Sharing My Medicine
Elders Teachings

Companion Text
Elder in Residence Program
Podcasts: linking the oral and the written
The Companion Text Elders in Residence Program Podcasts: linking the oral and the written. *Sharing My Medicine: Elders Teachings* is a publication of the Aboriginal Students Health Sciences (ASHS) Office, McMaster University.

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To view podcasts visit: www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/ashs/video
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*Text titles match podcast titles from which the excerpts were taken.*
Acknowledgements

With respect we dedicate this book in memoriam to Lorna Hill. We are grateful for her words and allowing us to share them with future generations.

These are the voices of experience, knowledge and wisdom—the voices of the Elders in Residence—which is a part of the Aboriginal Students Health Sciences (ASHS) Office at McMaster University. The Elders quoted are Bertha, Skye (Cree), Lorna Hill (Cayuga), Elize Hartley (Métis) and Gerard Sagassige (Mississauga).

The ASHS office would like to extend its deepest respect and appreciation to our 2010-2012 Elders in Residence (EIR); Elize Hartley and Bertha Skye from the Hamilton campus; and our 2011-12 Elders in Residence; Gerard Sagassige from the Waterloo campus, and Lorna Hill from the Niagara campus for allowing us to transcribe the ASHS EIR podcasts to produce this companion text.

ASHS wishes to acknowledge the collective desire to increase cultural competency and safety for health care practitioners and create a positive impact on learners. To continue to honour relationships by being good neighbours; create future champions who will take small but important steps by correcting myths or accepting different ways of thinking. And to create safe space for all to have access to knowledge, recognizing it is about spaces of respect, learning and bridging the divide between knowledge’s/epistemologies; knowing what is available and how relationships can be harmonized.

We hope that the words shared within this text provide the reader with the same degree of pleasure as it has for those of us who have worked on its development. And wish to acknowledge all of those dedicated Indigenous leaders, Elders and advocates who work tirelessly for transformative change to current health education practices and their non-Indigenous allies.

We would also like to acknowledge the Aboriginal Health Human Resources Initiative, FNIH, Health Canada for their funding contribution to this initiative.

In appreciation,
Danielle N. Soucy,
Director, ASHS
About

About the Aboriginal Students Health Sciences (ASHS) Office
Our Mandate at the ASHS office is designed to address three broad areas of need: increased student preparedness, entry and completion of health sciences programs; ongoing identification and work to remove barriers to success within the university including increasing awareness of First Nations, Inuit and Métis health issues among the faculty and student body; and, improved relationships between the university and local Aboriginal communities. This mandate is fulfilled through a variety of activities including: Providing student career counseling and assistance with the admissions and application processes; working closely with health sciences programs to strategize ways for overcoming barriers and improving preparedness and access for students; acting as an advocate and champion for First Nations, Inuit and Métis student priorities; linking with local Aboriginal communities and organizations for consultation, outreach and recruitment; and creating an inclusionary environment for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students within the university which includes infusion of First Nations, Inuit and Métis specific content into all health sciences program curriculum.

Elder Elize Hartley explains the ASHS logo
And as you look at the [ASHS] logo, Aboriginal people live in a circle, so of course the logo is a circle. The sun dog is the Inuit sign, and the medicine bear inside the sun dog is for First Nations, and the infinity sign is the Métis People’s sign.

About the Elders in Residence Program
The Aboriginal Students Health Sciences (ASHS) office is pleased to offer the Elders-in-Residence program to students at McMaster’s main campus in Hamilton as well as monthly at the regional sites of Waterloo & Niagara. This program fosters the social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual well-being of students by offering a unique opportunity for students to learn from local community Elders who are eager to share their traditional experiences, knowledge and wisdom. The program increases awareness and understanding of history, traditions and culture for all students by providing students access to Elders who are actively engaged in their communities and culture. This enhances students’ sense of belonging, nurturing the feeling that they are a meaningful part of, and take pride in, an education system in which their Inuit, Métis and First Nations knowledge and culture are reflected, celebrated, and respected. The Elders are available to answer questions, offer support and to listen.
About Sharing My Medicine: Elders Teachings

When thinking about why do we need to do this type of work we asked ourselves; how as educators do we increase the level of cultural competency and safety for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students in the learning environment and in future practitioners caring for Aboriginal patients. And, what are some of the gaps that currently exist?

The answer is for multitude of reasons. First, because of identified gaps such as: increasing First Nations, Inuit & Métis content on traditional health, healing and medicines; to create inclusion for students from the regional campuses (Waterloo & Niagara), and, the need to increase access to traditional knowledge holders. Second, is in order for future practitioners to gain knowledge on the ways in which to engage in collaborative epistemologies on health and healing. Third, is for educators to assume the role of a champion to challenge and change the current system. Fourth, to address a need as noted by the Elders to assist in preserving Indigenous knowledge (IK) / medical knowledge, and fifth, to work towards removing the elitism of accessing medical education and break down barriers to information that have arisen due to colonization.

One innovative method we found to address these gaps and the reasons why this work needs to be done was to embrace the culture of social media integrated with traditional knowledge shared by Elders as a learning tool. Thus, this companion text, Sharing My Medicines: Elders Teachings—Elders in Residence Program Podcasts: linking the oral and the written was developed in extension of our earlier work of creating the Elders teachings podcasts.

This text is designed to provide the reader with a snapshot of some of the podcast/video teachings provided by the EIR program. You can hear their words in their entire context and learn more about the ASHS office by going to: www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/ashs. From the ASHS website you can access the link to the Elders’ podcasts on YouTube under the title provided at the start of each teaching and as listed in the table of contents.

Please feel free to provide comments on the YouTube site or contacting the ASHS office directly at ashseir@mcmaster.ca. If you would like to stay up-to-date with the latest Elders in Residence Program please like us on Facebook, join our group or follow us on Twitter.
Elize Hartley, Métis

Hamilton Campus

Elize is Métis originating from Manitoba. She has called Hamilton, Ontario home for many years. Ms. Hartley has long been devoted to improved education for Aboriginal learners in secondary and post-secondary education. Within education Ms. Hartley is involved with the Hamilton/Wentworth School Boards and also as an Elder for Mohawk College as an Elder in Residence; which is a great asset to our students in collaborative health sciences programs between Mohawk and McMaster and is a McMaster Alumnus.

Ms. Hartley continues to work at the local, regional and national level for Métis people and Métis women and she is the founder and President of the Métis Women’s Circle. Remaining active in the urban Aboriginal landscape, she serves as an Elder for the Native Women Association of Canada (NWAC) and the Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA). She is also the recipient of the 2006 Hamilton’s Women of Distinction Life Time Achievement Award.

“We believe that everything in this world has spirit, & therefore should be treated with respect & with dignity.”
Lorna Hill, Cayuga

Niagara Campus

Lorna is a Cayuga Elder born on the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory in Ontario. She is a holder of traditional knowledge and culture of the Iroquois and the Head Elder of the Sour Springs Longhouse on Six Nations. Further, she is fluent in five of the six dialects of the Iroquois. Over the past 50 years, she has been actively involved in language retention. She was employed by the Department of the Interior as a Cultural Specialist and Cayuga language teacher. In that time, she earned her New York State teaching certificate.

Lorna has been active in the revitalization of Iroquois beading techniques since 1978. She has helped elevate the status of Iroquois beadwork has won numerous awards. Her work has been published in "I Am an Indian" and "Households and Families of the Longhouse Iroquois of the Six Nations Reserve". Currently Lorna is working on several translation projects for various institutions across North America and is also collaborating with several Iroquois Elders to produce a collaborative work on Iroquois Tradition.

"The original way was nothing was to ever be written or recorded... everything was done orally... because of a loss of language... we feel that it's a necessity now to record things and to write things."
"...there has been a major movement towards spirituality... within a great revival of awareness, to us, is language, communication to Creator which is prayer, defined as in song."

**Gerard Sagassigge, Mississauga/Ojibwe**

**Waterloo Campus**

Gerard is an Ojibwe man from the Great Mississauga Nation. Currently he is an Aboriginal Spiritual and Cultural Advisor for the Healing of the Seven Generations office, a community healing strategy and support program, in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario.

Gerard was raised traditionally, with belief, faith and prayers; he maintains a guidance structure from a circle of Aboriginal Elders. Gerard's life focus is to seed one's healing path for the legacies of the residential school era and the 60's scoop of Aboriginal People.
"...The Creator left me for a purpose. There were some things I had to share with people."

**Bertha Skye, Cree**

*Hamilton Campus (Retired 2012)*

Bertha Skye (Cree) was born in Northern Saskatchewan, and traditional cooking is her passion. By the time Bertha was 10 she was making bread, pancakes from scratch and dinners of rabbit and venison for her 10 brothers and sisters. At the age of 17, she began her culinary career as a cook for Prince Albert Residential School, and continued cooking for various Residential Schools for a decade. In 1957 Bertha married Hubert Skye, and in 1958 they moved to Six Nations of the Grand River where they continue to live and have raised five children and six grandchildren. In 1992, Bertha was selected to compete in the World Culinary Olympics held in Frankfurt, Germany, as a part of the Canadian Native Haute Cuisine Team. The team received 7 gold, 2 silver, and 2 bronze medals.

Currently, Bertha is well-known as a caterer, a cultural interpreter, a teacher of traditional arts and crafts, and has danced with the Skye Dance Troupe, a group that promoted Aboriginal music and history. She also teaches traditional cooking to young women and women with diabetes.

To view podcasts visit: www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/ashs/video
Voices of Experience

Bertha Skye: Grandfather's Teachings, Part 1

I'm Elder in Residence at McMaster University, and I work for the ASHS office at Mac and I'm very happy to be here. I think it's important that we share our knowledge [with] the young people.

ASHS Elders Speak—Bertha Skye

I think it's very important for the students to learn a little bit about crafts and beading... making earrings... doing leather work, and moccasins... I think it's important for them to work with their hands. I mean they are all stressed out, you know, doing a lot of reading and their homework and studies. Just to relax and work with their hands. And we talk, you know. If they have any problems, we can talk, and they ask me questions, sometimes really personal... I'm here to talk to the students.

ASHS Elders Speak—Elize Hartley

[As] part of the Elders program I hope to be able to give teachings to the students that come to the room, even if it's just to relax or to ask a question or if they need something that I could be of benefit by the knowledge that I have accumulated in all the years that I've lived on this earth. So if I can be of any use, that's what I want to do.

Bertha Skye: Untitled

McMaster University is well known across Canada—it's one of the top universities. When I was seventeen, I knew two teachers that came from McMaster University. They had their university jackets... [with] McMaster on their back... [T]hey were so well-educated, and everybody respected them. And here I was being an Elder at Mac, it was such an honour! And even today I still feel that way. Every time I come on campus it's an honour to be here... to work with people in the nursing field or becoming doctors or future doctors... sharing my medicine with the doctors, telling them—the midwives especially—sharing my medicine with the midwives because my mother was a midwife. And I remember picking some of the medicines that she used.

"We speak to the Creator." (E.Hartley)
Elize Hartley: 7 Grandfather Teachings of the Métis

There’s Seven [Grandfathers], and it’s really how you conduct yourself towards one another. The first one would be Wisdom... The second one is Love, and we should love unconditionally. The third one is Respect, and that’s respect for all things on earth... everything that has a spirit and that’s alive. And then we look at Bravery... And then we look at [Honesty] and that is to be honest in your dealings with other people. And Humility is of course to understand and know that if sometimes you are wrong it’s much easier to be humble and accept the fact that you have probably made an error... Truth is the seventh one. And we teach our children to be truthful and that little white lies are not acceptable... And if you live by those teachings you should find that you’re living in harmony with the natural world. And so that brings me to the spirituality of Aboriginal people... [We]... didn’t call our respect for the natural world as a religion but we respected the spirit, so we were spiritual people. We respected the spirit of our ancestors, we respected the spirit of the animals that we were going to kill for food; there was always a ceremony done before taking the life of that animal, and the same with the fish in the water. We gave thanks every day for the very fact that we were alive and were able to live our lives by the Great Spirit. We called it the Great Spirit, or the Creator, or the Great Mystery but it was always about the same spirit. The spirit that is in each and every one of us... is what we connect with the natural world and with the Great Spirit. So the Seven Grandfathers were one way of bringing us in the circle together to remember to give thanks to the Great Spirit.

Bertha Skye: Being an Elder at McMaster

The Elders in the community play a great role in the longhouse... The people look up to them for advice... people can just go to them and ask them for different things. Whether they need help with their ceremonies, the Elder knows the ceremonies that are taking place... like for an eagle dance or a bear dance... the Elders know all the ceremonies.

Bertha Skye: Being an Elder at McMaster

I think a person [being chosen as an Elder] has to have some Indigenous knowledge about the ceremonies...
**Bertha Skye: Grandfather’s Teachings, Part 2**

My grandfather was a strong medicine man. He lived ‘til he was about eighty-eight. And he used to tell us what important part the medicine played in our lives. Like, we didn’t have doctors. We had to go about ninety miles to go to Prince Albert to see a doctor but we never had to because we had medicine men, medicine women, and midwives to take care of our needs... And if we had an ailment, of, say pneumonia, he knew exactly what bark from the trees that we’d use. And he was a very wise man. And today I still use some of these medicines. But you know, when I came to this part of the continent, Ontario, I thought I’d leave everything behind. I was in a new place and they were so modernized here. Six Nations [was] modernized compared to the way my people lived. And I thought, “I won’t need my Indian medicines anymore.” Until I got sick, I had a heart attack and I had a stroke, shortly after I retired... And I lost my memory, I couldn’t remember my children’s birthdays, or how old they were, and phone numbers—there were so many things I’ve had to learn over again! But my mother’s teachings, and my grandfather’s teachings came back so clear, I could remember them. And after I got home I thought, “Why didn’t I die?” I should have died, you know. I’d had a heart attack and a stroke, and they had to revive me... And I thought, “The Creator left me for a purpose.” There were some things I had to share with people.

**Gerard Sagassige: Part 1**

My grandmother told me one time that we’re going to be in a struggle as people when we try to guide the spirit rather than when the spirit guides us. In the world of today I see a lot of what my grandmother is telling me where we’ve put ourselves ahead of the spirit rather than following the spirit. We’ve now adapted to many genocidal attempts for us for assimilation in mainstream. A lot of the ceremonies that were outlawed or put on hold away, a lot of our grandmothers and grandfathers were imprisoned, even put away permanently—however you want to define that—for practising a natural way of who we are. When we’re able to understand that we’ll understand the hardness or the “hardshipness” that the Elders of our communities across Turtle Island are facing.
Knowledge of the Medicines

Gerard Sagassige: Elder’s Teachings; life’s principles

The relationship to the plant world goes beyond any knowledge that you might read in a pharmaceutical curriculum guide of education. Is that we—even the tiniest of babies—understand the plants. We understand the earth to its relationship is; knowing when to pick medicine, knowing how to pick medicine and knowing why to pick medicine, and the basic protocol to that medicine.

Bertha Skye: The Value of Native Medicine, Part 1

We know that those are times when the earth, our first mother, not only needs her rest but also needs her ceremony. So our prayers—however it is that we pray and however it is that we feast—that is the ceremony that she hungers for and we honour her for all the things that she has ever done. She is the medicine keeper, she is the nutrition keeper, she is the warmth around the fire from the trees to the medicines.

Bertha Skye: The Value of Native Medicine, Part 2

In Saskatchewan, where I come from, they have a big ceremony when they pick their medicines. And they’ll have a ceremony for two days, drying the medicine, and doing it properly...[T]hey should always prepare the medicine at sunrise, and not...prepare the medicine at sundown. I always prepare my medicine...when the sun is shining. And you get the best results when you make medicine when the sun is out.

“Earth, our first mother...She is the medicine keeper.” (G. Sagassige)
Elder Elize Hartley Talks about Métis Medicines

We call them medicines because they are for healing, mostly people that follow the Aboriginal traditions follow the teachings of our ancestors, and that was that medicines are the healers of our people. So, when we got together, whether it was for ceremony or for things that we did as traditions, we always—first of all—used the medicines. Tobacco was the very first medicine that was ever used by our ancestors.

Bertha Skye: The Value of Native Medicine, Part 1

And we put also tobacco, [or] sage or sweet grass, or cedar... in a pouch like this and we wear it around our neck. It’s used for protection, for us to have a good mind, and to keep the evil spirits away.

Elder Elize Hartley Talks about Métis Medicines

Sage is a cleansing medicine. So when we use the medicines, for ceremony, it was really what we call "smudging"... The cedar is another medicine that is used and it’s used as a tea but [we] also... put it over the front door [of our homes], so that no ill comes to the house... Sweet grass is burned as a smudge as well and it has a very perfumed smell when it’s burned... These medicines are carried in what we call our medicine pouch—not everybody but a lot of people will carry this little pouch around their necks or in a pocket or something, and it’s for protection, it’s for good luck, it’s for keeping that person that’s wearing it in constant thinking of the Creator and why we’re here on this earth...

Bertha Skye: The Value of Native Medicine, Part 2

It is very special for Native People to handle their medicines. And they go through a ceremony when they find their plants and before they start picking their plant they will dig a hole beside the plant and give an offering of tobacco, and they’ll say a prayer and they’ll thank the Creator for giving them the plant, and for the plant for giving up [its] life to save—maybe—somebody’s life. And it’s usually a person that will pick the medicine that is gifted with medicines.
Elder Bertha Skye Talks about Birch Trees as Medicines

One of the medicines that were used with the Crees, the Inuit people, Lakota, and Ojibway people was birch... And to make medicine, we have to skin the top part of the silk, it's like a silk on top of the birch tree. And underneath that there's an orangey substance. That's where the medicine is. We scrape that off, and we put it in... a pot [and boil it into a drink].... And this medicine is good for your aching bones, arthritis, and especially people that work outside... [if] they have sore joints from working out in the cold. And it was used for people in Saskatchewan, Alberta, [and] Manitoba, where people worked for a living on a trap line. They would get wet, and maybe they'd end up getting arthritis. This was good for [many] ailments, even for the stomach... [I]t has a very good taste... it helps a lot of people.

Bertha Skye: The Value of Native Medicine, Part 1

One of the strongest medicines we have is cedar... [W]e can make tea out of it... And it's a tea that is for good health... [W]e hang a branch in our homes to protect us... I have cedar hanging above my door.

Bertha Skye: Grandfather's Teachings, Part 1

The Native people use sage, sweet grass, but the strongest of all is cedar. We use cedar for our ceremonies a lot. The Crees use cedar. Cedar is so powerful; it does so many things for people. And cedar is sacred.

Elder Bertha Skye talks about the Power of Cedar

Amongst the tribes across Canada, cedar is one of the top highly recommended medications for different ailments that we have with our communities. And for me it's very powerful and I use it quite a bit with my medicines... And where I knew it was really strong: my friend was dying of cancer—she had cancer in the fourth stage. And what possessed me to go get cedar... I boiled it, and she was on morphine, and after she woke up I said, "I would like to give you a cedar bath." And "OK," she said, "Yes, I'll try anything." So I put her in a tub, helped her, I poured the cedar in the tub, and she said, "Oh, it smells so good!"... And she soaked in there. And I said, "After you get out, I want to give you a massage." So I massaged her feet first, her feet and her legs, and I started down her back, and just as I got on the lower spine, I would burn my hand. She had a tumour in her spine, and I burned my hand as I went over where she had her tumour. And I got scared! I didn't know what to do! So after, I just got her dressed and I went to an Elder and I said, "Why did that happen? I burned my hand every time I went to that part of her where she had the tumour." And he said, "You are gifted. If you had rubbed her back and pulled it out, you could have helped her relieve some of that pressure and her pain... in her back." And so after that I did pursue using... [cedar] more. I knew how powerful it was. And I introduce [cedar] with the doctors or the interns that are going to school here, and the midwives... to me it's very powerful.
**Elder Bertha Skye talks about the Rat Root**

Rat Root... is good for is when you are catching a cold. You take a little piece of [Rat Root]... and chew it. And it has a very bitter flavour, but I remember when I was a child, this is all we used because we never went to the doctor.... And my mother had all her remedies that she used for every one of us, and this was the main one. And it's used for different things. A lot of native people use it for their diabetes.... Later on in life my brother made medicine... this was one of the main ingredients for a cancer medicine he made. Today so many people across Canada use it for their medication. When I was a child, I never went to a doctor. There was no doctor available... We had our own medicine men, medicine women, and midwives, and all the herbs [were] in our backyard.

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**Bertha Skye talks about Labrador Tea**

And one of the teas that we drank with our meals was Muskeg Tea. It's called Labrador Tea and it's found right across Canada. And this Native tea, now they are finding out.... is good for the bladder and the kidneys... [T]his is what we drank when I was a child. And my mother and father died when they were ninety and ninety-one and they never had diabetes. And I'm going on eighty and I still don't have diabetes, so I must be doing something right! ... [T]his is one of the main teas that are really popular with Native students.
Gerard Sagassige: Elder’s Teachings; life’s principles

But yet to hear its story in its entirety, how it comes to be, it all comes from the time when we weren’t well. So the only conclusion that I can relate to that is where we are today. How well we are. Meaning, do we understand communication to the spirit of a plant, or do we understand more of communication to the pharmacist at Shoppers Drugmart? There was a time when we [were so] closely connected that we didn’t need direction for medicine. Our prescription was our intuition to what our bodies meant; that’s how well we knew our bodies. We knew the ailments that ailed us and we knew the healers and the healing that we needed. So we lost the connection from the spiritual to the mental to the physical and to the emotional as a being.

Gerard Sagassige: Elder’s Teachings; life’s principles

At one time we knew that as just a part of everyday protocol to live, that there were the special ones that knew a little bit about coniferous life, there were special ones that were chosen for the water life, water responsibility, some were chosen for dreams and interpretations—we were all given responsibilities. But every once in a while within those responsibilities there was one selected that had all those responsibilities, that knew the medicines, knew the relation to the water, knew the prayer, knew how to pray to communicate, knew how to feast and understood that. But he was shown that, or she was shown that. They call those special ones. And those special ones in the world of today are known as two-spirited... [T]here was a time in our stories and all indigenous stories they were held with the highest of honour and the highest of responsibility.

“...Native languages are kind of complex. The language is very descriptive.” (L. Hill)
Wisdom of the Elders

**Lorna Hill: Part 4**
Haudenosaunee are the people that follow these age old traditions. We are taught that everybody is created equal, everybody is the same. And the good example of that is that within the Haudenosaunee traditions, they have chiefs, they have clan mothers, they have faith keepers--these are positions, and they are highly respected positions, but that doesn't mean that the person in that position is any better than the next person. Everybody is equal.

**Lorna Hill: Part 1**
And also at that time there were still many hereditary chiefs that were Elders and they were a great part in my learning. It's like they made sure that I understood what our traditions were. At an early age, my early teens, the hereditary chiefs sort of depended on me for different purposes. If they had to go somewhere, if they were asked to go somewhere and deliver some kind of ceremony or a speech, I translated for them. So that it could be explained in English what it is they were doing. So I had all this mentorship which I'm so grateful for.

"We respected the Spirit of our Ancestors."
(E.Hartley)

"We [Haudenosaunee] are taught to have compassion, and love and respect, to help one another." (L.Hill)
Elder Elize Hartley: the Importance of the Feather

The eagle feather is not just given to anyone; you have to earn it; it's like your diploma if your community gives you your eagle feather, then you know that you are doing the work that's expected of you... We use this eagle feather, because the eagle is the bird that flies the highest and has the best eyesight of all birds—or of anything on earth for that matter! So the Aboriginal people always respected the eagle because it was so tender to his family but it could be very... ferocious to somebody... or another animal or... bird that came towards their nest. So our ancestors realized that, and they thought that they would adapt the things that the eagle did... And as we smudge, the feather is held up next to you so that you get all the good teachings and the feelings of bringing you into the circle. As you know, when Aboriginal people meet, we always meet in a circle because for the circle there is no end and no beginning... So the circle and the feather are one and all with the medicines. So when we start a gathering... the first thing that you'll see and hear is about the feather, about the teachings, and about the medicines. Then we sit down and get to work and do what we have to do.

Elize Hartley: Métis Regalia

...When we become an Elder, when our community honours us with the name “Elder” and asks us to do the traditions and the ceremonies, we are handed an eagle feather. And the feather is very, very precious. And we have to look after it and make sure that no harm comes to it.

Elize Hartley: Métis Regalia

Because the eagle was the bird that flew the highest and there's stories and traditions that talk about how the eagle could be in touch with the Creator. So it's kind of revered and very much part of the Métis people.
Gerard Sagassige: Part 4

I was raised not to question the spirit of ceremony, but I was raised to be very careful of what I let into my own vessel. So it's not to say my grandmother or my grandfather [was] better or higher, but what they were was very cautious. And when you're cautious and you're careful, you won't ever get hurt. But if you're careless and you're fast, you're going to end up being hurt. Or you're going to end up hurting somebody. So I always use those as very cautionary tools for physical protection in... honouring... the old way.

Gerard Sagassige—Elder's Teachings: life's principles

All the young people nowadays... they are coming back to ceremony, they are coming back to traditional living.

Gerard Sagassige—Elder's Teachings: life's principles

We may never capture the song but we can capture the spirit of living the way that we were, and the way that we are supposed to. So when we have that tobacco in our hands, or we have the aroma of our sweet grass, or we have the aroma of our sage, or we have the drinkings of our red willow tea or cedar tea; you have those induced or introduced to your bodies for the first time, you can feel that change, the gentle change. I call it the medicine change: for us to come together in a complete thought.
Lorna Hill: Part 1
And I've been able to keep my language all these years, despite all the little incidents that happened along the way. I even had problems in school during the times when they forbid us to use our language... I mean we always found a way to use [it], you know, huddle in a corner and talk. As long as we didn't get caught we were OK. And I did hang onto my language; I never forgot it. But then, it was used in the home. I got past that, and I was still able to hold onto it. I was taught traditional ways. I had a lot of mentorship in my growing years; not only from my parents... They went out of their way, I thought, in order for me to learn traditions. But my whole family—I had uncles and a grandmother and great uncles that were all a part of my learning.

ASHS Elders Speak—
Elize Hartley
To know about the natural medicines and the Western medicines would be of great advantage to them for the simple reason that most of the medicines that are out there now in the pharmacies have a little bit of natural medicines... [As] Aboriginal people, we all knew, at least my generation... that if there was a plant that was bad for you, there was one right next to it that was good... [T]here is so much knowledge out there about the natural medicines that [the students] would benefit from learning)... I feel that I have a lot of knowledge, because I've lived so many years... I think that if I can pass just a little bit to ASHS... I've done my duty in life. All students are welcome to ASHS. I am excited to be... an Elder here at ASHS, at McMaster University. And I want you to know that I am never too busy for you to come and say hello or ask me a question, or if you need to hear a teaching or a story and if I know it, I would be so happy to pass it onto you.

To view podcasts visit: www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/ashs/video
Bertha Skye: Being an Elder at McMaster

I've been asked, "How did you get the job as... Elder?" ...I thought it was such an honour to be asked to come here to help students when they're going through difficult times. Whether they have problems with money or problems with their learning or... problems at home—they need to talk to somebody. And if they have to smudge I will smudge them and talk to them and calm them down. About three times I’ve had students that were studying all night because they had a big exam that day. And they come to school just a nervous wreck... And when it's time for their exam they're shaking and trembling, "I can’t do it!"... And then I have to get them in a room and give them a hug, "You can do it!" and smudge them. Just--make them understand they can do it, and be strong... [E]ducation for our people is so important. In order for us to survive in this land we need our education. And this is what I tell our young people, that it's so important that they continue school and especially university.

"Bringing us in a circle together" (E. Hartley)
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