

Transcript of Interview with Albert Dumont

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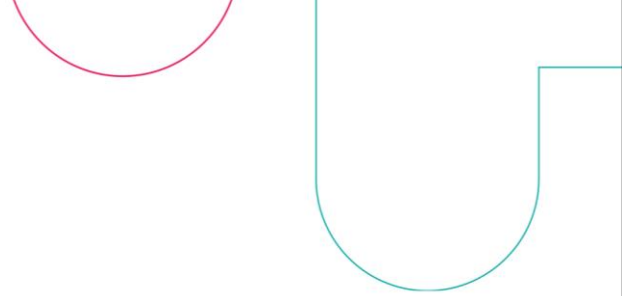
[Albert Dumont]: My name is Albert Dumont. I'm an Algonquin, and right now I'm living in the Algonquin community of Kitigan Zibi, that's near Maniwaki, Quebec, about 100 miles or 135 kilometres from Ottawa, north of Ottawa. I am recognized as a spiritual advisor, and I have grandchildren and I'm the father of daughters, and I don't have sons, but I love my daughters. You know, it's, I guess I could say that when it comes to purpose of life, they're in there, you know, they give my life purpose. And I dedicate a lot of things that I do to the wellness of my family members. And it's good to be with you today and to help out however I can. And hopefully it's going to go well. As far as the ceremonies go, and the members of the collaborative and why we get together for a day and maybe do circle teachings or to feast and to communicate things of health for the purpose of why we, why the collaborative was created in the first place.

[01:52]

I definitely, I think a good way to put it actually is for people to know that I worked as a bricklayer and stonemason, that was my trade for many years in Ottawa. And whenever I think about that trade and I think about mortar, you know, you mix mortar a certain way for bricks. You mix mortar a certain way for cement blocks. You mix mortar a certain way for stone, and you mix mortar a certain way for [unclear]. But the thing about mortar, though, it's something [unclear], and then you lay a brick on it or a cement block or a stone, and it's how you mix that mortar that's going to support that brick or the cement block or the stone properly. So whenever I think about my purpose as a spiritual advisor and I'm involved with a group or committee such as yourselves, I try to be that person who's going to mix the, who's going to know what to do when it comes to a proper mix to support that committee in particular. And I think, instead of using sand or gravel and cement and lime and things like that, you do it through storytelling. The mix includes storytelling, spiritual beliefs, Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous ways of knowing, that's what makes the mix. And I think, I like to think that I'm a good mixer to help things out. And I definitely feel that people are recognizing that, I think. And when we're together, and especially if we gather in Kitigan Zibi or somewhere in Algonquin territory, that's even more meaningful to me.

[04:24]

You know, the circles that I've stood in, the circles that I've marked out with tobacco and sat in the centre of and went without food and water for as long as four days and four nights are in my territory. So for visitors or for people to come into my territory, I've got a lot to share. You know, just to give you an example, I like to tell people on occasion that in Algonquin territory, we have the greatest pine trees of this planet, like anybody who knows trees, you know, experts,



specialists or whatever, who know pine trees. Well, you know, there's pine trees in other parts of this planet, you know, not just on Turtle Island, there's pine trees in Russia I guess, and pine trees in Europe. But nobody has greater pine trees than in Algonquin territory, even the great pine trees in the west here in Canada, the wood, it's the wood, eh? And it's the pine in Pontiac County, and Pontiac County is in Algonquin territory. Maybe it's the soil or the clay or, whatever it is, it's the best wood in the world. So that kind of thing, you know, as a spiritual advisor from Algonquin territory and visitors come here, I definitely, I'm carrying that, you know. The pine, zhingwaak, that's what we call the pine tree is zhingwaak. So, zhingwaak, spirit of zhingwaak is there with me in my territory. And whenever we, if we do ceremonies and the visitors are here, we, that energy and that spirit of zhingwaak, it touches them, too, you know. It's not like they say, oh, I just think I just caught the energy of a pine tree, but it's there. They just feel good, you know, they feel at peace. And it's the pines of our territory, or the rivers and the lakes.

[06:50]

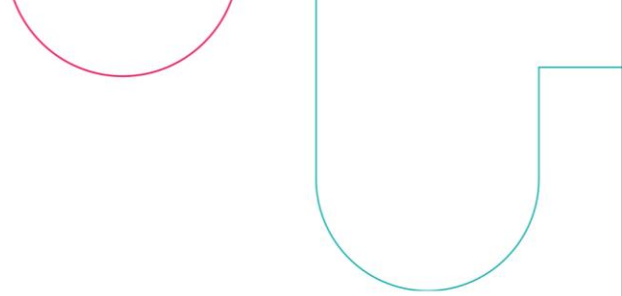
You know, in Algonquin territory, we have what is known today as the Chaudière Falls. But there, so there's an energy and a spirit that's radiating from that place. And as an Algonquin, I bring that with me to my circles as well. As a matter of fact, every morning I acknowledge Akikodjiwan, we don't call it Chaudière Falls, we call it Akikodjiwan, and so that spirit and energy of Akikodjiwan is with me when I conduct a ceremony on behalf of the collaborative or whenever we're in a circle and we talk about wellness and our purpose, you know, to bring success to what we do as a team. It's good to understand that fully.

[07:49]

I love it that when people do come, like we did have a conference or meeting right in Maniwaki. And it was, it was just a stunning success, I think. And I felt so good, you know, to have these people that I respect so much near my reserve, near Kitigan Zibi. And as a matter of fact, I'm extending an invitation, everybody, to come back some time. I know some of the leadership have been up to visit me, and that was good, too.

[08:42]

To be recognized as a spiritual advisor by such a collaborative is, to me it's a great honour because we, that's, what it's all about is health and the wellness of Indigenous peoples and communities. So for me, anyways, as an Algonquin and as somebody who has had a pretty rugged past, and then 33 years ago, my life changed, and I, you know, I totally one hundred percent embraced the Indigenous spiritual beliefs of my ancestors. So I bring that into my daily life. Like I commit, I start my day with a prayer. And so it means a lot to me, spirituality means a lot to me, because whenever we think about the spirit and we think about the physical and about how a human being, no matter how long they live, you know, it's going to be, it's not a long time, but the spirit, though, lives a long time. So as a spiritual advisor, that's what I like to focus on, or



it's central to my advice or my counsels with a collaborative, like the ones that help me out, or that I try to help out.

[10:43]

We definitely have to have respect, and there has to be a trust between us. And we've established that. And I was, that brought me to a point where I could say I want to do all I can for this collaborative. And that means a lot to me, to be able to see these people that I work with as friends and as allies. Whenever I say, about describing the work that I do, I'm also well known in the community as a storyteller. And so I often will refer to a legend or traditional teaching story, sometimes a life memory. And I bring that forward to make a point, you know, when we're together. I like the idea of people listening with both ears, if I could put it that way, and whenever we're together. And I think I see it, you know, whenever I'm doing a talk and I look around the room and I always feel that everybody is respecting the way that I present, and so it means a lot to me.

[12:26]

Also, the fact that people respect Indigenous spiritual beliefs, you know, everybody, not everybody is Indigenous in the collaborative, but from my view, and the way that I see it, everybody respects the spirituality, so, I don't know, sometimes it seems to me to the equal degree that I do, and that's pretty amazing. And I like that. You know, like right now, I'm holding this eagle feather and I'm holding the tobacco because I trust in these things, they mean everything to me spiritually. And if we think about it, you know, spirituality, if somebody embraces spiritual beliefs, and they make them, like, put a spiritual base to their Earth walk, then they're going to be well emotionally too, and it's very important to be emotionally good to go. And I think spiritual beliefs that make sense should be adhered to and respected. I think Indigenous spiritual beliefs are simple. I know for me, I don't go to any ceremonies or circles where they're complicated, you know. If anything should be simple, it's a person's spiritual beliefs, because whenever it gets complicated with all kinds of rules or things like that, I don't know, I just don't connect with that.

[14:43]

So spirituality is definitely important, and it's good to be respected like that. I like to give advice about circles and ceremonies that I'm familiar with. It's not like I know all the ceremonies, but the ones that I am familiar with and that I've conducted many times, I like sharing them with the collaborative. I like to remind people about water. And then the thing about water is, for me, water is medicine. You know, if a person began their day and their first contact with water, whether it was to take a drink of water or to turn the shower on or whatever. And if they said water is medicine, you know, if they said even that, it would be, after a period of time, they would believe it, you know, that water is medicine and all the, like, without oxygen and the wind, without the land and without the sun, you know, human beings are, nothing would live.

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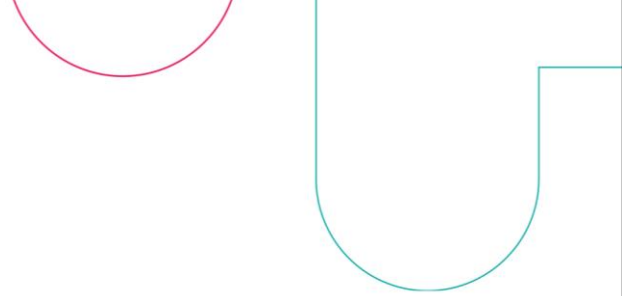
To me, it only makes sense. It's just common sense to respect those things and to bring them in to our prayers and to, whenever the physical communicates to the spiritual, because we need to, maybe we need to remind ourselves occasionally that it's important to understand fully that the spiritual communicates also to the physical, because a lot of people forget about that. And I think somebody like me, a spiritual advisor, and what I believe in, I remind people of that. Not to forget that your grandmother, who passed away 40 years ago, her love, her support is still right there beside you when you bring it in, but you need to bring it in though, you know, you need to make that call. And maybe to do that with a medicine such as sweetgrass or sage or cedar, there's our first medicine, tobacco, of course, is our most important medicine, or to stand in a circle and put your bundle, that's, I'd like to say that, too, about giving advice to the collaborative about what is a sacred bundle. And it's good to get these artifacts or sacred things from all across Canada and to be respectful of them and put them in the centre of our circle and take something from that bundle. You know, somebody might want to hold a rattle from it or a feather or whatever item that somebody has contributed, let's say, from the North, and they're respected equally, all those sacred things. And there's not one that's more powerful or more meaningful than the artifact beside it.

[18:36]

So that's the kind of advice I think I give as a spiritual advisor. And just to remind people, too, that nobody is perfect. You know, human beings are creatures of many faults and shortcomings, and there is no superiority in the circle. Everybody is respected equally. That's what we need to keep telling ourselves over and over again cause it's that important to never forget, you know, that somebody could be a hurting unit, as my kid brother used to say, inside. But I know if somebody is a hurting unit, I'd like to think they'd reach out to me to talk about anything that they want to. As a spiritual advisor for the collaborative, I'd like to come across as somebody who truly cares, because I do. You know, I guess I need to say that if I didn't care, I'm not a person with a false face, you know, I think people in the collaborative understand that about me, that I'm approachable and that I do care. And that there's a trust between us, a respect. I respect the leadership, you know. And I think that I know they respect me too, because we've had so many conversations, and it means a lot to me to laugh and to feast and to just have a good time with members of the collaborative, it means a lot to me.

[20:37]

Because of the simple fact that it's been said long in the past that our spiritual beliefs was our way of life. So if you just think about that, you know, that our spiritual beliefs was our way of life. So just to give you an example, I was told that in the past, before organized religion arrived here, that there was, the community had several drums, like there was somebody who was keeper of the hunters' drum. There was somebody who was the keeper of the fishers' drum. There was



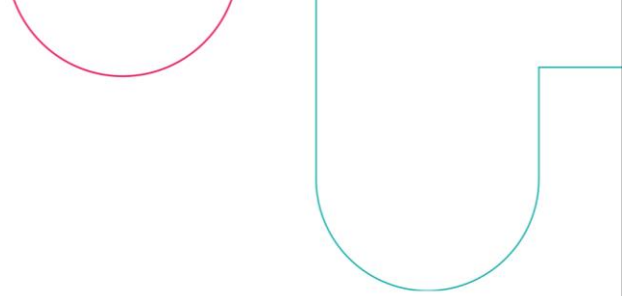
somebody who was the keeper of the drum for medicines and so on. And the, and so the drums and the rattles and the songs and the dancing, the circles, the stories. So all of those things together are what, are all connected to spirituality. And it's all so simple. It's like understanding that if you're, if you have, if you're kindling a sacred fire and you've offered tobacco, and at night it's going to throw circle light, the light it's, you're going to be in a circle of light in that, around that fire. And that circle of light will be as big or as small as the amount of wood that you're burning. And you're covered, and you feel secure because it's nighttime. And beyond that light is total blackness. And you don't know what's in that blackness, that darkness.

[22:39]

You, I know I've passed it many times, and I've been around the fire in strange territory. And I'd hear the leaves rustling, and I'd hear twigs cracking, and it didn't make my heart pound in fear. I was calm. Whatever was in the darkness, I knew it wasn't anything harmful to me. I was in ceremony. And even if it would have been a gigantic bear or a dozen wolves or whatever, it's not like there's, that these animals would be thinking, oh, there's a human being doing ceremony, let us eat him. You know what I mean? If they're there, they're there to honour you. To see a human being is humbling himself in that circle. And also, whenever we think about that circle, I know one day it dawned on me that in the daytime when I was kindling, still kindling, that same fire, and I said to myself, that energy, that light is still present, and it's still as small or as big as the wood I'm feeding the fire. But in the daytime you cannot see it. At night, you see it because it's lighting up the darkness. But in daytime, it's still there, but it's invisible. And I remember, I think it brought tears to my eyes because it was like, to me it was like people who say, well I don't believe in Creator because I've never seen Creator. Well, at night they will believe in that light because it's there. They're comforted by it. And in the daytime, it's still there. But they don't see it. They need to believe that it's there, that energy, right? It's there equally as it is at night. The difference is, though, at night it's bright, and in the daytime it's not because it's the daytime.

[25:03]

That was, stuff like that is the kind of things that I like to impress on audiences and to people that I'm supporting, people that I'm working with, so that they understand how serious life is, because we're only here for a short time. But there'll come a day where we will be old and frail and on your deathbed, you know, if you have that chance, you know, if you don't die suddenly, and you might have an opportunity to reflect on your life and to be able to review your life and to think about what you were part of. You know, what did you do to make the world better, you know, to make the worksite better, you know, as an employee somewhere? Or what did you do to contribute to the wellness of your colleagues or whoever it was that you're serving? And if you worked as somebody who was trying to remedy the negative things that happen because of the Indian Act, well, then you could say, well, you know, we did this and we did that, and I'm at



peace now. You know, I brought health and wellness to somebody, and I'm very proud of that time.

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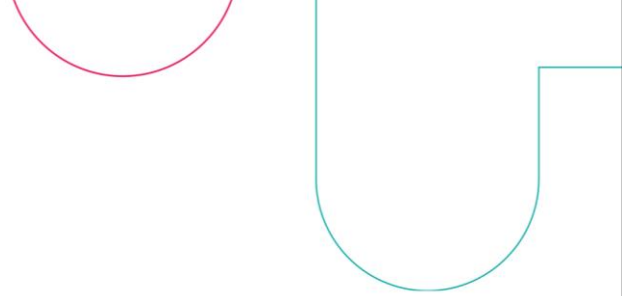
Anyways, for me, it's important. And it's... the other day I was with a group and it had to do with children and the wellness of children. And I asked the group to imagine that they owned a house. And I said, imagine that in, the house has two rooms. And in one room, let's say you stowed away for a rainy day, let's say \$10,000 in cash money. And in the other room, you've, that's where you store your commitment to the health and well-being of Indigenous children. And one night the house catches on fire, and you've only got time to retrieve one or the other of those two things. Are you going to run in to save your \$10,000 in cash, or are you going to go in to save your commitment to the wellness of Indigenous children? And people shouldn't have to think about it. You know, if somebody sits there and they scratch their head saying "Hmm, hmm, uhh, I think I don't save my commitment." Well, if you have to think about it, then you need to go to a fasting site and, you know, get a little bit humble again, because you don't have, you shouldn't have to think about it at all.

[28:38]

I want to say this. I worked at the prison, a maximum security prison, which is very violent, Millhaven with J unit. It doesn't even exist anymore. They transferred those, Millhaven, to Collins Bay Maximum now. But at that time, I met a 22-year-old Ojibwe boy, and he said that he killed himself emotionally when he was 17. He said, I'm 22 years old now, but for me to physically live, I had to emotionally die. And it was just, we were just having a conversation, and that's what he said. I never forgot that. And nobody should forget that, you know, that some people, there's more than him. I don't know how many thousands of people are in this world in Canada that really are emotionally dead so that they could physically live.

[29:56]

And we need to understand how important it is to keep ourselves healthy emotionally, because whenever somebody is emotionally dead, you've got to wonder, is that person really a human being, because a human being is supposed to have emotions. And the collaborative is working, I think, to make that happen sooner than later and contribute something to the emotional wellness of Indigenous peoples. Everybody needs to be well, emotionally. So I'd just like to add that because I think we often forget how severe it is to be in emotional pain. It's greater than physical pain, you know, far, far, far greater, because somebody who's in emotional pain, that's when they start getting those crazy thoughts of ending their life. And like that kid said, he killed himself emotionally so that he could live. He said that whenever he was finished his jail time, then he was going to do something about being emotionally well again. But he said in this place, I can't have any feelings because I want to survive here. And if I start having emotional feelings



here, I'm not going to be able to do it. He was only 22 years old, but he had some things figured out. I just wanted to say that.

[31:38]

Yes. Well, when I was a young lad, and I met a teacher in school when I was 10 years old, and whenever I think back in my life, and I know that what, the relationship I had with that teacher, what were the seeds that created rage in my heart. Because that teacher, all the actions that she did, everything that she did to me, it was like it was, in her mind, it was her mission, her purpose of life was to destroy this kid Albert Dumont emotionally and spiritually. And it wasn't a fair fight because I was 10 years old and she was probably about 35 or 40 years old, and she would do the nastiest things to make me feel worthless. You know, she would, I could sit here for hours and share memories of the things she did to make the other kids laugh at me, to make me, try to make me ashamed of myself for my Indigenous bloodline, or to make me ashamed of my ancestors.

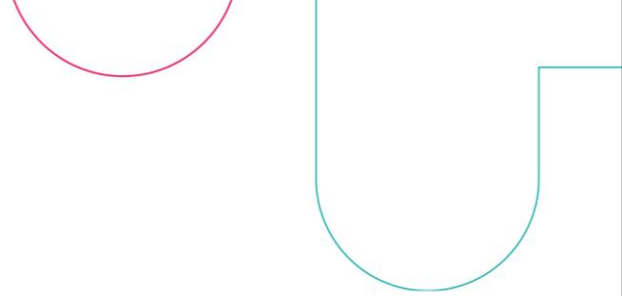
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And she never succeeded because I've never been ashamed. As a matter of fact, I cringe when I hear other Indigenous people say that there was a time in their past where they were ashamed. Because I don't get that, because I don't think they went through what I did, because we were the only Indigenous family living in a town of white people, a mining town. And if you know anything about mining towns, they're pretty rough places. So we had to learn how to fight and to, and I guess, to survive as Algonquins living in a town of white people. And that's going back into the 1950s. So those memories that I have, I don't want them for anybody that I love. I don't want them for anybody. I don't want anybody to have memories like that. But especially my grandchildren. And I didn't want that, memories like that, for my daughters either.

[34:29]

Hatred is something I don't understand. I totally reject hatred. I've never hated anybody in my life. I cannot bring myself to hate anyone, because hate does not make any sense. There's no payoff to hate. But yet, you know, when my family went to live in that town, some people told us to go back where we came from. We were right in the heart of Algonquin territory. I don't know where they wanted us to go. They said, "Go back where you came from, you damn Indians." And they'd throw stuff at our house at night. We all have to look at, try to imagine a world, we're never going to create a perfect world. There's always going to be dysfunction. And the reason why we're going to be dysfunctional is because human beings are not perfect. We're never going to create anything that is perfect.

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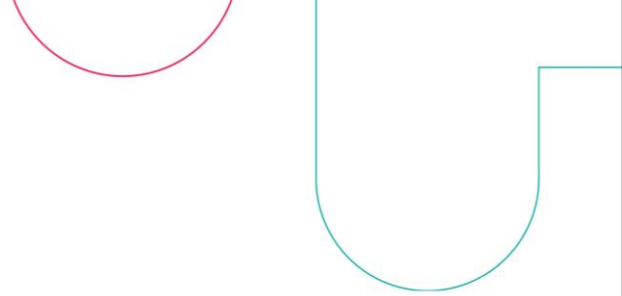
But if we try a little harder, we will definitely be able to make a world that's more at peace with itself, a world that's less dangerous, a world where rehabilitation means something in the prisons. It's not like, like I worked in a prison for three years. And after I was working there for six months, I said one day to some staff people there, I said, "You know what? I've been working here for six years, six months now, and I've never heard, here's one word I've never heard mentioned yet. And that's rehabilitation." And it's a prison, you know. What's wrong with that word, you know? I don't understand that kind of stuff. We need to be dedicated and, for the sake of the next generations, because I've said it before, where, some world leaders are exploring the universe to try to find another planet for us to go live on. But I'm never going to go. I'm connected to this place. And if this planet is going to die, I would die with her. It's like my mother, you know. You don't leave your mother's sick bed. I won't do it anyway. And I think that if ever another planet was discovered and they said, well, this planet's going to die in five years, so let's get out of here now. And if they all went, I think, I know this planet would recover, because the people that would go would be people who don't love this planet. They'd be gone. And the planet would heal, and we'd be happy. All the polluters would be gone.

[37:38]

That's what I think. But we need to understand about what it is just to hold your grandchild, hold them in your arms, and imagine that you're holding that grandchild's grandchild, or your grandchild's grandchild's grandchild. Because it's the same thing, it's your relative, it's your blood relative. But you're able to hold this grandchild physically, the next one, you're going to be holding them spiritually. And after I've been dead for two or three hundred years, I don't want my grandchildren to forget about me, my grandchildren's grandchildren's grandchildren. And therefore, I conduct myself in a certain way today. And I do things, actions, today that I believe will confirm or assure that my grandchildren, nobody, they won't forget me. Even 300 years from now, they'll still think grand mishoomis who lived this time here. It means everything to me. And I hope that the water they're drinking is still drinkable. And that the wind that they're taking in their lungs is not poisonous. If I have my way there's going to be help for them too, yeah.

[39:29]

So it's good to talk about it and have the opportunity to talk about it, because that's what the collaborative is supposed to be all about. And I believe it is. That they're trying, we're all trying our hardest to do some good work together as one, as a unit, you know, as a team. And that's, never, let's find the strength to keep pushing forward. You know, like that little bird that's flying against the wind, you know. It doesn't turn around and go the other way. It keeps going. I don't know if you ever saw that before, but I did one day. This little small bird was flying against the ferocious wind. And there was a man there that hated everybody. And he pointed to that. And he says, "I've been watching that little bird now for ten minutes, and he hasn't moved an inch." You know, he said, "If I was that bird, I'd turn around and go the other way." But people who hate, that's what they do. When they're confronted with some turbulence, whenever they're



confronted with an opposing wind, they turn around and go the other way. Don't hide somewhere, don't crawl under a rock and hate people. You know, it's, be like the little bird. Don't give up.