

The Wind Waits For No One
Nłhts'ı Dene Ası Henáoréhı́le Qt'e:
Spirituality in a Sahtúgot'ı́nẹ Perspective

by

Fibbie Tatti
B.Ed., University of Saskatchewan, 1982

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in Indigenous Education, in partnership with the Department of Linguistics

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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The Sahtúgot'ı̨ne have lived in the Sahtú Region around Great Bear Lake since time immemorial. Our Elders believe that spirituality is the foundation for our language, culture and worldview and that it is essential for our language and culture to be taught in the context of spirituality. This thesis provides a description and a definition of spirituality from the perspective of the Sahtúgot'ı̨ne, distinguishing spirituality from concepts such as worldview, culture and medicine power. In keeping with our traditional ways of preserving and transmitting knowledge to future generations, the paper relies heavily on stories passed on to us from our Elders. The paper elaborates on key concepts of Sahtúgot'ı̨ne spirituality. First, like human beings, all animals on this earth have a living spirit or *bets'ı̨ne*. Other entities on this earth - plants and trees, the water and the wind - are also living beings with their own *yóđı̨*. Specific geographic sites with a special significance to the Sahtúgot'ı̨ne are also said to be *yóđı̨*. The other key concept is the existence of three dimensions of existence and their inter-relationship which is crucial to the understanding of Sahtúgot'ı̨ne spirituality.

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Dedication

To my father Francis, mother Lucy, grandfather Susiekw'i who took every opportunity to teach us so that we can pass on our knowledge to all those that will follow.
To my best friend who paved the way, the late Chief George Kodakin.



Figure 1: Map of Great Bear Lake (Sahtú) and region

Map originally appeared in Miggs Wynne Morris, *Return to the Drum: Teaching among the Dene in Canada's North* (2000, p. x). Used with permission from NeWest Press (see Appendix F).

Chapter 1: Introduction

The largest group of indigenous people in the Northwest Territories are the Dene. In all the Dene languages Dene means ‘the people.’ The Dene consist of five major tribes, each with their own distinct cultures and languages. The Sahtúgot’ıne¹ are the people who live and sustain themselves around the shores of Great Bear Lake known to the Dene as Sahtú. Hence, the name Sahtúgot’ıne which means ‘people of the Sahtú.’ I come from the Sahtúgot’ıne people.

Educators have stated again and again that spirituality is a critical component of indigenous education. At the same time, they have acknowledged that they do not have a clear understanding of what spirituality is and do not know how to teach it. Many scholars in their writings on indigenous research methodologies have referred to spirituality, acknowledging the importance of it and yet writing very little about it. It has been suggested by indigenous scholars such as Shawn Wilson that there may not be a place for spirituality in writing. As an illustration of his ambivalence on the subject he writes that, “At a higher level are sacred stories which are specific in form, content, context and structure. These stories themselves must be told at different levels according to the initiation level of the listener...I maybe shouldn’t talk about it here but it’s already

¹ Names, place names, and words are spelled according to the orthography for the Sahtúgot’ıne language. The vowel symbols *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u* represent approximately the sounds of the same International Phonetic Association (IPA) symbols, comparable to the English words *ma*, *met*, *ski*, *go*, and *Su*. *ə* represents the IPA symbol /*ei*/, similar to English *hey*. Vowels with an ogonek (hook symbol beneath them) are nasal, and the acute accent ‘ represents high tone. The glottalized consonants are *ch’*, *k’*, *kw’*, *t’*, *tl’*, and *ts’*. The symbols *b*, *d*, *dl*, *dz*, *g*, *gw*, and *j* represent voiceless sounds, and *ch*, *k*, *kw*, *t*, *tl*, and *ts* represent voiceless aspirated sounds. *gh* is equivalent to the IPA symbol /*ɣ*/, and similarly *ł* = /*l*/, *sh* = /*ʃ*/, *tl* = /*tl*/, *wh* = /*ʌ*/, *x* = /*x*/, and *zh* = /*ʒ*/.

on the page...” (Wilson, 2008, p.98). There is uncertainty, ambiguity and fear surrounding this topic.

Similar issues were raised with respect to Dene spirituality and Dene worldview in the development of the Dene Kede curriculum (Dene Kede, 1993), in the Northwest Territories which I coordinated and participated in. However, respected Dene Elders representing the five Dene tribes in the Northwest Territories, who were ongoing members of the team developing Dene Kede, felt very strongly that spirituality must be included. They wanted it to be included because it is one way by which this important knowledge could be passed to the younger generation and be taught in context.

In the development of the Dene Kede curriculum, the Dene worldview is expressed through four concepts: relationship with the land; relationship with people; relationship with spirituality; and relationship with self. One quarter of the content of the curriculum is dedicated to spirituality. The complexity of the subject and different understandings that the many indigenous peoples of North America and the world possess make it very difficult to develop a pan-indigenous definition. Therefore, my research has limited the description and definition of spirituality to the Sahtúgot’ıne people from my home community of Délıne on Great Bear Lake.

I feel that research on indigenous spirituality must be undertaken by an aboriginal person fluent in his or her language. I believe this because the nuances and deeper level of understandings embedded in the language are sometimes lost in translation and the challenges and complexity of the subject matter require one-on-one interviews and discussions with unilingual Elders from Délıne using the Sahtúgot’ıne language.

The purpose of my thesis is:

*To develop a clear definition and description of spirituality from the perspective of the
Sahtúgot'íne people.*

The paper describes and defines spirituality and differentiates spirituality from Sahtúgot'íne medicine power, worldview and religion. The paper has relied upon an indigenous research methodology with an emphasis on the use of the qualitative research tool of storytelling for data collection. It also includes journals, reflections and the gathering of existing information. A postcolonial indigenous worldview is the frame, using the interpretive paradigm.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Theory

Methodology speaks to how you conduct your research and the means by which you answer your research question. I have utilized the following methodologies in the conduct of my research.

The Indigenous Research Approach Using The Qualitative Method

...the indigenous ways of seeing reality, ways of knowing, and value systems are informed by their indigenous knowledge systems and shaped by the struggles to resist and survive the assault on their culture. (B. Chilisa, 2012, p.13)

The following are the four indigenous research dimensions as outlined by Chilisa:

- “(a) it (indigenous research) targets a local phenomenon instead of using extant theory from the west to identify and define a research issue;
- (b) it is context-sensitive and creates locally relevant constructs, methods, and theories derived from local experiences and indigenous knowledge;
- (c) it can be integrative, that is combining Western and indigenous theories; and
- (d) in its most advanced form, its assumptions about what counts as reality, knowledge, values in research are informed by an indigenous research paradigm. The assumptions in an indigenous paradigm guide the research process” (B. Chilisa, 2012, p.13).

A Postcolonial Indigenous Research Paradigm using the Interpretive Paradigm

This research paradigm is a way of describing a world view that is informed by philosophical assumptions about the nature of social reality (ontology), ways of knowing

(epistemology), and ethics and value systems (axiology). It articulates the shared aspects of the three. Chilisa (2012, p.140-141) states that, “Story telling allows the researcher to speak freely about all their relationships, including the role of spirituality in their life... Stories provide the literature that bears testimony to postcolonial and indigenous ontology with its emphasis on connectedness with the living and the nonliving... These practices and legends are the testimonies that give legitimacy to a postcolonial indigenous research paradigm with its emphasis on relational accountability.”

Storytelling Method

Our readings tell us that there are many ways in which knowledge and worldviews are passed on. I have relied upon journals, reflections, interviews, reference books, legends, songs and above all the storytelling method to gather and present my data.

Margaret Kovack confirmed the value of the storytelling method when she stated the following; “Stories remind us of who we are and our belonging. Stories hold within them knowledge while simultaneously signifying relationships... They are active agents within a relational world, pivotal in gaining insight into phenomenon. Oral stories are born of connections within the world... They tie us to our past and provide a basis for continuity with future generations” (Kovach, 2009, p.94).

‘It is Said’

As my father, Francis Tatti, told us, legends and stories are passed from generation to generation. These stories are the primary instrument our Elders have always used to transmit our history, our knowledge and experience, our worldview and spirituality, our laws and traditions and our language to the next generation. My father

called this process ‘godı ełetł’áetł’é’ which means the stories flow like a river to the next generation. To honour our history and culture in this process of transmitting knowledge, the storyteller must be honest and truthful. Unless they are personal stories, these stories do not belong to the storyteller. They belong to the people. In telling these stories, the storyteller always use the phrase ‘haredı’ which means ‘it is said.’ As Linda Ruth Smith (Smith, 2008, p.27), stated in her Master’s thesis, “In Tsinlhqut’in, the oral citations, “they say” or “it is said” connects listeners to ancestors and validates the story as being factual.” This statement holds true for the Dene including the Sahtúgot’ıne as well. This thesis relies on storytelling as means to describe and define spirituality from the perspective of the Sahtúgot’ıne.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary source for the data for my thesis was myself, the stories and the knowledge I have gathered in my lifetime from Dene Elders and storytellers from Délıne and the other Dene tribes. I refer to and relied on a select number of stories from my father Francis Tatti, my mother Lucy Tatti and other Elders that relate directly to spirituality and medicine power. I have also relied on the knowledge I have gained to put forward a definition and description of spirituality from the perspective of the Sahtúgot’ıne. This approach is consistent with the qualitative approach to research, the postcolonial indigenous research paradigm and the storytelling method for gathering and presenting data described below.

I made extensive use of the sources listed in my literature review to complement the data collection and analysis described above. They provided confirmation for the track I followed and fresh insights to assist my analysis and understanding. My research

on spirituality and medicine power explored the following publications: *The Sahtúgot'ıne Long Ago*, *The People of Denendeh*, *The Sahtú Atlas*, and the *Dene Kede Curriculum*. I utilized Elder George Blondin's publications including *When the World was New*, *Yamoria*, *Trail of the Spirit* and *Medicine Power ık'ı*. I have referenced *Wolverine Myths and Visions*, *Maps and Dreams*, *Handbook of North American Indians*, *Stories Told*, *Dene Gudeji:Kaska Narratives*, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, *If Only we had Known*, *Report on Great Bear Lake and Watershed*, *Travels Around Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes*, *The Green Book Of Language Revitalization*, *Research is Ceremony*, *Rakəkəe Gok'e Godı:Places We Take Care Of*, and *Athapaskans: Strangers of the North*. I also drew on my own publications, knowledge and experiences.

In the course of my research and analysis, I also interviewed two Sahtúgot'ıne Elders to enable me to move forward and complete the project.

Assumptions and Limitations

I have undertaken a considerable amount of research over the years, for my community, and in my position as an educator. However, I have never been involved in a project this sensitive and complex. I assumed that the topic of spirituality would be a complex one, but I had no idea how complex it would be. I assumed, for example, that there would be a word for spirituality in our Sahtúgot'ıne language. However, after some research, I concluded that there is no one word in our language that translates into the word spirituality. I am fluent in the Sahtúgot'ıne language and therefore I assumed that I could take on this topic with some ease. However, it was difficult to find words in the Sahtúgot'ıne language that had the same meaning as the word spirituality in English.

Once I gave up looking for that word, I realized that there are a number of words in the Sahtúgot'íne language which together describe the concept of spirituality from a Sahtúgot'íne perspective. As I began to explore the meaning of these words, I realised that each concept could be a thesis on its own. The more I researched the concept of spirituality, the more its scope continued to expand. Each concept was so intriguing that it was tempting to concentrate on a particular one and not look at the others.

It was a challenge to find much information about the concepts surrounding some of the key Sahtúgot'íne words associated with spirituality. During my discussions with the Elders, each word had to be explained within context and thankfully they were very open to discussing these with me. In that sense speaking my language with the Elders made the process much easier and much more productive. Working with the Elders was a very tranquil experience as it often is.

One of the other limitations on exploring the concepts was that there has not been much academic research on the topic of spirituality that has been published. I would have liked to expand on some of the topics identified in this thesis, but some are not the type of topic about which information is readily given to strangers. Another limitation was that there is not much research on spirituality that has been done from an Aboriginal perspective. This was not the case for just the Sahtúgot'íne people. I found this to be the case in the studies conducted on spirituality about most of the Dene.

The other sad reality is that those who were very knowledgeable about indigenous spirituality and epistemologies are our ancestors and Elders. There are not many Elders left from the ancient people who are as old as the rocks – the Ts'ídu people - and therefore a lot of information and knowledge has been lost. The language, the

Sahtúgot'ınę words for the different categories used to explain the concept of indigenous spirituality, are also being lost.

However, undertaking this research was a great experience for me and I hope this paper can serve as a small contribution to the teachings of our young people. As our Elder Alfred Taniton (Taniton, personal communication, 2014), said, “The stories are there to be retold, to give them life and to bring happiness to our people.”

Chapter 3: Spirituality

Setting the Stage

The Elders involved in the development of Dene Kede believed strongly that the Dene worldview, including spirituality, must be included in the development of indigenous curriculum materials. To this end I believe this research will contribute as a resource for future generations, for language advocates, for curriculum and program developers and for our young people who are trying to learn our language and our culture. This research is intended to bring to the surface the richness of our stories, open doors to indigenous concepts, knowledge, vocabulary and the untapped knowledge of the Sahtúgot'ıne worldview. This research is intended to validate the knowledge and wisdom of the Elders which is truly reflective of the indigenous research methodology. Chilisa (Chilisa, 2012, p.153) states that using the indigenous language to conduct research, “gives legitimacy to indigenous languages.” More importantly, using the indigenous language helps me and the reader understand the worldview that is encompassed in the language and helps me to describe and define more accurately what spirituality is for the Sahtúgot'ıne.

It is critically important to convey to our young people today the knowledge and the meaning of our knowledge from the Dene and Sahtúgot'ıne peoples' perspective. In the old days, our people made informed decisions based on their life long learned experiences and traditional knowledge regarding the land, the water, the animals, and the interests of our people. Right from the moment we were born, we were taught that we are connected to everything around us; that everything around us is alive. We had to establish

relationships with these living beings in order to survive. In the Dene Kede curriculum (Dene Kede, 1993), the Elders identified the four relationships that they felt are important to becoming a capable Dene person. Again, those four relationships are: relationship with the land: relationship with the people: relationship with spirituality: and relationship with self.

The Elders believed that these concepts are crucial for understanding the Dene and therefore, the Sahtúgot'ı́nę worldview. "Every culture has a world view whether it is stated or not. It gives people a characteristic perspective of things which runs through every aspect of their lives. This perspective tells the people what is important and why. It tells people how they must behave in life. Perspective explains life for a people and gives it meaning" (Dene Kede, 1993).

Another explanation that I feel encapsulates indigenous worldview and perspective is the following statement about the Hawaiian all inclusive concept of maui (Hinton and Hale, 2001).

"Hawaiian language is seen as part of a fuller aspect of cultural continuity and individual identity described as maui. Some features of maui are covered by the English word "culture," but maui also includes world-view, spirituality, physical movement, morality, personal relationships, and other central features of a person's life and the life of a people. . . In this sense, language and maui are closely related, as language is always with us in the thought processes in which we view the world and act out our thoughts... (and are) seen as the essential feature in maintaining and increasing the strength of that worldview and keeping culture from being simply the public display of physical articles and activities which lack the soul of being truly lived as part of daily life."

We, the Sahtúgot'íne, still live in a world where we fish, hunt, trap and harvest. We teach out on the land and continue to practice our traditional ceremonies such as feeding the fire, honouring the water, honouring the land, honouring the fire and honouring the animals. Although we still practice these ceremonies, slowly over time the understandings associated with these practices and ceremonies are being lost. Much of it is because we are losing our language, the language which the Elders used to explain the ceremonies. They are still conducting these ceremonies in our language. However, the knowledge and history underlying these ceremonies are being lost.

Some of these ceremonies can still be explained because you can observe them taking place and you can be a participant. However, the explanations regarding some of our ceremonies can be too abstract. Their history has to be told in order to understand why they are taking place and the meanings behind them. They have to be explained through “our ways of knowing” and through our knowledge.

More and more we are losing the Elders who once spoke to us only in our language. They spoke of a time when our people were referred to as the Ts'ídu people, the people who were as old as the original rock formations - as old as the ‘rock people.’ The Gwich'in have similar stories regarding Ts'ii deii (The History and the Stories of the Gwichya Gwich'in, 2007). Our Elders talked about the time when Náhzáacho (dinosaurs) roamed the earth. They spoke of a time when the Creator sent the twin brothers, Yámqréya and Yámqhgá, to right the crimes and injustices that were being committed against the Dene. They spoke of a time when the ‘first’ people, the animals, had a great meeting where they negotiated and came to consensus decisions with regards to their own

conduct on this earth and their duties and responsibilities towards helping the humans on this earth to survive.

The animals, followed by Yámqréya, were the ones who made the laws by which the human beings were to be governed. The animals gave us our language and even our dancing which was provided to us by the rabbit. It is said that these negotiations amongst all the animals were conducted by the leader of each animal who was called Becho. The Becho of the caribou, for example, spoke on behalf of the caribou during the negotiation meetings of all the animals. We, the Sahtúgot'ıne, believe that we are relatives of the animals who were the first people on this earth. (The Sahtúgot'ıne Long Ago, 1991).

It is important for the reader to be aware of this background to provide some context for the following discussion on spirituality.

Concepts of Spirituality

Spirituality is connected and related to worldview and to culture, but as described by Elders, they do not have the same meaning. In fact there are different words to describe each of them.

- The word for worldview is Dene K'ę Kázedets'enıá which translates to 'set in the ways of or thinking like a Dene.'
- The word for culture is Náowere which mean 'how we do things in accordance with our laws.'
- Our concept of spirituality is captured in two words:
 - a. The word for the soul or spirit of a human being is 'bets'ıne' (Alfred Taniton, personal communication, 2012) and the same word applies to the spirit of an individual animal, bird or fish.

- b. The word for another aspect of spirituality is yá'dí, 'the world of living beings or living entities.' Yá'dí refers to specific geographic sites or features which have special, historic and traditional significance for the Sahtúgot'íne which have their own living spirit. Yá'dí also refers to the living spirit in organisms such as plants, trees and to more inanimate objects such as the thunder, the lightning, the water and the rocks, each having distinctive characteristics and possessing a living force.

Building understanding about spirituality is very difficult. Spirituality has many definitions and means different things to different people. As stated by Dr. Peter Jacobs in a lecture, "There is no one way to explain it." (Jacobs, 2013). It is important at this stage in the thesis to distinguish a Dene or Sahtúgot'íne perspective on spirituality from a more Eurocentric perspective which tends to be associated with a system of beliefs unified within an organized religion.

The Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary (Webster's 1984), defines religion as, "Belief in and reverence for a supernatural power accepted as the creator and governor of the universe." and as, "A specific unified system of this expression." The definitions of religion provided by the computer thesaurus describes religion as, "people's belief and opinions concerning the existence, nature and worship of a deity or deities, and divine involvement in the universe and human life ... an institutionalized or personal system of beliefs and practices relating to the divine."

The Dene believe wholeheartedly that everything is designed by the Creator, a being who created and oversees the universe including mother earth, the animals the plants and the people. The Sahtúgot'íne and all the Dene believe and understand that all

gifts are given to us by the Creator. Everything on this earth is on loan to us from the Creator. It is our relationship with the Creator that establishes the relationship we have with all living things on this earth. It is the Creator who sent us all the animals who defined the roles and relationships of each animal, and it is the Creator who sent us Yámqréya, often referred to as the great lawmaker at a time of great hardship. It is through maintaining our love and respect for the Creator and by maintaining our balance and equilibrium within ourselves and with all of his creations that enable us to receive these gifts. “We do believe that the Creator ... is everywhere” (Blondin, 2006). From the moment we are born, our lives are dedicated to having this special relationship with the Creator. We strive and live our lives to achieve this balanced life, with much guidance from the Elders.

Today, the Sahtúgot’ıne have their traditional belief in the Creator as well as the practice of Christianity brought to them primarily by the Roman Catholic Church. However this thesis will focus on Sahtúgot’ıne spirituality as something separate and distinct from religion as defined above, although the role of the Creator will be respectfully referenced on occasion.

The Webster’s dictionary defines spirit as, “1. The vital principle or animating force traditionally believed to be within living beings. 2. The soul, considered as departing from the body of a person at death. 3. Spirit. The Holy Ghost.” (Webster’s, 1984). In defining spiritual and spirituality, the Webster’s dictionary tends to focus on what I would call a Eurocentric view of spirituality; spirituality in relation to religion and in particular Christian religion, and a spirituality that focuses, perhaps exclusively, on the soul in relation to a human being.

From a Dene or Sahtúgot'ıne perspective spirituality is appreciating all the elements of the world and seeing in each of them a living being. The idea of bets'ıne or living spirit with respect to the animals, the birds and the fish is relatively easy for people to grasp. You can through observation describe and understand their nature and their role, and you can interact with them. However, the spirituality I am talking about goes beyond these organisms to plants, trees and to more inanimate objects. For us the thunder, the lightning, the water and the rocks are each yódıı, living beings, with distinctive characteristics and possessing a living force. The story above about Yámqréya and the first meeting of the animals only begins to illustrate the Dene perspective on spirituality.

The Three Worlds of Spirituality

My father Francis Tatti explained that for us, the Sahtúgot'ıne, there are three dimensions to our world. The first dimension is hıdə néné (the upper world). The second dimension is edırı néné (the now world) and the third dimension is hıyuwə néné (the under world). In each dimension there are different expressions of spirituality. Chapter 4 will examine two dimensions, hıdə néné (the upper world), and edırı néné (the now world), and explore the interconnections between them.

Chapter 4: Ediri néné (The Now World) and Hıdā néné (The Upper World)

This Chapter describes ediri néné, the ‘now world’² and what my father referred to as hıdā néné or the ‘upper world.’ Aboriginal spirituality is a word used often and in a number of contexts, and as a result it does not have a precise definition. This thesis seeks to provide a clear definition of spirituality from a Sahtúgot’ıne perspective.

As stated in chapter 3, spirituality includes taking the elements of the world and seeing in each of them a living being. The concept is relatively straightforward when applied to humans and to the animals, the birds and the fish. You can understand and describe their nature and their role, and you can communicate with them. The word for the spirit of a human being is ‘bets’ıne’ (Alfred Taniton, personal communication, 2012) and the same word applies to the spirit of an animal.

However, Sahtúgot’ıne spirituality goes beyond bets’ıne, the living beings or spirits of organisms, to include more inanimate objects or phenomena. The word for this other aspect of spirituality is yódıı (which some people pronounce as édıı), ‘the world of living beings or living entities.’ Yódıı refers to specific geographic sites or features which have special, historic and traditional significance for the Sahtúgot’ıne. These special sites or features, which are discussed in greater detail later in the paper, are living beings with a spirit of their own. In addition, for us, even entities such as thunder, lightning, the water and the rocks are ‘godıı’ (alive) and they too are yódıı, living beings, with distinctive characteristics, spiritual entities with an unseen living force.

² The phrase “ediri néné” translates literally as ‘this world’ but I translate it as ‘the now world’ to emphasize the time dimension.

Sahtúgot'ínę Long Ago (Vandermeer et al., 1991), Heine, 2007, and Blondin, 1990 set forth our creation story in slightly different versions. They state that the human beings, or Dene, were created last by the Creator, after the animals, and that their survival has always been dependent upon their relationship with the animals, and the cosmos. There is a recognition of the Dene's dependence on all these beings and the knowledge that these beings in one way or another support the survival of the human beings. The recognition of this special relationship guides our behaviour. Dene K'ę Kázedets'enįá, the worldview, is our understanding of the world, our role within it. How we act within our 'Náowere,' culture, is guided by that worldview – indigenous epistemology, or closer to home, the Dene perspective.

Spirituality is a deeper level of knowledge and awareness and it too guides our behaviour. Living fully and successfully in 'ediri néné,' the now world, is dependent upon our understandings and our relationship to the living entities of 'hıdә néné,' the upper world. Our lives are regulated by these relationships and maintaining the balance in these relationships is of utmost importance. Our very existence depends on maintaining and respecting these relationships.

My father told us that in the Dene world, there are three dimensions of existence. All the objects that you see and the activities around you are in ediri néné, the 'now world'. Hıyuwә néné, the 'under world', which is discussed in a later chapter, is the after death existence. The other dimension of existence my father spoke of is hıdә néné or the 'upper world.' The best way to introduce hıdә néné is through a story given to me by my father.

Caribou Love Song Story

By Francis Tatti

A Man and his brother-in-law were out looking for caribou. They made camp in a place where caribou usually pass. They waited. In the morning, they woke to the most beautiful song they had ever heard being sung by a woman. They lay there listening. The music was so beautiful. The song was about the love of the land. The lyrics to the song were as follows,

“How can you be tired of wandering on the land?
What did you mean you want to rest!
Look how beautiful the land is.
The beauty of the land stretches out onto the horizon.
The land is so beautiful to look at, to appreciate, to gaze at, and to breathe in.

One is literally overcome by its exoticness.
It is paradise.
To gaze out on the land is to experience living.
You cannot rest, for then you cannot see.
When one dies, one can rest.
But it would mean never again to see the land and its beauty.”

These are the words the woman’s voice was singing so beautifully. It was a love song.

The Man and his brother-in-law were listening, mesmerized by the beauty and rapture of the song. Finally the brother-in-law said, “I thought we were out here by ourselves with no people near us. Who is that singing and where is it coming from?”

The Man answered, “All these years we have been working together and you have repeatedly told me that you have strong medicine power, and yet you ask who that is? Do you not know who that is? That is the caribou singing its love song for the land it travels on. For the land that gives us life, for the land that loves us, for the land we must be caregivers for, for the land that keeps us wandering to share in its beauty and delight” (Tatti, personal communication, 2000).

This story reveals the essence of spirituality and the meaning of *hıdə nənə* or the ‘upper world’. Knowing the caribou at this level is very different from the level of seeing the caribou in *edıı nənə*, the now world, in which you are hunting for food crossing the tundra. The story reveals that the caribou can speak and, in fact, can sing in a beautiful voice. The message speaks to the very nature of the caribou’s behaviour, always in migration and following the seasons. However, in its song, the *bets’ıné*, spirit, of the

caribou celebrates being alive and expresses the wonder and beauty of the land. This story illustrates both the existence of the *hıdā nēnē* or the ‘upper world’ dimension of existence and the ability of the hunter to see beyond *edıı nēnē* to *hıdā nēnē*, to be able to hear the song and to know who is singing. Unlike the *hıyuwə nēnē*, the under world, *hıdā nēnē* the upper world is not a separate world from *edıı nēnē* the now world, though it is interconnected. Rather it is an enriched vision of the *edıı nēnē*, the ability to perceive another dimension to the world we live in.

In the story above, a third person in *edıı nēnē* might only be able to see and hear the caribou moving on the land. The second man in the story has the ability to hear the song, to take one step into *hıdā nēnē*, but his perceptions are limited and he believes the beautiful song comes from a woman nearby. The Man is much more in tune with *hıdā nēnē*, the upper world. He knows it is the caribou themselves who are singing the song and that the words of the song speak to the very essence of the caribou, its *bets’ınē*. The caribou have lived on the land since time immemorial so they can see and appreciate the land and its living beings in their entirety. For us, the human beings, we may only get a glimpse of *hıdā nēnē*, the upper world, and some much more than others.

Spirituality in practice is not necessarily the ability to actually see and experience *hıdā nēnē*, the upper world, but rather it is to know from the stories and the teachings of the Elders that it exists, and to understand and appreciate it. To know the caribou and who they are as *bets’ınē*, living beings, that the caribou have this knowledge and love of their land since time immemorial, and that they know from the creation story that part of their role in this world is to help sustain the Dene. Spirituality is first of all having this knowledge about the caribou and appreciating the caribou offering themselves to us. This

knowledge engenders respect for the caribou and its bets'íné and leads to the formulation of laws regarding how to treat them and how to behave in their presence.

ʔekwé edeka daewə, The Caribou Spirit, Bets'íné, Hovers Above Itself

For example, during the hunting of a caribou, it is said that ʔekwé edeka daewə, which means that the caribou spirit, bets'íné, literally hovers above itself watching the hunter as he prepares the meat (Bekale, personal communication, 2012, Vital, personal communication, 2014). It is said that, if the caribou carcass is treated with the proper respect and the meat is prepared properly and carefully, the caribou will reincarnate itself and reoffer itself to the people. By treating the caribou and other animals with this respect, based upon the understanding of the existence of hıdə néné, the upper world and its interconnectedness through spirituality with the edırı néné, the now world, the caribou and other animals will reproduce and re-present themselves, ensuring the survival of the Dene. It is said, as part of our creation story, that in the big meeting of the animals, the wolves wanted to restrict the role of the caribou to provided food for them. However, the caribou Becho, leader, disagreed, stating that their primary role in edırı néné should be to offer themselves as food to the Dene to help ensure their survival. The image of the caribou bets'íné hovering outside itself observing the hunter is another illustration of the existence of hıdə néné and the benefit of the hunter having this knowledge and therefore treating the carcass of the caribou appropriately.

Striking a Caribou With a Stick

It is also said that one should never strike a wounded caribou, rabbit or white fish with a stick in order to kill it. In this instance Elders tell us the bets'íné of these three animals will be so affronted that they will disappear and not present themselves to the

community again as food. This is a law that was given to us from the animals when they established the rules for the behavior of animals and men. At one time, not too long ago, it is said that there were many caribou gathered on the ice very close to the community. This was the normal migration route of that herd of caribou. A man tried to kill one of the wounded caribou by striking it with a stick. The caribou did not return to this area for forty years. If the man was aware of the *bets'ı́né* of the caribou, or if the man was aware of and respected the Dene law derived from our ancestors' knowledge of the *bets'ı́né* of the caribou, he would never have struck the caribou. This is why knowledge of Dene spirituality, even if you are not one blessed with the ability to see the *bets'ı́né* of the caribou, is so important to our survival.

Yídı́ zha, Thunder Child

My father (Tatti, personal communication, 2003), told me a story which he said was given to him by his uncle. It is said that his uncle came upon the carcass of a baby eagle floating in the water by the shore. He did not know that a baby eagle could be drowned. It began to rain and shortly thereafter, to his amazement, the baby eagle began to move and soon it stood erect on the shore. He had failed to notice the blue tinge of power emanating from its wings. It is said that the eagle has the power of the thunder storm and therefore when it began to rain the *bets'ı́né* of the eagle used the *yádı́* of the thunderstorm to come back to life in *edı́rı́ néné́*. My father said that in the fall, when you hear the thunder, '*Yídı́ dezha nenazho*' – the thunder is guiding its children back - on their migration to the south for the winter. The Dene believe that the *bets'ı́né* of the eagle has the power of the thunderstorm which is also *yádı́*, a living being. This story illustrates again the existence of *hı́dä néné́* and its connection to *edı́rı́ néné́*. The *yádı́* of

the thunder and bets'ine of the eagle in hıdə nene bring the baby eagle back to life in ediri nene.

The Yádı of the Wind and Trees

We the Sahtúgot'ine, like other Dene, believe that everything on this earth is created by the Creator and is alive. On one occasion when I was young, I told my father that I really wanted the wind to subside because it was preventing us from reaching our destination by boat. My father told me to observe the trees. He said, "Do you see how they are swaying in the wind?" He said the trees are stationary living beings, they are yádı. When the wind is blowing, they are bending, swaying and moving with the wind. He said they are grateful for the wind as it is the time when their sap is flowing throughout their limbs and body. Their movement to the wind is so desired and appreciated by the trees. They are rejuvenated and they feel happy. The Creator takes care of the needs of all its creations and therefore the wind is welcomed by these beings, the trees which are yádı. I acknowledged my father's gift to me and never expressed feelings against the wind again. This appreciation of the yádı of the trees and the role played by the wind, also yádı or a living being, is another example of the knowledge and practice of spirituality in the world of the Sahtúgot'ine.

When I was a young child, I was raised by different members of our family. Often times the person who took care of me and guided me was my grandfather Suziekw'i. In Délıne we harvested and lived primarily on fish and caribou. Fishing is a major activity of our daily lives. My grandfather used to wake me up early in the morning so we could go and visit our nets. He wanted to go early in the morning so we could avoid the winds that usually came in the late morning or early afternoon. My grandfather used to say,

“The wind waits for no one.” He was reinforcing the fact that the wind is yáđıı, it is a living being and it too has a role to play in this world. The title of this thesis is “The Wind Waits For No One,” as a tribute to my Grandfather Suziekw’i and all the ancestors. The Elders always tell us that the wind and the other natural yáđıı, phenomena, are the boss and they rule us. Ours laws tell us that we move on the land only when these yáđıı tell us it is safe to do so. To ignore these laws founded within our spirituality is to put you and your family at risk in edııı néné. If we listen to the yáđıı in hıdö néné and the teachings of our Elders, if we follow our knowledge and our laws, it is remarkable how comfortable we can be in what is a very harsh environment.

The Land Is Our Mother

In developing the Dene Kede curriculum, the late Tłchq Elder Mrs. Elizabeth Mackenzie told the curriculum committee, “If you want to know if the Creator exists, just look outside.” She went on to say, “It is no good to be scared of the land. We are from the land. We come from it. Why are we scared of ourselves... We are the land.” (Dene Kede, 1993). Elder George Blondin spoke at a Dene Kede Workshop in 1990, of an Elder who was on his death bed in a tent. As he lay dying, he requested that the flap of the tent be lifted so that he could see the land one more time. The connection and relationship that the Dene have with the land and the spirit of the living beings is totally embedded and engrained in who we are. We are so dependent on the land, but our feelings go way beyond our needs and dependencies. As our late Chief George Kodakin expressed with the utmost conviction in many of his speeches, “The land is our mother.” The Elders have reiterated again and again that we the Dene must maintain a respectful, ongoing

relationship with the land and all the living beings: our very survival as human beings is dependent upon it.

Chapter 5: Yóđí of Sacred Spiritual Places

We have discussed hıdə nənə, the bets’ınə or living beings in the animals, the yóđí, living beings, in the trees, the wind and the thunder. However, yóđí also refers to the spirit or living being in a specific sacred geographic site. For example, water, meaning natural water on the land, is yóđí, a living being and, as my father told us, it is important for our health that we drink water that is ‘alive’. However, yóđí in reference to water can also speak to the living being and the nature of that being in the water in a very specific location.

As in any relation that one has with one’s mother, one is dependent on the mother for survival from infancy. The mother displays great love and affection and provides an abundance of food and nurturing for the growth of the child. As you look out on the land in Délıne, you can see how loved we are by our mother earth, the beauty that surrounds us and how much we are given and blessed with. Everything on this land is reciprocal. In return for the gifts we receive, we are charged with being the stewards of the land. We show our affection, care and love for the land by trying to maintain a balance in our relationship with everything on the land. We are so tied to our land that our very name as a people is taken directly from the land we have always lived on. The Sahtúgot’ınə are the people of the Sahtú, the region of Great Bear Lake. As Basso stated (Basso, 1996, p.21), “... their names for themselves are really the names of their places. That is how they were known to others and to themselves. They were known by their places.”

Every geographic site on the land has its history and its own stories, and names are given to that location to assist in recording its history. Some special geographic

locations or features are also named to show great respect and honour. These land marks and place names hold so much spiritual significance that they are themselves seen by our people as being yédí, or living beings. “At a few places, where powerful entities are resident, culture heroes are associated with landscapes features, or important events have taken place, special conditions exist providing the locality with power and significance. These places are often prominent landmarks, and consequently become powerful memory aids for recalling the significance of the location. Often special rules are required while travelling in these areas” (Sahtú Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, 2000, p.18).

These special places have spiritual entities that even we, with our knowledge passed down from our Elders, have a hard time knowing and appreciating in their entirety. Some of these sites have been known to us as living beings from the beginning of our time on earth. The living beings in other sites were recognized more recently in association with important events in our history that occurred at that location. The living beings in some of these sites are honoured because these sites were or are crucial to our survival as a people. We are honoured and blessed to have many of these spiritual places around Délıne, Great Bear Lake and throughout the Sahtú region.

Chileku ?ehdá – Young Man Point

One yédí site in the vicinity of Délıne is an island called Chileku ?ehdá, young man point. It is said that this island belongs to the children yet to be born. Since the beginning of time this place has existed to help our people. My mother told me that this island is there to provide children to women who are barren. She said that it is said that when a couple wants to have a child, they place items on the shoreline of the island. It is

said that the items left can determine the gender of the child. If a girl is desired, sewing items are left on the shoreline. If a boy is desired, then items such as a miniature bow and arrows are left on the shoreline. Upon placing these items, the would-be parents speak to the living being of the island to express their desire for a child. As the living being of this island belongs exclusively to the children, no one is allowed to make camp here or stay overnight. It is said that when one walks onto this island, there are footprints of little children everywhere. No photos exist of this place because it is so sacred and so honoured and it must remain untouched and unrecorded for the yá'dí, living being, to maintain its power. This is one example of yá'dí being a geographic site rather than an object (the water), a phenomenon (the wind) or an organism (the eagle). Recognizing the yá'dí is recognizing the power of the location, and respecting the laws for how to treat the island helps the yá'dí maintain its power to help the people. This is a very sacred and spiritual place for the Sahtúgot'ıne.

Dárelı – Flowing Waters

Many years ago when we were producing reading materials with cultural and language content that pertain to the understandings of our children in Délıne, we researched the following story. This story is about two orphan girls who were wandering around Dárelı, the entrance to Great Bear River, situated directly across from Délıne. The two girls came upon an evil old lady. As the story goes, the old lady killed the younger sister and chased the older sister to kill her as well. The older sister ran to the entrance of the river and came upon a Godéneho, a giant. With words of respect and kindness towards the giant, the older sister was able to escape with the help of Godéneho who, with his powers, extended his leg across the river enabling the girl to run across to safety.

The old lady was not as fortunate because Godéneho, displeased with her disrespectful words, lifted his leg causing the old lady to fall into the river and drown. It is said that when the old lady fell into the water, the packsack that she was carrying also fell into the water releasing all its contents. The fish rushed to the packsack and took some items which can still be identified in the fish today. For example small bones in the head of a trout are replicas of the axe and the ʔáká, the shin bone in the leg of a moose. It is said that the sound of the old lady gurgling as she drowned can still be heard today, but not as strongly as in the old days. The Elders say the sound was weakened when the water was dynamited to make the channel deeper for the barges to come through. As children, we used to listen to see if we could still hear the sounds of the old lady. Dárél̓ is a land mark identified by its history and events that took place at the entrance to Great Bear River. Dárél̓ is a sacred place with a yéd̓i and people often pause to ‘honour the water’ to show respect and to ask for a safe journey before travelling down the river.

Tatsóʔehká – A More Recent Yéd̓i

We recognize, through our legends and stories from the Elders that the land has many of these land marks with yéd̓i, living beings. As young children we were told that no one sleeps on the southern shore of the little lake adjacent to Great Bear Lake near Dél̓n̓. There is a ridge of dark blue tinged spruce trees marking that location which is called Tatsóʔehká. It is said that a very powerful elderly man once lived in this location who used his medicine power to control a whole village. Because he was an excellent hunter and a good provider, many people depended on him for their survival and therefore endured his abuse. A young man who had a medicine power which the old man did not, challenged the old man and defeated him. Today, we still use the land to gather

berries, moss, spruce boughs and wood. However, because of our respect for the old man who was so powerful and provided so much to the community, the Elders of that time decided that no one should sleep there. Since that time, no one to our knowledge has ever slept in that area. Tatsózehká is an example of a site having yádí, that was recognised by events which took place in more recent times.

Tehlets'égáádó – Speared in the River

My father told us that on one occasion when the Sahtúgot'íne people went on a fall hunt they encountered an enemy war party. It is said that they were attacked and only two people survived and returned. This so angered the people of the village that a war party was organized to avenge the loss of our people. One young man wanted to go with the war party so badly that he repeatedly asked for permission from his mother. Knowing the danger the men would face, she denied his request. The war party was leaving early the next morning and to ensure that her son did not go, she placed his mitts under her pillow and went to sleep.

The war party went to where the enemy were camped and a great battle was fought. It is said that the water in that area ran red with the blood of the people killed. It is said that spears were used to kill each other. Today that place is called Tehlets'égáádó which means speared in the river.

Our people know where Tehlets'égáádó is and believe that it has its own yádí. However, it is not a site that is used frequently because of its history. The young man, determined to participate in the battle, snuck his mitts from under his mother's pillow and went with the warriors. He was one of the many people that were killed that day. As a

result of this story, we are told today never to put our mitts under the pillow. It is still the practice of our people.

Elder George Blondin (Blondin, 1990, p.53) also refers to this story, "...another group was attacked and some of them jumped into the river. A few escaped but, but most were killed... So the young man dove under the water again, and used the river to get home. The old man also escaped and met him there. After that, they called the river Tehttetsigeh, "more than one speared in the water" – as it is known today."

Gorabə

The Elders speak of another place on the north shore of Great Bear Lake called Gorabə. It is said that a giant wolf lived there once. The Elders say that the sounds of a nearby village disturbed the animal so much so that it emerged from its den.

Unbeknownst to the giant living being, a woman who was sewing late into the night was observing its movements. The Elders say *belach̓né bórəhd̓*, that the gaze of the spirit of the woman fell upon it, and the giant wolf was frozen and transformed into a feature of the landscape. This site is also seen as an important geographic feature with a living being. To this day we honour this location, this living being. It is said that the *yád̓i* is a giant wolf. The land mark is in the shape of a wolf with large, protruding ears. This is a *yád̓i* place, a spiritual place. What is being recognized is the power of the giant wolf and it is believed that one day this *yád̓i* and the other giant beings on our land will come alive once more. A gift is always presented to honour this living being each time people pass by.

Techıꞑ and Kwətenıꞑá

There is a place called Techıꞑ on Great Bear Lake where the water is very deep. The Elders say that the great law-maker Yámqréya once chased the giant beavers away from this area. It is said that every fall time our people would cross these waters when travelling to the barren lands to hunt for caribou. It is said that a long time ago many boats would leave for the fall hunt but only a few would return because the giant beavers living in these waters would slap their tails on the water capsizing most of the boats. While many of our people perished in this way, this was still the only practical route they could follow to reach the hunting grounds. Yámqréya heard of the plight of our people and came to assist them. He chased the giant beavers out of Sahtú (Great Bear Lake) and down the Sahtú Dé (Great Bear River) to Dehga/Dehcho (the Mackenzie River). There he killed three of the giant beaver and nailed their hides to Kwətenıꞑá (Bear Rock) where they are still visible today. Techıꞑ and Kwətenıꞑá are also honoured by our people for their spiritual and historical significance. They are both special places with yádıı, recognized as places with spiritual living beings. They are important because they are part of the story of Yámqréya, the legendary hero and law-maker for all the Dene. George Blondin (Blondin, 1990, p.30) also speaks of this legend in greater detail.

Tsia – The Caribou Calf

There is much laughter associated with many of our stories and legends as well. One story told by the Elders is said to have taken place at a site called Tsia, which is situated on the shore of Great Bear Lake east of Délıne. (Other people telling this story associate Tsia with another location). Based on the version I have heard, it is said that long ago all the animal families gathered at Tsia. Tatsó, the raven also arrived for this

great gathering. Upon his arrival, he noticed that the grebe had long flowing hair of which he was very envious. Tatsó concocted a story lamenting to his audience that he was the carrier of bad news. He told them that most of the grebe's family had succumbed to a bad accident on their way to the meeting and died. Today, as well as in those days, people cut their hair to honour their deceased relatives. In honour of his deceased relatives, the grebe at the meeting was having his hair cut. Tatsó, chagrined by the effect of his story, told people not cut the grebe's hair too short as the story he told only came to him through gossip. It is said that thanks to Tatsó, this is how envy and gossip came into this world and to the people. Tatsó is still known today as the bearer of bad news and he is still associated with envy and gossip.

Shortly after they cut the grebe's hair, the grebe's family arrived safely. The grebe, distraught from having his beautiful hair cut short, cried himself to sleep by the fire. As in most gatherings among the Dene, the animal people began to celebrate and dance. Unable to move the sleeping grebe, they danced around him. Some dancers inadvertently stepped on the grebe's feet, so when he woke in the morning, not only did he have short hair, he now had flat feet. Tsia is known as the great gathering place of the animals. Today Tsia is still recognized as a unique site rich with historical and spiritual significance.

Often other Dene tribes have a similar story attached to a specific geographic site within their traditional territory. For example the Gwich'in tell a similar story about Tatsó meeting with the grebes which recognizes Vik'ooyendik (Church Hill) as their location for the story (Northwest Territories & NWT Cultural Places Program, 2007, p.89).

Elders' Story: The Water Heart

About forty years ago, we were mapping and collecting place names of all the sites that our ancestors used for our land use mapping project. During this project, Chief George Kodakin described the significance of our Sahtú, Great Bear Lake. The spiritual significance of this information never left me. He told me that our Sahtú, Great Bear Lake, has a spiritual place in it called Tudzá. The literal translation of that word is 'water heart.' He told me that the Elders have said that our lake holds the beating heart of all water bodies on this earth. Water is godí, alive. To be alive, water needs a heart and the yádí, the specific site that is a living being, the heart of the water, is in Sahtú (Great Bear Lake). It is said that there was only one powerful medicine power person amongst us who was powerful enough to visit Tudzá and survive. This Elder is called ʔehtsáa Dáoye.

“The Elders of Délı̨ne have passed a story down through many generations. In times past, their spiritual teachers were often “mystically tied” to different parts of the environment: some to the caribou, some the wolf, some the northern lights and some the willow. ʔehtsáa Kaye Daoye was one such person. He lived all around GBL or “Sahtú” in the Slavey language, but made his home primarily in Edaiila (the Caribou Point area), on the northeast shores of the lake... ʔehtsáa Kaye Daoye was mystically tied to the loche. One day, after setting four hooks, he found one of them missing. This disturbed him - in those days hooks were rare and very valuable - and that night he travelled in his dreams with the loche in search of the fish that had taken his hook. As he travelled through the center of GBL, he became aware of a great power in the lake - the heart of the lake or the “Water Heart.” Contemplating this heart, he became aware that it is connected to all beings - the land, the sky, the plants, other creatures, people - and that it helps sustain the entire watershed of GBL. Charlie Neyelle” (Hamre, 2004)

Chief George Kodakin spoke of ʔehtsáa Dáoye and Tudzá when I interviewed him for the Dene land use and occupancy study in 1974. As Chief Kodakin told the story, ʔehtsáa Dáoye actually descended to Tudzá, the heart of the water. ʔehtsáa Dáoye said that as he neared the bottom of the lake, he saw giant fishes that were so large that no one

could get beyond them to the centre where Tudzǎ is located. However, through his experience, he surmised that the leader of the fish, and the only one amongst them who knew the path to the heart of the water, was the loche. The loche is considered an idle kind of being. However his importance cannot be understated because of the role he plays. It is said that all the fishes in Great Bear Lake need to make a yearly pilgrimage to Tudzǎ in order to live another year. Therefore the fishes migrate to Tudzǎ each year and they are led there by the loche. It is said that when he described his experience, ʔehtsǎ Dǎoye told the people that Tudzǎ was a very terrifying place. This story reminds us that the fishes migrate during the seasons of the year, just like the birds, the caribou and even the Dene.

This is another example of a geographic location having such high importance to the Sahtúgotʔnǎ that it is identified as a distinct living being, or yǎdí. Water is such an important element in our lives; we live and travel on the lakes and rivers and on the ice in winter. We consume the pure clear water to survive. It is part of the beauty of our land. Recognizing Tudzǎ as the living heart of the water makes this very specific location in the lake one of the most sacred and spiritual places in our land. We always ‘pay the water’ in honour of what it provides to us and to honour the living being Tudzǎ.

The Elders speak of how the fishes, having been under the ice for a very long winter, swim to the surface in the springtime when the ice has receded and, in their happiness, rejoice and sing love songs as they enjoy the open waters on the lake and the streams (Miller & Taniton, 2006).

ʔehtsǎ Kaye Daoye is the Elder most known for his visit to Tudzǎ (water heart), the heart of our lake. Tudzǎ is one of our most important yǎdí, a geographic location

with its own living spirit or being which is, "...connected to all living beings" (Hamre, 2004). However, there are many stories of Elder ʔehtsáá Dáoye, who was a powerful medicine power person who was able to use his powers to learn about the animals. His experiences and the stories he told enabled our people to better understand the cycles of the animals, the characteristic of their world and how they behave. These understandings enabled us to further develop our relationship with them.

An elderly woman (Vital, personal communication, 2014), who helped me with my research told me that as a child, her father would encourage her and her siblings to visit and assist the Elders. Sometimes these visits would be just to provide company for the elderly or to look through their hair and remove any white ones. She said that, as she was looking through Elder ʔehtsáá Dáoye's hair one time, she noticed a large growth at the nape of his neck. Curious, she touched it. Knowing that she was curious but too polite to ask an Elder a direct question, Elder ʔehtsáá Dáoye told her that it was his medicine power. He turned lightheartedly to her and told her that he would give his ʔłk'ǫ, to her if she wanted it. By then, he was already considered such a powerful medicine power person, and, afraid of that kind of ʔłk'ǫ, she declined. Good naturedly, she laughed at the experience and said maybe it was all these act of kindness that enabled her to live as long as she has. This story affirms the medicine power associated with Elder ʔehtsáá Dáoye and reminds us that powerful people were still with us in our living memory.

Chief George Kodakin said that the spiritual significance of Sahtú must never be underestimated, recognizing that it holds Tudzá, the heart of all the water on the earth. Tudzá, which is a yódıı, is a very spiritual and sacred place to the Sahtúgot'ıne of Great Bear Lake and to all the Dene. This section has set out several examples of yódıı

associated with specific geographic site sites which hold great spiritual significance for the Sahtúgot'ıne and all the Dene. In most cases these yódıı have great power and our ancestors developed various laws and protocols we must know and adhere to when approaching these yódıı.

Chapter 6: Yakach̓n̓é – The Animal World

We have discussed how h̓d̓a n̓en̓é, the upper world, and ed̓ı̓ n̓en̓é, the now world, exist as two dimensions connected to each other. What separates a person in ed̓ı̓ n̓en̓é from h̓d̓a n̓en̓é is ‘hen̓er̓ı̓dı̓,’ a deeper level of awareness that enables a person to see and hear the living beings of h̓d̓a n̓en̓é. However, my father told us that there is another aspect of h̓d̓a n̓en̓é, the upper world, which is in fact a dimension of existence that is distinctly separate from ed̓ı̓ n̓en̓é, the now world. He called this dimension of h̓d̓a n̓en̓é ‘Yakach̓n̓é.’

My father said that Yakach̓n̓é is a world belonging exclusively to the animals. It is said by the Elders that one day all the animals in ed̓ı̓ n̓en̓é will return to their world. It is said that the animals who give themselves freely to us for our survival are always watching us to observe how they are treated. If they are unhappy and dissatisfied with the way we treat them, they can return to Yakach̓n̓é from where they will never return to ed̓ı̓ n̓en̓é and we will never see them again. The Elders know how important the animals, especially the caribou are to us. When I was younger, each time I returned to Dél̓n̓é after a lengthy absence, one Elder in particular would always ask me, “How are the caribou travelling?” He wanted to be reassured that the caribou were still with us and that they were not going to their land and disappearing from ed̓ı̓ n̓en̓é.

Other Dene peoples are also aware of the world my father called Yakach̓n̓é. For example (Moore et al., 1990, p.60), “The Beaver believe that swan people live in a separate land above the earth...” and that, “The Dene Dhaa also believe that swans have a

special homeland above the earth...” and that, “Other animals may also live in these lands above the earth...”

Two years ago, the caribou counts of most of the herds in northern Canada were so low that the authorities decided to place quotas or even a ban on hunting caribou except within a few designated areas. Everyone was shocked. People had been taking the caribou for granted. People often do not appreciate the natural wealth we have until it is threatened. Every fall time we receive fresh caribou meat from our hunters, but this particular year there was no fresh caribou meat for many. However, it was more than the meat that we missed. The psychological impact of not seeing our caribou brothers who so willingly offer themselves to us, coupled with the fear that they may not come again, is one of the saddest events in our lives. The question to me from the Elder, “How are the caribou travelling?” is now being asked with a new urgency by many Dene as we are faced with the real possibility of losing our brother the caribou. The Elders know from our ancestors that one day the animals, including the caribou will disappear from *ediri néné* and return to *Yakachiné*. They were always concerned about the impact this would have on us as a people, not only regarding on our ability to sustain ourselves, but also regarding our essential identity which is so deeply embedded in the relationship that we have with the caribou.

Pursuit to Yakachiné

My father once told us a story about very powerful medicine power people who travelled to *Yakachiné*, a world that very few people were even aware of. It is said that it is only the most powerful of the medicine power people who were knowledgeable about

this place. It is said that on one occasion some men had gone hunting, leaving the women, the elderly and the children at home.

As an aside, it is important that the reader understand the Dene concept of home. In the not very distant past—this time includes my parents when they were young—there were no permanently established communities in the sense that Dene families did not live in permanent dwellings, even for a period of time, throughout the year. The Dene spent the entire year following the fish and the caribou, making camp and setting up tents wherever they travelled. Home was literally wherever people set up their tents on their traditional lands which they knew so intimately. As Elder George Blondin said (Blondin, 2006), “...Aboriginal people are the kind of people for whom any place in the bush is their home.” It is no coincidence that our word for fire, ‘kó’ is also our word for home.

Returning to my father’s story, while the men were away on their hunting trip, the women were attacked by their enemy and all the people who lived there were killed, except for one beautiful woman who was kidnapped. The kidnappers used all kinds of medicine power to cover their trail and disguise their whereabouts, but the kidnapped woman’s husband was a very powerful medicine power person and they could not hide from him. He and his companions pursued the kidnappers everywhere they went. In a last desperate attempt to escape and hide from the husband, the kidnappers used their medicine power to travel to the animal world, Yakachı́né. Elder George Blondin (Blondin, 2006) refers to a tunnel through the floor of Mother Earth which he calls ‘yah’, which the most powerful medicine power persons could access, and this may have been the tunnel the kidnappers used to pass from edı́rı́ néné́ to Yakachı́né.

Only the most powerful of the powerful can go to this place. Most medicine power people had only been able to hear about it. As a last resort, the kidnappers thought that Yakach̓né was the only place where the husband would be unable to pursue them. Unbeknownst to them, he was one of them. He was among the very powerful of the medicine power people and he knew how to travel to Yakach̓né. Taking other medicine power men with him, the husband followed the kidnappers to Yakach̓né, killed them all, and retrieved his wife.

When my father was telling us this story, he expressed such sorrow. In pursuit of a woman, many of the most powerful medicine people of our people, the kidnappers and some of the husband's companions, were killed. The expression of sorrow from my father was because those medicine power people were the last of our people who had the knowledge and ability to go to the animal world of Yakach̓né, the h̓d̓a n̓é̓né reserved exclusively for the bets'̓né, the spirit or living beings of the animals.

This other aspect of h̓d̓a n̓é̓né, the animal world of Yakach̓né, reserved only for the bets'̓né of the animals, is one more source of our Sahtúgot'̓né spirituality. The fact that the animals could leave us, leave ed̓ı̓ n̓é̓né, forever, reminds us of how dependent we are on the animals and how we must respect their bets'̓né, obey our laws and be effective stewards of the land in order for us to retain the essence of being Sahtúgot'̓né. Our worldview, our culture, our spirituality, even the richness of our language are tied directly to our traditional lands and the animals. We are the weak people in ed̓ı̓ n̓é̓né, dependent on the land and animals who committed themselves so long ago to helping us to survive. When my father spoke of the land, the animals, h̓d̓a n̓é̓né and Yakach̓né, he

spoke with much humility. Our Elders tell us that we must never forget our place in this world and we must never abandon our humility.

Chapter 7: H̱yuwə ṉeṉé – The Under World

This chapter focusses on the third dimension of spirituality in our world as described by my father. H̱yuwə ṉeṉé, the under world, is a world that exists in parallel to eḏı́ ṉeṉé, the now world. It is where bets'̱ṉé, the spirit or living being in each individual human being, journeys to after they have passed away. Our Elders explain that when our people pass on, they wander on eḏı́ ṉeṉé for three days before they continue on their journey to ẖyuwə ṉeṉé.

H̱yuwə ṉeṉé is an important aspect of Sahtúgot'̱ṉé spirituality for several reasons. First and foremost we are talking about the bets'̱ṉé, the living spirit of human beings, and the fact that the bets'̱ṉé journeys from the dimension of eḏı́ ṉeṉé to the dimension of ẖyuwə ṉeṉé when the person dies. The Sahtúgot'̱ṉé believe that it is important to facilitate the journey of the human spirit from eḏı́ ṉeṉé to ẖyuwə ṉeṉé by observing all the laws and protocols associated with the passing of a person. We believe that there is an ongoing relationship between the bets'̱ṉé in ẖyuwə ṉeṉé and the people in eḏı́ ṉeṉé. Finally we want to honour the bets'̱ṉé of our ancestors who contributed so much to our ability to continue to survive as a people in eḏı́ ṉeṉé.

Lifetime Allotment

The following is my father's story about his experience of ẖyuwə ṉeṉé. My father began to prepare his children for his oncoming death. He told us that he knew his death was coming soon because of what he witnessed in a dream. He began by telling us about the three dimensions of existence in the Dene world: the eḏı́ ṉeṉé, ẖḏə ṉeṉé and ẖyuwə ṉeṉé. In this instance he said he was talking about ẖyuwə ṉeṉé. He said that in

his dream he saw his dog-team entering h̥iyuwə n̥ɛn̥ɛ and that they were on a spiralling trail that kept going further and further down. He said that he tried to call them back, but they ignored him and kept going. He felt helpless in his attempts to retrieve them and understood that his efforts were futile. He told us that this is how he knew that his time to enter h̥iyuwə n̥ɛn̥ɛ was upon him.

My father explained that while he was in ediri n̥ɛn̥ɛ, he was allotted what was essentially a quota of things to accomplish including, for example, the number of animals that he was allowed to harvest in his lifetime. He said that he had consumed all the gifts that had been allotted to him on this earth. Therefore, he knew that his time had come to depart from ediri n̥ɛn̥ɛ. My cousin, John Bekale (Bekale, personal communication, 2014), told me another story related to this concept of allotment. Once, while on a hunting trip, he kept encountering wolverine, an animal which generally is very hard to find. Again and again the wolverines appeared. Unable to understand the significance of this, he asked an Elder about it. He was told that he had been allotted a certain number of animals he could harvest during his lifetime in ediri n̥ɛn̥ɛ. The Elder told him that these are gifts given to him by the Creator. Everyone receives an allotment from the Creator at birth. The wolverines were presenting themselves to him because it was time for him to harvest them as part of his allotment. This concept of allotment is what my father was referring to when he said that he was relieved of all his gifts and that his allotment had come to an end.

The Death Song

Our father told us many stories over our lifetime. As adults, we now understand that all of his stories were somehow connected. He would tell us parts of a story and parts

of another story and it was up to us to make the connections. When we were young, he told us the following story about the pilgrimage that his uncles, aunts and father made, using a moose skin boat, up the Mackenzie River and then the Liard River to visit a prophet named Náteho. It took them a long time to get there as they were using paddles against the strong river current. After this trip, my father received from his father the gift of the final death song which his father had received from the prophet Náteho. This song was only given to selected individuals who had the ability to know when they were going to die so they could sing the song at the time of their death. Always the researcher, I asked my father to sing it for me and he just laughed at me. This song could only be sung once.

My father lived until he was 93 years old and he died on his birthday in Délıne. Knowing that his allotment had come to an end and his time was near, my father had dressed himself in his best clothes. On the morning of his last day, his cousin who lived in Tulıt'a and who had also been given his death song, woke up and said, "all is not well for I heard the death song being sung from Délıne." My uncle heard the death song being sung and knew that my father was passing on. That evening my father passed away. This story relates to spirituality. My father can see his own bets'ıne and foresee the time of his own passing. My uncle can hear the song being sung in another community and knows exactly what it means.

Parallel Worlds: Links Between Hıyuwə néne and Edıı néne

It is believed by our people that the living spirits of people who pass from edıı néne to hıyuwə néne live in a parallel world to us. They are active during the night while we are active during the day. They continue to live by us and they hear and see

everything that we do. Así gonáhʔí góʔóle as the Elders say. It means that nothing is done without their knowledge. Some of our people are dreamers and they can tell us what the living spirits of h̓iyuwə n̓en̓é would like. Some of our people believe that the living spirits of h̓iyuwə n̓en̓é are constantly thirsty and so water is given to them periodically by pouring it onto their graves.

In our community, the Elders tell us that the people of h̓iyuwə n̓en̓é have their own road parallel to ours. That is where they walk. Once the dreamers told us that the people of h̓iyuwə n̓en̓é wanted tobacco and so tobacco was given to them. It is said that they visit only those in edırı n̓en̓é who they feel will carry out their wishes. Out of respect for the departed, when we talk about their spirit, we say their names with the ending sound or suffix ‘ʔı’ to indicate that they have passed on. As George Blondin (Blondin, 2006, p.19), stated, our people call the spirit of the deceased persons “incha Dene,” the away or separate people.

My father and many Elders explain that the deceased are also spirits who may assist us even after they have passed on. My parents have a cabin at Tawoya (open water in winter), on ʔehdaɭla (Caribou Point), an area used traditionally and currently by our people. Just above their cabin are two burial sites. When my parents arrived at their cabin, they respectfully paid a visit to these sites, and left food there by performing a feeding of the fire ceremony. My father called this gogha ʔets’eredı, feeding the spirits. The deceased usually reciprocated by guiding them to a place with caribou or a moose to hunt. Once, after living there for a period of time, my family decided to return to Délıne. They travelled for a day, then set up their tent to spend the night. During the night my father dreamt of the spirits of the two deceased persons. They told him how pleased they

were with his help, but that this was as far as they could go to protect them. Our people believe whole heartedly that the deceased are with us, living in *h̓yuwə n̓n̓*, a parallel world to us, and they are always aware of everything that we do.

Risks Associated with the Linkages

My father cautioned us that, while it is true that the deceased can assist us, in our dreams we have to be careful not to eat the food they offer us as *h̓yuwə n̓n̓* is their world and we cannot pass that boundary. He said that, while the spirits of the deceased know that they must not offer us food to eat, it can sometimes happen in a dream. When we are asleep the deceased spirits of *h̓yuwə n̓n̓* can appear to us in our dreams. When I was growing up, the Elders were adamant that we wash our hands before we touch anything after sleep because we are returning from the dream world. We must not bring anything back from that world. Although we share worlds during sleep, the two worlds, *ediri n̓n̓* and *h̓yuwə n̓n̓* have to be kept separate at all times.

As an Elder once explained, the spirits of deceased persons are not all the same. One has to approach some burial grounds with caution. In most cases, burial grounds are approached with words of respect. However, stories are told of incidents where the living spirit of a person is taken from *ediri n̓n̓* by the spirit of a deceased person who is not pleased with its situation. As the Elder George Blondin (Blondin, 2006, p.20), described it, “Selfishly, the old woman spirit stole the girl’s spirit.” Elders tell us that there are places on our land within the vicinity of *Dél̓n̓* where incidents like this have occurred. Both my parents explained that there was once an old lady who passed on and was buried at the entrance to Great Bear River near *Dél̓n̓*. It is said that her spirit would light what would appear as a fire and many a weary traveller would be lured there. When they did,

the old woman's spirit would take the living spirit of the traveller and the traveler would die. This happened many times until a man with medicine power, at the request of others, took the power of the fire away from her. However, the old lady is still buried there and our people are told to be cautious when passing that place, especially at night.

Our Elders also told us to take caution when approaching the burial ground of another old lady who is buried far up the river Turǵı (Johnny Hoe River), where many of our people used to live. She is also a spirit who can steal the spirit of the living. This is how the Elders explain that the burial grounds of some people who are deceased cannot be approached in the normal manner.

They also tell us never to speak the name of a deceased person after dark because their spirits are the 'night' people and speaking their name may draw their attention to you.

Wandering Spirit

It is said that sometimes a person's living spirit leaves the body in preparation for entering *hiyuwə nēnē*. This was the case for my grandfather, *Susiekw'ı*. My father worked seasonally for Imperial Oil and so we spent every summer in *Tłehgóhı* (where the oil is) also known as Norman Wells. After spending the summer in *Tłehgóhı* in a tent near a ravine where there was a fresh water stream, my grandfather returned before us to *Déłıne* where we wintered every year. Shortly after my grandfather returned to *Déłıne*, my family heard him calling as if from the stream close to the ravine in *Tłehgóhı*. They were alarmed by this incident and they told my grandfather of this event when they returned home to *Déłıne*. He responded simply, “*edenakwó k'énarehı sá ʔaht'ı*.” which means, “I must be wandering ahead of myself.” He knew that his spirit had already left

his body and the spirit was wandering in advance of his passing. He knew that he had lost connection with his spirit and therefore it was only a matter of time before he was to physically follow. Elders knew this and graciously accepted the inevitable. My family told us that during this period things happened that were hard to explain. For instance, everyone was sitting for dinner and suddenly the door opened and they watched and waited for someone to enter, but no one did. The event of hearing my grandfather calling from the ravine happened in late fall and my family encountered inexplicable occurrences until he died in the beginning of the New Year.

Reincarnation

The Dene believe in reincarnation and that everything completes itself in cycles. It is said that a person whose life in *ediri néné* is incomplete or who would like to be reincarnated tries to find a suitable pregnant woman in order to be reborn. Elder George Blondin (Blondin, 1990, p.100) states that for some people, “If they knew they were going to die, their spirits would leave their bodies. Their bodies died without a spirit, and they could enter a womb and be born again.” Sometimes the reincarnated person is not known immediately, as the pregnant woman may be young and unable to read the signs or her dreams correctly. However, the Elders can tell immediately. It is said that the baby that is the reincarnation of a person will exhibit the characteristics of that person and will speak of experiences only that person would know. According to respected Elder George Blondin, the great leader and healer (Blondin, 2006, p.101), “Teleway was reincarnated three times and could remember each successive incarnation. He told stories about his previous lives and claimed that he could remember everything. His medicine power remained with him in each life.”

Father Petitot (Petitot, 2001, p.348), in his travels amongst our people, also described the concept of nadl̥ (again exists). He said, “..according to ancient Danite beliefs, the first baby conceived by a woman after the death of someone in the tribe is considered most certainly as the incarnation or transmigration of the deceased. We are to understand that through this the ancestors always remain with their tribe and that the Dene can easily be his own grandfather.” The concept of nadl̥ was also addressed in observations by Hara and Savishinsky. They said that, “the Hare continue to maintain a firm belief in reincarnation, and a newborn infant or child who physically or behaviorally resembles a recently deceased person, or who dreams about such an individual, is often named after that person in accord with the concept that he or she is that individual avatar” (Sue Hara & Savishinsky, 1981, p.320). Throughout the life of the reincarnated person, he is treated respectfully and at times is addressed with the name of who he is incarnate of. Elders speak to that child as an adult and the whole community is made aware of the reincarnation.

In the chapter on h̥d̥ n̥n̥ I described how the bets’̥n̥ of the caribou could leave its body, observe how the hunter treated its carcass, and, if satisfied with its treatment, it could choose to reincarnate and re-offer itself to the people. Knowing this, the hunter would show his respect for the caribou by preparing the meat in the proper way. This knowledge and practice is an expression of spirituality. In the instance above, the spirit of a human being can leave its body, seek out a expectant woman and be reborn. The Elders, then the people, can see that a person has been reborn and they acknowledge and treat that reborn person with the respect they deserve as person who has lived before.

This knowledge and practice in relation to a human spirit and reincarnation is also an expression of spirituality.

Helping The Spirit Of The Deceased To Move To H̱yuwə ṉeṉé

During the time immediately after a person passes away, we light a candle or keep a light burning so that the deceased person's spirit does not try to return to us and so it can keep on the path it needs to travel to ẖyuwə ṉeṉé. As my mother, Lucy Tatti, and other Elders explained, before contact our people used to place the body of the deceased on a platform. June Helm (Helm, 1981, p.301), in her studies of the Ṯchq̱ also stated that, "it is said that stage burial was once practiced." This is also referred to by research done by Sue Hara and Savishinsky (Sue Hara & Savishinsky, 1981, p.320), on the Hare people of the Fort Good Hope area. They stated that, "Scaffold burials were used to dispose of the dead, and a pennant was erected near the site in order to amuse and keep the deceased's ghost (?ewi) near the grave, thus preventing it from haunting the living (Hurlbert 1962:65)."

Burial became the common practice for the Dene after contact with Europeans. Elders explained that during the time when the people were travelling on the land, a deceased person was often buried in the fireplaces of the tipis where the frozen ground was now soft. This was necessary because our people live in a climate of long, cold winters and permafrost conditions and they travelled on the land without the equipment necessary to prepare the burial grounds. Immediately after the burial ceremony, the whole community would move to another location so as not to disturb the deceased and because they believe that the Ɂ̱w̱ (ghost) of that person may still be at that location. "The time between death and disposal of the body held danger for the living, as the spirit of the

deceased hovered about and might bring harm to a survivor or take him to the land of the dead” (National Museum of Man (Canada), 1974, p.35).

ʔets’ehch’ə, a Burial Ceremony

My father said that when he was a young man, he and others his own age, with the guidance of an Elder, would conduct a burial ceremony called ʔets’ehch’ə. The young people would keep themselves up for three nights, build big bonfires and keep them going. They yelled and made a lot of noise for those three days, especially during the night. They would also help the community with its needs, particularly the Elders.

Today, as in the past, the deceased person’s body is washed and prepared for burial. When you are a participant in this ritual, you talk to the deceased and tell them that you hope that your efforts are pleasing to him or her. Participants in this ritual are encouraged by the Elders to rise early the morning after the person died as a tribute to the deceased. All the worldly belongings of the deceased are either given away or burned. It is believed that the remaining property of the deceased must be carried by that person into the under world. Therefore everything is done to lighten the load as the deceased’s spirit enters *h̓iyuwə n̓en̓é*.

Various sources describe the appropriate state of mind people should maintain when dealing with the death of a community member. As people prepare the burial grounds, they are encouraged to make jokes about the deceased and not to perform this duty in sadness. Brody (Brody, 2004, p.76), confirms this statement, “The atmosphere was not at all that of a funeral. Men were jovial.” The burial site is prepared the day of the burial. To do this before the day of the burial is to bring upon what is referred to as *ʔets’ón̓é*, inviting a negative spirit, which is discussed in greater detail later.

Celebration of a Life

Today, after the burial ceremony, the lives of deceased people are celebrated with a feast and a drum dance. Following the feast and the opening prayer songs, the spirit of the deceased person is honoured and invited to join the dance by a special song performed by the drummers. In this instance the drummers actually participate in the dance and lead the other dancers in the circle. Most of the people present will join in the dance to honour the deceased person and to bid farewell to his or her spirit. Upon the completion of this dance, the drummers complete the ritual by dancing in a circle by themselves while everyone else looks on. In doing so, the drummers are directing the spirit of the deceased person to *ḥỵuwə n̄n̄é*. People and relatives are encouraged not to grieve too long so as not to hinder the spirit of the deceased person on its journey to *ḥỵuwə n̄n̄é*.

Promises to a Dying Person

One personal experience with grieving occurred when my grandfather Old Andre, who was also a prophet, was dying. I went to visit him with my mother so he could give me his last words. “At the moment of death, the individual was considered to possess great spiritual power and his dying words were carefully remembered” (Asch, 1981, p.344). My grandfather gave me three messages to live by. One of them was to ask me not to cry for him at his passing. Given my love and respect for him, I told him, without much thought, that I would comply with his wishes. He was a dying person who was very dear to me and the wishes expressed by a dying person are binding if you agree to them.

At the time I was committed to an engagement that I could not cancel, and while I was travelling, my grandfather passed away. When I was informed by my mother, she,

in keeping with our traditions, reminded me of my promise, even though she knew it would be almost impossible not to cry. She told me to kneel on the floor and keep my head back so that not a tear could fall from my eyes. Every time I wanted to succumb to my tears, I would hold my head back and yell. I kept this up until the initial waves of emotion and grief subsided. My mother taught me how it was traditionally done and helped me through this painful experience. It is not an easy request to make of a person and my mother knew this. However, when my grandfather made this request he said; “If I hear you crying, I will not be able to leave this world and begin my journey.” How can you refuse a respected person so loved and honoured by his people? I have vowed that I will never make that promise again for another person as it is one of the most difficult requests to honour.

The Concept of ʔets’óné

The Sahtúgot’íné have a concept of inviting fate in a negative way by your actions and your words and that concept is called ʔets’óné, inviting a negative spirit. Elders warn you to be careful of your actions and your words to avoid inviting ʔets’óné. For example, as stated above, the Elders tell us that you must dispose of the belongings of a deceased person to enable the person’s spirit to complete its journey to h̓yuwə n̓éné. For people to carry on as if the deceased is still alive and not dispose of their possessions is an act of calling upon ʔets’óné. Elders remind you of this through stories such as the story of a person who grieved so much that he would not allow anyone to dispose of the belongings of his loved one. The grieving was excessive and that person continued to live with the property of the deceased. With their property still on this earth, it is believed that the deceased person’s spirit is prohibited from going on its journey to h̓yuwə n̓éné. Although

repeatedly reminded of ʔets'óné, the person did not adhere to the advice of the Elders and within a year that person also passed away.

In another story, a woman was so angry at her husband that she cut up all his clothes. The man's mother was very upset and told people that the woman was committing an act of ʔets'óné. True to her words, her son died shortly thereafter.

Father Petitot referred to ʔets'óné the following way, "...the Dene do not exterminate each other, but they do not fear any the less to expose themselves so boldly to the hate of edzil or edze, the heart, of ettsene or ettsonne, the spirit or angel of death" (Petitot, 2005, p.32). Our understanding of ʔets'óné is a little different than Father Petitot's. We see it as inviting ʔets'óné, not simply exposing oneself to this negative spirit. It is believed that the deceased person's spirit may not be pleased with how he or she is dealt with thereby bringing about ʔets'óné. Therefore, it is important that our rules or laws must be closely adhered to.

ʔets'óné does not occur only with burial ceremonies, but may occur with any disrespectful behavior directed towards any living beings on earth, not just the spirit of a deceased person, as well as through the words that someone speaks. Other examples of ʔets'óné are to talk of the living as if they were dead or speak of them in the past tense. Once a casket is lowered, it should never be lifted out again for each time it is brought out, it is believed that another person's spirit will soon follow. A casket should only be kept open once and not be reopened once it is closed. A clear cloth is placed on the deceased person's face, especially during the night, while the casket is open.

Elders and parents are quick to correct inappropriate behavior as it can affect not only that individual but the whole community. Great care is taken not to invite ʔets'óné.

Developing Dependencies While Grieving

Elders also remind us that during a time of grieving if you grab on to some object or behavior to help you through this period, then it will become a crutch for you and you will become dependent on it. Therefore, they remind you not to smoke, consume alcohol, gamble or engage in other activities to excess, as the one you chose as a crutch may remain with you for the rest of your life and be very difficult to overcome.

Medicine Power and H̓y̓uwə n̓n̓ – The Loon Story

Several years ago, three of our young people travelling by snow mobile fell into the fast flowing open water and all of them drowned. Two of the young peoples' bodies were recovered but the third one was never found. The weather changed for the worse and it was -50C as families of the deceased youth were trying to find him. One morning in late December or early January in minus fifty degree weather they went out again and saw a loon swimming on the open water. Loons migrate in the fall and are never seen in the dead of winter. The Elders believe that the loon was actually the third youth. The Elders believe that in desperation, facing his demise, the young man used his medicine power to change himself to a loon. Since then, when my father saw a loon swimming close to shore, he would go to the water's edge and speak to it. He would address it as "My grandson, is that you? How are you doing?" Today we have many families of loons swimming on the lake in summer and people no longer kill them. Like my father, many people now speak to the loon. I know I do.

The Elders believe that the weather will change for the worse if a person dies by the environment. Examples include cases when a person freezes to death or drowns on the water in a bad storm: there will be storms and very bad weather for several days

reflecting the way the person died. It is also said that the spirit of a person who dies this way will sometimes have a difficult time going to *h̓iyuwə n̓en̓é*. For instance, it is believed that a person who drowned may roam and remain in *ediri n̓en̓é* for seven years before they can begin their journey to the under world. It is also said that some spirits of the deceased may remain in *ediri n̓en̓é* if they died prematurely and had not accomplished all the tasks allotted to them.

The Annual Feeding of the Fire Ceremony

One of the most moving of our ceremonies is the special feeding of the fire ceremony in honour of our ancestors whose spirits journeyed to *h̓iyuwə n̓en̓é* long ago. Every year on August first, our people assemble at the grave yard in *Dél̓n̓é* to perform a special feeding of the fire ceremony. As the Elders explain, this is traditionally the day when our ancestors are celebrated and a holiday is declared for everyone. In the old days people lived year round on the land and only gathered at *Dél̓n̓é* during certain times of the year. During the summer gathering, it was understood that by the middle of August most of the people would be leaving *Dél̓n̓é* and travelling to where they would spend the winter, and it would be many months before they could see each other again. Many unpredictable things can happen to people on the land so August first was the day they set aside to celebrate with each other.

At this special feeding of the fire ceremony, which continues today, people bring a small portion of items or foods such as drymeat, tobacco or bits of other things that have significant value to them. A bowl is placed by the ceremonial fire and each person places his or her offering in the bowl. People place their offerings in the bowl in silence and may make a special request for something to be bestowed upon them. Although there

may be some quiet conversations taking place, the reverence of the ceremony is not lost on anyone.

After the placement of the gifts in the offering bowl is complete, the feeding of the fire ceremony proceeds with an Elder addressing the spirits of all our ancestors who are now in *h̓yuwə n̓n̓́́́*. Addressing the *h̓yuwə n̓n̓́́́* people, the Elders explain that they understand how difficult the lives of our ancestors were during those times. An Elder would say that we understand all the knowledge and skills the ancestors had to have to sustain themselves as a people. He would say that we know how hard they had to work and how tenacious they had to be to overcome the many hardships they encountered throughout the year. The Elder would continue to address our ancestors and express how grateful we are, that they are the source of the strength of the people we are today, and how they enabled us to maintain our culture and language and carry them forth to this current world. All of this is said with heart-felt eloquence and simplicity. The Elders complete their address with a special request of the ancestors on behalf of the community, perhaps for the return of the caribou or to watch over everyone, especially the youth.

Upon completion of the speeches by the Elders, the drummers sing spiritual songs given to us for such special occasions by our prophets. All the attendees stand during this part of the ceremony. When the drummers complete their songs, the offerings in the bowl are placed on the fire by one person. The chosen or volunteering person walks in a clockwise direction, following the movement of the sun and the earth, and stops four to five times, kneeling before the fire as the offerings in the bowl are placed in the fire. When this is completed, the Elders address the people again. Once the speeches are done

and the ceremony comes to an end, all the attendees walk in a clockwise direction around the fire and shake hands with the drummers. Everyone wishes each other the best for the year. This special ceremony, conducted annually, is dedicated to recognizing the spirits of our ancestors in *h̓iyuwə n̓en̓é*, what our ancestors did for us and the legacy they left behind. We are thanking them for making us the people we are today.

The feeding of the fire ceremony is done for other special occasions. This could be for the feast and drum dance that takes place on Christmas Day, New Years or Easter. Sometimes the feeding of the fire ceremony is conducted at the school so that nothing bad will befall the students and the teachers and that they have a good educational outcome that year. We might do a feeding of the fire ceremony when we are holding orientation workshops for teachers out on the land or for any other occasion when this sacred ceremony is deemed appropriate. The feeding of the fire ceremony is an expression of spirituality and is one more way of practicing and passing on our language and culture.

Chapter 8: Medicine Power World

Previous chapters focussed on describing spirituality from a Sahtúgot'íne perspective. We discussed the three dimensions of existence; h̓iyuwə n̓én̓é, the under world, ediri n̓én̓é, the now world, and h̓ɪdə n̓én̓é, the upper, world including Yakach̓íne, the world of the animals. We looked at spirituality, the world of living beings and the relationship of spirituality to the very essence of being Dene. The next stage is to further clarify the meaning of spirituality from a Sahtúgot'íne perspective by discussing it and differentiating it from the Sahtúgot'íne perspective on medicine power. Medicine power and the knowledge of medicine power, while related to spirituality, are separate and distinct. Dene nárídí means physical medicines made from plants, animals and other sources in nature that are gathered and processed into medication for healing. However, this gathering, production and administration of medicine are always done in conjunction with the exercise of certain protocols, and these protocols are rooted in spirituality.

Medicine power, or ɣ̓k'ó, is distinct from Dene nárídí, although the application of Dene nárídí might be accompanied by the use of medicine power, ɣ̓k'ó. In some cases healing can be accomplished without applying any Dene nárídí, physically tangible medicine. This category of healing is accomplished using ɣ̓k'ó, medicine power, and is associated and administered by individuals who have been granted a spirit helper or helpers. Someone who has this ability is said to have the spirit power of another entity. This power can come from an animal helper or another entity in nature such as a spruce needle or the wind.

Medicine power can be used to heal someone, but it can also be used to hurt someone else, or to protect someone from the medicine power of a third person. Another form of medicine power that may belong to a medicine power person is the ability to travel to a different physical location or travel into the future to bring back information to help the people. This last form of medicine is believed to come directly from the Creator. The people with gift of seeing the future speak to people primarily about how to lead a good life. They are called Nakwónáreʔę, or prophets, and they are discussed in the next chapter.

Trail of the Spirit is the third book that was written by Sahtúgot'ínę Elder George Blondin (Blondin, 2006) and it confirms the perspective set out above. In this book he describes what medicine power means and its place in the Dene worldview. At one time medicine power was considered taboo to talk about by our people. However, the changing world and the need for understanding by the young Dene people of today has made it necessary to understand how medicine power was practiced by our people and our ancestors. Legends allow us to visualize how these powers from medicine power people enabled our people to survive. Mr. Blondin describes how one must conduct oneself and the rules one must follow to acquire medicine power. He describes how some families, recognizing how crucial medicine power was to their very survival, would seek the help of other powerful medicine power persons to obtain it.

In this book he describes the many forms of medicine power and the amount of power each level had. He describes strict rules that had to be adhered to in order for one to receive these powers. He states that medicine powers can be used to heal people, to help people, how some have used it to destroy people and yet others have used it to

prevent harm. He also acknowledges that with great powers come much responsibility and how in the old days, people who were really powerful were often the leaders of their camp. In his personal life he always chuckled at all of his family's efforts to procure medicine powers for him without success.

In Elder George Blondin's book, *Medicine Power ᐱᓴᓴᓴ*, he said that, "Elders must tell stories of the past because stories shape behaviour and attitudes"(Blondin, 1996, p.10).

Three Ways to Acquire Medicine Power

In the old days, "medicine power was extremely valuable and every parent wanted his or her child to have medicine power" (Blondin, 2006, p.39). The land that we live on, which was given to us by the Creator, is absolutely beautiful and yet, in the sub-arctic north, we live in a very harsh environment. You must be a very skilled person to survive on the land even today. However, the Elders tell us that in the time of our ancestors, knowledge and skill were often not enough. It is said that it was very important in the old days to have ᐱᓴᓴᓴ, medicine power, that ᐱᓴᓴᓴ was essential for survival. June Helm states (Helm, 1981, p.302), "Traditionally, magico-religious beliefs and practices centered on the concept of ᐱᓴᓴᓴ 'power' or 'medicine.' Power was given to men or woman by animal-spiritual beings, who directed them in curing, divination, or controlling game and weather."

The Elders believe that the Creator saw our struggles and sent medicine power to help us survive. However, it is said that ᐱᓴᓴᓴ was only given to us on a temporary or "it is just a loan" basis (Blondin, 2006). As my father explained, every opportunity was seized upon to acquire medicine power, ᐱᓴᓴᓴ. According to the Elders and the great story

teller Elder George Blondin, there were different classes of ᐱᓕᓴᓴ, each dependent upon how it was acquired. “First class of medicine power... is given directly from the Creator before you are born...” (Blondin, 2006, p.18). “I suggest that we call the medicine people who have received their medicine power before they were born, “first-class medicine-power people,” and medicine people who receive their medicine power after they were born, “second-class medicine-power people.” Then, medicine people who were passed their medicine power from their grandfather or relations could be called “third-class medicine-power people” (Blondin, 2006, p.17).

Elder George Blondin states that, “Second-class medicine power is received after you are born, through visions and a messenger from the Creator.” (Blondin, 2006. p.18). He states that, “People who receive their medicine power sometimes have bought their medicine power, which doesn’t actually work very well. Perhaps it’s because they have not received the power directly from the Creator. It’s also possible that the spirit of the medicine power is not entirely committed to this person and, therefore, the third-class medicine person isn’t in control of the medicine power. Third-class medicine power is not reliable. ... Medicine-power spirits are very powerful and not to be played with. A third-class medicine person will eventually end up in trouble if he does this” (Blondin, 2006, p.17). Elder George Blondin concludes by stating that, “Those of us who are not medicine people cannot distinguish between the different kinds of medicine people” (Blondin, 2006, p.17).

The Medicine Power House

When my father was describing his own experience with the world of ᐱᓕᓴᓴ, he told us that he went to the medicine power world before he was born. He said it was a

place used by our ancestors to receive their medicine powers. In his journey he said that he passed through huge wooden doors to a large wood framed structure. He said he walked into the structure following a voice that guided him. The voice told him that this was the medicine power house from which ɔ́k'ó was obtained for use in ediri néné, the now world. Inside the building he saw rows upon rows of empty shelves. He said that that there was no ɔ́k'ó left for anyone to acquire and take from the building. It had all been taken by our ancestors.

His anger flared when he described what he saw, because he felt that our ancestors had been so irresponsible in taking more than their share and not leaving anything for the generations to come. In our legends there are stories of individuals who challenged each other out of sport, using up many different medicine powers in the process. These stories are consistent with my father's expression of disappointment. However, the fact that my father was able to visit the medicine house indicated that he was to be a medicine power person himself. My father told us repeatedly throughout his life that ɔ́k'ó was given to our people by the Creator to enable the medicine power people to help our people. It was never given to do harm to anyone, however, people were given individual choices as to how it was to be used.

Begalé, The Spiritual Lifeline

My father said that in the old days our people were constantly in pursuit of medicine power. For example, it was the custom of our people that newly born babies be given names within three days of their birth. The babies were presented to the Elders by their parents so that blessings could be bestowed upon them and so that they could be named according to the spirit lifeline belonging to the child that the Elders can see. It is

said that when Elders look upon a child, they can already determine the character of the child and the kind of person he or she will grow up to be. The Elders will follow the spirit lifeline of that child to give them a name. The naming of the child embodies the character of that child. It is said that each person is on a trail that is already designed for them. In the Dene world this is called Begalé. It is a spiritual lifeline. It is created for the individual when they were born. The respected Elder George Blondin, (Blondin, 2006, p.59) states that, “.. medicine people have the ability to review the trail that a person’s spirit has taken both in the past and into the future.. We call this power *Beh Gahley*.”

My father shared with us his own experience about his birth. He said that he was one of three children who happened to be born at the same time. During the naming ritual, the Elders took the first child and, try as they might, they were unable to name him. My father was the second child and, while they could not provide him with a suitable Dene name either, they were aware that he was a gifted child. They said that his name should be Francis. The people called him Ferasewé. The third child was given the powerful name Begalé (trail of the spirit) the actual name for the spirit life line itself. My father told us that the first child who the Elders could not name died shortly afterwards. My father lived until he was ninety three years old and Begalé lived into his late nineties as well.

As the Elder George Blondin (Blondin, 2006, p.39), explained, “It was common for parents to go to great lengths to try to obtain medicine power for their child.” It is known that a couple brought their first born by boat to a community ninety miles away to have their child blessed in the hope that he would acquire ɁɁk’ó. This was during a time

when travel on the land was really difficult and much care was put into planning this journey for a new born child.

Dene Haredó Story

I will now share our family's medicine power stories as shared with us by our parents. In a sense it was as if our parents chose something from themselves as a gift for each one of their children. I was chosen to hold the stories. In describing medicine power, my mother told me of an experience she had as a child. She recounted how her parents took her on their annual trip to the community of Tulít'a which is situated where Great Bear River empties into the Mackenzie River.

Once in Tulít'a, while she was playing with some children, she remembered her mother reminding her to be careful and not to make too much noise. Before she went out to play that day, her mother told her that there was an elderly man living in the community who was known for swallowing the spirit of people, Dene Haredó. As Patrick Moore (Moore, 1999, p.174) stated in reference to the Dene Gudeji Kaska, "They called that kind of person *dene nédahdébi*, 'person who swallows a spirit.'" The following day when she was playing with her friends, her mother came and without explanation seized her hand and took her home. Once at home, her mother explained that the elderly man had informed the community that he had accidentally swallowed the spirit of some children. Her mother felt that it was her daughter and her friends who the Elder was referring to.

It was explained to my mother that once someone has swallowed the spirit of a child, Dene Haredó, each affected child must visit with the elderly man. If this does not happen, the person who was swallowed will perish. Although my mother was aware of

the severity of the situation, she told my grandmother that she was afraid of the old man and was very reluctant to go. The whole community was aware of this man's power and many of the children were afraid of him as well. My grandmother insisted that they had to go and pay their respects, so reluctantly my mother accompanied her mother to the elderly man's tent.

The elderly man acknowledged them and then retrieved a bowl that was sitting beside him. He motioned for them to approach and then showed them the bowl. My mother said that to her astonishment, she saw four or five children appearing as very small people, swimming in the bowl. She saw that she was one of the children. Her mother spoke respectfully to the old man and she was removed from the bowl. The old man appeared pleased and they left his tent. As they left the tent, they saw the other mothers bringing the children who had been playing with my mother to the elderly man.

Later she heard that one child was so terrified of visiting the elderly man that she absolutely refused to go. My mother learned about two weeks later that the little child who refused to visit the elderly man had passed away. My mother said that they were told by Elders that there existed people who swallowed other people, but she herself never believed this until it happened to her, until she actually saw herself swimming in that bowl with the other children. My mother related this story to us in a matter of fact way. Elder George Blondin refers to this kind of medicine power as well (Blondin, 1990, p.75), "There once lived a certain old man who had swallow medicine. He was often able to help sick people. However, as he grew older, he wasn't able to control his medicine very well, and occasionally he swallowed a child's spirit by accident. When this happened, the child of course died."

In the Dene way, we are always reminded to be aware of people who are eating. The elderly man did not intend to swallow the children but he did. In this instance, my mother said it just happened. Although this was my mother's personal story, I remember that all the children I knew were aware of such stories and it kept people very cognisant of other people who were eating, especially the elderly. The key to this story is how important it is to be careful around people who are eating, especially the elderly. It has not been that long since people were actually swallowing the spirit of other people.

How is this story about medicine power connected to spirituality? Earlier in the paper I stated that one word for Sahtúgot'ıne spirituality is yódıı, the living beings. I have discussed spirituality in relation to hıdā nēnē, the upper world, and the bets'ıne, living spirit, of the animals. I also discussed edırı nēnē, the now world, and the bets'ıne, living spirit, of each person. The use of medicine power is not in itself an expression of spirituality. However, in this story and many others it is the bets'ıne or living spirit of the person that is directly affected by the use of the medicine power. In this story it is the spirit of the child that has been swallowed by the elderly man and appears in the bowl, however the spirit of the child must be returned to the child or the child will die. Also, like many of the other stories about living beings, laws and protocols have been developed which must be respected and followed for the protection of people.

My grandmother, my mother's mother referred to in the story above, was called Tut'á, Black Water. It is said that she was so powerful that she could hear drums made from beaver hide being played in Délıne from as far away as Saoyú, Grizzly Bear Mountain, and ?ehdaıla, Caribou Point. It is said that on her annual journey to Tulıt'a with my grandfather, her powers were recognised by the people and it is said that she was

asked to play the drums and do prayer songs for the people assembled there. My mother was the only child to reach adulthood from my grandmother who comes from the Dolphus family.

Nahwhı Story

Another story related to my mother, a display of her own medicine power, was shared with me by my grandmother. In the Sahtúgot'ıne way it is said that my mother yet's'ę wətı, slept to specific animals, which is another way of saying that she was aided by the following animal helpers. They are partners with her. "The medicine person is actually in partnership with the medicine-power spirit..." (Blondin, 2006, p.92). It is said that she received help from the loon, the raven and the caribou and that she had ʔık'q for love potions.

My grandmother told me that while out on the land during hıdóh xae, early spring, my grandfather Old Andre became sick with nahwhı, snow blindness. The reflection of the sun's reflected rays off the snow and the glare ice can cause this affliction, especially at that time of the year when the sun is strong but winter is still here. My grandfather was so uncomfortable that my grandmother went to my mother and asked her to help him using her medicine power. My grandmother told me that my mother heard her request but chose to ignore her. After several hours of waiting, my grandmother again went to my mother and this time she ordered my mother to help my grandfather. Reluctantly, my mother went over to their tent and with a feather gently brushed his open eyes. He recovered fully and was never afflicted with snow-blindness again.

After my mother died, as is the custom of our people, we were burning all her worldly possessions so that she could proceed to hıyuwə néné unburdened. While

searching through her belongings, we found under her bedding the tanned head of a loon. My cousin and I had the responsibility of burning all her belongings and this was the last thing we threw in the fire. According to our legends, the loon was the person who gave sight back to one of our Elders and that story was retold to us over and over when we were children. This was indicative to us that my mother was a partner with the loon and that the story our grandmother told us about my mother healing my grandfather's snow blindness was authentic. Elder George Blondin (Blondin, 1990. p.54), speaks about a similar talisman, "The medicine man asked for the owl head skin he carried in his pack."

Even though my mother suffered the effects of tuberculosis all her adult life, she was nevertheless a woman of strong character. As Elder George Blondin stated, "They knew that medicine-power would only come to a person with a strong mind and a good heart." (Blondin, 2006, p.39)

Power of the Wolf

Although my father mentioned his medicine power, he never said exactly what his ᐱᓕᓐᓂ was until much later in life. As an Elder, when he felt comfortable speaking about his ᐱᓕᓐᓂ, he told members of our family about his medicine powers. However, even as children, we heard stories from and had conversations with other people about my father's ᐱᓕᓐᓂ. As we were growing up, people would come to our house and ask for his assistance to cure some ailment or for him to dream for something that they needed. It is said that his ᐱᓕᓐᓂ, came from the animal helper, the wolf. As children, we were told never to eat any parts of the head of a moose that my father killed. We were also told not to step over or disrespect his hunting tools or his dog harness and his clothes were always washed separately.

Power of the Caribou

Once early in the morning my grandfather came into the house as the fire was just lit. Without much ceremony he addressed my mother who was still a child and said, “My daughter, how come you are playing on the newly formed ice which is still dangerously thin?” He had seen her playing on the newly formed ice in a dream. It is said that my mother replied that, like all children, it was in her nature to play as she must. It is said that it is in the nature of young caribou, ‘Tsia,’ to play on newly formed ice. Young caribou were very playful and they enjoyed the newly formed ice with little or no snow on top. It is said that their feet are far enough apart that their weight is distributed and therefore they do not break through the ice. Her reply indicated to my grandfather that she had the gift of power from the caribou.

The Caribou and the Wolf

All her adult life my mother was constantly ill because she had tuberculosis and much of her lungs had been removed. This happened when the tuberculosis epidemic occurred in the north in the early 1950’s. Six members of our family were hospitalized at the same time. My mother was hospitalized when I was a baby and she did not return home until I was seven years old. One of my sisters and my grandmother did not recover. My mother became an only child. Her mother had had many children, but only my mother survived. She was very strong willed and a very determined lady. She never complained about her illness and continued on with her life as a wife, mother and grandmother.

My father told us that one evening when my mother was in the Charles Camshell hospital in Edmonton, he heard that it was quite possible that she was not going to make

it through another night. He said that he was very distraught and had very little sleep that night. However, when he did fall asleep, he had a dream. In his dream, he was transported to Edmonton to see her. In his dream, he decided to bring her home to Délıne. He dreamt that he was walking ahead of her and she was following him. Uncertain as to whether she was continuing to follow him, he would occasionally turn to see if she was still there. Each time he turned, he saw that she was following him, however, he also saw blood following her trail. Based on his dream, my father said that he knew that she was going to make it home but that she would always be afflicted by her illness.

When we were young children, my mother spent years living in the hospital and we were raised primarily by my father, grandfather and our relatives. My father in the last stages of his life told us that he only realized late in his life that their constant separation from each other in their life was the way it had to be because of the incompatibility of the relationship between their respective partner animals. She was a caribou and he was a wolf. She was the hunted and he was the hunter.

Power of the Raven

There is another more humorous story about my mother and one of her partner animals the raven. There is a law of ʔk'ó that you cannot eat any part of your animal partner. Michael Asch (Asch, 1981, p.344), stated that “Some individuals possessed personal animal-spirits who could warn them of danger in a dream or could be called upon in a time of crisis. Shamans possessing such a spirit would avoid killing or eating the animal that represented it.” Father Petitot (Petitot, 1862-1882, p.133), expressed it this way, “In return for advantages real or imaginary, the animal that reveals itself to the shadow man and who has become his ellonhe or animal god, orders him never to kill it,

never to eat it, and never to pronounce its name before unbelievers, in a word to consider it as his protector, his guiding genie, his god.”

My mother told me a story. One time when she was much younger, she was suffering continuously with her illness and she was looking for relief. In desperation she told my father that she wanted him to kill a raven because she had heard that if you ate from a raven, you would be healed. My father agreed that he would kill a raven the next day. That night my mother had a dream. In her dream the raven came to her. The raven was outraged and said to her, “Why do you want to kill me? You are going to live for many years to come. How can you even think of taking my life today?” The next morning my mother told my father about her dream. She was very relieved to learn that she was going to live for a long time. She laughed about the raven’s outrage and how he scolded her for putting out a contract on his life. Needless to say she told my father to forget about his promise to kill the raven. True to the raven’s word, my mother lived for many years despite her serious disabilities.

Power of the Marten

An Elder once told me that he too realized late in his life why he lost his first two wives. He was always known as an outstanding trapper, but, he said, he did not realize that his animal helper was the female marten. Because she was jealous of his wives, the female marten took their lives. He was married at the time to his third wife and he said that because he loved her so much, he would no longer trap fur for a living. In this way he denied his animal helper the power to interfere with his relationship with his third wife. He was such a great trapper because of his animal helper. However, he gave it all up to ensure his wife’s safety and she did outlive him.

The ʔɪk'ó Twins

Through the knowledge of ʔɪk'ó, medicine power, it said that my grandfather Susiekw'ı and grandfather Susiecho were supposed to be born twins. However, for some reason, their living spirits separated as they were entering the world and they were born of two different women. It is said that they were born just minutes apart. All their lives, they were considered brothers and they referred to each other as brother. They were always very much aware of each other and they travelled everywhere together throughout and beyond the Sahtú region. As a result of their travels, they spoke several indigenous languages including Inuktitut. They travelled north to the Kugluktuk area trapping for white fox which were much in demand and very valuable at that time. Once on their travels they stopped at a trading post on the northeast shore of Great Bear Lake on route to Kugluktuk, where grandfather Susiecho purchased a tin cup. When I was interviewing grandfather Susiecho as part of the Dene Nation's Dene land use and occupancy study in the 1970's, he told me that he and my grandfather Susiekw'ı continued on to Kugluktuk where they encountered an Inuit family. The family had never seen a tin cup before and so one of the Inuit men decided he wanted to exchange his whole dog team for the tin cup. He literally brought his dogteam into the igloo where they were visiting. Grandfather Susiecho, who subsequently lived among the Inuit for over ten years, graciously declined the offer. However, he never forgot the experience.

The significance of this story is that, even though they were not born as twins from the same woman, nevertheless their bets'ıne, their spirits were twins and this kept them closely together throughout their lives.

ᑭᑦᑭᑦᑭ Song

As stated by Michael Asch (Asch, 1981, p.344),” Often, a young man would acquire spiritual power for curing and hunting from an animal spirit who appeared in a dream and gave the boy a special song by which the spirit could be summoned when needed.” This theme is reiterated by Robin Ridington (Ridington, 1981, p.357), when he states that, “...individual medicine songs were sung privately for the protection of individuals in specific situations.”

My father told us about one of his experiences involving a medicine song. He was eighty years old when the doctors told him that he needed to have heart surgery. They told him that, despite his age, they felt he was physically strong enough to survive this operation. After the surgery, he told us that it had been necessary for him to call on his medicine power to assist him. He said that he sang in the hospital for three days and he summoned all the animals that he needed to assist him. He said that for three days the medicine animals he called upon paraded before him constantly as he sang and he was assured by them that he was going to recover. When others around him expressed their concerns about his constant singing, his physician wisely assured them that my father needed to do this. Nothing more was said about his singing. He lived another thirteen years after this experience.

As he was getting older, my father spoke more freely about his experience with medicine power, noting that he still had control over it. With age and lack of usage, the Elders say medicine power becomes less and less defined and can actually overpower the person possessing the ᑭᑦᑭᑦᑭ.

Power of the Lynx

During the time of the tuberculosis epidemic in the 1950's, many families were separated and many children had to be raised by relatives. There was no government assistance at that time, so it was through the kindness of relatives that children were looked after. An elderly man had placed his daughters with relatives in Délı̨ne, but his only son was so young that he could not bear to separate himself from him. As a result, he brought the young boy with him on his visit to Tulít'a. The young son remembers that they were exhausted when they arrived in Tulít'a by dogteam after several days of travel and they had spent all their money on supplies necessary for the trip. Tulít'a was the communication and trading centre for the Sahtúgot'ı̨ne at that time and the elderly man was hoping to receive messages from his wife who was hospitalized in Fort Simpson with tuberculosis.

As a last resort, being unable to obtain any help without furs to trade, he went to the priest to ask for assistance. He was counting on how many times he had assisted the church in the past. The priest told him that he could not help him. The young man said he had never seen his father so angry or so despondent. Rather abruptly his father re-harnessed their dogs, travelling just above the community where he set three traps. It was rumored that three lynx had been seen around the community for some time, but no one had been able to catch them. The next day they went to check the traps and they had caught all three lynx. His father skinned the animals and dried the pelts and three days later his father sold the pelts to the trader. He sold them for a good price and they had all the money they needed.

He said that his father was so angered by the inability of those who he thought would help him that he used his medicine power to trap the lynx. The son is now an

elderly man and when I was young, I remembered his father. He was a kind man respected by the whole community. He and his wife were great friends of my parents. There are many stories of this old man and all the tricks and verbal skills he possessed to create laughter. The ability to create laughter is also considered a gift from the Creator by our people because it is so essential to maintaining a healthy community. His animal helper was the lynx.

The Gift of Laughter

My father also told us that laughter is considered a direct gift from the Creator. People who had the ability to make others laugh were sought after. Laughter was used by our people to correct behaviours and therefore, the ability for a person to laugh at themselves was considered virtuous. This was a way to enable a person to heed the words of the Elders and also a way for that person to grow up to become who she or he was meant to be. It is said sometimes that through laughter a person will find his or her way to the Creator, even though the person may not have any other gifts. A person who holds *dló whárehzq*, ‘laughter in his or her mouth’ is highly valued. Laughter has always been so essential for healing and dealing with hardship for our people. During my uncle’s last days, he told me he had missed the *Sahtúgot’ine* people since he moved from *Déline* because they are so good at *dló gerehtsi*, ‘creating laughter for each other.’

Birth of a Gifted Child

Elders often know when a child is gifted. My father told us that there is only one amongst our siblings who was born with a special gift. He said that when that child was born, the tent was surrounded by animals. Birds of every kind sat around the tent singing when the baby was born. He said he never heard such a beautiful sound. He said it was

obvious to those present that this child was born with gifts from the Creator. The animals were celebrating and welcoming this newcomer. However, it is only the very few upon whom the Creator bestows special gifts at birth. Others have to earn and acquire medicine power during their lifetime.

Our people really listen to young children because they speak in innocence and in truth. For example, when a young child says he or she does not like a certain food, then that food is not offered to him or her. It was also our custom to ask if a person can eat certain kinds of food before they were served. If that individual has medicine power to a certain animal, he or she cannot eat that food, so it was a precaution that was practiced. Sometimes a person is healed by medicine power involving an animal partner and then advised not to eat that animal for the remainder of their lives. It is our belief that when you are advised by a medicine power person, it is critically important for you to heed those words. My father once advised a relative of ours not to revisit a specific traditional area that included a yádlí. Unable to resist, the individual went back for a visit and within a year that individual passed on. All my father could do was give advice, people make their own choices.

One Elder's Pursuit of Medicine Power

Another Elder told me about his personal pursuit of medicine power. He said that all his life he tried to live a good life recognizing that medicine power only comes from the Creator and it only comes from the goodness of an individual. He tried everything to receive a vision, but nothing came to him in his dreams and he thought he would have to live only on his skills. Although he was getting older, he still hoped he would receive ʔk'ó. When he reached his seventies, he accepted that he was not one of the chosen ones.

He told me that finally, at the age of seventy-three, he had a vision and his whole face lit up as he was telling me. He was a wonderful person who had nothing but kind words to say to everyone. I heard that he helped some young people with his ᐱᐱᐱ'ᐱ before he passed on. I remember as we were growing up, we were told by our parents that we must be respectful and show kindness to him all of his days and so we did. This story illustrates that it is the Creator who bestows medicine power on us and only when we are ready for it. Age has nothing to do with it.

Calming the Water

This is a story told to me by Alfred Taniton, one of the two Elders who assisted me in my research. Although the stories told are from Délıne, this particular story uses words that are no longer in common use because we no longer witness medicine power as in the old days. He told the following story one evening as he was looking out on our beautiful lake. He said that it was said that many years ago all the people who were fishing around Délıne had moved back to the places where they usually spend their winter, edınagerık'ᐱ. An old couple had just arrived back in Délıne from their visit to Tulıt'a. When they arrived, the elderly wife was inconsolable because her sister had already set out for their winter camp with her family, and she had been so looking forward to seeing her. To please his wife, her husband decided they would follow his sister-in-law and her family.

Following her sister on the lake was not as easy as it sounds. In late fall, beláłunedá, a heavy crust of ice, forms along the shore of the lake. In the old days it could be as high as five feet in some places and it had to be chopped through to get onto the water or onto the newly formed ice now covered in snow. It is the belief of the

Sahtúgot'ine that the belálunedó is the pillow of the lake. Travelling in the late fall, the big winds and high waves were already upon them and in those days their travel had to be done using yénáret'óé, oars. This was a time when our people had acquired few of the amenities of the modern world.

On their way, they encountered waves that were so high that they had to find shelter on an island. They were trapped by the waves on that island for over a week. ?ehtsi ?óht'oa, an elderly woman travelling with them, collected kwətsí, black lichen, that grows on rocks, and some berries called ʔhdene, and she cooked them with water and a small amount of flour that they had carried with them. That mixture and an occasional fish that they caught sustained them for the time they spent stranded on the island.

Finally after a week, the waves were calm enough for them to continue their travels. They were travelling with their winter gear in the boat; dogs, sled, traps, tents and all the people who would winter with them, so the boat was loaded down. When they got to the middle of the lake, the wind began to blow. Even though they were tu ts'edeneze, bailing water, the boat was in danger of flooding. ?ehtsi ?óht'oa, the elderly woman, talked to the leader guiding the boat and said, “We followed you onto the lake realizing the dangers we could encounter, now is the time for you to nádurézı , to call upon, your medicine power.” The elderly man, to their surprise, said he had nothing that could help them with the situation that they were in.

It is then, it is said, that ?ehtsi ?óht'oa called upon her own medicine power to calm the winds and they were able to reach their destination. As the Elder explained, these stories are about rejuvenation, about telling and retelling them in order to keep them

alive. He said it is about making people feel good about themselves. It is about the heroic deeds of our people and the use of medicine power during the times of great difficulties. It is about performing great deeds to enable your people to survive. As Alfred Taniton (Taniton, personal communication, 2014) stated, our people were a people who really edet'áogerawə, had the ability to rely upon and sustain themselves.

I use this story because it illustrates how the spirituality is embedded in the language used to tell the story. In this instance, Alfred used ancient words to tell the story including the word nádurézi, 'to call upon' your medicine power – a word connoting great medicine power that is used only in this context.

Seeking Blessings From the Elders

In the not too distant past it was clear that we had to rely on ourselves and each other to survive, and because medicine power is so rare, our parents would send us to Elders to assist them in any way that we could. We were sent to help them, but also in the hope that the Elders would bestow upon us a long life by giving us good words to live by. This was a common practice amongst our people, to send your children to assist the Elders. Our parents told us how to behave before we went to visit. We were told not to make fun of Elders, not to disturb them, to give them what they asked for and to perform every task in the proper way. We were told not to laugh at the expense of Elders and never to walk past them without acknowledging them. By contributing to our peoples' survival, we too may be fortunate enough to live a long life.

I remember one occasion when my sister and I were encouraged by our parents to visit an Elder and to assist her in any way we could. We would go over to ʔehtsi Delúria's house and wash her dishes, haul water from the lake, bring in wood for the

stove and generally clean up her house. We would take turns using her traditional swan wing sweeping brush to clean around the fire place and around her sleeping area. It was believed that Elders, reading the character of the child and being pleased with their efforts, would give them the gift of good advice to sustain them in their lives. As Elders usually do when they have received help from children, she produced a box from under her bed and brought out two oranges which she gave to us. I remember how happy my sister and I were at receiving a gift of oranges which were such a rare commodity at that time. The only time we saw oranges or other fresh fruit or vegetables from the south was in the summer when they were brought to Déḻṉę by barge. As children, we were encouraged and directed to assist the elderly in the hope that they would consider us worthy and give us advice to live by.

It is said that Elders chose very carefully who they are going to give advice to. They look upon the individual and note everything about them. Once they make their decision, they give the advice. If you do not heed their advice the first time, they give you a second chance and give you advice again. It is said that an Elder will not give you a third chance. Only those who the Elders feel will heed their words and are deemed worthy are chosen for this gift. The Elder will periodically ask if you have conformed to the advice he or she has given you. It is not done in a harsh way. They will ask in a gentle way, as they know it is sometimes difficult for the individual to make that adjustment in their life. If others are aware that an Elder has given you advice, they too will remind you that there will be no third chance and that gift will be bestowed on another.

ʔłk'ó Can Take Control

Medicine power was used by our people to assist them during times of great difficulty or in other circumstances when they felt it should be used. When we were young, some elderly persons would behave in a manner that seemed peculiar to us and we would question their behaviour. We learned by listening to Elders and others that the individual, who is a person possessing ʔłk'ó, is behaving that way because he or she is being dominated and controlled by his or her medicine power. It is said that medicine power is given to be used. However, if it is not used, the accumulated power begins to overpower the individual and is no longer under that individual's control. The individual can no longer direct their medicine power to do their will and the medicine power is now in control. It is said that the individual remains in that state until he or she passes on.

Bright Light

Once while out trapping, my father and a colleague stopped to light a fire and make tea for those that were following. It was a cool winter evening and they had stopped near a clearing. It was already getting dark. While standing by the fire, they noticed a bright ball of light rushing towards them. The colleague who was telling this story said that my father placed himself directly in front of the oncoming light. He caught the ball of light in his hand and threw it back in the direction from which it came. He was silent for a while and then he told his colleague that it was bad medicine power sent to the community of Délıne and that is why he threw back to where it came from. The colleague noted that there were no burns on my father's hand. When telling the story, he related how amazed he was by what he had witnessed.

As my father recalled from his visit to the Medicine Power house, there were no medicine powers there to be acquired because all the Ɂk'ó had been taken by our ancestors. Elder George Blondin (Blondin, 2006, p.181), also alluded to this when he said, “They say that we no longer need medicine power to survive and that people have forgotten how to take care of it properly. That is why it is not as prominent as it once was.” Now our knowledge of all the great medicine power people and their accomplishments comes to us from the stories that we keep and pass on to our children and future generations.

The Risks of Helping People

It was recognized that my father was a powerful medicine power person. He told us stories that reflected his own powers and his possession of medicine power was substantiated by others. He was sought after by many people who wanted him to assist them. Through stories of him from others, we know that he did help people. My father told us that sometimes it was difficult to assist people even though a request was made. He said that if you are going to assist people, you have to be very prepared to do so.

My father told us this story to emphasize the serious nature of assisting someone with the use of medicine power. He was raised in the Mackenzie Mountains and he told us a story he heard as a child one time when he was travelling in the mountains with his people. It is said that all the men had gone hunting and only the women, children and one elderly man remained in camp. Every day the women, followed by the young children, would check their rabbit snares. One evening all the meals were cooked and everyone had settled down to eat in their tents. Suddenly hysterical screams and a commotion ensued in one tent, a young mother had accidentally swallowed a rabbit bone. The sharp

bone had lodged itself in her throat in such a way that she was literally bleeding to death. Although the women did all they could to assist her, it was apparent that she was beyond their help. Elder George Blondin tells the same story with a slight variation (Blondin, 2006, p.66).

In desperation, recognizing that the elderly man in the camp was a powerful medicine power man, the women pleaded for his assistance. Reluctantly the elderly man walked over, took hold of the young mother, removed the bone with his ʔɪk'q̓ and then blew on her. The bleeding ceased immediately. He then grabbed her and forcefully threw her aside, admonishing her for her carelessness. He told her angrily that her carelessness and his use of his ʔɪk'q̓ had caused him to lose five years of his life. Depending on the seriousness of the assistance provided, each time you provide help through the use of your medicine power, it takes away from the longevity of your own life. Because he had to save her from death, he had to accept five years off his own life to save her. My father explained the seriousness of assisting someone, especially since there is a personal sacrifice required, so you must choose carefully who you are going to assist.

“This also explains why medicine power people are usually quiet and rarely talk publically about their own medicine power. They are different from others because medicine power is a spirit, and to own medicine power you have to be careful. That is why they are that way” (Blondin, 2006, p.105). My father also told us that when a person speaks freely of his or her medicine power, be aware that that individual probably has none. Medicine power is really well guarded and people do not talk about their medicine power, even when they are sought for their assistance. In my experience, only the Elders who no longer have any use for medicine power and who have used it responsibly, talk of

their own medicine power experiences. Both my parents have expressed regret over the loss of my two sisters and a brother. However, they told us one more important aspect of medicine power; it cannot be used to assist one's own children.

Song of the Giant Yabríza

My father told us that there once were two well known giants who lived on our land. Dene gha ʔecho hɫé, they were giants for us. With the help of hɪdása, the sun, the giant Yabríza rose and fought with the other giant called Bets'eriḥdele. It is said that Yabríza raised a grandchild who slept in the nook of his neck. The grandchild played there and each day when Sanénaʔa nɪdé, when the sun set and began to turn red, it symbolized the bleeding in the giant's chest. When this happened, the grandchild would cry. It is said that the giant yebarechɪné k'ə nanetə, always slept on the early morning sunrays, not on the ground. On this occasion, the giant slept on yebarechɪné k'ə for three days so that he could die alone. By the third day, strange sounds began to emanate from him. Concerned for his grandfather, the grandson called out to him.

Yabríza told his grandson to call his dogs to him and this is the song that Yabríza sang as his dogs came to him:

“ʔeget'uwə
Belɪ yɪh yɪhgɔné
Sah yɪh yɪhgɔné
Nɔhwhə yɪh yɪhgɔné”

My father concluded this story by saying that those who know and sing this song will always have a good dog team. It is said that, by singing this song to his dogs as he was dying, the giant Yabríza ensured that the Dene were looked after. By singing this spiritual song, a person would be assured of a strong and powerful dog team to serve him and his family. This is one of Yabríza's legacies to our people. Earlier in his life, my

father captured wolf cubs and his dogs were bred with wolves. They were a very powerful dog team.

Song of Bets'erihdele

Bets'erihdele was another historical character in our legends. There are many stories of him and many of them are comical. My father said that Bets'erihdele often accompanied Yámqréya, the historical law maker, in his travels. He was a happy-go-lucky person famous for always talking to himself, and he kept Yámqréya company on his travels. There are many comical stories about the tricks Yámqréya would play on him. After many adventures together, Yámqréya decided to travel on his own. No matter how many times he told Bets'erihdele to stay behind, he would follow. Yámqréya tried to outdistance him but still Bets'erihdele would arrive at his camp by nightfall. While trying to outdistance him again, this time in the mountains, Yámqréya came upon a snow ridge. When he tried to cross it, he noticed that it was only a crust of ice and it was not strong enough to support his weight. He traced his footprints backwards and covered his tracks to make it appear as if he crossed that ridge. He then went around the mountain and made a fire right across from the ridge. Sure enough he could hear Bets'erihdele coming up the mountain singing this happy and carefree song:

“Yə yebaa n̄shuk n̄t'u, j̄ie wó
Yə yebaa n̄shuk n̄t'u, j̄ie wó”

When he came to the ridge and saw the foot prints crossing it, Bets'erihdele began to walk across towards Yámqréya and his warm fire. Just a few steps onto the ridge following what appeared to be Yámqréya's footprints, the ridge collapsed and down the mountain fell Bets'erihdele. This is one version of the story as to how Yámqréya finally got rid of his travelling companion Bets'erihdele. The legends told of Yebríza and

Bets'eríhdele, who were powerful medicine people who lived and travelled in the time of Yámqréya, are many, and they bring much hilarity and joy to our people as each legend is told by the story teller in his or her own way.

Chapter 9: Nakwónáreʔe, The Prophets

Another category of very special people who have spiritual powers are those we call ‘Nakwónáreʔe’, the future seekers. They are known as prophets and they are people that have been with us since the beginning of time. The words used to name them are different depending on whose language is used, such as Nóggha for the Dene Dháa (Moore et al., 1990), and Náteho, the dreamer, from the Dehcho where my father’s relatives went to visit in the Fort Liard area. However, they are all known as future seekers or as dreamers.

“As long as the Dene Dháa can remember there have been prophets called *ndátin* ‘dreamers’ living among them. As children, the prophets, both male and female, were trained by listening to stories of animal people and culture heros. They were taught to pray, singing the songs of the prophets who had come before them, until they were ready to seek a vision of their own” (Moore et al., 1990, p.59).

These people may also have medicine power, but the ability of the prophets to seek the future through dreams is different from medicine power, and it is said that the kind of power they have is given to only a select few. It is our belief that the powers they receive come directly from the Creator. They are chosen to represent the Creator in *ediri néné* and their primary purposes are to deal with the spiritual growth and well-being of the people and to help them live their lives in accordance with the path set out by the Creator. They seek visions which allow them to see the future and they guide the people based on those visions. “Dene Dháa prophets are called *ndátin* ‘dreamers’ because they can perceive the spiritual world in their dreams...Kaska, for instance, call curers *nedete*

‘dreamers’ and believe they have similar powers to foresee the future and work with spirits.” (Moore et al., 1990, p.66). They are chosen by the Creator and they strive to live exemplary lives and they are very spiritual people. It is said that the powers given to them are for the betterment of their people and not for personal gain. It is also said that because they are representative of the Creator on earth, no one can falsely claim to be one. The Elders tell us that when a person declares themselves to be a prophet, no one can contradict them, as this is an issue between the Creator and that individual and it is not our place to judge.

Elder George Blondin said, “Prophets are created the same way as first-class medicine people. Even before the person is born, the Creator chooses him or her to fulfill this role in life. The prophet has a vision in which one of the Creator’s helpers or messengers comes to him or her and presents them with the knowledge they need to become teachers of the people” (Blondin, 2006, p.88). In our land of the Sahtú, we have been blessed by the number of Prophets we have had in our recent history. Our Elders say that the Sahtúgot’ıne live on the land of the prophets.

The future seekers can also have medicine power for which individual songs are given to them to sing when they are summoning their animal or spiritual helpers. These are private songs used just for that purpose. However, Nakwónáreze are also given songs directly from the Creator for the spiritual growth and betterment of their people. These songs are sung for the whole community. Prophets have a special drum to sing their spiritual songs. Often these spiritual songs are sung with other drummers at the beginning of major events or at spiritual gatherings. Each Dene tribe has had their own prophets and

tell stories of their great deeds. The prophets, whose brief history I will provide, are the ones we were told about and those I have encountered in my lifetime.

Nakwónáreꞑe ꞑehtsáo Ayah

The most well-known prophet from Délıne in our recent history was a very spiritual man called ꞑehtsáo Louie Ayah. “Louie Ayah was born in 1857 and died in September, 1940... Every time he prayed his place was full of people, morning and evening. He would preach to us all and we would listen until he was finished. Until then we wouldn’t move or make a noise. ... Grandfather Ayah was a prophet and many of his predictions have come true. To this day, every summer the people gather in the community for a spiritual gathering to celebrate Louie Ayah’s life.” (Délıne Uranium Team, 2005, p.6). We grew up with many stories about him.

My father told us of one encounter he had with the prophet Ayah. He said that he was coming back from ꞑehdaꞑla, Caribou Point, where some people were staying for the winter season. He was travelling back to Délıne and was in the middle of Great Bear Lake when he was engulfed by a snow storm. There was no visibility, but he could not stop on the lake, so he followed the angle of the drifting snow to continue travelling. Eventually he saw the lights of Délıne. As was the custom for many, the first house he went to was prophet Ayah’s. He arrived with drymeat and other gifts that he was carrying for him. The people visiting there told my father that Prophet Ayah had said that he saw my father travelling, that he was watching him, and that he should be arriving safely soon. No one knew my father was travelling as there were no means of communication back then. But Prophet Ayah knew. This is what my father told us of one experience with Prophet Ayah. Although he passed on before I was born, we all grew up with the stories

he gave to people to pass on to the next generation. He is honoured every year in Délı̨ne with a week of spiritual celebration and prayers in recognition of the greatness of this man. People arrive from many communities to join us in our celebration.

Nakwónáreʔe ʔehtsá Naedzo

When I was a little child, it was my grandfather Susiekw'ı who raised me in the absence of my mother who was hospitalized with tuberculosis and my father who was earning a living on the land trapping and hunting or working in the summer as barge captain on the Great Bear and Mackenzie rivers. Every evening, my grandfather and I would go to ʔehtsá Naedzo's house. He too was a prophet. Prophet Naedzo was blind, so when we entered his house, we would announce ourselves and he would recognize our voices. Every evening, the Elders gathered in Prophet Naedzo's house and he would talk about the Creator and the kind of life one should lead. The Elders spent a lot of time listening, but they also laughed a lot. They told many stories to create laughter for each other and they often shared a meal. Children like me sat near the entrance to the door and observed in silence.

Because he was blind, he used a walking stick to walk around the community with the help of people. Many times it would be the chore of the community children to take turns escorting Prophet Naedzo to his destinations. Once, when I was about nine years old, it was my turn to take him to the church for evening rosary service. I was doing fine, leading him to church, giving him directions to guide his steps all the way. We would tell him where there were stones or little water streams to cross so that he would be aware. I was a short distance from the church, when I saw children playing nearby. I asked Prophet Naedzo if he could wait while I went to see who were playing. He said it

was fine. I went to see the children playing and promptly forgot about him until I heard someone calling my name. I quickly returned to him and we resumed our journey to the church. I finally got him to church and fortunately they waited for him to arrive before they began the prayers. He laughed about the event and nothing more was said about it. He was a kind man who always had laughter in his pocket for you. Sometimes just the children would visit him and he would laugh and enjoy our company. As a child, I did not understand the significance of this man or my experiences with him. Today I feel fortunate that I knew him and was raised with him in my community. It was through him that I began to appreciate the Elders, their stories, and the richness of their language, and to understand the spiritual significance of prophets.

Nakwónáreʔe ʔehtsáa Andre

In our culture, if as a child you do not have grandparents, you adopt them. Hence, all the Elders in our community were addressed by everyone as grandmother or grandfather. My father was an orphan and my mother was an only child and so we did not have many grandparents. My mother's uncle Old Andre and his wife Madeline became our grandparents. In our culture, it is an affront to address a person with familiarity by addressing them using their given name. Therefore, once a person had a child, they were addressed by the Elders as the child's mother or father. In our case, the Elders addressed my father as my sister Christine's father as she was the first born.

The songs called *nace ne yine* 'dreamer' songs' are distinguished from *məyineʔ*, medicine songs. The dreamers' songs were sung publically and for the benefit of all, ... The songs of the dance were dreamers' songs brought back from the people in heaven by particular dreamers whose names and lives were remembered, but they were also the prayers that animals sing during hard times. (Ridington, 1981)

Grandfather Andre, who was also Nakwónáreʔe, a prophet, and grandmother Madeline played an important role in our upbringing and throughout our lives. Often times, in the absence of my parents, we lived with them, were out on the land with them or were engaged in some activity with them. Grandfather Andre was the son-in-law of Prophet Ayah through his first marriage. All my life I recall the gentleness of ʔehtsáa Andre. He became the prophet late in his life. I spent much of my childhood with them and often stayed with them as an adult. I can still hear him rising in the morning and preparing himself for his morning prayer. He would stand in the window facing the rising sun and start singing with his drum, the ‘Angel’ song. Yak’ə got’ɪnɛ meaning heaven people song, or angel song, which is still sung today as the prayer song that our community uses at the commencement of our drum dances and most major events such as feeding the fire ceremonies or important meetings.

Nakwónáreʔe Andre left us with many songs that he received from the Creator. He is also the person who brought our traditional use of the drum into events within the church. He spoke on many occasions about how to live a good life and many people travelled to visit with him in his lifetime. He received all people, children, adults, and youth alike and he had a wonderful sense of humour. He was truly a beautiful man. He spoke often about how to live your life to be able to be received by the Creator. “...a strong dreamer can tell others how to get to heaven... the way to heaven will have been seen in dreams that only a few, special individuals have had” (Brody, 2004, p.47).

Nakwónáreʔe ʔehtsáa Bayha

ʔehtsáa Bayha is another Nakwónáreʔe from our community. He too began to receive his visions late in life. He was my father’s first cousin and is from the Táhtɪ,

‘brought ashore’ family. He spoke with much wisdom and when he spoke to you, he had a twinkle in his eye. He was the person the community went to for help if someone drowned and the body could not be located. He was very influential in the spiritual growth of his family and especially his grandchildren.

The one thing that the last three prophets that I knew had in common was that they did not lecture people. They did not give you orders on how to live your life. They provided you with guidance, nurturing words and with much affection and love. They conducted themselves truly as representatives of the Creator. The choice as to how to live your life, is still very much your own. These are very special people and when you meet them, you know you are truly among greatness. Today, when I hear my grandfather Andre’s angel song, I can still see him in his embroidered black jacket holding the drum and bringing reverence to us through his songs.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

Research on spirituality can be viewed as a sensitive or even controversial subject. It has been suggested by some indigenous scholars that there may not be a place for spirituality in writing. Similar issues were raised with respect to Dene spirituality and Dene worldview in the development of the Dene Kede curriculum in the Northwest Territories. However, respected Dene Elders representing the five Dene tribes in the Northwest Territories, who were ongoing members of the team developing Dene Kede, felt very strongly that spirituality must be included in the curriculum. They wanted it to be included because it is one way by which this important knowledge can be passed to the younger generation and be taught in context.

It is my view that our Elders want fundamental concepts such as spirituality to be recorded and discussed in written form. In addition to our traditional practice of passing on knowledge orally through storytelling, writing about these concepts has become essential to assist our Elders in passing on our knowledge and our language to future generations. It is also essential that we ourselves fully understand our own language and culture, including spirituality, in order for us to be able to teach our children and grandchildren.

Each generation has a responsibility to pass on our traditional knowledge. When I was a young child accompanying my grandfather on his visits to the Elders in our community, I developed a strong personal appreciation, a love, not only for the stories the Elders would tell, but also for the rich traditional language, the vivid vocabulary rooted in their knowledge and love for the land, they would use when recounting their stories. This

appreciation for our language and culture has guided me throughout my professional career including my research and my work on indigenous languages and indigenous education. Relationships among the Dene are reciprocal. Elders have recognized my interests and my skills in these areas. On many occasions Elders have sought me out to share stories, language concepts and traditional knowledge with me, with the full intention that I record, retain and share this knowledge with others. This thesis is a product of what I believe is my responsibility to the Elders and is one more way of fulfilling their expectations for me.

The purpose of my thesis was:

To develop a clear definition and description of spirituality from the perspective of the Sahtúgot'ıne people.

I set out to describe and define Sahtúgot'ıne spirituality and to differentiate spirituality from Sahtúgot'ıne medicine power, worldview and religion. I relied upon journals, reflections, interviews, reference books, legends, songs and above all the storytelling method to gather and present my data. Storytelling is the primary instrument our Elders have always used to transmit our history, our knowledge and experience, our worldview and spirituality, our laws and traditions and our language to the next generation.

I have concluded that there is no one word in our language that encompasses our concept of spirituality. Instead there are a number of words in the Sahtúgot'ıne language which together describe the concept of spirituality from a Sahtúgot'ıne perspective.

From a Dene or Sahtúgot'ıne perspective, spirituality is appreciating all the elements of the world and seeing in each of them a living being. Our concept of spirituality begins with two words. The word for the soul or spirit of a human being is

‘bets’ıné’ (Taniton, personal communication, 2012). The word bets’ıné also applies to the spirit of each individual animal, bird or fish. The word for another aspect of spirituality is yáđı, ‘the world of living beings or living entities.’ Yáđı refers to the living spirit in organisms such as plants, trees and to more inanimate objects such as the thunder, the lightning, the water and the rocks, each having distinctive characteristics and possessing a living force. Yáđı also refers to specific geographic sites or features which have special, historic and traditional significance for the Sahtúgot’ıné and which have their own living beings.

The other key aspect of Sahtúgot’ıné spirituality is the three dimensions of existence. There are three dimensions to our world. The first dimension is hıdā néné, the upper world. The second dimension is edıı néné, the now world, and the third dimension is hıyuwā néné, the under world.

All the objects that we see and the activities around us are in edıı néné, the now world. Edıı néné is where we live our life on this earth. Hıdā néné, the upper world, is an enriched vision of the edıı néné. It is another dimension to the world we live in. It is not a separate world from edıı néné. The bets’ıné or living being of each animal lives in hıdā néné. What separates a person in edıı néné from hıdā néné is ‘henęıdı,’ a deeper level of awareness that enables a person to see and hear the living beings of hıdā néné. Only a few gifted people have the ability to see into hıdā néné. Spirituality in practice is not necessarily the ability to see and experience hıdā néné, but rather it is to know from the stories and the teachings of the Elders that it exists, and to understand and appreciate its significance.

It is said that there is another aspect of *hıdā nēnē*, the upper world, which is a dimension of existence that is distinctly separate from *edırı nēnē*. This other dimension of *hıdā nēnē* is called ‘*Yakachıñē*.’ *Yakachıñē* is a world belonging exclusively to the animals. It is said by the Elders that one day all the animals in *edırı nēnē* will return to their world.

Hıyuwə nēnē, the under world, is the dimension for our after-death existence. *Hıyuwə nēnē* is a world that exists in parallel to *edırı nēnē*. It is where *bets’ıñē*, the spirit or living being in each individual human being, journeys to after they have passed away. The *Sahtúgot’ıñē* believe it is important to facilitate the journey of the human spirit from *edırı nēnē* to *hıyuwə nēnē* by observing all the laws and protocols associated with the passing of a person, both to help the deceased person’s *bets’ıñē* in its journey to *hıyuwə nēnē* and to avoid any negative consequences or *æts’ónē*. We believe there is an ongoing relationship between the *bets’ıñē* in *hıyuwə nēnē* and the people in *edırı nēnē*. We believe in honouring the *bets’ıñē* of our ancestors who contributed so much to our ability to continue to survive as a people in *edırı nēnē*. The special feeding of the fire ceremony, conducted annually, is dedicated to recognizing the spirits of our ancestors in *hıyuwə nēnē*, what our ancestors did for us and the legacy they left behind. The feeding of the fire ceremony is an expression of spirituality and is one more way of practicing and passing on our language and culture.

The *Sahtúgot’ıñē* also believe in reincarnation and that everything completes itself in cycles. If a person’s life in *edırı nēnē* is incomplete, the spirit of that person can leave its body, seek out an expecting woman and be reborn. The Elders and the people can see

that a person has been reborn and they acknowledge and treat that reborn person with the respect they deserve as a person who has lived before.

This thesis further clarifies the meaning of spirituality from a Sahtúgot'ıne perspective by discussing it and differentiating it from the Sahtúgot'ıne perspective on medicine power. Medicine power and the knowledge of medicine power, while related to spirituality, are separate and distinct. Dene náridıı refers to physical medicines made from plants, animals and other sources in nature that are gathered and processed into medication for healing. However, the application of dene náridıı is always done in conjunction with the exercise of certain protocols which are rooted in spirituality.

Healing can also be accomplished through the use of Ɂk'ó, or medicine power, that is associated with individuals who have been granted by the Creator or has acquired a spirit helper or helpers. Someone who has this ability is said to have the spirit power of another entity. This power can come from an animal helper or another living being in nature such as a spruce needle or the wind. Medicine power can be used to heal someone, but it can also be used to hurt someone, or to protect someone from the medicine power of a third person.

Another form of medicine power is the ability to travel to a different physical location or travel into the future to bring back information to help the people. This last form of medicine is believed to come directly from the Creator. The people with the gift of seeing the future speak to people primarily about how to lead a good life. They are called NakwánáreɁ, or prophets. These people may also have medicine power, but the ability of the prophets to seek the future through dreams is different from medicine power, and it is said that the kind of power they possess is only given to a select few.

They are chosen to represent the Creator in *ediri néné* and their primary purposes are to deal with the spiritual growth and well-being of the people and to help them live their lives in accordance with the path set out by the Creator.

While the use of *ṛḵ'ṛ*, medicine power, is distinct from the practice of spirituality, its existence is closely linked to and rooted in spirituality. Medicine powers can be powers granted by the Creator or powers exercised with the assistance of a spirit helper. Elders tell us that in the time of our ancestors, knowledge and skill were often not enough to live on the land. It is said that it was very important in the old days to have *ṛḵ'ṛ*, that *ṛḵ'ṛ* was essential for the survival of the community.

This thesis also tries to clarify the meaning of spirituality from a Sahtúgot'ine perspective by differentiating it from the Sahtúgot'ine perspective on worldview and religion. Spirituality is connected and related to worldview and to culture, but as described by Elders, they do not have the same meaning. Our word for worldview is Dene K'ḗ Kázedets'enízá which translates to 'set in the ways of or thinking like a Dene.' Our word for culture is Náowere which mean 'how we do things in accordance with our laws and traditions.' Dene K'ḗ Kázedets'enízá, the worldview, is our understanding of the world, our role within it. How we act within our 'Náowere,' culture, is guided by that worldview.

Spirituality is a deeper level of knowledge and awareness and it too guides our behaviour. Living fully and successfully in '*ediri néné*,' the now world, is dependent upon our understandings and our relationship to the living beings of *hıdā néné* and *hıyuwə néné*. Our lives are regulated by these relationships and maintaining the balance

in these relationships is of utmost importance. Our very existence depends on maintaining and respecting these relationships.

I feel that my thesis has only touched the surface of the subject of spirituality. Spirituality is the foundation of the Dene and Sahtúgot'ıne world. It runs through every aspect of our lives and governs our behaviour. Spirituality is who we are. It is engrained in every aspect of our lives. Spirituality is to act accordingly, with knowledge imparted by our Elders, to become the best person we can be. To become a spiritual person is to become one with all that is around you, to become *henęıdı*, to have a special heightened awareness of all that is alive and provided to you by the Creator. Spirituality is acknowledging the Creator, being thankful and maintaining humility for all that is bestowed upon you. We are Dene, we are Sahtúgot'ıne and we must strive to become spiritual. A small child is encouraged at an early age to say “*Máhsı dıdı*” to say thank you. Thank you for being alive, for the gifts from the Creator, for the Elders, for our families, for the animals, for the water, the rain, the caribou, for the land. Every act guided by the knowledge and the spirit from our ancestors is spiritual.

Chapter 11: Postscript

Elder Alfred Taniton who consistently supported and assisted me in writing my thesis said the following, “Animals are placed on this earth by the Creator and it is only through the design of the Creator that they behave in accordance to his will. It is not for mere mortals like ourselves to guess what will happen to these animals” (Taniton, personal communication, 2014). Words of wisdom such as his are what I have heard all my life. I have been blessed in so many ways. I was blessed by being born in a tent on the land like so many friends and people of my generation. My early memories are of being out on the land, trapping and hunting with my grandfather, father and my family. I was also blessed because, as a child, I was often raised by my grandfather, and then by my grandmothers and grandfathers of our community. These times were extraordinary times for our people. We were immersed in our culture and language and our parents were the last generation to be born and raised on the land year round. However, this is not the case for our young people today.

As I was growing up, the Elders would constantly give me bits of information, they said for me ‘to place in my pocket for later.’ I did not know the future they were imagining for me. In exploring Sahtúgot’ıne spirituality, I realised I was embarking on a road many have journeyed on, but of which little has been told. I see this thesis as a first step towards describing and defining what spirituality means from a Sahtúgot’ıne perspective. However, I did not embark on this journey lightly. Without our Elders we will not have a full understanding of spirituality. In pursuing this research, I believe I have only touched the periphery of the concept of spirituality. However, it is my hope

that others will take some of knowledge and concepts of spirituality identified in this thesis and build on them further.

I cannot tell you what a joy this experience has been. Many times it brought me to tears to hear the words of the Elders within me, as if they were here today speaking to me again; the words of our Elders in my memory, speaking, or singing the words of the Caribou Love song. Although I have felt some trepidation researching such a complex and sensitive topic, I had to believe that there was a reason why I chose this undertaking. I had to trust the Elders who worked with me and the words of many of the other Elders who taught me along the way.

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Appendix A Sahtúgot'ine Glossary

Así gonáhʔí góʔóle: Nothing transpires without their knowledge in reference to the under-world people

Becho: The leader and spokesperson for every animal

Begalé: The life line of a person or trail of the spirit as referred to by Elder George Blondin

Belachiné béréhdi: the spirit of the living gazed upon the giant wolf, in this instance

Beláhunedó : Heavy crust of ice that forms along the lake shore believed to be the pillow of the lake

Bets'erihdele: The humorous companion of Yámqréya

Bets'iné: the spirit of a person or animal

Chileku ʔehdá: Young Man Point (place name)

Dárelí: Where the river flows (place name)

Dehgá / Dehcho: Mackenzie River (place name)

Délíne : community on Great Bear Lake (place name)

Dene K'é Káʔedets'eníʔá: Set in the ways or thinking like a Dene

Dene haredó: Person who swallows people's spirit

Dló Whárehʔq: Holding laughter in one's mouth

Dló gerehtsi: Creating laughter for each other

Edenakwó k'énarehʔí sá ʔaht'í: Spirit of a person leaves the physical body and wanders ahead of itself

Edet'áogerawə: Ability to sustain themselves

Edet'áogerhwhí: They were totally self-reliant

Edínagerík'q: where they wintered

Edırı néné: The now world

Ferasewó: Denenized version of Francis

ʔehdaɭla: Caribou Point (place name)

ʔehtsə́ Dáoyə: Elder who journeyed to the heart of the water

ʔehtsə́ Ayah: Prophet Ayah

ʔehtsáə Andre: Prophet Andre

ʔehtsáə Behyá: Prophet Bayha

ʔehtsáə Náedzo: Prophet Naedzo

ʔehtsɪ Delúria: Mary Therese Kenny's grandmother

ʔehtsɪ ʔóht'oa: Grandmother who rescued people stranded on the island

ʔekw'é edeka daewə: Hovering above itself eg. Caribou

ʔets'ehch'ə: Traditional three day mourning ceremony

ʔets'óné: The act of inviting negative spirit

ʔídí dezha nenazho: Thunder hastening it's young ones in the fall time when you hear
the roar of the thunder

ʔɪ: Suffix added to the deceased person's name

ʔich'a dene: Deceased persons

ʔɪhdene: Dry red berries grown on the ground, eaten by our people. Traditional name of
Prophet Andre

ʔɪk'ó: Medicine power

ʔɪwɪ: Ghost

Godéneho: A giant

Godí: Alive

Gogha ʔets'eredɪ: Feeding them as in the case of feeding of the fire ceremony for the
deceased

Gorabə: A land mark of the giant wolf (place name)

Henɛɾɪdí : heightened awareness

Hɪdə nɛnɛ: Enriched version of the now world

Hɪdóh xae: Early spring

Hɪyuwə nɛnɛ: The under world

Kó: House, Fire, Community, home

Kwətenɪʔá: Bear Rock Mountain with the three beaver pelts placed there by Yámqréya
(place name)

Kwəts'ɪ: Lichen eaten by caribou

Nadɪ: Again is, reborn, reincarnate

Nádurɛzɪ: The act of calling upon ones' medicine power

Náhʔáacho: Dinosaurs

Nahwh̓: Snow blindness

Nakwónáreʔe: Prophet, future seeker

Náowere: Culture

Náridi: Medicine from the earth

Nátəho: The great dreamer, name of the Fort Liard region Prophet

N̓hts'ı dene as̓ı henáoréh̓ıle q̓t'e: The Wind waits for no one

Sahtúgot'ıne: People of Great Bear Lake

Sahtú: Great Bear Lake (place name)

Sahtúdó: Great Bear River (place name)

Saoyú: Grizzle Bear Mountain (place name)

Táhtı: Brought ashore, great, great, grandfather of author

Tawoya: Open water in winter. Place of Francis Tatti's cabin. (place name)

Tatsóʔehká: Southern Spruce ridge on little lake where no one sleeps (place name)

Tech̓ʔo: Place of deep water where giant beavers emerged to escape Yámqréya (place name)

Teh̓lets'égóədó: Place where spears were used in the river of last war (place name)

T̓leh̓góh̓ı: Where the oil is, currently known as Norman Wells (place name)

T̓h̓ch̓o: We call them people of the muskeg. They are the largest Dene tribe of the NWT

Ts'ıa: Name of young Caribou, also known as a place where grebe encountered the raven (place name)

Ts'ıdu kə: Oldest Dene people comparable to the formation of the rock people

Tudzó: Water heart of the Sahtú (place name)

Tulít'a: Community south of Dél̓ıne at the confluence of Great Bear River and Mackenzie River (place name)

Tur̓ıı: Place called Johnny Hoe River (place name)

Tut'ó: Grandmother of Author on mother's side

Tu Ts'edeneze: Bailing water

Yabríza: Traditional being who slept on the sunrays

Yakach̓ıne: The exclusive animal world

Yak'ə got'ıne: Heaven people or angels

Yámqoréya: Twin brother of Yámqhgá, known as the Dene law maker who left many landmarks on the Dene land

Yámqhgá: Twin brother of Yámqoréya who went into the future and travelled to the south

Yebarechne k'ə nanetə: Sleeps on the early morning sun rays

Yáđí / éđí: Landmarks or place names that hold much spiritual significance or living beings

Yénáret'óé: Oars

Yets'é wetı: Sleeping to, in reference to the animal helper

Appendix B

Francis and Lucy Tatti

The written records say that Francis Tatti was born in the mountains west of Tulita on Sept 1, 1912. However, my father said he was born on August 12. At a very early age his father died and he and his sisters were forced to live with relatives. For many years he and his family lived with Paul McCauley and his family. According to Madeline Karkegee, they travelled on the land together and Francis and Paul McCauley were like brothers. They had so much fun being raised together, constantly play fighting until there was no snow on the ground. It was decided by the authorities that his sisters were to be sent to Residential school in Fort Providence. All his sisters were taken except for his older sister Katherine who remained with his aunt Catherine Zaul Blondin. His mother Christine Tatti moved to Fort Simpson to be near her daughters. During this time my father, who was still a child, was left to take care of his brother George Doctor. They lived with their grandfather Old Doctor and his wife until they became young men. Their grandparents died and my father said that this was the turbulent time in his and his brother's life. They learned how to hunt in the mountains by travelling with and watching other people. They scavenged and lived as orphans. They learned to work hard and survive in the harsh environment, and they did survive.

My mother, Lucy Susiekw'i was the only surviving child of siblings that numbered as many as eleven. She was the only child of my grandfather and grandmother to reach adulthood. She was also raised by her uncle Old Andre and his wife Madeline. She learned to sew at an early age and was taught everything about survival skills on the land. She married Francis Tatti at an early age and had eight children. Five of those children survived. She taught all her daughters how to sew and every summer how to harvest from the land and to tan hides. She was very instrumental in her grandchildren's life and played a major role in their upbringing. Lucy developed tuberculosis in the early 1950's and spent several years away from home in the hospital and she felt the effects of her illness the rest of her life. Her family was very important to her. Even when she was not well she usually travelled with her husband Francis on the land. When she did stay behind in Délı̄nę, she was able to provide for her family on her own by sewing, snaring and managing the household. Her last major trip was to go to Caribou Point for several months where the family built a beautiful log house.

When he was a young man, Francis was advised by the Elders of his people of the mountains that the only way he was going to lead a long life was by moving to Délı̄nę. The marriage between Francis and Lucy was arranged by the Elders. Together, they lived life to the fullest teaching and telling stories to their children. Francis became known as an excellent hunter and trapper and always lived an independent life. They taught life skills to the youngest of their children ensuring that they could survive on the land. They were a much loved couple. They never spoke of the hardships they both endured. Lucy was calm and serene in her demeanor whereas Francis was always full of stories, humour and laughter. They supported their children always with the idea that family is of the utmost importance and that life is what you make of it no matter what the circumstances. Every day, Francis woke up with something mischievous that he would share with his family to create laughter and that is how they started the day.

Appendix C

Letters of Support



Deline First Nation
 PO Box 158
 Deline, NT X0E 0G0
 Tel: (867) 589-3151 Fax: (867) 589-4208

April 11, 2014

REVISED

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

APR 11 2014

Support For Ms Fibbie Tatti's Thesis Proposal

The membership of the Deline First Nation and the Deline Land Corporation recently voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Deline Final Self-government Agreement concluded with the Government of Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories. It will likely take two years for Canada and the Northwest Territories to ratify the Agreement and enact enabling legislation, after which we will begin to implement our new Treaty.

The Deline First Nation, in conjunction with the Deline Land Corporation, strongly supports education for our people and we understand that to reach our goals for self-government, we must work on capacity building, including training, adult education and higher education at all levels. Research is critical to the continuing development of our people. Recordings of our elders are vitally important for our future generations. Our young people need to be able to reach back into our history to understand the vision that our elders had for us and to assist us in working towards our goals.

Fibbie Tatti is a member of the Deline First Nation and she has worked closely with the community over many years in developing community based education curricula and materials in English and our language. She has conducted language and culture based research with elders from Deline and throughout the Northwest Territories.

The Deline First Nation possesses a substantial amount of archived materials provided by our elders over the years, a significant amount of which was gathered and recorded by Ms. Tatti. When the elders recorded this material, they knew and intended that their words would be used for educational purposes and that the community would make good use of their material.

We wish Ms. Tatti all the success in her studies and I support Ms. Tatti in using our archived materials to assist her in completing her Master's thesis. We know that our investment in her is well spent and we will continue to support her as she completes her Master's program. We know that her thesis will contribute to our efforts to educate our youth and that Ms. Tatti will continue to play an important role in the building of self-government for the people of Deline.

Yours truly

Chief Leonard Kenny
 Deline First Nation
 Deline, NT



P.O. Box 156
Deline, NT X0E 0G0
Tel: (867) 589-8100 Fax: (867) 589-8101
Website: www.deline.ca

August 19, 2014

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Letter of Support

Fibbie Tatti is a member of the Deline First Nation and the Deline Land Corporation, and she is a beneficiary under the Sahtu Dene and Metis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement.

Ms. Tatti is currently enrolled in the Aboriginal Language Revitalization Masters Program at the University of Victoria. She has completed the eight required courses under this MA program with outstanding grades and she is currently in the process of writing her thesis.

In March 2014 the community of Deline formally ratified the Self-government Treaty that we negotiated with the governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories. As a result of this treaty, our new Deline Government will have a broad range of law-making powers and authorities over subject matters that are very important to our members, including pre-school and kindergarten to grade twelve education.

A critical component of exercising our jurisdiction over education will be to incorporate our language, culture and traditions into our school curriculum to a much greater extent. Ms. Tatti has a long history of actively supporting and participating in initiatives to promote and advance the retention of our language and culture within the Northwest Territories education system and otherwise. She led the development of the Dene Kede curriculum for kindergarten to grade nine for the whole NWT. She co-chaired the Northwest Territories Aboriginal Languages Task Force in 1985-86 which resulted in legislation whereby the nine Aboriginal languages in the NWT became Official languages along with English and French. She has served a four year term as the Official Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories. She has also conducted research and worked extensively over the years with the elders of Deline and other Dene communities, recording stories and producing education materials. She has served as a translator and interpreter, and she can read and write her language fluently.

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- 2 -

Capacity building within our First Nation is a major component of implementing self-government. As President of the Deline Land Corporation, I strongly encourage you to approve Ms. Tatti's application for this scholarship to assist her to complete her Masters program which will enhance her ability to serve her community.

Mahsi,

Gina Dolphus
President
Deline Land Corporation

Appendix D

Ethics Certificate of Approval



**University
of Victoria**

Human Research Ethics Board
Office of Research Services
Administrative Services Building
PO Box 1700 STN CSC
Victoria, British Columbia V8W 2Y2, Canada
Tel 250-472-4545, Fax 250-721-8960
ethics@uvic.ca www.research.uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Fbbie Tatti UVic STATUS: Master's Student UVic DEPARTMENT: LING SUPERVISOR: Dr. Leslie Saxon	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER 14-085 <small>Minimal Risk - Delegated</small> ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 15-Apr-14 APPROVED ON: 15-Apr-14 APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: 14-Apr-15
PROJECT TITLE: The Wind Will Not Wait For You: Sahtuot'ine Spirituality RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER: None DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: None	
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol. Modifications To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol. Renewals Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date. Project Closures When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.	
Certification This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants. <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; align-items: center;"> <div style="border-top: 1px solid black; width: 150px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="text-align: center;"> Dr. Rachael Scarth Associate Vice-President Research Operations </div> </div>	

Certificate Issued On: 15-Apr-14

14-085 Tatti, Fbbie

Appendix E

Interview Questions

The Wind Waits For No One

Script for verbal consent

I am very grateful that you have agreed to meet with me.

The Wind Waits For No One is a thesis that I am undertaking as part of a Master's Program on Aboriginal Language Revitalization I am taking at UVIC. It is about Sahtúgot'íne spirituality based on the stories that my father the late Francis Tatti and My mother the late Lucy Suziekw'i Tatti and other stories that have been told to me by the elders. I will explain to you what the project is all about which will help you to make the decision as to whether you want to participate. Before we continue, there are a few procedures that are required by the Ethics Board at UVIC which we will complete.

I have prepared background information which I will share with you. Please feel free to ask me any questions at any time during my short presentation. Thank you once again for agreeing to listen to me.

Purpose and Objective

Many people of my own age and people younger than us do not know what Sahtúgot'íne spirituality is. My father Francis Tatti speaks of spirituality at three levels. The purpose of this project is to describe and define spirituality and differentiate spirituality from Sahtúgot'íne medicine power, worldview and religion. I will be writing mostly about yádlí of the upper world; a description and definition of spirituality as I understand it from my father's, mother's and elders stories.

Importance of this Research

My father once told me that stories are retold to continue the flow of information. In this way our people will always know who they are, where they come from and the importance of maintaining the traditions of our people base on traditional knowledge and the importance of the Sahtúgot'íne language which encompasses and holds within it the sacred meanings and practices. Without these understandings and practices, the language encompassing these meanings becomes lost. We are losing our elders and with them we are losing all the knowledge that they carry. Most importantly our younger generation will lose that critical opportunity to learn about themselves and their people and become the people they are meant to be. We are the carriers of our people's knowledge and we have the responsibility to ensure that it is carried forward as it was intended.

Participants Selection

I have chosen you because you have lived on the land, you are knowledgeable about the land, you carry many of our ancestors stories and because you are fluent in the Sahtúgot'íne language.

What is involved

I will be using stories from both my parents and from what elders have shared with me. I will also be using tape recordings of my parents and the elders. I will write different sections of my thesis and periodically I will come to you, share my writing with you. If I have any questions or I am uncertain about the meanings of what is being said, I will speak with you about your knowledge on the subject. I would like to take your picture to use in my thesis.

Inconvenience

I am not aware of any inconvenience that this process will incur for you, however if you get tired let me know and we will stop. I am not aware of any risk involving you in this thesis. If there are subjects that you are uncomfortable talking about, let me know and we can refrain from discussing this. You can participate at any time that is convenient for you.

Benefits

Our children are losing their language, traditional knowledge and culture, particularly in the area of spirituality. Together we can give something back to our community and I am looking so forward to hearing and sharing stories with you. The Sahtúgot'ıne language, the nuances and the meaning are invaluable to the community.

Compensation

I am working on my thesis and will be unable to provide you with any monetary means.

Voluntary Participation

Unless I am uncertain about a specific topic, my visits with you will be at minimal. It is entirely up to you and at your convenience when you want to meet with me. I will be happy with any arrangements we make. If you do not want to talk with me about this, I will understand totally.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

You are the elders of my community and I have known you all my life. I hope to share a great experience with you. I would like you to know that your participation is completely voluntary.

Anonymity

I will be taking notes and sometimes I will tape our conversations. If you want to remain anonymous then I will try to ensure that by not using your name or identify in anything that I write for my thesis. However, you realize that this is a small community and it will probably be known that you are involved in this project.

Confidentiality

This is a small community and people will probably know that you are involved in this project. However, if there are parts of our conversations or taping that you do not want to share, I will assure that.

Dissemination of Results

As part of the agreement with the community, it is understood that I will be sharing the results of my thesis with the community. It is possible that some of the stories that you share with me may be shared with the community as well and your participation and contribution would be recognized. Because the community is losing its language, the

language component of this research may be used by the school staff for the development of educational materials to promote the learning of our language. Anything that is confidential will not be used for educational materials. I may be making public presentations globally about my thesis. Since the materials will be made available to the community and the museum, other researchers may use these materials for their research project in the future.

Disposal of Data

A lot of the materials that I will be using will be coming from my father and mother, some of that material is already available to the community on tapes and on DVD. Some of that material is already stored at the Prince of Wales Museum. Copies of the material from this research will be stored on my computer. With your permission I will give the community those materials that you would like to share. The tapes and information will not be disposed of because it is so important. Copies of my thesis will also be made available to the community.

Contact

If there are any questions or you would like me to provide more information about the thesis, I will provide you with my phone number both here and in Yellowknife. I will also be spending two months here in Délı̄nę during the summer and I can be reached at my home here. You can also contact The Human Research Ethics Office at UVIC. (250 472 4545) Their contact information will also be made available to you.

Verbal Consent

1. Do you understand how the thesis will be developed with your participation?
2. You need to tell me at any time when you do not want to be recorded?
3. Are you okay with your pictures being used in my thesis?
4. Can the recordings used in our discussions be used in public presentations, if they are not confidential?
5. Are you okay with your recordings being distributed to the public, to the museum and to the schools for their use?
6. Are you okay with the possibility of your materials being used in other research by other researchers?

The directions that you provide for the above questions will be respected and appropriate actions will be taken. Máhis

Appendix F

Letter of Permission to Reprint Map of Great Bear Lake



NEWEST PRESS #201 8540.109 street EDMONTON ALBERTA CANADA T6G 1E6 | t 780.432.9427 | f 780.433.3179

Fibbie Tatti
PO Box 1372
Yellowknife, NWT
X1A 2P1

April 21, 2015

Dear Fibbie:

I am writing you this letter in response to your request to reprint the map of Great Bear Lake that originally appeared in Miggs Wynne Morris' book *Return to the Drum* in your M.A. thesis.

NeWest Press is pleased to grant you permission to use this image. If this thesis is republished commercially, we will need to charge you a small permission fee, but for the purposes at hand, we are happy to let you use the image free of charge.

Good luck with your thesis, and thank you for consulting us on this matter. Your thoughtfulness is very much appreciated.

All the best,

Paul Matwychuk
general manager