

Marjorie's Story

Kwe'. N'in teluisi, Marjorie Muise. Hello everyone, my name is Marjorie Muise and my spirit name is Running Deer. I'm a Mi'kmaq Elder from Bay St. George on the western portion of Newfoundland & Labrador. I come from a small community of St. George's.

I am happy to participate in the Solstice Project, which invites me to engage in the reflection and connect with voices that hold meaning leading up to the Solstice. Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this.

What wisdom has been passed down to me through Elders and Knowledge Keepers? That's a very important question and one that I'd like to reflect on.

First, I'd like to say that I come from a long line of Mi'kmaq Elders and Knowledge Keepers. I have 18 siblings. Because winter solstice has less hours of sunlight, people start experiencing sadness. Some people, not all people. You can start feeling really exhausted, but I think it's just our bodies telling us we need to slow down. Because of the lack of energy from the sun, maybe a lot of us get our sleep patterns disrupted.

We lived surrounded by a lot of cousins and a lot of families. Our cousins who lived on the land next to us, in that parcel of land, they kept sheep and horses. So, my dad always got firewood in the winter because it was easier to travel by horse and sled through the marshes in the winter. We lived right smack on to a beautiful marsh up Steel Mountain Road on Muisen Lane. The marshes would be easier to navigate, especially if the snow was packed down nicely. We had a lot of snow when I was a young girl. So, we had beautiful winter solstices. We would travel with dad and he would take long lengths of the pulp and attach it to a sled. We had no car. So, basically, that was our means of transportation, was the horse and the sled that the horse would carry and we would transport our wood that way.

And even in the late of the fall leading into the winter solstice, there were many chores for us to do as children of, you know, 18 siblings. We would gather our food from the fall harvest and we had plenty of supplies like pickled salmon, root vegetables, lots of jams and jellies prepared in the fall from the berries that we would have picked in the summer. And mom would put these in cold storages to last through the winter because winters were very long. They would start like in October and right into like March or April, even sometimes into May and June.

So, a lot of the times we stayed indoors while, you know, sharing small spaces. It was a time to share our stories and reflect on the years, goods and the bads. I guess you can call it reflection. We may have lost a loved one or, you know, joined that period of that year or somebody in the field might have gotten sick or sometimes it was a good celebration, you know, celebrating life.

We might have had an auntie or a cousin may have given birth to a newborn baby. So, we would, you know, be all happy over that and we would have to go visit the aunties and help

them with the new baby. Even though the fire in our house was always lit because we only had a wood stove, we never had no means of any other heating source. And the smell of mom's cooking, which sent beautiful aromas, you know, right through the house. We always had to step outside to bring in wood though. And we had to carry water for mom's cooking because we didn't have running water. So, we have to go down to my aunt Sarah's and uncle's, to Richard Swyers', to their house. They were the only one in the neighborhood who had a pump. So, we would have to go get water for mom continuously because she needed water, you know, for cooking, for bathing, for washing clothes and drinking. Always clothes to be hung on the line. I guess in a sense of survival, we were tested for our endurance during the winter solstice.

Mom and dad would expect us to carry out, you know, the chores that they wanted us to do. She would, you know, not have a list but just let us know like what she wanted us to do on any given day. And we helped because she had a lot of children to take care of. I thank them today though for that because it helped me become the strong Mi'kmaw woman I am today.

We lived in a field with family in every square foot. So, family visited more in the winter solstice because they had less to do if they prepared in the right way in the harvest. Well, they wouldn't have that many things to do. I remember like people would come over to our houses and we had, you know, go in another place where they were to the adults. And I can remember us playing games and while the adults played cards on tables, my dad always made whistles and carved in the winter, in the winter solstice. And he did a lot. He did that a lot in the winter. And my mom seemed to journal more in the winter. She seemed to be reading a lot too in the winter, more so like in the summer. She would get us books delivered to us. I don't know - I can't remember offhand from where, but yeah, they would come to our door, like used books. So, the siblings always found something to entertain themselves with, you know. And she always made sure that we learned through these books that we read.

And a lot of folks be out ice fishing. They did that a lot, like the men and women as well. And the young boys that would go like ice fishing, catching, you know, the different fish you could catch in the winter on the ice. It was always something to do, it seemed like, you know. We were like always busy. The nights would be so pretty. That's what was my favorite. They would, the new fallen snow, like I would fall in love with that right away. And the light of the moon would always, you know, remain embedded in my memories. And I still love that. Yet today, I'll look for that first fallen snow and just, you know, reminisce about the sky, how pretty and the stars and just the feeling of the, you know, a new beginning and new fallen snow.

Now I'm older, you know, I'm called on as an Elder in community. And I still think about the winter solstice in terms, now, in terms for me now, it's more like a reflection and a bit sad. But it's also magical. You know, sometimes continuous. It's always continuous. That's what I love about it. And that's what I look for each year, the continuity of it. Just waiting for the energy from the sun to peep through again.

Wela'liq (thank you all)!