

Exploring the Concept of Mitho Pimachesowin

## Northwest Saskatchewan Métis Perspectives of Miyo-Pimatisiwin

### Kiwetinohk Saskatchewan Otipemisiwak Kayisi Wapahtakwaw Miyo Pimatisiwin

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**Abstract:** This article looks at the concept of *miyo-pimatiswin* (a good life) as it relates to the Northwest Métis culture's views, values, and way of life. The concept shows that *miyo-pimatisiwin* (in Plains "y" dialect, *miyo* is "good") encompasses the four elements of the emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical ways of living one's life on the land and in community. These four elements are nurtured through prayer and a shared community contribution of wealth that fosters the spiritual aspect, which, in turn, contributes to good emotional and mental health. This has often happened through the use of oral storytelling and oral history, which reveal important life lessons such as empathy and compassion, as well as humour. These conveyed lessons contribute to the physical aspects of self, and encourage a strong work ethic. Oral stories have been an important tradition, including teaching, listening, and striving towards keeping the elements in balance. The research for this article is based on the literature, my own background, and stories or lessons passed on by my own father, Dan Ross, and how he lived the concept of *miyo-pimatisiwin*. I conclude by arguing that the traditional concept of *miyo-pimatisiwin* (a good life) is essential for Métis people in present day, as it was throughout Métis history. Working as a community in modern-day life, we can collectively and collaboratively continue to work towards self-determination and a healthy self-governance system, as well as a Métis Nation Constitution that promotes *miyo-pimatiswin*. This article is a chapter in the open textbook *Indigenous Self-Determination through Mitho Pimachesowin (Ability to Make a Good Living)* developed for the University of Saskatchewan course Indigenous Studies 410/810, and hosted by the *Northern Review*.

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This article explores the meaning of the concept of *miyo-pimatisiwin* (a good life) as it relates to Métis culture, views, and values in northwestern Saskatchewan.<sup>1</sup> My parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents lived and modelled *miyo-pimatisiwin*. This way of life was shown by example; it is lived experience, which gave me my understanding. My interpretation is that *miyo-pimatisiwin* requires me to have the knowledge and understanding to live and model the concept.

The concept of *miyo-pimatisiwin* encompasses the four elements of the emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical ways of living one's life on the land, and in community. According to Cardinal and Hildebrandt (2000), "when treaty Elders use the word 'Pimacihowin' they are describing a holistic concept that includes a spiritual as well as a physical dimension" (p. 43). The concept of *miyo-pimatisiwin* is a cultural value that incorporates all aspects of a way of life—it contributes to self-determination and is an important concept for many Métis, Cree, and other people who share this common language, to understand and embrace as a way of life and being. And, despite living in the modern landscape, whether rural or urban, this concept can be significant for the retention of cultural values and living a good life today. *Miyo-pimatisiwin* is a world view that is important for understanding a way of life—living a good life. It also encompasses the concept of *wakohtohwin* (all my relations). These Métis concepts were lived by my Elders and have contributed to my identity and way of being.

The research for this article is based on the literature, my own background, and the stories and lessons passed on by my father, Dan Ross, and how he lived the concept of *miyo-pimatisiwin*. I begin by providing a short historical background of Green Lake and the Métis of the area. Second, I discuss the literature context of *miyo-pimatisiwin* and some of its key elements. Third, I discuss and share some of the oral stories from my own background and their influence in my life, and their continuing significance today. I conclude by arguing that the traditional concept of *miyo-pimatisiwin* (a good life) is essential for Métis people in the present day, as it has been throughout Métis history.

## Background

Green Lake, Saskatchewan, is a small Métis community situated in northwest Saskatchewan about three hours north of Saskatoon. The Green Lake Métis settlement has a long history with the fur trade with both the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company. Green Lake is "one of the oldest communities in Saskatchewan with the North West Company first establishing a post in 1782, and the Hudson's Bay Company opening a competing post in 1799. The fur trade

industry has had a prominent history in this area continuing up to the 1970's when the Hudson's Bay Company post closed" (Northern Municipal Services, n.d.).

The fur trade in Green Lake was significant to the Métis community for their livelihood and the ability to build capacity and progress for *miyo-pimatisiwin*. Thornton (1997) writes that the "Métis people originally settled in Green Lake because of the pattern of development of the fur trade. Green Lake was a major nexus on the fur trade transportation system, which encouraged Métis settlement and community development" (p. 1). The people in Green Lake are predominately Métis who endeavour to remain community minded people: "Métis history is steeped in values—like giving back to the community, helping each other, and advocating for Métis culture" (Sciarpelletti, 2021).

I grew up in Green Lake. My parents had nine children of which I am the eldest. Along with the role of being the oldest came added responsibility. For example, it was expected that I help my mother take care of my younger siblings and do chores such as housework, laundry, gardening, and so forth. This work ethic was inherently acknowledged; it was a way of life. Therefore, everyone pitched in and pulled their weight, which helped us all live *miyo-pimatisiwin* (a good life). In addition, we were taught to respect our Old People/Elders, the land, and animals, and to be kind to people, to share, and have faith. In her work, Settee notes that, "for Indigenous peoples, land, food, and health are key components of *Pimatisiwin*" (Settee, 2007, p. 5). We were also guided to attend to our spirituality; I recall we went to church every Sunday with our parents.

## Elements of *Miyo-Pimatisiwin* (A Good Life)

There are four elements of *miyo-pimatisiwin*, which have been practised in order to live a good life—it is important to balance the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical components of being a well-adjusted human being. Lavallée (2007) writes that "an individual's health and wellness is based on maintaining balance between the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual realms" (p. 128). These four elements are nurtured through prayer and a shared community contribution of wealth that fosters the spiritual aspect, which in turn contributes to good emotional and mental health. This has often happened through the use of storytelling and oral history, which reveal important life lessons such as empathy and compassion, as well as humour. These lessons contribute to the physical aspects of self and encourage a strong work ethic. Oral stories are an important tradition, including teaching, listening, and striving towards keeping these elements in balance.

Moreover, I remember this was expected of all of us—to sustain a good life. Also, the importance of humour, laughter, sharing/connection, and spiritual lessons were encouraged and practised. Accordingly, this was viewed as a significant

aspect of maintaining good physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and an essential part of living miyo-pimatisiwin.

### *Humour and Laughter*

One of the aspects of miyo-pimatisiwin is humour. Peat emphasizes that “humour has been, and is such a significant aspect of Aboriginal cultures that there are numerous stories based upon the antics of various clowns and tricksters” (as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 57). I grew up hearing many stories of Wisakejak. There was humour and laughter integrated in the stories, but there were also lessons revealed in the oral stories about the heroes/tricksters. For example, Macdougall (2010) states “... the cultural belief was Wisakejak [is] an important spirit being and cultural figure” (p. 35).

These memories and lessons learned while growing up in my Métis community and living miyo-pimatisiwin contributes to who I am today. The stories, connection, humour, and laughter made life happier and much more pleasant.

The laughter of my parents, relatives, and extended family as they visited with each other was a source of comfort, and presented a safe feeling and a sense of belonging. They were always so full of life, even though they faced many hardships raising their families. For many people the ability to make a good living in the northern environment could prove to be harsh at times, as Macdougall (2010) comments, “it was a region where food shortages, harsh climatic conditions ... tested the resolve of the population to build their lives” (p. 25).

However, these adversities did not interfere with their humorous ways of being and living miyo-pimatisiwin; they were happy. Furthermore, they were supportive of each other and always willing to help others in any way they could. There was always a sharing of food, stories, and laughter. And, because most everyone had large families, there was a sense of relatedness and belonging.

### *Spirituality and Community*

The spiritual faith I witnessed and experienced with the community of people who went to church every Sunday was an essential part of life; it seemed the whole community would be there. The faith, values, beliefs, and prayers were a fundamental part of the community. For example, there were always activities going on in church, including bake sales, bingos, and goods such as handmade moccasins and mittens. People would volunteer and contribute their time, visit with each other, and share their stories. Settee states the “one value that is common to all Indigenous Peoples is the value of working for the betterment of the community” (p. 13). The sense of a strong spiritual, faithful, and shared community contributed to living miyo-pimatisiwin; “the Metis of the northwest

internalized and adapted their Christian ideas to an existing spiritual worldview centred on familial relationships” (Macdougall, 2010, p.131).

### **Oral Teachings and Lessons**

A more enriched understanding of miyo-pimatisiwin in practice is further illustrated by a personal interview with my father, Dan Ross. I questioned him about the Métis way of life in his day, and in my Mushum’s and Kookum’s time. What was it like? How did they survive off the land? What was the importance of miyo-pimatisiwin in their lives? Did it contribute to enhanced self-determination?

Dan Ross, my father, requested that I take him to see his sister, who was not in good health, on September 21, 2012 (Ross, 2012). She had moved into a nursing home in Spiritwood, Saskatchewan, in the north-central parkland, about two hours from Green Lake (Tourism Saskatchewan, n.d.). I was busy and considered not going at this time, but I realized it was my responsibility and the respectful thing to do for both my Old People/Elders. I made the decision to respect his request.

On the drive to Spiritwood, my dad shared his view of miyo-pimatisiwin through oral storytelling. He told me how it was in the time of his grandfather—my Great-Grandfather Placid Morin. He recalled his time spent with his grandfather as a child, and later as a young man and adult living his life—the good life, the life they called miyo-pimatisiwin. Ross stated, “It was a good life where respect for all things was done ... land, animals ... and sharing, and helping others was important ... it was a way of life that was practised, that’s the way it was” (Ross, 2012). He continued, “nothing was ever wasted and nobody took more than what was needed” (Ross, 2012). Similarly, Vizina (2010) states that “Métis perspectives of the environment extend beyond the content of sciences such as biology, chemistry, physics or geology into values and spiritual beliefs resulting in a unique Métis holistic worldview” (Vizina, 2010, pp. 12–15).

I understood from my dad’s shared words of wisdom that the world view was taken seriously, and they revealed that the sustainability of land and animals was paramount, and that sharing one’s wealth was part of giving back to ensure all people in the community also lived a good life.

This form of oral history related through storytelling has “taught Indigenous peoples how to conduct themselves in a good way for the good of the community” (Settee, 2007, p. 5). It was a way of sharing knowledge and teaching traditional values. Therefore, in this traditional way, I was learning more about my history and the concept of miyo-pimatisiwin (the good life) they practised and modelled for each generation.

The significance of fulfilling my dad's request to visit my aunt, his sister, was apparent to me. This was an important value that showed respect, and it was a reciprocal interaction. I also realized that I had also put into practice miyo-pimatisiwin by choosing to respect and honour my dad's request, and listen to his oral story of my history. And, as is the way with my Old People/Elders, they choose the time and place to share their knowledge and history. It became clear to me that my decision to take my dad to visit his sister was reciprocal and it gave us time with no distractions. It was a good environment for him to talk and share, and also for me to hear him; I understood it was reciprocity in action and important knowledge about miyo-pimatisiwin, the good life of living, with my core values and culture.

#### *My Father's Shared World View*

As we drove down the highway, my dad continued talking about our family history and I appreciated his knowledge and his sharing stories with me. For example, Ross (2012) told me that they would "travel from Meadow Lake with a team of horses to go visit relatives in Muskeg Lake; Kookum (Margaret Morin/Laliberte) had relations there. They carried with them the essentials, flour, sugar, tea, and potatoes; when it was time to eat, they would stop, shoot grouse, duck, rabbit, or fish and that would be their meal" (Ross, 2012).

What is more, Ross stated, "they had relatives all along the way, and would stop in to visit; they were welcomed, people were happy to see each other." And, "when they arrived at their relatives', food was shared. ... nobody went hungry, food was plentiful, that's the way it was." My dad paused for a while and I waited. He then said, "the old ways were good ways, people cared about each other, it was a good life" (Ross, 2012).

As Macdougall (2010) observes, "their worldview was, and is, rooted in family and relationships begun on the land, where the marriage of individuals spread outward to encompass all their relatives" (p. 9). Thus, the strong family connections and knowledge of the land made it achievable to live miyo-pimatisiwin (a good life). By hearing my dad's (Dan Ross's) communicated view of family history, my memory is triggered and I recall much of this way of life.

#### *Hunting, Farming, Ranching: Sharing the Good Life*

As we continued on our drive, Ross (2012) told me that "When someone killed a moose, or deer, they shared it, nothing went to waste, they used it all, the fat to make lard, the hide to make coats, and moccasins; they had big gardens, people shared/traded stuff." He also said: "the same thing when they hunted, farmed, ranched, they shared and helped each other out." And, "When they butchered livestock, they shared" (Ross, 2012).

Morisset and Pelletier (1987) also quote Ted Trindell that when hunting, "... everybody went and got the meat together, they shared it" (p. 70). Ross continued that, "people would go blueberry, raspberry, strawberry, cranberry picking, and then they would can the berries, they had cellars, so they stocked up" (Ross, 2012). According to Ross, "they ate well; they did not consider themselves poor." He resumed his storytelling and indicated that even though they may have been viewed by mainstream society as living in poverty, "in terms of money, that was true, we didn't have a lot of money." "But," he added, "they had a good life; they had miyo-pimatisiwin ... It was a good life (Ross, 2012)."

According to Trindell, "The white man's way, you get the money, you accumulate the money, but you spend it buying grub ... It's the same thing, only different ways" (Morisset & Pelletier, 1987, p. 104). The people lived off the land and had great respect and connection for the land they called home. Likewise, Settee (2007) states, "Indigenous people worldwide share common beliefs, practices, and similarities of knowledge ..." (p. 5). My dad further stated, "you can't eat money, it doesn't always give a good life, maybe sometimes an easier life today, not always a good life" (Ross, 2012).

#### *My Mushum, Great-Grandfather*

The drive to Spiritwood was flying by as my dad continued to share his stories of my ancestors and the old ways of life. Ross communicated that my great-grandfather (Mushum) Placid Morin worked in many different positions in his lifetime (Ross, 2012). My dad told me that "he had the contract to build the telegraph line to Buffalo Narrows." Wuorinen (1985) also writes that "Placid Morin, from Green Lake, constructed the line from Fort Black to Buffalo Narrows." My dad told me that Placid Morin, my grandfather, was also "a rancher/farmer, freighter, logger, trapper, fisherman, and hunter" (Ross, 2012). He further stated that, "In addition to my Mushum's skills and contracts, he was able to give jobs to his people" (Ross, 2012). Thus, in my view, this skill and capability to enable jobs for his people created the capacity to continue living miyo-pimatisiwin collectively. Therefore, it was "at these geographic locations and moments, that Métis communities were established and thrived in an environment that needed their labour" (Macdougall, 2010, p. 50). And so, it appears to me, that within my great-grandfather's world view, it was important to share miyo-pimatisiwin. As my dad emphasized to me, "Mushum lived off the land, shared what he had" (Ross, 2012).

Consequently, it was apparent to me throughout the drive and listening to my father tell the story and history that community was an important part of who they were and the life they lived, where “family is the central theme, with land and language taking strong supportive roles” (Macdougall, 2010, p. 15). My father, Dan Ross (2012), continued his story about my great-grandfather as we drove down the highway: “Mushum was the Community Witcher, he witched [looked] for water; when he found the water, people came to help dig the well, it became the community well, it was shared” (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Author's Great-Grandfather Placid Morin “witching” for water using a divining rod, Green Lake, Saskatchewan, October 1955. Reprinted here with permission of the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, images 55-314-02 and 55-314-07.

My dad added, “Mushum worked hard, but he liked his life” (Ross, 2012). As I recalled memories of my Mushum, I could agree that he did appear content with his life. I continued to actively listen and hear these stories and the rich history. This brought the realization of the strong sense of community and collaboration they had; and how it contributed to the good life (miyo-pimatisiwin). It was “an Indigenous world view that created family among strangers” (Macdougall, 2010, p. 50). And by creating this network of collaboration “the Métis forged their own society, formatted a world view and established a unique cultural identity in the northwest” (Macdougall, 2010, p. 71).

This trip to visit my aunt was enhancing my knowledge of the traditional Métis community of northwest Saskatchewan who lived miyo-pimatisiwin. This knowledge was shared with me by my father, an Elder, through traditional oral history—storytelling was the practice and way of teaching and passing knowledge. Therefore, the oral history supports and enhances my understanding of where I come from, my values, and how my world view plays out in my life.

I spent a lot of time with my Mushum. For example, a way I would spend time with him was playing cards (cribbage in particular) and throughout the card game he would tell me stories about his life and he would explain his perspective regarding the Cree Bible to me; I would listen to all his stories. (At times, I can still see and hear him reading his Bible.) I never found this time with him boring and, I realize, I really did enjoy those times and the Traditional Knowledge I learned from my Mushum. I am aware how lucky I was, and currently am, to have the opportunity of generations of teachings. I am grateful to continue to hear my father's stories and words of wisdom. Placid Morin, my great-grandfather (Mushum) read his Bible every morning and every night. In his Elder years (retirement) he continued this practice. Additionally, despite his age, he liked to keep active, so he made headstones for community people when they died; he became the cemetery headstone maker for the Green Lake community and I would help him make the headstones. He would share stories with me about that person who had departed. This did not seem unusual to me.

#### *My Kookum—Great-Grandmother*

As we continue on our drive, I am curious about my great-grandmother (Kookum), Margaret Laliberte. My father, Dan Ross, told me that Kookum, my great-grandmother, Margaret Morin-Laliberte, “was a midwife, she delivered babies it didn't matter what time of the night it was or if it was bad weather” (Ross, 2012). He recalled that “one night she was woke up after midnight, it was cold outside, the daughter of the woman in labour travelled to Kookum's house with a team of horses, Kookum got up, grabbed her medicine bag, she had herbal remedies,

and went with her in the dark, cold night to deliver the baby. They were strong women.” He emphasized, “That’s the way it was” (Ross, 2012).

Similarly, Préfontaine (2012) writes that “Métis women delivered many of the pioneers’ babies, while others tended the sick through the use of traditional medicines and remedies” (p. 1). The shared story showed me that my Kookum practised and shared her Traditional Knowledge with the Métis community and this world view assisted all people to live miyo-pimatisiwin. It was a reciprocal way of living and being.

### *Helping the Old People/Elders in the Community*

We, myself and my siblings, helped our Mushum and Kookum with chores so they could continue to have the ability to sustain their home and life. Many times my siblings and I would haul in wood and water for their heat and drink. What’s more, this was expected of us; it is a cultural value for family to help each other. It was as if it was an unspoken rule, which we just seemed to know inherently, these were our values, principles, and world view of the good life, miyo-pimatisiwin. It was a community of people who “valued reciprocal relationships between family members” (Macdougall, 2010, p. 5). Our Old People/Elders were valued for their kinship, knowledge, and for sharing their wisdom with their families and community through their oral stories.

### *Kinship*

Métis culture is rich in kinship, sharing, prayer, stories, laughter, and values. The empathy and connection in the community was expressed in the collective strengths they demonstrated when others were going through challenging times. For instance, the community held fundraisers for various causes to raise money to assist each other in times of hardship.

For example, Dan Ross, my dad, said that when someone had “hard luck” they had community support to help them through this difficult period in their life (Ross, 2012). I asked my dad what he meant by hard luck? Ross replied, “When they lose someone, somebody in the family died.” Ross continued, “people did fundraisers to help them with the cost and help them to grieve losing their family by giving them food too, so they didn’t have to cook and worry about that.” Moreover, “People prayed and held wakes, they used to have them in houses, we had no hall then.” And “they told stories about that person who passed at the wake, prayed, sang hymns in Cree for that person who left and for the family, the community helped” (Ross, 2012). My dad continued to communicate that laughter was good too, “even at wakes,” he expressed, the community had compassion for the grieving

family, but it was important to show humour, good, and fun times—“it helped people to heal” (Ross, 2012).

I remember there were also many dances and music events held in the community. Dan Ross related that, “the community held dances, where they played the fiddle, jigged, and enjoyed themselves; they worked hard, played hard, prayed hard ... everybody brought food, most everyone knew how to play fiddle and guitar” (Ross, 2012). Préfontaine (2012) explains that “in the oral tradition, as told by Elders, the Métis were a proud and independent people who ... spoke their own Michif language, were stewards of the land, danced and jigged to spirited fiddle rhythms, told stories, had reverence for the elderly and the young, and were deeply religious” (p. 1).

### **Miyo-Pimatisiwin**

This mutual experience, with my father Dan Ross conveying his story and oral history of his life, work, prayer, humour, laughter, music, and fun, provided meaningful insight into the traditional concept of miyo-pimatisiwin. Although I grew up with miyo-pimatisiwin (a good life), I did not fully realize the meaning of this Métis/Cree word and concept. This was a way of life and of being that I took for granted. However, as my awareness of this concept expanded during this trip with my dad to visit my aunt, I fully comprehended that this practice is a way of being and living. Likewise, “Mitho-pimatisiwin is a northern Woodland Cree term that means ‘the good life,’ in reference to the overall quality of life or well-being that is culturally embedded in a northern way of life” (Beatty & Weber-Beeds, 2012, p. 113; Beatty, 2006; Hart 2002; Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000). Moving forward in my life, I will embrace and continue the practice of miyo-pimatisiwin.

In that moment when my father, Dan Ross, made his request to visit his sister (my aunt), I recognized that I had subconsciously observed miyo-pimatisiwin simply by my choice to honour and assist my father to realize his request. This was a reciprocal act that involved one of the characteristics of living miyo-pimatisiwin. The shared experience also provided me with the ability to accomplish my research on the meaning of the concept miyo-pimatisiwin through the perspective of Métis traditional ways of teaching oral history and storytelling. In addition, I also noticed another lesson within the storytelling—my ability to listen and hear improved because there were no other distractions. Choosing to talk at the right time and place was another lesson. I understand now why my Old People/Elders wait for the right time to speak about certain topics. These acts and ways of being were inherent, value-based choices that shared a world view that encompassed miyo-pimatisiwin.

The research enhanced my understanding of the traditional concept of miyo-pimatisiwin (a good life); it also deepened my awareness that it was a way of being and living that is inclusive of the quality of life or well-being that is socially rooted in the Métis way of life. Deer (2008) states that, “Appreciating the importance of relationships that are explored in all dimensions of miyo-pimatisiwin gives some life to the idea that collective balance, health, harmony and growth, to name a few, are essential to the notion that what is desired is a life that is experienced in its fullest, healthiest sense” (Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre. [MFNERC], 2008). This concept is just as vital for Métis people in modern day as it was in the past, to maintain and empower self-determination.

Miyo-pimatisiwin is an important concept to sustain in the present day because it will encourage self-determination for families who move away from their communities for various reasons and live further apart. Many people often live in different locations mainly due to lack of employment not available in many home communities. This development can lead to a sense of loss of community and perhaps the potential to lose sight of this cultural concept and the ability to live this concept. Thus, people conceivably lose their sense of identity and self-determination. The sustenance of miyo-pimatisiwin in a modern environment can empower the individual by the continuance of the traditional practice in the community collective.

#### *Actualization—Miyo-Pimatisiwin*

This can be actualized by the application of community gatherings with Elders and youth that demonstrate and live miyo-pimatisiwin and the specific elements of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual balance to live a good life. Miyo-pimatisiwin “is based on the traditional view of co-existence, respect, collectivity, representation and recognition, and it is also grounded in the requirement to prepare the next generation to ensure the continuance of those perspectives” (Zoe, 2009, p. 267). Thus, the support at gatherings demonstrating these views, that are shared with youth by the Elders and Leaders of the community, is fundamental for all to have and live a good life. This traditional way of being is helpful for aspiring to successful interactions in the urban environment. As my father indicated in his stories to me, the people shared what they had and it was their ability to stay connected to community that provided the elements to live a good life. Furthermore, this can be actualized by oral stories/history and the community collective spirit that embodies the elements of miyo-pimatisiwin, and how that can be conducive to self-governance and, moreover, empower entrepreneurship, education, and jobs amongst the youth and the community to promote the continuance of a good life.

#### *Past and Present Communities*

Listening to my father, Dan Ross, brings to mind how community-centred we lived when I was a child, and how that same sense of community is hard to live by in the urban environment since that sense of community is not as available. However, I do recognize that myself and my immediate family do practice and live miyo-pimatisiwin. And, upon reflection, the significance of my dad’s oral history lessons and the way of living he has modelled for us, has helped me and my family to stay connected, get together regularly, and help each other out through difficult times. This value has been a constant source of support for myself, my siblings, our children, parents, and grandparents which helped us stay strong in our identity and our self-determination. Similarly, Deer (2008) affirms, “that many of us have ... our families and ourselves may be best appreciated by affirming and celebrating those aspects of our ancestry, languages, and experiences that inform who we are” (MFNERC, 2008). Present-day urban living, passing away of the Old People/Elders and their shared stories puts at risk the loss of this Traditional Knowledge and cultural values to live miyo-pimatisiwin.

#### **Conclusion**

This research has shown me that in many ways the old ways my father, Dan Ross, spoke of demonstrated that the people were interconnected, connected to their culture, cared for each other, and built community and alliances that sustained a good life (miyo-pimatisiwin). Additionally, this research heightened my perspective of the importance of actively listening to Elders and their oral history and the skill involved in conveying these oral stories and histories, as well as their influence and the continuous inspiration they provide today because:

Not only do the Métis people have their own stories to tell, but they have their own way of telling those stories. Métis oral histories form a complex web of valuable lessons, traditions and customs. They are the cornerstone of Métis knowledge, culture and ways of knowing. (Lombard, n.d.)

Thus, it is imperative that the Old People/Elders, Métis Leaders, and community ensure the continuity of this practice for the youth, so all have the ability to live a good life.

These traditional concepts are and can continue to be integrated into the urban landscape by sustained inclusion of self-governance structures, community, language, shared values, and wealth:

Consistently throughout history, the Métis people have acted collectively to protect and fight for their rights, lands and ongoing existence as a distinct Aboriginal people and nation within the Canadian federation – from the Métis provisional governments of Riel in Manitoba (1869–70) and Saskatchewan (1885) to contemporary Métis governing bodies. This dedication continues to exist as citizens and communities throughout the Métis Nation Homeland keep the nation's distinct culture, traditions, language and lifestyle alive and pursue their own social and economic development. (Métis National Council, 2019)

Therefore, working as a community in modern-day life we can collectively and collaboratively work towards a healthy self-governance system and a Métis Nation Constitution that promotes miyo-pimatiswin. Consequently, the “Métis people from throughout the Homeland have consistently expressed their desire to have a Métis Nation Constitution in order to strengthen Métis nationalism and build a stronger and more effective governance structure” (Métis Nation Constitution, 2019). Thus, as Métis people we need a local urban organization that reminds us of the strength of the community collective and caring that will enhance miyo-pimatisiwin for all, and that continues to foster who we are as a people with our own culture, values, and world view, and as a community of people with a rightful place in modern-day Canada. This right to identity must be recognized and valued in order to live miyo-pimatisiwin (a good life) in this country:

Within a Métis Nation Constitution, we can effectively reflect our values, principles and aspirations as a nation and put them into effect by how we choose to exercise our self-government. A Métis Nation Constitution can serve to bind our people together so we can move forward as a united Métis Nation exercising its inherent right of self-government. A Constitution for the Métis Nation can indeed function as a mirror reflecting our national soul! (Métis National Council, n.d.)

I conclude by arguing that the traditional concept of miyo-pimatisiwin (a good life) is essential for Métis people in present day, as it was in our historic past. The concept of miyo-pimatisiwin is a cultural value, and incorporates all aspects of a way of life. Miyo-pimatisiwin itself contributes to self-determination and is an important Indigenous concept for all Indigenous people to understand and embrace as a cultural way of life and being. And, despite living in the rural/urban modern landscape, this concept can be significant to retention of cultural values

and living a good life today. Miyo-pimatiswin is a world view that is important for understanding a way of life—living a good life: “It is based on the traditional view of co-existence, respect, collectivity, representation and recognition, and it is also grounded in the requirement to prepare the next generation to ensure the continuance of those perspectives” (Zoe, 2009, p. 267). For this reason, the significance and remembrance of the traditional concept miyo-pimatisiwin in the modern environment is essential for well-being, identity, and self-determination and also encompasses the concept of wakohtowin (all my relations). These concepts are central for the strength of the community. These Métis concepts have been lived by my Old People and Elders and have contributed to my sense of identity, way of being, and living a good life.

## Notes

1. Cree (Algonquian language family) has five dialects generally associated with geographical areas, and three of these are found in Saskatchewan. The Plains Cree spoken in the northern, central parkland area speak with the plains y- dialect, as in “miyo” (good).
2. Other spellings include *wahkootowin* and *wâhkôhtowin*.

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