

Anishinabe Proud to Be



Teachings

Written by Candida Sinoway
with teachings from Elder Linda Barkman and
support from Melissa Deschamps

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All the women that participated and shared their life journeys with us and each other. Sharing how they navigated the world to meet their needs and support their friends and families.

Elder Linda Barkman, Candida Sinoway, and Melissa Deschamps shared and exchanged teachings with women participating in ceremonies at Elevate NWO and Oahas. Teachings are from the women leading the ceremonies who are from the region and living in Thunder Bay. The local teachings shared in this booklet may differ across Ontario or even from others in the region. Some differences may lie in the details of the teachings or some people may tell and retell teachings emphasizing different aspects.

This is not a comprehensive booklet on teachings and some teachings are sacred and can't be documented here, but must be experienced firsthand.

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Returning to Culture

Healing can take place from the intergenerational trauma such as returning to culture, learning the language, attending ceremonies. For others, it can take formal acknowledgement of their experiences. Reconciliation, laws, and apologies are necessary to help us move forward, and it also requires true understanding and empathy to create space where healing is possible.

Connecting back to our traditions, crafts, music and art is a form of healing. It can also come from having sweat lodge ceremonies, sharing circles, and even just being on the land learning how to fish, hunt or trap. These are all part of healing. We must work together on healing. Every story is different, this is where we learn to trust, open up internal wounds and heal. It doesn't happen overnight, but just being able to talk with someone is a step toward healing.

There are many different ways of sharing a teaching or learning our language. It varies with each nation, and there are many nations across Turtle Island (Canada), and the world. These traditions and knowledge can only survive by being taught or being a teacher, sharing your knowledge with oral stories, and with land-based activities because we can now do it without breaking a law. Teachings have been handed down through spoken word, shared stories, art, music, ceremonies, Pow Wows and more.





My name is Linda Barkman.

Growing up in a little town, mostly of non-Indigenous families, it was there that I was always told “What I was” vs “Who I am” as I was being raised in a religious family, my dad was a minister and my mom a teacher. She raised us alone after my dad passed away.

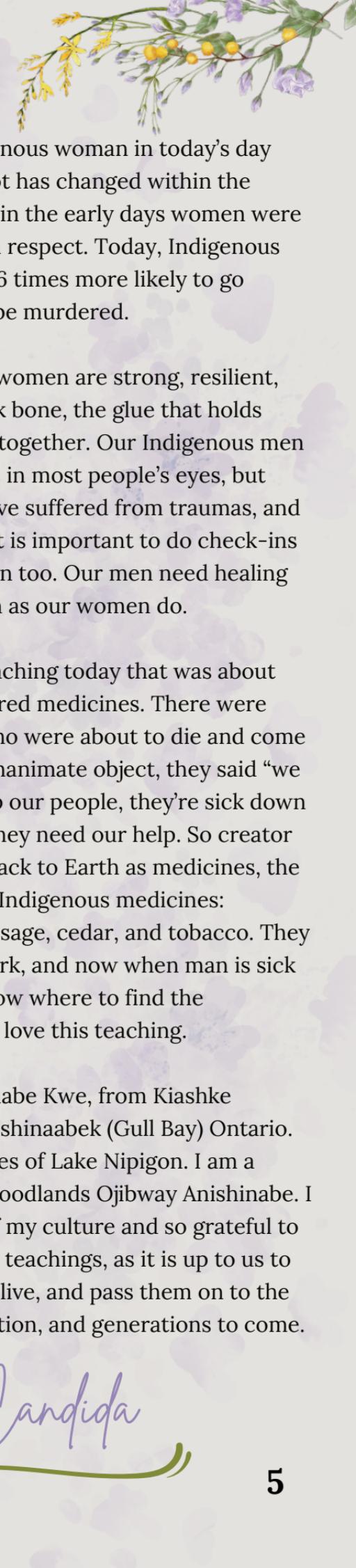
Being involved with my traditional background kicked me into overdrive to learn more and to teach all that I’ve learnt.

So now I know “What I am and I know Who I am”. Proud, loving, respectful, brave, humility, wisdom, truthful; all these teachings, ceremonies, are gifts from the Creator and our ancestors. All free for the learning and what a way to live!!

Thank you creator for all I have.



Elder Linda

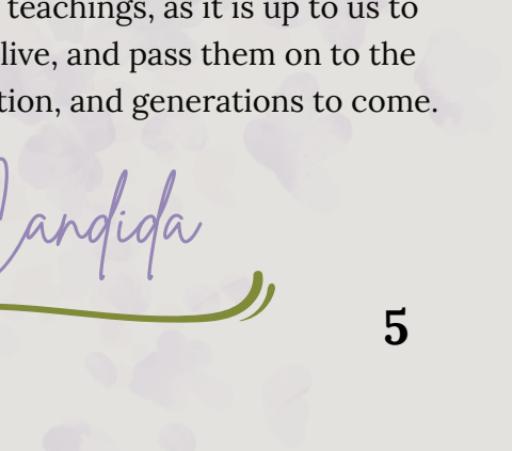


As an Indigenous woman in today's day and age, a lot has changed within the world. Back in the early days women were treated with respect. Today, Indigenous women are 6 times more likely to go missing, or be murdered.

Indigenous women are strong, resilient, and the back bone, the glue that holds community together. Our Indigenous men are warriors in most people's eyes, but they too, have suffered from traumas, and this is why it is important to do check-ins with our men too. Our men need healing just as much as our women do.

I heard a teaching today that was about the four sacred medicines. There were four men who were about to die and come back as an inanimate object, they said "we want to help our people, they're sick down there, and they need our help. So creator sent them back to Earth as medicines, the four sacred Indigenous medicines: sweetgrass, sage, cedar, and tobacco. They did their work, and now when man is sick they will know where to find the medicines. I love this teaching.

I am Anishinabe Kwe, from Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek (Gull Bay) Ontario. On the shores of Lake Nipigon. I am a Northern Woodlands Ojibway Anishinabe. I am proud of my culture and so grateful to learn these teachings, as it is up to us to keep them alive, and pass them on to the next generation, and generations to come.



Candida



Boozhoo,

My name is Melissa Deschamps and I am an Anishinabe kwe from the wolf clan. I reside in Thunder Bay, ON and am a member of the Red Rock Indian Band on Lake Helen First Nation.

Growing up, I didn't have the opportunity to learn a lot about the Ojibwe culture or history, because of colonization. You know, the stigma, misinformation and misunderstandings of who we are as Indigenous peoples. I didn't know who I was. Now, as an adult, I embrace who I am as an Indigenous woman. I want to learn more about us, and everything that made us.

Getting together with other Indigenous women, like for the Circle of Care, gave Indigenous women an opportunity to be who we are, without judgement. Sharing food, sharing laughs, listening to teachings, and creating our bundles was an amazing experience. It was good medicine!

Chi Miigwetch,



Melissa



Rain - Gmiwan

There are days when people get upset with the rain, and I am one of them. It can sometimes put a damper on plans that were made. Some plans were to go sit outside or enjoy a cold drink on a patio. The rain is an element, it is the water and we should be grateful for it.

It is the way Mother Earth and the Creator tell us the plants, trees, berries, and animals need water. The rain replenishes all that we need. It helps the berries grow for the animals and for us. It helps the trees and plants grow. Water is life, and this is how plant life or any other life begins. It begins with water. The power of life comes from water and from the power of women.



New Day - **Shki-Giizhgaat**

The ceremonial teaching of honoring a new day is the moment we take our first breath, and open our eyes. It is our responsibility to do the work and to give thanks and acknowledge the new day. Some people smudge or say a prayer. Many people often say that life can be hard, and it can be. Sometimes we are our biggest challenges, our own worst critics. This is for ourselves that reminder, a reminder to just pause and breathe, also to take things slowly as we move forward knowing we do not have to have control all of the time, or have all the answers.

To know that whatever is before us, Creator has given those gifts to us, our job is to acknowledge them, and find the meaning in them, to understand its purpose. We live a life where we are constantly moving, and we sometimes forget to stay still and enjoy life, or acknowledge what is in front of us. We must give thanks to our women, acknowledge their power because they are our life givers.



Drum - Dewe'igan

For many First Nations Peoples, the drum, represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth, the mother to all of us. The drum also represents balance and equity, wholeness and connection. The drum can be used to pray for food, thanking Creator for the life that was given to us to eat. It can be used at the beginning of meetings or gatherings to pray for good work and outcomes, or used at the end of meetings or gatherings for safe travels home to the ones who have participated or were present in the meeting or gathering.

There are also welcome songs which can be played for the public. Private or intimate songs can only be sung by the owner of the drum. There are songs for water carriers and women. Whether you make, buy or are gifted your drum, it is unique to you and your voice in the world. Fall in love with your voice, you don't know who is listening and needs to hear it.

The purpose of hand drumming is to engage and sing about the stories of our people. These songs remind us that we are responsible to Mother Earth, and our drums invite active and spiritual engagement. The drum also creates a sense of community. This lets us and the women know that their voices are being heard in a positive way.

The drum is a symbol of connection and relationship.



Birthing your Drum -

Niig'aa Gidewe'igan

(Give birth to a drum)

The woman who is birthing her drum will put tobacco in the middle of the drum, the other women stand around you while they sing an Anishinabe song, causing the tobacco to dance. They stand in all four directions North, East, South, and West singing.

Once done, the woman who is birthing her drum takes the tobacco off, puts it into a colored cloth, along with the end of the cord that ties the drum together. This is called the “umbilical cord”; the cord is cut by a “doctor or midwife” (another woman) and now your drum is your baby. Then the woman who is birthing her drum will stand and strike her drum facing each direction North, East, South, and West so the drum, her baby will know her voice.

Once this is done, the tobacco and umbilical cord are wrapped in the cloth, and the woman can either tie it on a tree, put it in the water, bury it, or burn it in a sacred fire. That is the beautiful teaching of “Birthing your hand drum.” You must take care of your drum like a baby. Never place your drum on its face (hide down); it is like placing a baby on its face. I am honored to learn this teaching and to have gained this knowledge, so I can share it when the time is right. That time is now.

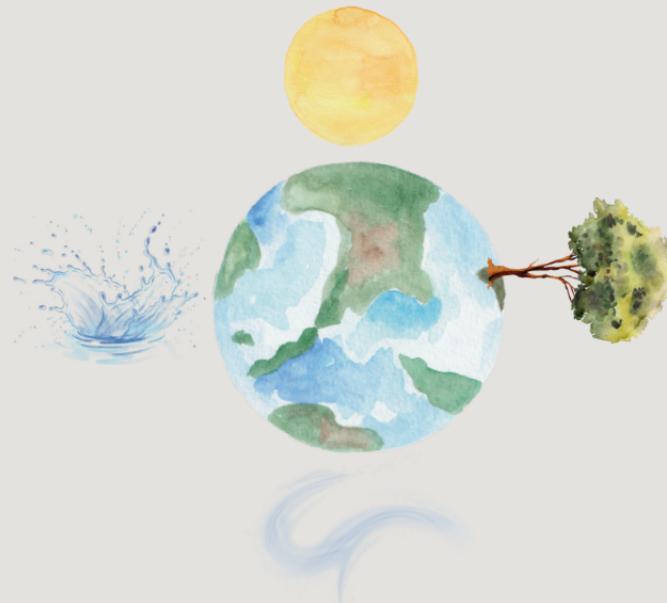


Rattle - **Mbiigweweshmaa**

The teaching on the rattle is that we live in darkness, when the sun is not out. The word rattle means a rapid succession of sharp clattering sounds. The Elder told me it meant “annoying sound”. In the Ojibwe Peoples dictionary, it is defined as Zhiishiigwan; pronounced “see see one”. Gwan means Spring. In the Odawa & Eastern Ojibwe dictionary, it is closely translated to: Noisily against something.

The Elder said “In the spring time, everything is waking up, coming to life - new growth - new life comes - trees grow leaves. The ice breaks up and wakes up, making way for new beginnings. In prayer and ceremony, the rattle calls the spirits above because the gwan was already here, we don’t need to call the spirits down there anymore.”

Just as the medicine wheel is circular, we are all connected. For us to create the rattle, the deer gave his life. We use the deer’s hide, which will let us call the spirits. For the rattle to come to life, water is needed, this is why we soak the hide, for up to 48 hours, to soften it. Your part is to sew it with sinew and to use the Earth to stuff the rattle into a shape. There is a piece of wood that goes with our hide. This is the stick that we use to hold the rattle. We always need a tree. We also need the wind and sun to dry the rattles. We hang them to dry for 24 hours, take the stuffing out, put in a handful of stones, drill a hole in the stick, and tie the rattle shut by putting your sinew through the hole that was drilled.



Sacred Medicine -

Gchitwaawendaagot

Aaabziichgan

The four sacred medicines are tobacco, cedar, sweetgrass and sage. They are used in everyday life and ceremonies. You can smudge with any one of the medicines, it does not have to be a specific one. The medicine you pick depends on your preference, or what is available. It is said that tobacco sits in the eastern door, sweetgrass in the southern door, sage in the western door and cedar in the northern door. The medicines give a sense of direction. You can care for the medicines by storing them in a dry place in paper bags, wooden boxes, or pouches.

Our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual self must be in balance and equally developed for us to remain healthy and happy. Smudging is a tradition in many Indigenous cultures, which involves the burning of one or more of the medicines. There are many ways to perform a smudge and different variations and protocols exist. Smudging allows people to stop, slow down, and become mindful and centered. It allows people to remember, connect, and be grounded in the event, task, or purpose at hand.

Smudging allows people to let go of negative feelings and thoughts. Letting go of things that inhibit a person from being balanced and focused comes from the feeling of being calm and safe while smudging. Smudging is always voluntary. It is acceptable for a person to not smudge. They may stay in the room and refrain from smudging or leave the room. Respect for all is the guiding principle in any Indigenous tradition.





Tobacco - Sema

Tobacco is the first plant that Creation gave to the Anishinaabe People followed by sage, cedar and sweetgrass.

Traditionally, tobacco is always first. It is used as an offering for everything and in most ceremonies. Tobacco is given to us so that we can communicate with the spirit world. It opens up the door to allow that communication to take place. When we make an offering of tobacco, we communicate our thoughts and feelings through the tobacco as we pray for ourselves, our family, relatives and others.

Tobacco is always offered before picking medicines, or anything we take from the land. When you offer tobacco to a plant and explain why you are there, that plant will let all the plants in the area know why you are coming to pick them. When you seek the help and advice of an Elder, and give your offering of tobacco, they know that a request may be made as tobacco is so sacred. They just know. We express our gratitude with an offering of tobacco each day when we decide to smudge.



Cedar - Giizhik

Cedar can be found in urban and rural areas and is a protection medicine used to take away negativity and to invite positivity to you or your space. Negativity can be how we think about others such as envy or jealousy or how we think about ourselves like "I am not good enough". It may be how we think about life by asking why am I here, or what is my purpose. Sometimes we carry negativity in our bodies or our Spirit because we can no longer see the path that we are supposed to be walking, so we lose hope or our faith.

Cedar can be used to cleanse, uplift our Spirits, and to purify the home. When children or babies can't sleep, place some cedar leaves by their bed or pillow to help them feel safe and secure. It also has many restorative medicinal uses. If adults or children have a cold or flu, make a tea by taking a small handful of cedar leaves, boil it in water for 10-15 minutes. It is a source of vitamin C. When mixed with Sage for a tea, it cleanses the body. Cedar baths are also very healing. When cedar is mixed with tobacco and put in the fire, it crackles. This gets the attention of the Spirits to whom offerings are made. Cedar is also used in fasting and sweat lodge ceremonies as protection: cedar branches cover the floor of the sweat lodge and can circle the faster's lodge. We can also hang cedar above our doors, or around our homes for protection, to ward off negativity.

If you did not pick the cedar, you can give thanks for its life and the people who picked it. In many cultures, the plants used to burn and purify ourselves provides us with access to their soul and power. It is essential that we ask their permission before gathering plants. Take only what we need without damaging the plant and give thanks.



Sage - Bashkodejiibik

Sage is used to prepare people for ceremonies and teachings. Because it is more medicinal and stronger than sweetgrass , it tends to be used more often in ceremonies. When smudging it is recommended to always use sage, because it is the only medicine that women can use to smudge when on their moon time. Sage is used for releasing what is troubling the mind and for removing negative energy. It is used for cleansing homes and sacred items. It is also used to cleanse the spirit of negative thoughts of a person or place.

It has several medicinal uses. Sage is used by the original peoples to make their prayers and to signal to Creator someone needs help. There are many varieties of sage and they are all effective for smudging.

Sweetgrass - Wiingashk

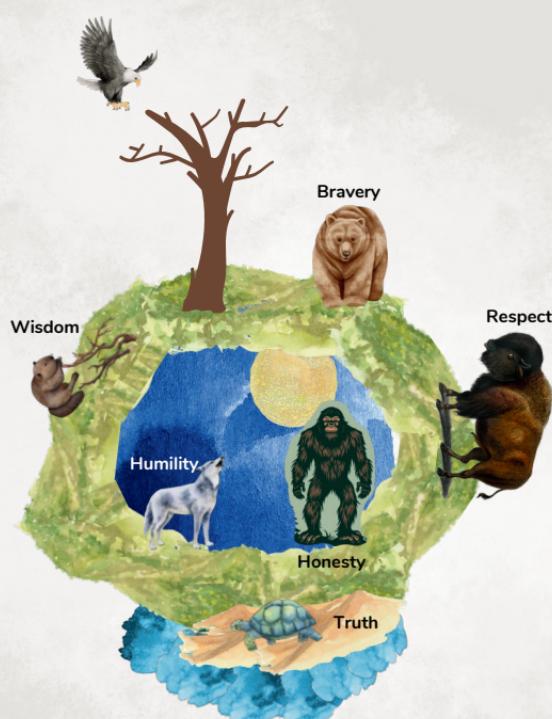
Sweetgrass is the sacred hair of Mother Earth and is considered a gift from the Creator. Its sweet aroma reminds people of the gentleness, love and kindness she has for the people. When sweetgrass is used in a healing circle it has a calming effect. The three strands of the braid represent the balance of body, mind, and spirit.

Seven Grandfather Teachings

The Seven Grandfathers were spirits that watched over the people. They sent a messenger to the people who could share the teachings, but the messenger found a baby. For seven years, the baby learned and was then brought to the Grandfathers who shared the teachings that could be passed on to the people.

The Seven Grandfather teachings guide how we should treat one another. Each teaching is associated with an animal which helps teach us how we can live our lives respecting animals, people, and the environment – every living thing.

To cherish knowledge is to know wisdom.
To know love is to know peace.
To honour all of creation is to have respect.
To face life with courage is to know bravery.
To walk through life with integrity is to know honesty.
To accept yourself as a sacred part of creation is to know humility.
To not deceive yourself or others is to know truth.

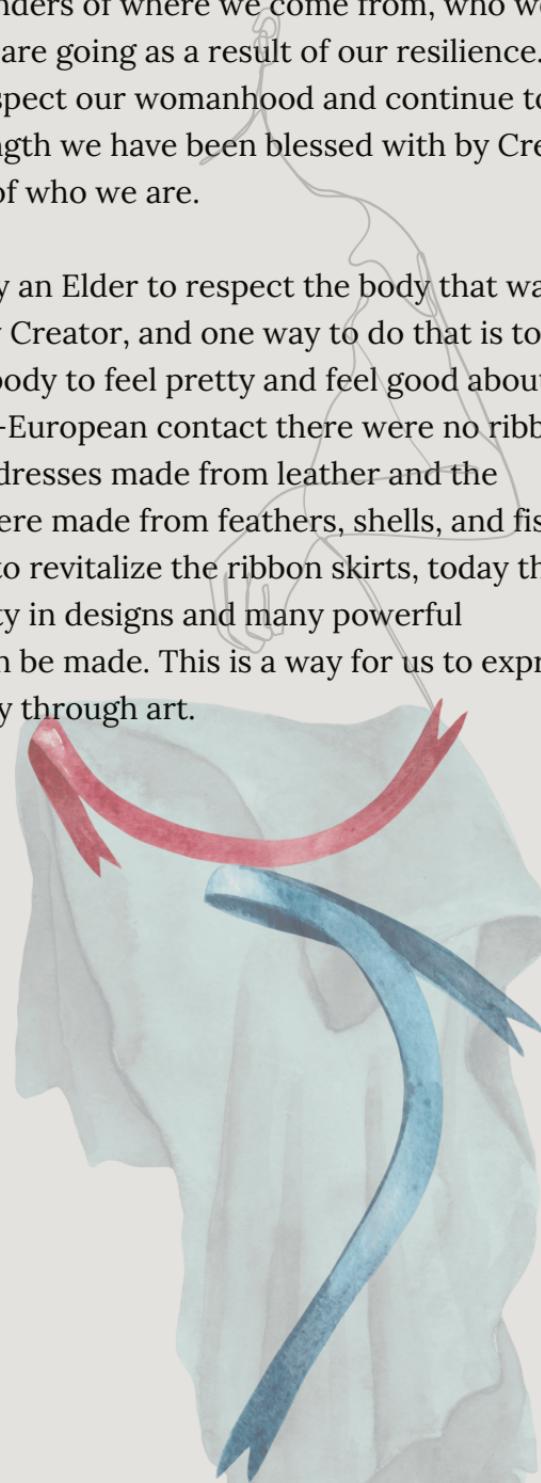


Ribbon Skirt -

Zenbaa Mjigoodenh

Ribbon skirts are a sign of womanhood. Skirts are for all females including those who identify as Two-Spirit and of all ages that includes babies, toddlers, young folk and the mature. Wearing one is healing. It heals the spirit and connects one to Mother Earth. As we create our ribbon skirts, there is love, thoughts, ideas and our hours working to make them perfect. Wearing a ribbon skirt symbolizes great strength, pride and hope for a better tomorrow. Standing united to speak out for our children, our grandchildren, and the future generations to come. They are reminders of where we come from, who we are, and where we are going as a result of our resilience. They teach us to respect our womanhood and continue to learn the strength we have been blessed with by Creator. It is a symbol of who we are.

I was taught by an Elder to respect the body that was given to me by Creator, and one way to do that is to decorate our body to feel pretty and feel good about ourselves. Pre-European contact there were no ribbons. Women wore dresses made from leather and the decorations were made from feathers, shells, and fish scales etc. So to revitalize the ribbon skirts, today there is so much variety in designs and many powerful statements can be made. This is a way for us to express our Indigeneity through art.



Moon Time - Aanjgiise (Menstruate)

Moon time is a powerful time for a woman, where she can mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually cleanse herself. Grandmother Moon controls all of female life and is close to a woman during her time in the moon cycle. Women can ask Grandmother moon for wisdom, direction, and help for her family and children. During moon time, a woman becomes very intuitive and should use this time to take care of herself, rest, and focus on her and her family's needs.

When the moon is full, a woman can honour Grandmother moon and ask for her to give her wisdom through a Full Moon Ceremony. She can sit on the ground and ask Grandmother Moon to replenish her body with energy; she can bring water and ask the moon to bless it as it becomes medicine. Views on ceremony and moon time differ from community to community. However, a woman can certainly practice her ceremony and traditions during this powerful time, as moon time should not be seen as a barrier to ceremony.



Giving & Receiving Teachings

When gifts are received and given, they don't have to be expensive, but they should be from the heart, and have meaning to them. Just as a teaching, no matter how you take or look at the teaching, it is how you, yourself, pass it along. There could be a time when you don't even know you are receiving or giving a teaching. It's just the way you share it. Some teachings could be really big and rich in one person's eyes, and for the other person it is just words of wisdom they keep to themselves, or they think they do. This is what I mean by, passing a teaching on, without even knowing you're doing it. I love my culture and language, teachings, and most of all my People.

As Anishinabe when you have the chance to share teachings to a younger person, do so. This is how our traditions, teachings, hunting, fishing, dancing, singing, knowledge are passed down. We must pass on our knowledge to future generations to come. We lost several generations of rich teachings because of the government. Many of the children and young adults who have journeyed on, took many teachings with them. We as their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will never get this knowledge back. Our teachings come from the survivors, they could not take away what was in their hearts, memories and in their language. They are the ones who have taught us what we know today. I am thankful for them. We are still learning and passing on these wonderful teachings. Meegwetch.



Please feel free to journal your
own experience.



Your experience ...



Your experience ...



Your experience ...



Your experience ...



Sources

The teachings were shared by:

- Elder Linda Barkman, Elevate NWO, Thunder Bay, ON
- Melissa Deschamps, Oahas, Thunder Bay, ON
- Candida Sinoway, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, ON

Women participating in the session also contributed to the teachings. The resources below were used to supplement the information shared.

- The Meaningful Teachings of the Drum,
<https://powwowtimes.ca/the-meaningful-teachings-of-the-drum/>
- Anishnawbe Mushkiki,
<https://mushkiki.com/programs-services/sacred-items-and-bundles/>
- The Four Sacred Medicines,
<https://mushkiki.com/programs-services/the-four-sacred-medicines/>
- Tobacco, <https://keepitsacred.itcmi.org/tobacco-and-tradition/traditional-tobacco-use/>
- The Four Sacred Medicines, <https://aht.ca/our-approach/traditional-teachings/>
- Ontario Native Women's Association,
<https://www.onwa.ca/7-sacred-grandfather-teachings>
- What is a Ribbon Skirt?,
<https://www.theribbonskirtproject.ca/whatisaribbon-skirt>
- Story of the Ribbon Skirt,
<https://www.7generations.org/story-of-the-ribbon-skirt/>
- Moon Time Teachings.
<https://mushkiki.com/programs-services/moontime-and-grandmother-moon/>



