

An Interview with Yellowknives Dene Elder Fred Sangris
Video Transcription

Participants: Fred Sangris (Yellowknives Dene) and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg)

Abbreviations: Fred Sangris = FS, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson = LS

(0:34) LS: Alright, so, the first question... there's a lot of people talking about this pandemic as 'we're in unprecedented times, it's never happened before', and when Indigenous people hear that, especially our elders and our knowledge holders, that doesn't ring true because we have lots of experience with sickness from colonialism and epidemics and pandemics. So, what is that Dene experience that you have about epidemics and pandemics?

(1:09) FS: How much time do we have?

(1:11) LS: We have as long as you want [laughs]. Oh, maybe you should introduce yourself too.

(1:16) FS: That's what I want to do.

(1:17) LS: Yeah, sorry about that. I skipped ahead.

(1:21) FS: Let me know when to start.

(1:23) LS: Okay go!

(1:25) FS: Okay. Good day, good afternoon. My name is Fred Sangris, I'm a member of the Yellowknife Dene First Nation in Northern Great Slave Lake. I am Indigenous and Treaty 8. I was born here in this area 63 years ago and I still reside in my home area. I'm gonna be talking about a bit of history of sickness and pandemic over the past centuries known to our people in the far North. As an Elder, I was raised in a village to a nomadic family. My parents were nomadic, my grandfather was still using a bow and arrow when I was just a little child, and my family didn't speak any English at all. So, I grew up in a very nomadic lifestyle, I understand the language. When the Elders and people get together and tell stories, I'm always there. I'm hearing, I'm listening, I'm picking up the stories, and I have a good memory of all the stories of the past. When something impacts you and affects you greatly, you have a great memory of it, you can never forget it. For me, it's embedded in my mind, in that I live with it almost every day. I never tell stories about it, but I would like to tell this story about it, the sickness and the epidemic that's happening with us, and the past history from colonial

settlements, from the very beginning when the first priests arrived in our country here, and that's where things have started. I want to begin by saying that all of North America, from South to North, is the original Indigenous homeland of Indigenous people. This is the only world that they know, they know no other countries, no other islands. This is their home, and since it's been our home, there has been many discoveries of our people, Indigenous people in North America, when the first European settlers walked on the shore. No one ever thought their first step would probably have a big impact on the millions and millions of Indigenous people that live in this country, North America, that they call home. That first step on the shore was the beginning of intrusion, of colonialism and its very long history right to this day, here. I can tell you that Indigenous stories are not limited, Indigenous stories are told almost every day, at camps, at places, at gatherings, everywhere, young and old, so we hear it all the time.

One of the stories I heard was [about] the 1928 epidemic. My own father and grandfather, who were the only two survivors of that whole family, have told us stories. Many of the elders in my village, whose numbers were almost over 7000 people, and within 20 years or so, came down to only a few hundred, a handful, and all those people passed away. I'm gonna tell my story. As my grandfather said, when the first man arrived here, the black robe, the man dressed in black, all black, come preaching to our people, trying to tell our people the right way to live, the right way to go with God. At the time they were trying to get as many flock I guess, as many people under their wings. There was Catholic, there was Anglican, protestant, there is many other priests and ministers that wanted to get Aboriginal people under their wing. But my grandfather was one of those people who did not trust the men in black because he was a spiritual person. He was almost like a psychic, he could tell what the persons goal is, what the persons intention is, and my grandfather's feeling was that the man in black was there to preach but he was working for somebody else, and his goal was to get the people, the Dene people, to pray his way and live his way of life and change our way of life for the coming of other people that would follow them. In our history, the Canadian government followed the priests up North, and that's how, I think, the very first colonial settlement here was forfeiting and getting rid of our own religion, our own way of thinking, and our own world. And we have a way of connecting with the creator, we have a way of healing our people, we have a way of living, we have our own laws. I don't blame the people dressed in black robe, but I do believe in what my grandfather told me, in that their intentions may not have been good, because behind them was men of Ottawa that came here and tried to take our land. Take our land that we have Indigenous title on and trick Indigenous people into handing over their land, in return for a few promises that were never delivered. To this day, Indigenous people all over North America I believe are feeling that hurt, mistrust, and I too, as an elder, I have that same feeling as my grandfather did.

Around 1850's, my father was born on the Coppermine river near Great Bear Lake in the far north, Northeast of Great Bear lake on a long port called [name]. It means 'the long portage'. He was born there 1865 to a very nomadic family, that were very spiritual, that were very kind, and didn't live a very violent life. They lived a peaceful life with their neighbours in this country. They believe in how they live, it's what they believe is their right way. They were living on their land, living on the resources that the creator provided to them, in that they were free to travel without question from anybody, to do what they want. And they were free people. They had language, they had culture, they had society, and above all they had Indigenous title to their lands, which Canada forfeited and tricked people in taking that land away. So, I always ask that question to Canada, how did you acquire this land legally? Show me the documents that you have been sold this land. I don't think so, they want to come to a table and negotiate. They know they are wrong, they know they lied, they know it was all bad. They'd rather negotiate, but negotiations are never what Indigenous people intend, what they want, it's always a small handful of gifts and this and that but never the real meaning of recognition as Indigenous people. About 1850, when the priests arrived here, they were, from the stories I heard from my own family, my grandfather in 1876 was 107 years old. Other people in my village say that my grandfather was probably the oldest, as old as 120 years, so through his stories, and what he saw, is what I'm gonna share with you. When the priests arrived here, they were trying to get the people to learn how to pray, how to walk around, about worship, about alter, about the God. The Dene people, I believe here, already had a spiritual connection with God. They already had a creator. They already believed that this whole earth and the universe and everything that is beautiful was created by the creator, and that there is a person who is the creator of all, and that we worship through our drums, our songs, our gatherings, everything. It's always been there. Missionaries arrived here and they didn't understand that. They thought everything we done was bad, they got the help of Ottawa to ban many of our religious ceremonies, and because of that many Indigenous people have lost their religious beliefs, their culture, and they are lost in their own homeland all across North America. Look at every city, town, you see them in the streets. It's what's been done. Their life and style have been forfeited into something that was new to them, and they were told to live that way, when their own way of living was okay and there was nothing wrong with it. I think Canada really wanted to change people. The way I see it, when Canada, Canadian people came up North and started to engage and talk to people about their lands, about their environment, about their way of life, the big part of it, all of it, was racism. A lot of it was prejudice, a lot of it was a view that they were superior and that the Indigenous people were not. But look at Indigenous people today, they are very intelligent, very spiritual, and very human, as like any other people. And as Indigenous people, they are not violent people, they are good people, and I think under the creators hand Indigenous people probably sit

on the right hand of the creator because they are the ones that have been abused the most and probably been challenged by the newcomers, the colonial settlers that came into this land.

The epidemic, in about 1850, small parts of it started. Indigenous people were not immune to disease, cold, smallpox, and many other things the Europeans that came to the country brought with them. Around 1850, people did die, they were not immune to the colonial settlers, such as cold and many other things that came. But it wasn't big, it was small I believe at the beginning. People did die, people did lose their life, and there was no medicine here at that time. So, the worst one was probably about 1890 and 1900, when many diseases started to come up with the discovery of gold in the Yukon and the discovery of gold in the North. It made many prospectors, none of whom are Aboriginal people, Canadians who came up here. I would call them British subjects, because under the Crown that's what they are, and they came up to look for gold. And when they did they brought their own disease, and cold, and many other things. People did get effected. By 1925, 26, 1927, was probably the worst case here. From the stories I heard, that probably brought tears to my eyes when I hear it, is that it was horrible. It was anywhere from 14 to 20 people dying each day at various camps and the villages in the back round by [noise interference] ... Yellowknife east, west, south, wherever the Dene people had their tents and were living off the land, there were people dying. And an Elder named [name of Elder] was a young man at that time, was very fortunate not to have caught any of that disease. He had cloth, I believe, that he was wearing. And he was burying people, 10, 15 people almost every day. So much that it affected his life, his whole lifetime. He told me one time, 'when I look in the distance', he said, 'all I see is burials, all I see is these people dying, and I still have good memory of it' he said. So, even at his old age when he passed away, you know, he still had the grief in him. But from the 1928 epidemic, it was horrible, it was very horrible. The Yellowknife Dene, my tribe was probably about, a little over 7000 people all over the land. My people went to the Arctic coast to Fort Churchill, Prince of Wales Churchill, they went to the coast, they went to Great Slave Lake, Great Bear Lake, Coppermine River, they went South [to] Dehcho. Because there were so many people, they went all over the land, they were occupying the land, they had title to it, they had sovereignty, they were free to do whatever they pleased on their land. And that's how they governed themselves, they looked after themselves. But the epidemic that came here really devastated them and it was after July 1900, Treaty 8 was made at Fort Resolution, that Treaty, and many of the elders here, all over who testified at the Thomas Berger inquiry in 1974, all say that the Treaty was peace and friendship. It was not for the selling of land or the giving up of land. No Indigenous person in their right mind will ever give up their land, they have title to it, they would never sell it, unless there was coercion, unless they were tricked into it, and that's how probably Canada acquired the land. Today I think they got caught in their

negotiation of land claims cause of that and apology is probably a big part of it.

Going back to 1920 epidemic, it was very sad. Some of the surviving elders I talked to, because as a young man I was always outspoken and I was always interested in the elder story, interested in what they know, I wanted to carry it on for the future. So, I tried to learn as much as I could. Judy Sharlow[?] who is 96 years old, she lives in my village here, she's still around. She may not get around, but she is still around. And through her, maybe 15 years ago, she told me a story. In 1928, she was barely 8 years old, maybe 9 years old at the time when the epidemic was happening here from Fort Resolution to this way. She was travelling with her father and her family from Fort Resolution through Gold Cap, which is about 60km out of here. Gold Cap, there was a village called [name], many people lived there, and there was a sickness going around, many people were dying over in that village. And then they decide to come to [name] which is another village about 8 miles from here, and they want to come visit the villages and go to that old village where their remaining families were. As she travelled with her father, she was probably 8 or 9 years old, they went from village to village and all they saw was loose dogs and people lying all over on the rocks. Outside of their log houses, all over the place, and people were dying. The sled dogs were all let loose because of the people who died and the sled dogs probably all died too. So, they were let loose, and people were burying each other. As she went from village to village, one village that they went to, her father told her 'stay in the boat, don't get out, you might catch a disease' whatever it is, they had no idea what it was. But they know that a lot of people were dying at that time. As her father went around the old village and he was coming back, he said 'no one survived here, everyone's gone except for the dogs'. And he was walking back to the boat and Judy heard a young child, a baby crying, and told her father 'I heard a baby crying' [noise interference]. 'No no' he said, 'all the dogs are loose and probably the dogs are fighting each other'. She said 'no I heard a baby' so she got off the boat and she led her father towards where she thought she heard the baby. In the middle of this grass, surrounded by four or five dogs, who were probably protecting the baby, there was a two-year old baby that was crawling around. And inside the cabin was her mother and her other family members, there was no one around, all persons in that village passed away except for that two-year-old baby that Judy found. And it was lucky that she found the baby because that baby would probably never lasted more than several days. She probably would have passed away too, but they took the baby, and managed to save that baby. And that baby grew up in that village to become an elder and he was saved, but he has no memory of his parents or families, because he was just a young child himself. And at the same time, when Judy and her family were going from village to village to find out who was alive, there was a white person, I don't know who it is, maybe from Hudson Bay, but there was an RCMP and white person with a boat, a Europe boat, they were also going from village-to-village. So, when

the RCMP and the other person caught up to them at one village, and they all investigated one village and there was no one alive. So, the RCMP took the rifle from the building, all of the lockhouses, and threw all the rifles into the water. And they took all the nets, and they cut it all up and burned the nets. So, I asked Judy, what was the RCMP doing, burning the rifles and cutting up the... or throwing the rifles in the water and burning up the nets? These are tools that you need to survive with you can never survive without them, and if the RCMP was doing something to allow people to continue to get sick and disappear, this is the kind of action a person does. You know, if you're trying to save the person you leave the rifles there and you leave the nets so they can defend themselves. So, right in my own mind, oh boy this is not good. If Judy is telling me this, and it's true, then they weren't really trying to save people, were they? They weren't trying to save people they were allowing people to continue to get sick and maybe disappear. You have to remember that this land is valuable, it has many resources, and Canada really wants this land. And how are they gonna get it? Are they gonna bring medicines to help these people? Maybe not.

By 1927 my father was born, just a year before the big epidemic. Influenza... I think they called it the Spanish flu. But my father was born 1927 and my grandmother passed away in 1931. So, my father was four years old, he lost ten of his brothers and sisters, his mom passed away, he was four years old and just my grandfather and my dad were the only two survivors of that whole family. So, they left the area and they went to Lac de Gras where the diamond mines are, with a man named [name of person] from the [surname] family here, and there they spent close to several years. As my grandfather said, 'I spent over two years with your father, he was only four years old, I took him out far into the bear land, I didn't want to lose him so I did everything I could to save him'. They survived. Years later when they came back to this place, Yellowknife Bay [?], and they tried to find their remaining family members and other tribal members. And they found out that many, many, many people perished, and only a few hundred people survived out of thousands of people... over 7000 people. So, if you go to my community around Yellowknife, Yellowknife Bay here, you're gonna find graveyards, graveyards, graveyards, graveyards, islands, graveyards, mainland, graveyards, further out graveyards, there is graveyards everywhere. It was so many crosses and burials on the islands all within that short timeframe that something horrific happened here. Something big happened here. We know the story, us Dene, we know the story of what happened. We share the story with the other elders, we share the story with our schools, what we want to do is we want our families and other Dene people and other Indigenous people to know what happened to us, because Canada is not going to talk about it. Canada is not going to say anything. The priests are not going to say anything. They know they came very close to a residential school lawsuit, they don't want to be involved in another thing that horrifically took the lives of many, many... not thousands but hundreds of thousands of people. It went all the way from Alberta right

to Fort Smith, [lists various places], McKenzie River, Dehcho, Coppermine... it just went all over. And many people talk about it. My wife is from Délı̄ne [?] and the old people in Délı̄ne talk about the epidemic. It went through there too. It went right up to McKenzie River, as far as the Arctic circles, and further into the Arctic coast. Including the Nunavut people. People from Nunavut and the coast also got affected and Kugluktuk, Inuvik, Churchill... they just went all over. So, 1928 was the worst one and it continued and continued years after people were still dying. Father [name?], on behalf of Chief [name?], told Ottawa, told the priests, 'we just had a treaty here in 1900 and then in 1920 we had renegotiated treaty, and in that treaty, Ottawa, Canada, is supposed to come to us and give us the medicines that we required, because it was part of the agreement. The Queen's people are gonna come into our country and because of that we need to be protected, and Canada under that treaty Canada negotiated that the medicine box will be available to us should their own Crown subjects bring issues up here that could really affect Indigenous people here. Because the Indigenous people have no way of defending themselves in any way. Father [name?] had wrote a letter that I read in 1937 that I found in an archive, in that letter it says, and I have it in my memory very clearly because I read it quite a few times, he writes a letter to the Prime Minister in Ottawa, "Dear Prime Minister, I call on you, I write this letter, from the country of the Indian people here in the North, who made treaty with you many, many years ago, and these people today are in need of your help. They ask you to bring their medicines to them, as their people are all dying all over this country. They request you, as Prime Minister, to bring medicines as quickly as you can. They Indian people require you to do it under the treaty that was made and promised to them many, many years ago. I, the priest, write this letter on behalf of the Chiefs, the Northern Chiefs here, for their request to you'. And that was the letter that was sent to them. So, 1928 epidemic, 1927 took place. Ten years later, the medicine still never arrived here. So, the priest writes a letter in 1937. And the epidemic was still around by 1940, by mid to late 1940's it probably disappeared. By then it was too late for the medicines to arrive because the Yellowknife Dene, as my Grandfather said, when they came back there was only a handful... a few hundred people alive. I was born in 1957 in this Yellowknife Bay here, and I grew up in Dettah, and I always see all these Graveyards hunting with my parents on the land. I see crosses all the time. And I never asked a question, and to me, one day I asked my father 'why all those crosses and graveyards all across the land'. And he said, 'those are people that died in epidemic, the great, great disease that came here'. You were helpless and many, many people died'. So, by 1950, the Yellowknives, my own village people, was only less than 500 people probably.

When I was like 6 years old, I'm looking at Dettah and all the people, I thought we were the only people on this earth and there's no one else. Until my father went to the trading post and I saw a white man for the first time. I seen priests before, but I was afraid of them. But then, I went to

residential schools many years later, and then I found that we were not the only ones in this world, there's other people too. The residential school I find the colonial settlers to be very extreme, what you can say is that they were trying to be more superior than Indigenous people. That Indigenous people were gathered up and put on barges and shipped to Fort Resolution in the 1860's, 1870's, taken away from their families, and many of the parents were crying, as Judy Charlotte [?] was telling me. And that's how forceful Canada was, the colonial settlers, who took children. Imagine yourself, myself, going up to the city here. I'm gonna tell the non-Aboriginal children, I'm gonna take your children away from you, our Chief and Council are gonna do it. We're gonna take your children away, we're gonna take them to our culture camp, teach them our language, our way of life. And we're gonna take your children away. Wow. The RCMP will come. The Canadian government will come. Everyone will come to the rescue. That didn't happen for us. We were practically torn from our parents' hands and taken away forcefully with the help of priests, of all people, who are supposed to be loving and helping people, you know. But they were working for somebody else. They weren't working for us. So, today, there's no priests in our village in Dettah. There's no priests in [name]. We are going back to our drums. We are going back to our own spiritual beliefs. Because our own spiritual beliefs, as my grandfather says, when it's our time to go, our families are all waiting for us. They are all standing there waiting for us. To accept us into another world, into another journey. That journey never ends, my grandson, the journey always continues. When your time comes, I'm gonna be waiting for you, never be afraid. So, when my dad passed away in 1994, he told me the same thing, 'I'll be waiting, but go enjoy your life, live a long life, but enjoy it. Even though many bad things might have happened to our people, you know, the hurt is still there'. So, what they're trying to tell me is that, you know, the religion and other things that were taught to us by the colonial settlers, including the priests, was not all true. As my grandfather said, 'there's no hell... there is no place like hell, nothing like that. No one would do anything like that. Once you passed on, you live in a spiritual world, all your ancestors, all your families will all come to you. They will wait for you'. As a medicine man in my village here in the last five years ago, an elder was passing away, and the elder communicated with a spirit, the elder who was passing away... her best friend passed away ten years before her. She was an elder. And she communicated through this old man and said 'I'm waiting for my best friend to arrive, she is gonna go soon, and all our families and friends... we're all waiting for her. Why is it taking so long for her to come'? This elder was passing on her deathbed at the hospital and her friend communicated. So, the spiritual world is there, when the world goes, when your time goes, your families, all your families, everyone will be there too, to welcome you into your next journey. So, my grandfather, as I always said when I go hunting and trapping, and I do religious beliefs, you know a little prayer for my grandfather. And I always say, my grandfather would never lie to me. There

is a spiritual world, there is no fire, there is a happy place, and then you go on to your next journey. That's the book that's never been written. But the other book that's written was to bring fear to you and take control of you so that other followers could come and acquire your land illegally and take possession of all of your property, including ownership over you as a state government. And those things, I don't believe.

As Indigenous people we are free people, we are sovereign, and we have Aboriginal title to North America, all this land. And Canada knows it, but today we are trying to get reconciliation, working with them you know. When one party does something bad, and they don't want to go back into history to fix it, they would rather do reconciliation, 'I'm sorry, for all the wrongs pasts, I'm done, goodbye, let's get it over with'. That's reconciliation from Ottawa but that's not the real conciliation. Reconciliation is giving the property back to Indigenous people, giving back their Indigenous beliefs, all their cultural artifacts in 1946 that was taken from Ottawa illegally for practicing their own ceremony, should all be returned. Many things were done wrong, reconciliation is a very small word, but in the view of Indigenous people it's a big word, we want it all back. Everything that was taken from us. And that's what colonial settlers did to Indigenous people here, you know really effected their lives. From illness, to epidemic, to acquiring land, to colonial settlers, many bad things happened. But, you know, Indigenous people, in our heart we still cry, but when we talk about politics, we are very strong. Because when you feel the pain, you can fight harder, when the pain is there it can speak harder. When you feel the pain you can be a better person tomorrow, a strong Indigenous person, and that's what we're all about. Continue to be strong. Never let anyone control you or tell you what to do. You are free, free people as Indigenous people. Right now, we're going through this Covid-19, and Canada is doing the same thing, taking control. But, they are doing the right thing today, by advising, supporting, and helping. That was not there in 1928, it took fifteen years for Ottawa to bring the medicines here in 1928. Fifteen years. But now, you know, things are faster because... things are faster today because the world is watching now. The world is watching Canada. How they behave. They can never get away with it again. So, they're trying to do their best to do what they can to help. All Indigenous and non-Indigenous in this country, they're trying to do what they can. As Indigenous, you know, we still have that grief, we still have that hurt, we still have that loss of property. We still feel that this is our country and we want to continue to be free. We need to feel good about all things. We haven't felt good about all things in the past. We need to move forward on that. And that's my message, to you all. Mahsi.

(38:22) LS:

Mahsi Fred. So, you talked about that very, very traumatic experience, a huge loss from the Spanish flu epidemic, and how the government really used that against Dene people by not getting that medicine box there for almost twenty years. What should our communities be doing now in Covid-19 to make sure that we are safe and that we are well?

(39:00) FS: Well, we do have a treaty and agreements with Canada, called the medicine chest. Healthcare. In Canada, because we've gone through this Covid-19, we've learned that those kind of disease can still come today, even in modern times. And it could happen again, numerous times in the future. But I think that governments, because of the treaties and agreements, they should try and set up a healthcare centre in every Indigenous community. Because some communities don't have it and are crying out for help. What does a person do in a small community of 200 people, and no nurse, there's no emergency health centre, and Covid-19 comes in. There's nothing they can do. But now, Canada wants a good relationship with Indigenous people in this country, maybe healthcare is probably a big thing. I truly believe they should set up healthcare centres in every Indigenous community across North America, so if these things happen in the future, Indigenous people will be ready. We will never have to wait fifteen years to get our medicines. It should be right in our hands and ready to access it when we really need it. And I think that's what Canada should do.

(40:29) LS: One of things you said was that your grandfather took your dad, when they were the only survivors of the sickness, they took him to the barren lands. They went back on the land to get healthy. What do you think... why is the land important then, during Covid-19?

(40:48) FS: The land is important because the land is fresh. Everything is fresh. And if you stay in an infested mall, like any city where there is a mall, there's nothing good about it. There's no clean air. You go to the forest, it's all natural, clean, healthy. If there's Covid, or any other disease, you go to the forest...the medicines are there. Our traditional medicines are there. We can help ourselves. We can help ourselves by feeding ourselves, eating the right healthy food, getting the right medicines off the forest, drinking the healthy water. So, when one stays away from this area, they can be free from any sickness, and that's what my grandfather did. He knew what to do at that time. If he stayed here, it would have been loss for him and his son, the only two survivors of a family of thirteen people. They were the only two people and he knew what to do. He took us out to the barren land, where there was no one, no colonial settlers, no Aboriginal people, and it's a wild open country. Him and his friend [name], another Indigenous person, they went to the barren land and stayed there for many, many years. And I think that's how he survived. My father never caught the Spanish flu, they were living off the land, they were eating healthy food, they were drinking healthy water, medicine plants were great, and I think he survived all that. When he came back years later, many of his family members were gone, and there were few survivors. Him and his son were the only few survivors of his family, with a few other hundred Yellowknives from my village that survived too. So, right from the city of Yellowknife, right to Fort Ray, there's graveyards all along the shorelines. And from Yellowknife going East, which is 200

miles East into the Arctic Tundra, all along the shoreline there is graveyards, all the way to the East Arm. And you can see them visibly. So, what we do, from time-to-time, we take white paint and we paint all those [gravestones?] so that other people that come into our country can see it. These are the evidence of Spanish flu that our people caught, and we had no medicines to defend ourselves. And that's why our people died horribly, and here's one graveyard, here's another one, here's another one. These are the signs of the epidemic that came and took the lives of many, many people. And the ones that survived, like myself here, the only voices that we have to try to educate other people, the voices that talk about the stories of the past that was really, really horribly wrong. I hope that it won't happen again. The epidemic, Covid-19, it's all over the world now, and it hasn't reached our village or our communities yet. I think the Indigenous people did the right thing by closing their doors as soon as they can, because they learned from 1928, this could happen again. And with the help of our government and other health professionals, closed up the borders, the airlines, and we did the right thing. So, we are kind of Covid free here up in the North, we're trying to keep it that way, although we do see licence plates from Nova Scotia, licence plates from Alberta, B.C., and Yellowknife already, and I don't know how they got through. So, we're trying to be very careful, at shopping stores and different places. Myself and my family, we stay in my house and only one or two person shops, we don't all go the store, we try not to do that. We don't try to visit our family. Even though we miss our families and friends, it's really hard to visit people you know. So, we use the phone and computer and laptops and other things to try and communicate with our family members, see how they're doing, see if they got enough food, see if they're doing very well. So, we check on each other, and so far, everything's been good so far. And I'm happy that that's the way it is, I hope that it will continue.

(45:27) LS: Do you think that the land is trying to teach us something right now, with this big sickness, about the way that we've been living?

(45:38) FS: The old people a long time ago, before the colonial settlers come to this country, the Indigenous people had no known sickness, disease, nothing. They were disease free. And they used the wilderness, the plants and the medicines to look after and heal themselves. It worked well for them. So, they had no disease. There was no such thing as cold. The old people, many of them have told me that nobody ever got sick before in the past, hundreds of years ago, before the colonial settlers came here there was no such thing as sickness. There was healthy, people were eating well, they had medicines, they had healers, they had doctors, all those people that took care of them, people that knew plants well, people that knew how to take care of other people. They had midwives, children were born on the land with the natural plants and medicines, so right from birth, you know, they were very healthy. The thing that went wrong was when the colonial settlers start to

come out in the open with the priest and start to explore the land, mostly for minerals and gold, and that really devastated people. And that's how the Spanish people went around really fast because there was people all over, they knew they had Spanish flu but they still came into the country and affected the Indigenous people here. And that was not a good thing. When one person is sick, they should've went back, but they continued to go North. You know, gold is a fool's gold, gold is attractive, gold drives people crazy. And I always tell my children, there is two things that makes a colonial settlers' eyes open wide. One, you tell them a joke, they'll open their eyes wide and laugh. The other one is when they see gold, their eyes open really wide. Those are the two things. And that's what really devastated us, is gold, minerals.

(47:50) LS: Alright. Well, thank you so much for sharing all your wisdom and your knowledge with us.

(47:58) FS: Yeah. I'm hoping that they will probably find the right medicines.

(48:00) LS: Yeah.

(48:02) FS: You know, they're searching. I can tell you that as Indigenous people in the North here, we're also looking at our own medicines too as well. We're trying to go back to discover our own medicines that we haven't used in the past and try to work with it today. You know, something has to happen. What worked for us in the past, you know, worked for us. It may not be the real medicines but at least we can find something that will hold us off and heal us a bit.

(48:34) LS: Yeah, that's... our Nishnaabeg elders are saying that too, that our healers, that our medicine people, are working really hard right now to try to find medicines that work for Covid.

(51:00-52:00): [Closing comments and next steps]