

Growing up on a Trap line.

Hello my name is Knighton Hillstrom I am a First Nations Man from the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. I was born in the summer of 1963 at the Holy Family Hospital in Prince Albert, SK. Shortly after being born, I was taken home to La Ronge where I started to live my life on the Reserve for a short periods, then we would go to the trap line for the majority of the year.

What is a trap line?

In Canada formal trapping territories were assigned by the State through Provincial administrators. The trapping industry in Saskatchewan includes more than 4,500 registered trappers. My family trapped various animals including beaver, muskrat, mink, lynx, fisher, otter, weasel, squirrel, timber wolf, and sometime bears. We hunted Moose for food, made nets for fish, gathered herbs and medicines throughout the year. Hunting & gathering, cooking and eating game, and bush survival really does build character.

Growing up on the trap line meant that as a child you were with the females who normally stayed behind at camp to gather medicine, wood , water to keep the family well, warm and fed, while the Men would go out to the wilderness to do the Hunting and the Trapping for food. This is when I learned how to prepare and make tea's, poultices and salves from my Kokum. During the winter months I spent a great deal of my youth with my grandparents especially my Kokum, this is Grandma in Cree. The Men would go out checking traps and my Kokum would take us kids into the wilderness and teach us the different types of trees, telling us stories of each one all along the way. At each stop that had to be made was significant to our wellbeing at that period of time. We would go to the very top of a hill on our lot where my Kokum would do a little prayer and offer tobacco when gathering medicine on this particular hill she would get the cones from the black spruce, along with some needles and tell us the good ones were the purple cones to clear and maintain your respiratory system and keep you healthy throughout the winter. She would boil these cones with the needles and make a strong medicinal tincture. First sign of a cold or a cough and Kokum would prepare the mixture and ask us to drink it.

These were some of trees that we used to maintain our vitamins and strength up throughout the winter. As trappers and Indigenous people living off the land these trees kept us alive and well for many, many thousands of years. Here are some are some of the medicines and cures made from these trees.

Tamarack: I recall my Kokum gathering the inner bark and boiling it to use it to stop bleeding, there was always an ample supply of bark available to be used for cuts and wounds. The needles were dried powdered and inhaled to relieve colds, bronchitis, and urinary problems. Teas were made from the bark and drank as part of this treatment.

Balsam Fir: In the fall my Kokum would gather the pitch from the trees and make ointment by boiling it with fish and used for cuts, scrapes, open sores and infections. She would also gather the needles in the fall when they turned orange. She would crush them and sprinkle it on wounds or infections. She would make a tea from the needles to treat us when we had fevers and chest colds. Often mixing these with other pine needles.

Common Juniper: My Kokum would gather fresh needles and burn them on the stove as incense, she would boil the bark with the berries to make herself a salve for her psoriasis and eczema. The fresh berries were used for people with Kidney problems and we were warned that pregnant women should never take part of this internally. As it was known as tool for abortions.

Jack Pine: Fallen Jack pine that had softened the inner bark would be collected by my Kokum as a poultice on deep cuts. She would melt lumps of pine pitch and use it internally to bring up phlegm from the lungs. She would put some on the stove to use as a disinfectant to kill parasites and fumigate the rooms.

Popular: I remember my Kokum using the white powder from the inner bark to dry make into powder and boil

Birch: The leaves used to be chewed and applied to wasp stings or to draw out the poison.

Herbs: Some of the more common herb picking would begin early spring around late May when the ground was melting and the earth no longer has snow over it. We would go to the Muskeg and go gather wild cranberries that sat throughout the winter on their shrubs without falling. They made an excellent mixture to our bread, fish, meat, and also for flavoring tea. This was a great treat from a long winter. The cranberries frozen nature fermented all winter long were very high in Vitamin C.

Also in early spring, when the trees were melting my Kokum would take us to show us how to tap the running sap from the Birch. She would boil the water and make syrup from there for our sweet tooth. This was also a good time for us to gather Muskrat root, this was used very widely throughout the North for various ailments. It has a mild sedative affect as well as a calming of the nerves.

As I was getting older I began to explore other part of Canada. Living in Large urban centers like, Vancouver and Toronto. Today I live in Saskatoon, Much closer to my family as I get older and need family supports. I returned home in 2009 as I had become ill with HIV related issues. I started my wellness program with my Mother getting back to the land and promoting the uses of a few herbs and medicines my Ancestors used for wellness. It was my turn for Land Base Intervention involving me being on the land.

I went home the summer of 2010 to be with my family members as I thought I did not have long to live. My Mother and her siblings extended family, invited me to get out of the house to gather the many different varieties of berries as they flourished and bloomed with fruit. As we picked berries it came back to me of how my Kokum used to dry the berries entire plant to be used for medicine. It occurred to me that I could try heal myself with my Kokum's teas. While I was out there on the Land a health representative from my Reservation invited me to bring my tea teaching at Cultural Day Celebrations, **Lac La Ronge Indian Band**. I accepted and since 2010 I have been helping our community to get our tea teaching back. I have been using these teaching from my Kokum's knowledge of berries and herbs as my showcase and as part of my healing journey. These are some of the tea's that are available in our Natural Garden. I use them all for myself, friend's extended family and special events for wellness education.

Raspberry: I picked and dried the leaves berries and even together with roots then separated into bundles. Roots for Medicine, leaves and stock for tea and berries for desert, meat, fish. The entire is to be used. Only a few of the roots were gathered as they were used for Medicine. Only a few raspberry plants would be uprooted. These roots were then used for females during and after childbirth for hormonal balance.

Blueberry has several different uses similarly to the other berries they were dried and mixed with the meats, breads and foods. The leaves and the stem were used for tea and the roots were dried crushed then boiled to make a tincture and used for cleaning the intestines and using it for a cancer prevention and suppression.

Saskatoon berry were not as widely used in the north for medicine, they were used to mix with other food or eaten alone. Leaves were used and mixed with other berry plants for the tea to add flavor. **Mint tea** was used as a Medicinal plant and my Ancestors enjoyed it as herbal remedy to help with stomach issues and an all-around relaxing tea. **Muskeg tea** grows in the bog and is used for headaches, respiratory infections, skin conditions and preventing cancer. **Rosehip** leaves, roots and berries are used for medicines, they reduce fever, improve immune system and was used for arthritis or bone pain.

Since 2010 I have been very fortunate to have My Mother's blessing and help to bring these medicines back into my wellness and life. I have been able to share these gifts far and wide. I was invited to **All Nations Hope Network**, Buffalo Feast in Regina to feature my tea and teach as well. I also took my tea to Toronto to the **Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network** AGM Conference to share my tea with my fellow peers and co-workers. It has truly given me a new appreciation of nature and what it has to offer. I thought I had lost this part of my life. I am so happy to have this again and to help to teach others about the true benefits these plants have to offer. My trap line life has been a blessing in so many ways. I feel healthier and satisfied to know I could share this knowledge of the land with other people interested in learning.

My making teas have given me a fresh new outlook on life. They cleanse and help me to feel great about life and myself esteem especially. They have given me back my life. I was on a brink of extinction when I went home to die. I was lucky enough to find my way back home to my family where I relearned what I had lost. Plus there is now treatment available for HIV and after getting sick I was immediately placed on Anti-retroviral Medications which I now take on a regular bases. Lucky for me, I only need the one pill a day to keep the virus at bay. I am also drinking my tea that gives me a much better outlook. It really is very beneficial for my life now. It is great to knowing I may be helping to save someone by introducing them to the land activities, picking, sharing and to be surrounded by the wellness of Nature.