eastern side of Manitoulin Island, in Ontario. The reserve is connected to the rest of the island by a small isthmus referred to by the Anishinaabec as Manido WaaNzhing, or Spirit Cave. The reserve is bounded by the North Channel, Georgian Bay, Lake Huron, and Manitowaning Bay (See figure 1). The resident population is over 2,400 out of a total band membership of 4,000 people. The size of the reserve is 105,300 acres, and it extends north to south approximately 30 miles and 10 miles east to west.

Seven separate communities exist on the reserve. Most of the small communities have their own church and a small

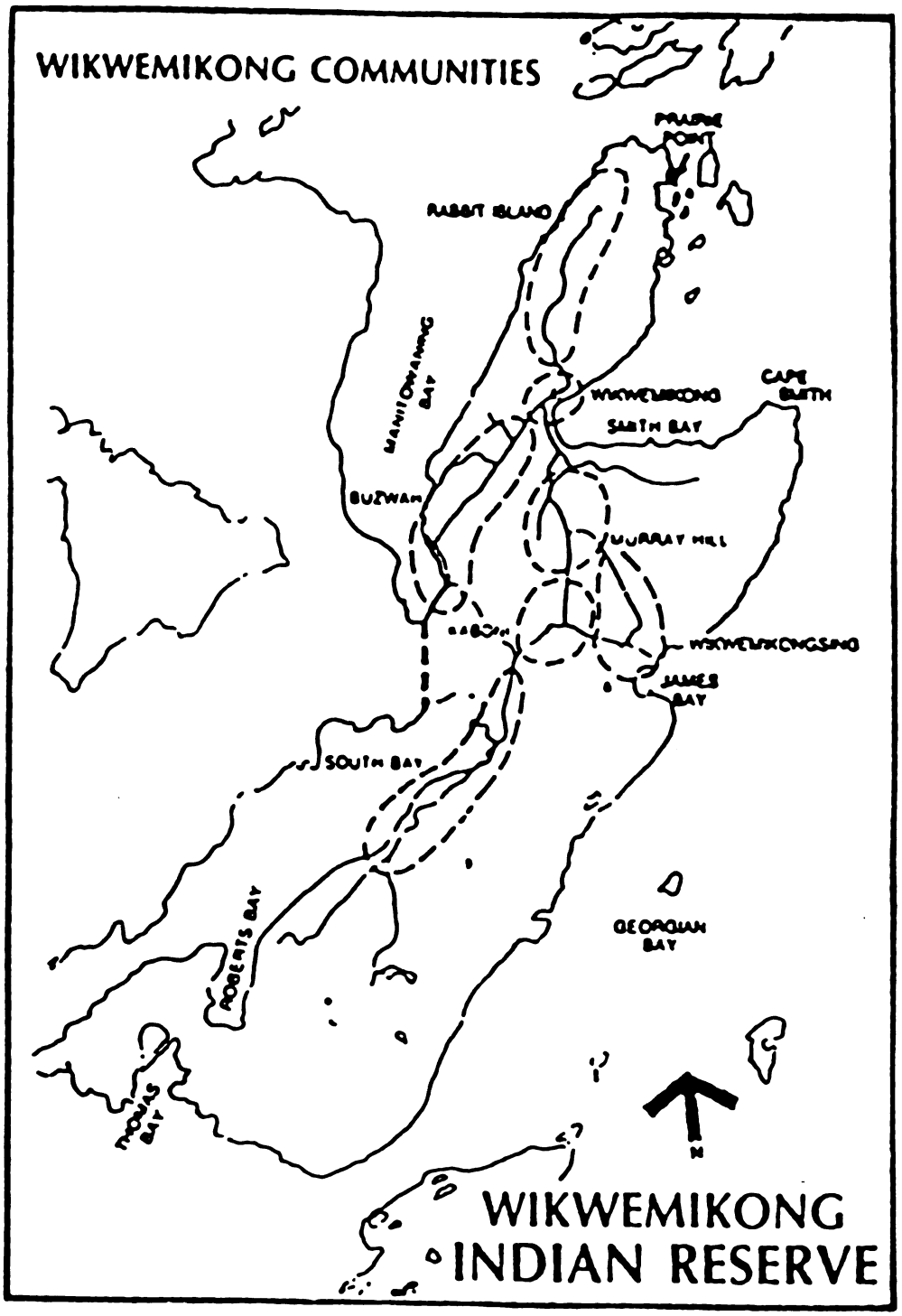
WIKWEMIKONG COMMUNITIES
RABBIT ISLAND
CAPE SMITH
SMITH BAY
BUZWAH
MURRAY HILL
JAMES BAY
SOUTH BAY
ROBERTS BAY
GEORGIAN BAY
N
WIKWEMIKONG
INDIAN RESERVE

Figure 1

confectionery (general store). The Anishinaabec of Wikwemikong, like peoples of all cultures, have varying views of "traditional life." Some, more than others, choose to live as their ancestors did in the "old ways." Both the Anishinaabe language and English are spoken on the reserve, and both are taught and used in the schools. Household residence varies from two generation to three generation households. Traditionally the Anishinaabec belong to exogamous patrilineages. Many people continue to identify with their clan or totem (dodem).

The main village of Wikwemikong has a water and sewer system, but many of the residents outside the main village depend on water that is delivered by truck weekly or carried in by hand. Two fire stations have been built on the reserve. Although the nearest hospital is more than an hour away, Wikwemikong does have licensed medical care available. A brand new clinic opened in July, 1988, the first summer that I was living on the reserve.

The opening was marked with a week of special events that included visits from traditional healers as far away as Six Nations (Iroquois Nation) and Thunder Bay (Anishinaabe Nation). This health clinic is unusual because it contains a traditional medicine lodge. This part of the clinic is operated by those knowledgeable of traditional healing and is available to anyone who seeks an alternative form of healing (that is, an alternative

to Western medicine).

The reserve has a band government comprised of a chief and twelve council members who are elected every two years. The reserve began operating its own nursery school in 1971 and has recently completed a new facility to meet the demands of a growing community. There are two elementary schools, kindergarten through eighth grade, as well as a special education classroom and learning facility for handicapped children. Secondary students attend school off the reserve, and some leave the island for their education. Many students graduate and go on to higher education at the universities or in a vocational training program.

The people of Wikwemikong earn their livelihood in a number of different ways. Some work in the schools as educators, in the local stores, or in the health clinics on the island. Others are working as road maintenance crew members on and off the reserve. There are several small general stores, snack bars, gas stations and craft stores. The people of Manitoulin Island depend on the seasonal tourism (May through September) which seems to increase more each year. Some craftmakers and artists sell their work at Pow Wows or to shops and galleries off the reserve. Recently, many young people from the reserve have been employed to fight fires in the western part of Canada. They leave home for several months at a time.

The residents of Wikwemikong have often left the

reserve to find work. For over fifty years, men have gone to other parts of Canada to work in the lumber camps. Many people moved to the United States in order to find work. Many ended up working in factories, some as far away as Chicago.

A few of the Wikwemikong residents still raise dairy cows and many maintain gardens to grow their own food. Some still gather fresh strawberries and blueberries each summer. Fish are often caught for personal consumption or sold to store owners in the larger towns. Hunting is also used to supplement many of the family diets. In spite of these various activities, the unemployment rate remains high on the Wikwemikong Reserve, as it is throughout Ontario.

Methods and Materials

This ethnography is the result of an ongoing study that began in the summer of 1988. My interest in Anishinaabe prenatal observances developed from my experiences of living and working on the Wikwemikong Reserve. During that summer, I spent many hours listening to elders and other community members. I was studying the Anishinaabe language and gaining a greater understanding and respect for the old ways (teachings).

Several shorter trips were made to the reserve the following fall and spring which enabled me to maintain the friendships which had developed and to continue my

learning. The following year a colleague and I once again returned to Wikwemikong to spend another summer. This time we set up a research design which involved the gathering of oral history from community members. The interviews (some of which were several hours long) were tape recorded and later transcribed into written form.

My interest continued to grow as I began to focus on their belief system of prenatal care. In 1992 I returned to Wikwemikong to interview community members about prenatal observances. Couples were interviewed together whenever possible. They were simply asked to share their experiences of pregnancy and birth. Interviews were recorded on audio-tape and later transcribed. In a few cases a close friend acted as a translator which allowed for better communication between me and the people being interviewed. The names of all community members have been changed to protect their rights to privacy. At the time I had no idea how much knowledge I would gain from the experience, nor did I realize what a broad impact it would have in gaining a greater understanding and respect for the Anishinaabec.

STORIES OF PREGNANCY FROM WIKWEMIKONG

While visiting with a friend, a story was related to me about the prenatal observances that are so much a part of their cultural system. A young female friend of twenty years of age recalled her father's reaction to her plans

to visit the zoo in Toronto. She and the expectant father had been living in the city and had decided to visit the zoo before moving back to the reserve for the birth of their child. When they mentioned their plans to her father, he forbade such an activity prior to the birth of the baby. When I asked her why her father had reacted in this manner, she explained the belief that viewing strange animals could affect the formation of the child. They never did get to the Toronto Zoo. When she returned to her parents' home, she was forbidden to have any contact with her childhood pets, three dogs and a cat. She recalled her disappointment but did respect the advice of her family members. Months later their baby boy was born healthy and strong.

This woman was learning of these prenatal observances during her own pregnancy. Guided by kin and community elders she was able to protect her child and experience a healthy pregnancy. While changes in behavior were difficult at times, she looks to her young son today and is glad that she had such guidance.

Another friend told me a story she learned from her grandmother and grandfather of a woman who was frightened while pregnant and what happened to her baby as a result. Apparently, it was her (the informant's) great-grandmother who was pregnant, and she had been warned to stay away from a nearby lake that was known to many as a place where rabbits lived. One day, the woman went to the lake anyway

and, sure enough, was startled by a rabbit. Some months later, her baby girl was born with a birthmark on her leg that was shaped like a rabbit. This story is told to illustrate what can happen when someone does not listen to the advice of elders.

The same individual related another story that her grandmother always told her about a man and a woman who slaughtered a goat shortly before the birth of their baby. The expectant mother held the goat's horns, and the man killed the animal. A few months later, their son was born severely deformed. The child was unable to talk (although it is said that he made a sound similar to that of a goat), and he was unable to walk as his hands and feet were twisted. His fingers were folded under like the hoof of a goat. Again, this story relates the importance of respecting the knowledge that elders have, especially in relation to the animate world.

These stories reflect a world view that differs greatly from the biomedical perspective found among Euro-Americans in the United States and Canada. The importance of prenatal care extends well beyond the Western medical perspective of what defines prenatal issues. In both countries, however, biomedicine defines prenatal care as a regimen of exercise and identified nutritional needs. Pregnancy is viewed and treated from a physiological basis, rather than with a focus on the mental, emotional, or spiritual health of the baby as is

traditionally the case among the Anishinaabec. The traditional view of health involves the balance of all of these aspects of a person's life. To prevent illness or to heal the body a holistic approach is taken. This same perspective is held in considering the health and well-being of the fetus.

The Anishinaabe of Wikwemikong often recall an incident that occurred some twelve or thirteen years ago when an expectant couple did not heed the warnings of the elders regarding such precautions. According to community members, the results can still be seen today. One day a small child was playing with some friends when she ran into a dirt road in front of her home, normally a quiet road with little traffic. At that moment, a truck came up the hill and struck the child without warning; the driver could not see the child beyond the crest of the hill. The child was killed instantly and was severely mangled. A young man was one of the first people to reach the scene; he and his wife were expecting at the time. He approached the child's body and saw the horrible sight. Her face had been almost completely destroyed on one side. Others soon came out of their homes, and seeing what had happened, they quickly warned the expectant father to turn away and leave.

The expectant father was given strict instructions on what to do once his baby was born, but it is said that he did not listen to the elders. They warned him that this

could severely affect his unborn child and pleaded with him to take their instructions home to his wife. He was told to take a piece of the dead child's clothing, place it in a jar and soak it in water until the birth of his child. He was then told that he should wash his baby's face with the solution.

Apparently, he never did this. He refused to adhere to such beliefs, but several months later his baby was born with a defect that extended across one side of her face. Many explain this defect as a result of the trauma that the fetus experienced the day that the fatal accident occurred. To this day, the young girl can be seen playing with other children on the reserve, her face severely swollen. She must travel several hours to the nearest qualified hospital for ongoing treatment. This story and others like it are a continual part of the daily discourse regarding pregnancy and care of the fetus. This story is one of the most commonly told stories, repeated to stress the importance of listening to the elders and observing certain behavioral rules during pregnancy.

I had the honor of interviewing one of the respected elders on the Wikwemikong Reserve. His name is Walter, and he is in his late eighties. He was the youngest of thirteen children born and raised on the reserve where his great-grandparents had lived. He stopped attending school at the age of six or seven years so that he could work and help with the family farm. His first language is

Anishinaabe, so we relied on a friend to help us communicate clearly. As an adult he left the reserve to work in a logging camp thirty miles from Wikwemikong. He was paid $18.00 a month to work from dawn until dusk.

He believes, after years of experience, that the old ways are a better way of life. He had several things to say about women and the issues that directly affect their lives. He strongly believes that women should breastfeed and is concerned about the consequences of formula used to provide nutrition for infants. Walter emphasized this point when he said:

> Although what you get from the cow is highly recommended by the doctors you know, drink all kinds of milk, drink six or seven glasses of milk a day. That's what they tell you to do, but the Indian people, the older people, would say, "don't touch that stuff," what you get from the cow, because it's not for you. It's for the calf the baby cows, you know, to feed on. Don't feed that to the babies, the kids. If a woman has a baby, they tell them to breastfeed them. That's why the woman has those tits on her chest, to feed the baby, not to get the feed from the cow and the baby will be a lot healthier if you do that.

He went on to say how pleased he was to see an Anishinaabe woman breastfeeding her baby at a public gathering and that he hopes many more women will follow her example. Walter seems to place little faith in the community of health professionals and the system of "advanced medicalization."

> I think the people that lived away back, before the white people took over this area ... not only this area ... they (white people) think that the people that lived here did not have

nothing. They live on what they can get out there in the bush. Like animals, they eat the animals and some sort of bark of a tree which we don't know. And they eat some kind of grass and we don't know that either. The only thing that we do, ah ... you can go out and shoot a deer meat, or a bear, or a fowl that flies in the air. Ducks, you know, the partridge, or whatever. They live on those, those older people. And the fish that swim in the lakes. They had a means of catching the fish. Of course, there might have been more fish in those days than we have now. That's what ... that's the way they lived and the way they raised their kids, you know.

It's something that you might not want to believe, ah ... like the younger woman, as she gets a little bit older, after ten years old, starts to see her periods as a young woman. They build a little shack. They wouldn't allow that woman in their home. They put a little shack just a distance from where they live, where they can watch them until after the period is over. They didn't let them run around, just in case they might get some kind of disease, you know. That's what they were afraid of.

And even when a woman gets pregnant, a married woman gets pregnant, they say that the man was pregnant also. Once they found out that the woman was pregnant, the man was not allowed to hunt anymore, or to fish, or to do anything else except to go and cut wood, you know, to keep the fire going. They didn't allow that because there are so many things that happen with the people.

Even now, there's a lot of Indian people that I know along here, that wouldn't go for that, you know, if you tried to tell them that. They wouldn't believe that. But there was a reason for that, too. Of course, when something happened, there had to be a reason, and the reason for that was, if the pregnant woman ... like if you go and take a walk some place, and you're pregnant, and all at once you see a snake, and you'll yell, and you're startled about the snake. Or maybe a little frog or maybe a little mouse. And when the baby is born, eight or seven months later, there's something wrong with the baby. Ah ... I don't know what they call it in English [birth defect].

So that was the reason why they disallowed the man to go out hunting, just in case he sees an animal and shoots the animal with a bow and arrow. You know usually there's a lot of blood coming out, and that's not good for the baby. He could die from that if you don't know how to treat him, but the Indian people, they looked

> after all these activities you know, what happened to the woman on that particular day, or the man. They looked at that (potential risks to the fetus) very closely. There's something wrong with the baby after it's born, then they know what to do. Something that you might get startled with, you know, maybe even a dog or cat and they know how to take care of the baby.
>
> That's something that the white people don't believe too. I don't know what kind of white people they are, they don't believe that. You see so many cripples, crippled white people, everywhere you go because the doctors couldn't look after that kind of a disease. I've seen it happen, right here on the reserve, people that don't believe that. So there's a lot of good things that we sort of forgot or we just ignore them, you know, although we've heard about it sometime, but we don't follow it up.

It is of interest to note that this elder is making reference to the story told earlier about the little girl who was born with a severe facial defect, a result of the tragic accident witnessed by her father before her birth. "I've seen it happen right here on the reserve" and so the story is alluded to again as an important lesson for others.

These stories are commonplace among the people of Wikwemikong today just as they were with their ancestors of many years ago. The stories are precautionary in nature because they serve as reminders of the important observances that must be followed during the term of pregnancy. The stories, most of them grounded in the present, are an important means of social control. Through a rich tradition of oral history, the Anishinaabec have passed these lessons down from one generation to the next. The knowledge of elders guides

expectant parents through a time of uncertainty and change. The stories reinforce the importance of listening to and respecting the elders; to ignore such guidance can have serious, often permanent affects.

Some evidence of this understanding and concern for the experience of birth is found in the traditional literature of the Anishinaabec. One of the older stories is the origin legend that deals with the birth of their prominent, often humorous character known as Nenibosh or Wenebojo. This figure often serves as a guide or teacher as well. The following is a section taken from the origin legend:

> Then the next baby was born. This one didn't have human features exactly, but he looked like a human baby to some extent. Just a little while later another one was born. This one didn't look like a human child. This one was stone, "Maskasawabik." Sometimes when I go out into the woods I see this stone. It's a very hard stone. I'm just telling you what I heard. It doesn't say that this woman took her babies home. I'm just telling you what I heard (Barnouw 1977:15).

Here we have an example of a story dealing with the birth of important cosmological figures. It is worth noting that one of the newborns is not completely human but is of stone. This illustrates the intimate relationship that the Anishinaabec have with the natural world of which they are a part. In the Anishinaabe language, the word for stone (asin) is treated grammatically and perceived as an animate object. As an animate object, stone (asin) is considered to have a life of its own. As a teacher and friend once explained

it to me, "it is capable of housing a spirit" and should, therefore, be treated with the same respect given to other living things. This baby was born of stone but categorically viewed as an important living being. The transition of birth was mysterious to those of the past and remains a marked event of great importance.

Birth has always been an important social event and an integral part of every social system (Meltzer 1981). The prenatal observances found at Wikwemikong are part of a system of health that probably extends far back into their past. As in the present, the Anishinaabe people have used oral tradition to teach and reinforce the importance of pregnancy and birth and the behaviors which surround these activities. The story of Maskasawabik illustrates the integral relationship that the Anishinaabec have with the natural world, the animate world. There are no distinct boundaries between nature and culture; they are interwoven as one fabric. This fabric is the experience of life.

CHAPTER III

CASE STUDIES: STORIES OF PREGNANCY AND BIRTH

The following case studies involve community members, both men and women, from different generations and various backgrounds. The case studies represent a wide range of perspectives regarding Anishinaabe prenatal experiences. Seven major categories of prenatal observances are discussed. These observances include: The avoidance of killing animals; abstaining from certain foods; avoiding wakes, and the sight of dead animals; maintaining an emotional balance, and controlling fear; knowing not to mock an injured or deformed being; not staring at animals; and avoiding situations where one might be startled.

Important themes surface in these case studies as community members relate cautionary tales regarding pregnancy. These cautionary tales are an important means of social control, reinforcing the power of the knowledge held by elders. The role of the father is as vital as that of the mother's during pregnancy. The fetus is cognizant of the outside world and experiences daily events through both parents.

Case Study #1: Daniel

Daniel is an elderly man in his late sixties. He and his wife raised three children at Wikwemikong, two boys

and one girl. His wife died when the children were still very young, and he raised his family by himself. He makes his living by operating a craft store and snack bar on the reserve. He also traveled the Pow Wow circuit for many years to sell his crafts.

His grandmother, Ester, was a midwife on the Wikwemikong Reserve, and much of his knowledge of pregnancy and birth came from his experiences growing up with his grandmother. He remembers that his grandmother "used to get called at all hours of the night and would go and deliver the baby." His grandmother often would see expectant mothers prior to the birth and advise them not to overwork or climb too many stairs.

His grandmother used to warn the expectant parents against being startled. "If you see a snake don't get too scared." He recalled that a "snake water" had to be prepared to counteract the effects of this startling experience. The parents were told to "kill a snake, boil it in water and bathe the baby." He went on to say that, "If the father is scared, then the baby gets born with that [feature]."

He said that such a precaution extends to both the expectant mother and father. Daniel said that if either parent is scared by something then the "baby is born with those characteristics. If it is a wolf or a porcupine then you need to get the fur or the hair of it and boil it."

Daniel said that viewing the dead could also be harmful to the baby and that in such a situation a piece of the dead person's clothing must be burned and boiled for a bath. His grandmother often used a cedar bath for the baby. He said, "It was a very important thing, that cedar." Cedar is considered sacred and apparently offers another means of neutralizing the ill effects which can occur when expectant parents view the dead.

Expectant parents were warned to avoid attending a wake for fear that harm would come to the infant. According to Daniel, "The man and woman had to stay away from the wake, because it could cause dwarfism or a deformity." He recalled (by name) various people who are deformed due to this happening.

He added that a man should not hunt or kill animals. He stressed the importance of this precaution to expectant parents and stated that, like viewing the dead, the killing of an animal could have severe impact on the child. When asked why this was so dangerous to the infant, he said that it is the act of killing (violence) or "maybe (the sight of) the blood."

This case study illustrates the caution that expectant parents must exercise during the term of pregnancy, especially in relation to the animal world. The presence of a snake may present a danger to the baby if a parent is suddenly startled. The danger of viewing the dead is also

mentioned, and thus the killing of an animal is also forbidden. Daniel stressed the potential danger that exists when an expectant father kills or slaughters an animal. This violence is directly experienced by the fetus and can harm the infant or even have a fatal effect. While it is not entirely clear how these events affect the fetus, it does seem that dangers are present in the animate world, especially in relation to animals. Perhaps the spirit of the animal being killed has some effect on the fetus.

When these situations do occur, there are ways to counteract the ill effects. He identifies a remedy which can neutralize the effects: one that is applied after the child is born. It takes the form of a medicinal wash or bath. What is important is the fact that the solution comes from the substance causing the ill effect. The cause exists in the natural world, but the cure itself is also found there.

Case Study #2: Bert and Phyllis

Bert and Phyllis are an elderly couple in their seventies. I visited them at their home in Wikwemikong and asked them to share their ideas and stories of pregnancy. Bert began by making the statement that he was very concerned about pregnancy among the youth, that they were too "weak" to have babies. He was also concerned that many people today do not follow certain eating

patterns and that they did not exercise enough while pregnant. They told me a story of a woman who did not listen to their advice and that she had recently lost her baby. They felt very badly and were certain that a different diet and more exercise would have prevented the loss. Bert told me, "Don't drive a car when pregnant." He believes that certain kinds of behaviors during pregnancy can "spoil the baby." They told of another woman who did drive and how that had caused the baby to "spoil inside." Phyllis added that too much food and then going to sleep may also have contributed to this outcome: that this habit was unhealthy for an unborn child.

Bert spoke of the harm that can be caused to the baby if the expectant parents look at strange animals. "If a man and a woman are having a baby, don't look at the monkeys. Even the fathers are not supposed to look on it." He explained that there are many outside pressures which can cause harm to the baby. "That animal is an outside pressure ... if the father looks at a snake too long, the baby will be like that. Don't look on it too long."

Bert and Phyllis recalled an incident that had occurred some fifty years ago when a white man from Manitowaning (a town located across the bay from the reserve) went out in a boat to fish. His wife and he were expecting at the time. Apparently, he killed a water snake and was warned by Anishinaabe fishermen of the

potential harm this could cause his baby. People on the reserve urged him to take precautionary measures, but he ignored their advice. A few months later his baby daughter was born blind. Her eyes were cloudy in appearance like the protective coating a water snake has over its eyes. According to Bert and Phyllis, the woman is now in her fifties and is still blind to this day. Bert remarked that, "White people don't believe that," and so the baby's eyes went untreated by traditional methods.

Bert went on to say that expectant fathers "should not hunt a bear or deer, that it is a mistake to shoot them." While he could not remember exactly what his father had told him about correcting such ill effects, he thought he had remembered him saying that the wood of a tree recently hit by lightning was one of the things needed in certain instances. He remarked that a mother often teaches the woman how to eat and stay active while the father or uncle of the expectant father "would inform him not to hunt." When asked why the killing of animals was dangerous, he explained that, "Whatever you do ... the baby feels that pressure (violence)."

This case study once again reinforces the importance of listening to your elders; they do know what is best for you. This couple referred to the fact that the young people are "too weak" to be having babies. Certainly this is in reference to more than just the physical state of the parents. This concept of the youth as weak probably

includes the emotional, mental and spiritual state of young people and their preparedness to be parents, roles that encompass a great deal of responsibility.

These elders, in the form of cautionary tales, speak of the dangers that are ever present for the unborn child. They too remind us that the fetus is vulnerable because he/she is cognizant of the outside world. This case is unique because it was the only time that I was told that a woman should not drive a vehicle when pregnant. What I have concluded from this cautionary advice is that the non-driving belief may have something to do with the fact that cars are perceived as dangerous by this elderly couple. Within their lifetime, cars have become a part of daily existence on the reserve. Many reserve residents still do not own vehicles or drive. Furthermore, the death rate of youths involved in automobile accidents is extremely high on the reserve. This fact may also add to the couple's concern about driving when pregnant. What they may be warning the young mother against is a situation where trauma might be witnessed or even experienced.

It is also worth mentioning that the word for car (daabaan) is grammatically and conceptually treated as an animate object, just as animals are animate. This categorization is derived from the fact that the car has a motion or movement of its own. From this example, it is clear that it is the animate world which can present a

danger to the fetus. As explained earlier, animate objects are "capable of housing a spirit," and this may be linked to the potential harm of the fetus. While it is not completely clear what the perceived danger of a car may be to the baby, it is worth noting and may warrant further investigation.

It is significant that both Bert and Phyllis stress the point that expectant parents should not take part in the killing of any creature. In this case, a water snake is killed by a white man and as a result his baby is born blind. The lesson, an important form of social control, is again repeated: listen to the elders and respect their knowledge of the natural world.

Case Study #3: John and Rose

John and Rose have five children. John is an administrator for a regional correctional facility in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Rose is a health worker on two neighboring reserves. She is also the natal health instructor at Wikwemikong. Rose's grandmother was a midwife at Wikwemikong for many years. They said that their first four children were born in a hospital some forty-five to fifty-five minutes from home. Their last child, a boy, was born in a hospital in Sudbury, Ontario. Rose had to be airlifted to Sudbury after complications arose. They spoke about the kinds of precautions that expectant parents need to be aware of. Rose said that

"The man is not to go hunting during the time of pregnancy." She then looked at her husband and laughingly said "He is not a hunter, so he didn't hunt."

John and Rose recalled an incident in which they were told by a family member that Rose should not be eating certain kinds of fish when pregnant because it could harm the infant. "There was one thing I was told just before Sheri was born. We came home and we were having supper one time, and my brother-in-law says to me, 'you shouldn't be eating that fish,' but that's all he said. I thought well why not? Why can't I eat that fish?" John added that it was one specific kind of fish. She later learned from an elder that this particular fish could cause a woman to go into premature labor or cause a miscarriage. "Another man told me, I guess we were talking about fish so I started to ask him a few questions, you should not eat this kind of fish ... sturgeon?" John said, "Yeah it was sturgeon." "A sturgeon is a very fierce fish, like it will kill other fish, so if you eat that then that is what you are feeding your baby and your baby will have those kinds of characteristics."

They spoke of the confusion that can arise when a medical worker advises an expectant mother to eat certain kinds of fish. This couple stressed the fact that not all fish are to be avoided and that a mother, for example, could get the needed protein from whitefish or some other kind of fish. John said, "It's only certain kinds of

fish" and that nutrition does not need to be compromised when following these prenatal observances. Rose shared with me a nutrition chart which listed the nutrient value of the various fish found in the Great Lakes. She pointed to the trout and said, "So if you were teaching a mother about having the extra iron needed, this would be the kind of fish you would tell her to eat, but if it causes another thing then you wouldn't want to tell her to eat that kind of fish."

John told me that an expectant mother must also avoid certain berries during pregnancy. "There are some berries that you are not supposed to eat." Again, certain berries are associated with birthmarks, moles and freckles. Rose said, "I think that because if you eat raspberries or strawberries then your baby is liable to have a birthmark." "Sometimes when you have a mother that has a baby that is born with a birthmark they don't say anything til after, and then they will say, 'well the mother probably had strawberries or raspberries or blueberries.'"

When asked about the danger of hunting during pregnancy Rose said, "It's the act of killing that animal ... the violence." They went on to say that the violence would have an effect on the infant and that it was a matter of "seeing it." She recalled an incident where a woman had viewed an animal when she was pregnant and that she had been warned to bathe the baby as a

precautionary measure. "Something had happened and she had to bathe the baby when it was born with that animal part. She had to bathe the baby, so I guess the teaching is that a bath has to be given to the child ... a certain kind of bath." Rose went on to say that, "Whatever you feel, it goes down to the baby also, so they always say that the mother should not be sad or depressed or angry because all those feelings are conveyed to the child."

John and Rose also discussed the potential harm that expectant parents can expose their baby to if they attend a wake or view a dead person. Rose said that parents "are not to view a dead body if someone dies and if there is a father with a young child he is not to be a pallbearer." The following story was told to me to illustrate the seriousness of these kinds of prenatal observances. Rose said:

> There was one thing when my friend died in February. Two of her daughters were pregnant. And they always say that pregnant women should not view the dead body, and what do you do in that case when its two daughters and they are both pregnant? Somebody came up to me and said, "Would you make sure that they cut some of their mother's hair and keep it for after when the babies are born," so I went to the sister (of the dead woman): and I said to her to cut some of her sister's hair and to use it in a bath (for the babies) and so she said that she would do it...so she went ahead and cut some of her sister's hair. It's a precaution.

John and Rose said that traditional beliefs about prenatal care often conflict with the opinions and beliefs shared by outside medical personnel. For example, young

parents may get strange looks or questions when they ask the doctor for the placenta after the birth. It has been explained to me that the placenta should be taken and buried somewhere at home. It should be buried in the earth "so that the children will always know their mother earth and never stray far from home." Like the friend who explained this to me, John and Rose referred to this as a ritual that followed the old ways of handling birth.

This case study is unique in that it offers an instance where the remedy (mother's hair) is collected as a precautionary measure which allows the two pregnant daughters to attend to their deceased mother, allowing them to honor their mother without endangering their unborn children. Hair of the deceased person is taken and saved until after the birth of the babies: it is then used to bathe the infants. This precautionary measure not only protects the baby, but it also reassures the expectant mothers in a time of uncertainty and emotional pain.

Case Study #4: Larry and Kate

Larry and Kate are a couple in their mid to late thirties. Larry is a well-known Anishinaabe artist. His paintings often depict the traditional teachings and values of the Anishinaabec. He uses their small home as a studio and sells his work off the reserve. It was a beautiful spring day when I visited with them at their home. Their children were at school, and while I spoke

with them Larry was working on another painting. They told me that they had had three children, but that the first had died during the pregnancy. A medicine person told them that if the baby had lived, it probably would have been an epileptic.

Their second baby, a healthy baby girl, was born without any problems. Their third child, a baby boy, was born autistic. While they are not sure, Kate did say that she attended her father's wake during the pregnancy and that may have affected their baby. She remarked that she had noticed similarities between her son's behavior and that of the deceased man, who was an alcoholic. They recalled teachings which warn of the harm that can come to the unborn in the presence of a dead person. They also said that it may have been the result of people practicing "bad medicine" against them and their baby out of jealousy. This jealousy may stem from Larry's success as an artist.

There were other teachings which they mentioned regarding prenatal observances. Kate explained that a man should not hunt during the time of pregnancy. She recalled a story in which a man had killed a snake and as a result his child had been born crawling like a snake would. A community elder, after observing this unusual behavior, instructed this father to find a snake and kill it while offering food and tobacco. Kate also said that looking at an animal could cause the baby to be born with

a deformity or abnormality.

Larry spoke of the father's responsibility to the child, before and after birth. Kate added that, "As a parent you are the first teacher to the unborn." Kate recalled her sister's pregnancy and explained that feelings of depression and fear can be harmful to the unborn baby. Her sister was afraid because she had seen a fire ball or "bear walk" (mekwamose). Kate told her sister to control her fear or it might "go to the unborn baby and affect its health." Kate also said that harboring ill feelings is dangerous for the unborn baby too, because you are "feeding that very emotion into the child."

In this particular case the couple had two of their three pregnancies affected by some external force. They offer multiple reasons for these outcomes. Their examples not only include their own pregnancies but also those of others in the community. Factors considered include: looking at or killing animals, attending a wake, the emotional state of the parents, and the presence of sorcery or bad medicine. The belief in sorcery is an integral part of the Anishinaabe world view and is relevant here because of its possible effect on the child. Kate mentions sorcery in regard to her own pregnancies, as well as the pregnancy of her sister.

Case Study #5: Jessie

Jessie is a single woman in her early sixties. While she never had children of her own, she did learn many things from her mother regarding pregnancy and birth. She spent several years away from the reserve when she worked in Sault St. Marie and later Chicago. Her mother lived with her in Chicago for many years. Her mother, Sarah, and she returned home to Wikwemikong in the 1960's, and she has lived there ever since. She still lives on the very spot where her grandfather's log home once stood, the home she was born and raised in.

She recalls her mother's advice to pregnant women, not to sit around too much and to get enough exercise. Jessie believes that it is better to continue working and to stay active. She remembers an incident when a white woman, pregnant at the time, went swimming. This woman had been warned to stay out of the water, but she did not listen to the advice. As she was swimming, she saw a water snake and it startled her. A few months later her baby was born blind; the baby's eyes were cloudy like those of the water snake. "People from here, Indian people, tried to tell her; and she said 'you're crazy,' and that woman's baby is still blind today."

Jessie explained that "it is the stare" that can affect the baby. She referred to the incident where the expectant father stared at the face of the dead child who had been hit by a truck. In this situation, his baby was

born with a mark on her face similar to that of the dead child. She tells of another story which illustrates how the infant can be affected by events experienced through the parents:

> There were some women quilting. One of the women had her son in the other room. He was listening in on these women, you can learn a lot I guess. Anyway, he came up and his mother was there and he said, "Oh yeah, I remember when I was a child, I was standing by the door when they dehorned the cows and when the blood came out of the horns I fainted." His mother said,"Oh impossible, you didn't see that," but he described the whole thing.

Jessie went on to say that indeed this mother was pregnant with her son at the time of the dehorning and that she did faint when she saw the blood. Jessie fondly recalls another incident when she took her mother to the zoo in Chicago. Her mother was horrified when she saw expectant mothers and fathers at the zoo. Jessie recalls:

> We used to go to the zoo...I'd take my mother to the zoo to see the animals from different places, and you would see these women, they are big (pregnant). My mother would say, "Oh my goodness, I'm not surprised people are crazy," (Jessie laughed) that's the way she phrased it.

This case study clearly illustrates several important precautionary tales which warn against the dangers of looking at or staring at animals during pregnancy. Again, the stories draw out lessons about what can happen when the advice is not taken seriously. It is interesting to note that several of the stories pertain to white people not listening or believing in these dangers. These kinds

of precautionary tales are common and often alluded to when pregnancy and birth are being discussed. Even the white people will suffer ill effects if they choose to ignore the teachings of the elders.

Another important aspect of this case study is the fact that once again the story of the expectant father at the scene of the accident (where the little girl is hit by the truck) is alluded to. Jessie also tells another story (the story of dehorning cows) which exemplifies the significant point that the baby is cognizant of the outside world.

Case Study #6: Walter

I interviewed Walter again in the spring of 1992. This time my questions centered on pregnancy and birth. Before I began recording the interview, Walter said that this idea of "the father also being pregnant" was new to him and that he really did not have much information regarding this idea. He went on to say that he had just, within the last few years, heard someone say this at a conference. At first I understood this to mean that he was unaware of any prenatal observances related to the Anishinaabe cultural system. Later in the interview I learned that this was not the case. This is a point that I will take up again later in my analysis.

Walter and his wife have spent their lives on the reserve except for the early days when Walter had to

leave the reserve to work in the lumber camps. Having lost two children in infancy, they raised twelve children, two of whom were adopted. Walter himself is the youngest of thirteen children. As mentioned in the earlier interview, Walter believes strongly that women should breastfeed their babies. He also knows that what the parents see can affect the unborn child. Walter explained:

> It does affect the unborn baby ... after it is born. After the baby is born then it starts to show, it varies you know. In some instances it will start to show very early, like a day or two after the baby is born, in some cases it will start to show maybe at a week or two weeks later and it goes on like that. That's why as soon as they find out that their daughter-in-law is pregnant they didn't allow the man to go hunting anymore, but those other relatives supply the meat for that particular couple in order to avoid those instances that happen sometimes, although it doesn't happen every time, but it happens. It is always better to be prepared for whatever might be.

He knows that many young people might question the old ways, as the white people do. "We get into a lot of trouble if we don't believe what we hear from the old people. I was there myself." Walter says that he now tries to help young people learn these teachings which include Anishinaabe prenatal observances. He goes on to say that expectant parents must know not to stare at something and avoid certain activities.

> When you stare at something. When you walk somewhere...Maybe in the grass and you happen to be almost stepping on a frog or a snake and all of a sudden you make that step and there is a snake there and you jump up and it scares you, or

a mouse or whatever it is that startles you. And there is a way to cure that too. All you have to do is watch the baby, what kind of actions he is making or sounds that come from its mouth. If it's a frog there's a lot of that stuff sticking on its eyes (cloudy appearance). That's what a frog looks like, that's what its sight is...it always looks like that.

We had that happen one time. Jeffrey (his youngest son) was like that when he was a little baby and we didn't know. Of course we heard that from other people, but we never believed that. Then all of a sudden our baby was that way. Someone told me that you go look for a frog and when you get him cut his head off with a knife and boil that in a little bit of water...maybe a cup of water, just for a short time and then put that thing in his eyes or wash with it in his face. It was late in the fall and frogs were nowhere to be found. So I thought about it for some time, maybe for about three days and I finally came up with it.

We lived on the farm up the hill there, and I used to see a pile of cedar posts piled up maybe eight feet high, so I thought there might be something down there at the bottom, frogs might crawl in there for the winter. I went over to that pile and started pulling down those logs. I finally got down to the bottom. At the very last pole...I raised it up and there sat a bull frog in a little nest about this size (he holds out his hands to show the size of the nest), a well made nest. Fine threads of very fine grass, and maybe he picked up a few feathers at the barn from the chickens that fell off. Oh...that nest it was real, real nice.

I felt sorry for him, you know. So I picked him up and did what the old lady (an elder from Wikwemikong) told us to do and two days later everything was okay. If it's maybe a deer or something else then you can eat the deer meat and give some to your neighbors or whatever you want to do with it. After you skin the animal, cut the hair off a little bit, maybe a slight handful and boil those hairs in water and you do the same thing, you use that water to wash up the baby. Sometimes it would be better if you put just a little wee bit in a small spoon and put it in his mouth and let him swallow that so that it is going in the stomach.

Walter describes another situation in which his experience affected his unborn baby child.

> There was a house on fire one time in the summer and I was out working at the time and I had just come in the house here and there was the house fire down the hill. So there was no fire trucks here so I went down there ... hoping that I I would be able to help out in some way. There were a lot of people on the road going in that same direction and when I got there the house was already pretty much burnt, and I noticed that there was a child laying on the ground. Not really a little one, so I wondered what happened to that child. So I picked her up, but all of the crowd were standing over closer to where the house was burning. I held that child for a while until somebody came and got her, not realizing that my wife was pregnant at the time. After I got back home and later learned that my wife was pregnant, I thought about what had happened and when the baby was born it was like that (lifeless, lacking energy as if she were unconscious), and we didn't know what to do, what to use to cure the baby.
>
> So I went to this lady (an elder) and I asked her that. I told her the whole story, how that happened, you know, happened when the baby was born. And she said, "you go down there (to the house that had burned) and get any kind of underwear that the child was wearing." So I got that piece of cloth. We boiled that in water for a while. Then we washed that baby (a daughter) all over its body the very next day. We noticed it about a month after it was born. It must have gotten it (right away) but it didn't show. So we had two children (affected by things that their father had experienced prior to their birth).

This narrative reflects the emphasis which is placed on the knowledge that the elders hold and offer to the younger members of the community. It is noted by Walter himself that the young people do not always listen to elders or believe the things that they are being told. Often, as people become older, they begin to learn that this knowledge is valuable as Walter admits he did. The theme of respect for the elders and the respect for all living things, especially the animal world, is reinforced

through the stories that Walter shares with us regarding two of the pregnancies which he and his wife experienced. Without the guidance of community elders, he and his wife would not have been able to identify the source of their baby's problem and, therefore, would not have known how to correct it.

Even after the source was identified, (story of finding a frog) Walter recalled his regret at having to take the life of this creature, but explained that there was no choice when there is a need to correct something that has happened to the child before birth. The lesson is stated and restated: have respect for your elders for they hold the knowledge to guide and heal during times of uncertainty.

Walter explained that the elder had known what to look for and what to do to correct the situation.

> The old lady recognized that it was a frog right away ... that one of us had been frightened by a frog. The old woman told us what it was and after we did what she told us to do it was all right, so that is the medicine right there. If it happens to be an animal with hair, like a dog or you don't know which animal that scared you, your husband or your wife, while the baby is not yet born. That answer, look for that particular animal and if you have to kill it, well ... you have to kill him.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Anishinaabe prenatal observances that have been described are an ever present set of norms which guide expectant parents through a time of uncertainty. Guided by elders and kin members, a man and woman restructure the activities of their daily lives to ensure the health of their baby. The fetus is believed to be cognizant of the outside world as it directly experiences sights, sounds and events through the mother and father. The prenatal observances are taught and reinforced through important cautionary tales. These beliefs can be categorized into seven major categories.

The first category involves the avoidance of killing animals during pregnancy. Expectant fathers are explicitly told not to hunt, fish or slaughter livestock during this time. Likewise, an expectant mother should not assist in or be witness to any of these food-getting activities. The act of killing, associated with the sight of blood and violence, is a very dangerous phenomenon for the fetus. Through the mother and father, the baby is aware of his or her surroundings; thus the child would experience these unpleasant events. This experience, prior to birth, directly affects the health of the child. There may be a relationship between the danger to the fetus and

the fact that the danger comes from animals which are a part of the animate world.

The fetus is, as stated earlier, seen as vulnerable (still growing) and the experience can have a grave affect on the child's formation. To breach such a precaution results in severe deformity or even death of the fetus. The warnings are strong sanctions against such actions on the part of expectant parents. Sanctions are stated and reinforced in the daily discourse of the Anishinaabec and remain a powerful means of social control by those, primarily community elders, who recognize the importance of holding on to the old ways and teachings. Stories are told and retold of those who did not heed the serious warnings. The stories provide examples of what can happen when parents do not follow these prenatal observances. Such is the case with the child whose parents slaughter a goat during pregnancy. Bert and Phyllis (Case Study #2) shared their story of the child whose father killed a water snake prior to her birth and how this led to her blindness. These stories are the lessons for expectant parents and contain strong warnings against the killing of any animals for any purpose.

The second category includes those prenatal observances that involve "food taboos." These observances of foods to avoid during pregnancy seem to apply only to expectant mothers at Wikwemikong. Certain plant and animal foods fall into this category. Community members identify certain fish that are to be avoided such as sturgeon, for

example, which causes overly aggressive behavior in a child. It is possible that the danger of certain fish has something to do with the animate quality of the fish. It remains unclear why some fish are dangerous and others are not since all fish are categorized as animate.

Certain berries are to be avoided during pregnancy because their consumption can cause the baby to be marked with a birthmark or other external feature. Blueberries (miinaan), it is said, cause dark marks on the skin; strawberries (odemin) cause a red mark (strawberry birthmark). It is of interest to note that not all berries are linguistically treated as animate. The above mentioned berries belong to the inanimate category, thus foods are the apparent exception in consideration of those animate things which present a danger or have influence over the development of the fetus. On the other hand, blackberries (dagaagmin) are seen as belonging to the animate world. Blackberries are said to cause a dark mark on the baby's skin. This may indicate that the actual substance is being passed on to the fetus. In this sense, it is believed that whatever the mother eats not only crosses the placenta providing needed nutrients to the baby but goes directly to the baby and may leave a permanent mark.

In this regard the role of the expectant mother may be viewed as different from that of the father's. The mother-to-be must be cautious of which foods she eats. In

providing nutritional needs for healthy development, many considerations must be taken into account.

The fact that the expectant father, at Wikwemikong, is not guided by these prenatal food observances indicates one difference between the activities of the mother and the father. From a biomedical perspective, the mother is responsible for physically carrying the child and providing the nutritional requirements. As far as I can determine, this is the most notable difference in responsibility between the two parents during pregnancy.

Emotionally and spiritually the child is dependent upon its parents in the same way, depending on each for safety and protection from the outside world and ever present dangers. The father may not be responsible for providing nutritional needs but may play an important role in helping the expectant mother eat cautiously during the pregnancy. Kin members also play a role in providing food for the couple. The relationship that a couple has with the extended family remains important as the kin members provide assistance and guidance throughout life.

Another area of concern has to do with the "viewing" of deceased persons or animals. To view the dead is a very dangerous act whether it is a deceased relative or an animal in the woods or near a roadside. To attend a wake can be a very serious danger for the baby. There are several cases where expectant parents are warned not to attend wakes at Wikwemikong. This can present a difficult situation for an expectant parent when the deceased person

is a close family member. Honoring the dead is an important ritual that often requires preparation on the part of close family members. Expectant fathers or fathers of young children are even discouraged from carrying the casket of a deceased person.

In Rose's case, this danger was perceived and precautionary measures had to be taken to protect the baby of the deceased woman's two daughters. The two young women were able, to some degree, to attend to their mother and honor her without jeopardizing the health of their children. Exactly how this experience is harmful to the fetus is not explicitly stated. A deceased person, however, is a part of the animate world and it may be the power of the spirit that presents a danger to the fetus.

The fourth category is also very serious and is concerned with the emotional state of the expectant parents. Sadness or fear can be transferred from parent to child, thus affecting the health of the baby. This belief is shared by many cultural groups world-wide; it also transcends the biomedical understanding of prenatal care. Many believe that a mother's emotional state can affect the health of the baby. It is not uncommon for medical doctors, like Anishinaabe elders, to direct the mother to maintain a calm state of being and to avoid upsetting events or situations that would cause anger.

Parental fear is one of the most pronounced dangers

that can affect the infant. As Kate explained, "You feed that very emotion to your baby." Thus, the fear caused by sorcery can harm or even kill the baby. An expectant parent is responsible for the avoidance of conflict situations when possible or at least to control the emotions they allow themselves to experience as a result of such a threat. As in the case of many of the prenatal observances, parents-to-be have a responsibility to the fetus to control themselves, as well as the events that go on around them. Beyond this, they have a responsibility to correct those events that they were unable to prevent or were unaware of at the time. These corrective measures are offered in the form of a remedy derived from the original source of the condition.

A fifth category of prenatal observances warns against the mocking or mimicking of an animal or deformed person. Again, to engage in this kind of activity is considered foolish on the part of the individual, especially an expectant parent. This act is dangerous to the fetus and affects its healthy development.

This category is interesting not only because it is dangerous to "look at" or stare at an injured or deformed being, but also because such an act is in violation of the respect that is due to all living things. Whether an animal or a person, mocking another living thing is seen as disrespectful. Not only is it dangerous for an expectant parent to stare at a deformity which might be transferred to the fetus; such an act of disrespect may

result in retribution on the part of the one being mocked. Sorcery is even a possible result. This could have serious implications for a person, especially an expectant parent who could become the target of revenge. This harm would affect the fetus, not the adult. An animal that is offended by such an act may not directly harm a fetus, but this certainly is not a way to appeal to the spirit world for guidance and protection, especially during pregnancy. As previously mentioned, relationships of mutual respect and cooperation are to be maintained with members of the natural/spiritual world. Individuals negotiate a balance with the spirit world in many ways whether it is through the medium of prayers or the act of offering tobacco. This category is complex because it is multi-faceted, and yet it well illustrates the interconnectedness of the Anishinaabe world.

The sixth category of prenatal observances are those concerned with staring at or "looking at" an animal. Of course, it would be virtually impossible for an expectant mother and father to go for nine months without seeing an animal, bird, or even household pet. What is important is that one does not continue to gaze upon or stare at the subject but knows to look away or turn away. To stare at an animal for prolonged periods of time may result in the features of the animal being transferred to the fetus who is still vulnerable (still forming). Expectant parents are to avoid daily contact with animals or to keep their

interactions with the animal world at a minimum level of involvement. The zoo, then, becomes a dangerous place for expectant parents. This is well illustrated by my friend's story of her father's reaction to her plan to visit the zoo in Toronto. Jessie (Case Study #5) also draws out this point in describing her mother's horror at seeing pregnant white women at a zoo in Chicago some years ago. One goes to the zoo to "see" or view strange and exotic creatures; such an experience can and does have lasting or even fatal effects on the newborn.

While it is not entirely clear how these activities affect the fetus, it seems that the fetus not only experiences the external world through its parents but also "sees" the external world through the eyes of its mother and father. What the fetus "sees" directly affects the features of the growing child.

The last category of prenatal observances involves the expectant parents and their avoidance of situations where they might be startled. Concepts of startling or of "being startled" are common in many cultures. In other societies, "to be startled" is a serious threat to one's health. In the case of the Anishinaabec, startling can affect the health of the fetus with effects often not recognized until days or even months after the child has been born. One might wonder how anyone could avoid being startled since the act involves not knowing or expecting the occurrence. The important element here is in knowing one's environment and taking the responsibility

to foresee possible situations that might result in being startled. Several of the Anishinaabe stories discussed in this work involve an expectant parent walking in the woods or going places "known" for many rabbits or snakes. Thus, the lesson is to know which areas to avoid so that one is not startled. Both expectant mothers and fathers must be conscious of their actions on a daily basis if they want to ensure the healthy development of the fetus.

Clearly, it is the members of the animate world which can present a danger to the developing fetus. This is especially true in relation to the animal world. As mentioned in the discussion of the cosmological world view of the Anishinaabec, animals serve as important symbols and guide people throughout life. There does not, however, seem to be any special significance in the role of a totem (dodem) animal in relation to the prenatal observances at Wikwemikong.

It is believed that a relationship of mutual respect and cooperation must be maintained with the natural/spiritual world of which animals are a part. Breech of this respect can result in harm to an individual. To offend the spirit world is to endanger yourself. In the case of a fetus, this potential harm is seen as particularly powerful since it is vulnerable to outside forces. It appears that once a baby is born and given a name, it is not as susceptible to effects from the animate world. While there are ways to correct

the ill-effects, the ideal situation is to avoid certain experiences during pregnancy.

Homeopathic principles are an important element in understanding the Anishinaabe prenatal observances. Each stated remedy or cure involves the use of the substance which caused the ill-effect or health problem. By administering small amounts of the substance, whether it is hair, an animal part, or the remains of burnt clothing, the affliction is often reversed. This principle often leads to precautionary measures in which the substance is collected and saved until after the birth of a child.

It is not explicitly stated exactly how the animate world might harm a fetus, but again there does seem to be a relationship between the animate world and the spirits that are contained in those of the animate category. A special relationship must be maintained with the animate world, especially during pregnancy. This relationship is defined through the prenatal observances found at Wikwemikong.

The Male Role During Pregnancy

Among the Anishinaabec, both the mother and father share a responsibility in the healthy development of their baby. The Anishinaabe male role in pregnancy is important because the fetus feels and experiences the external world through the father just as it does through the mother who carries it.

In this sense pregnancy (maajiishkaad), which is

translated as "to increase in number or size," is viewed as something much more than a physical condition. The concept has been related to the increase in kin membership and in this sense is shared by all kin. The concept that "the father is also pregnant" may be related to this shared responsibility on the part of the expectant parents. The fetus is truly connected to the father mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

In the case of Walter, the experience of being startled by a frog had an effect on his baby who was born with a congenital eye condition. Recognizing the importance of his relationship to his child and how his experiences affected the baby's health, Walter realized that he was responsible for correcting this condition, and began his search for a frog.

A dynamic aspect of the Anishinaabe world view is well illustrated through the examination of these prenatal observances. The relationship and responsibility that parents have to their baby reflect a spiritual dimension which is an integral aspect of Anishinaabe existence. For the Anishinaabec, there is no concept of the separation of daily existence and spirituality. Life, which many would categorize as an emotional, mental, or physical experience, cannot be experienced or described without a spiritual realm as well. Spirituality is an integral part of Anishinaabe concepts of health, which in turn reflect a broader concept of Anishinaabe existence. This existence is interwoven through a

spiritual fabric which is the world of the Anishinaabec.

The Anishinaabe prenatal observances which have been discussed serve to protect the fetus. Important social roles and responsibilities of community and family members during pregnancy are well defined. In some respects, people may see the expectant parents as limited by these prenatal observances. Not only are women prohibited from normal (daily) activities which would otherwise be routine, but men as well are redirected in the kinds of things they are able to do. An Anishinaabe man, for example, may not be able to join his father, uncles, and brothers on a hunting trip.

Both men and women accept a high level of responsibility for their children when they follow these prenatal observances. The world becomes an especially dangerous place when people become expectant parents. The potential harm or danger does not threaten the expectant parents directly but does have serious implications for the fetus. The balance that is maintained with the animate world becomes especially important during pregnancy.

Along with these guidelines which prohibit certain kinds of daily behavior, expectant parents are elevated to a status of special privilege. Special attention is given by elders and family members as the expectant couple adapt to their role as parents and all of the responsibilities that come with such a role change. Whether they will be

first-time parents or not, they are assuming additional responsibility as members of society. The responsibilities they have are not unlike the kinds of responsibilities that they will be expected to maintain after the child is born. The roles of a parent are many. A mother and a father will feed, shelter, protect, teach, and guide the child as he or she did before birth.

In essence, the prenatal observances among the Anishinaabec of Wikwemikong place great emphasis on parental roles and a connectedness to the fetus before and after birth. The relationship that people have with the natural world is both illustrated and maintained in this system of beliefs. These prenatal observances reinforce kin and community ties as a new member of society is cared for and eventually welcomed into the larger community.

Throughout the text, I have referred to the Anishinaabe prenatal observances as an important means of social control and feel that further discussion of the concept is warranted here. Forms of social control are found in every society and serve to guide people, identifying the framework for appropriate behavior. Norms of behavior are reinforced through a process of socialization which is both formal and informal in nature.

In the case of the Anishinaabec, the prenatal observances are reinforced through daily discourse. Cautionary tales warn expectant parents how to behave during pregnancy, securing their relationship with the natural/spiritual world of which they are a part. The

possible threat of harm to the fetus serves as a strong sanction against alternative forms of behavior. There does seem to be a link between the seriousness of the norm being broken and how serious the consequence is for the fetus. Certainly, the eating of a certain berry will not result in the same kind of ill-effect as that of the killing of an animal during pregnancy.

In essence, the Anishinaabec maintain their cultural identity through the medium of cautionary tales, cautionary tales which are a part of a rich oral tradition. Elders not only reinforce their significant roles as community leaders but perpetuate the continuance of a traditional way of life. In contrasting their prenatal beliefs and observances to those of the white community, the Anishinaabe of Wikwemikong maintain their ethnic boundaries. The survival of their cultural identity rests on the perpetuation of traditional beliefs and practices. Elders especially recognize the importance of maintaining tradition, and thus, group membership is seen as vital to Anishinaabe survival. In spite of considerable pressure from the dominant white system, these prenatal observances help to maintain Anishinaabe ethnic identity.

Pregnancy and birth have always been occurrences of great significance, events which are often accompanied by transition and uncertainty. The prenatal observance system of the Anishinaabec provides guidance and

understanding of a process that is physiologically universal but spiritually and emotionally culture-specific. The birth of a child represents the extension of an individual and a community. The birth and growth of a child have been celebrated universally and represents the continuation of existence. Individuals pass on, but through the process of birth, a family and community continue to exist with their own history and identity. There is comfort in this sense of permanence, a sense of leaving something of yourself in this world.

Among the Anishinaabec, the birth of a child represents not only the continuation of a given family but of a way of life. The prenatal observances which guide expectant parents through the experience of pregnancy are deep, meaningful structures of Anishinaabe culture. Despite change, these deep structures remain strong at Wikwemikong.

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