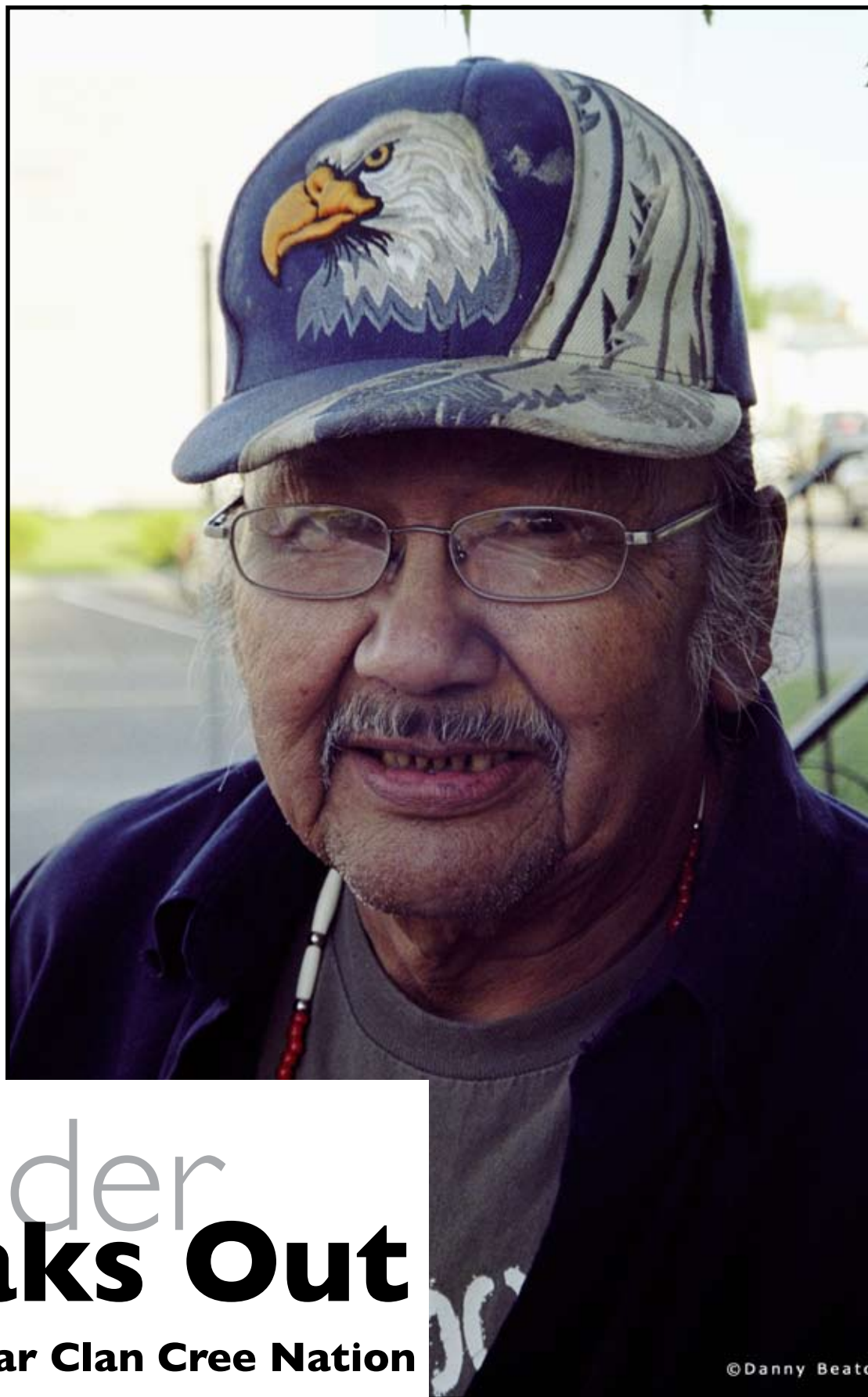


My father was born somewhere north of Kenora, Ontario, he was a Cree. My mother was born in James Bay, Ontario, and she was a Cree from the Bear Clan.

I've been involved in the native struggle, healthcare and the environment for most of my life. I can talk about the environment, the cutting, Abitibi Corporation and Kimberly Clark, they are from the States. They were cutting in the Cochrane and Kapuskasing area when I came down in the early seventies. That's when I started getting involved. A lot of trees are gone now, and they are not growing back as fast as they said they would. There is a lot of damage to Mother Earth and our culture because there are a lot of places we can't go hunting from my personal view.

The companies are spraying chemicals to control the trees. They tell us we can't pick blueberries for five years wherever they spray. Sometimes they don't even tell us where they are spraying the chemicals. Once they clear cut the trees and replant, they try to stop other trees from interfering with their replanting. Most of our animals and the birds eat the berries. The humans



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A Cree Elder **Speaks Out**

Danny Matthews Bear Clan Cree Nation

eat the animals and ingest the poisons. Even the fish are contaminated from the runoff. We all become toxic. I have found carcasses of moose and of other animals dead where they have been spraying, including young calves.

The companies tell us the chemicals don't bother the animals, but we know different. It really bothers me when they lie. Our rivers are also getting damaged from the chemicals. The Kapuskasing River was especially bad until things started to get better, but does the poison really go away? It was so bad at one time you could not drink the water. Mercury was floating on the surface. It had to be something bad when they told us you could only eat one fish per week. The lumber mills were dumping until the government said no more waste in the rivers. These things that happened in the past have really affected our way of life, especially the people living by the rivers, James Bay or Kapuskasing, where chemicals were being dumped. I am sure this type of damage had been done all across Indian country. It is time North America stopped the use and productions of toxic chemicals.

In the past we were told by the government when we could hunt. We were given dates when we could hunt, and when we could not hunt. We had to feed our families,

sometimes our families starved. It was wrong what the government did to us. As men we could not feed our families. In the past some companies built gates and fences around our hunting grounds. At times we needed to get a pass in order to get through the gates to our main roads where our hunting grounds were. I have been a hunter all my life, I started when I was ten years old, I haven't changed my ways yet, I still hunt for my food today like years back, and I still gather my blueberries like I did many years ago. I learned all that from my parents and I try to pass that on to the next generation, especially to my kids.

I am sorry to say that my children have lost their language because of the residential school thing. Before when I was young I was made to believe that the white man's way was better than the native way of life. However I keep my language and I teach my wife our Cree language as well. We both talk our language of today. Over the years I was able to teach my wife the Cree language in the 38 years we have been together. When we want to talk in secret we talk in Cree.

Over the years all my nephews, nieces and my family have protested against the rape and poisoning of our land, I have not protested yet, but my family and Cree nation have. They have laid on the logging roads,

and even have fasted to bring attention to our struggle against the government and corporations. I am involved indirectly and directly because I support my relations. I encourage my relations to protest, our young people have to be supported. I feel better seeing them go against the destruction of our land and culture.

A long time ago the government made restrictions with the church that we were not allowed to practice our way of life. I remember the religious ones that had contempt for our way of life. We were punished a lot back in the 1950's, we were not allowed in the bush to practice our ceremonial way of life. We were always hiding a lot back then from non native people, especially the government because they did not allow us to practice our sacred ceremonies and beliefs. A lot of the things that my father knew and his father knew, were buried. Artifacts and ceremonial objects had to be hidden. My relations didn't want to show sacred things to the establishment or communities where there were non natives. Indian agents, the church, the government and game wardens created a dark dark era for the Cree people. It was a really hard time, we were told to go to church and that there was a better way of life for us. A lot of our people turned to Christianity just to get away from them,

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Edited by Adam and Jeff Long

**Cree Elder
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just to get away from all the hassle that they were getting. All of this kept going on until the residential school era. That's when our culture really fell apart.

Our children were taken away from their homes for 8-10 months of the year. All my family went to residential school. They used a way to trick us into believing it was better. They called us 'savages', that was the term used for natives. They called themselves the redeemers. We were forced to eat pigs, cows and chicken when we were in their residential schools. I was in for 6 years and in a lot of ways it changed me completely. What it did was make me think my culture was a bad thing. It took me years and years before I could come to terms with myself and to believe my way of life was better than theirs. Our way of life was a good life and their way almost destroyed me completely. It affected my health. I became an alcoholic and a diabetic. Now I am on a healing journey back to the old ways of our ancestors, I've gotten over a lot now. I get help from our spiritual elders, the ones who maintain our traditional Cree culture and ceremonies. I found out what was wrong and I learned what was right. I learned to hate non natives, religious people and myself. For listening and getting caught in their way of life, my life was very difficult for a long time.

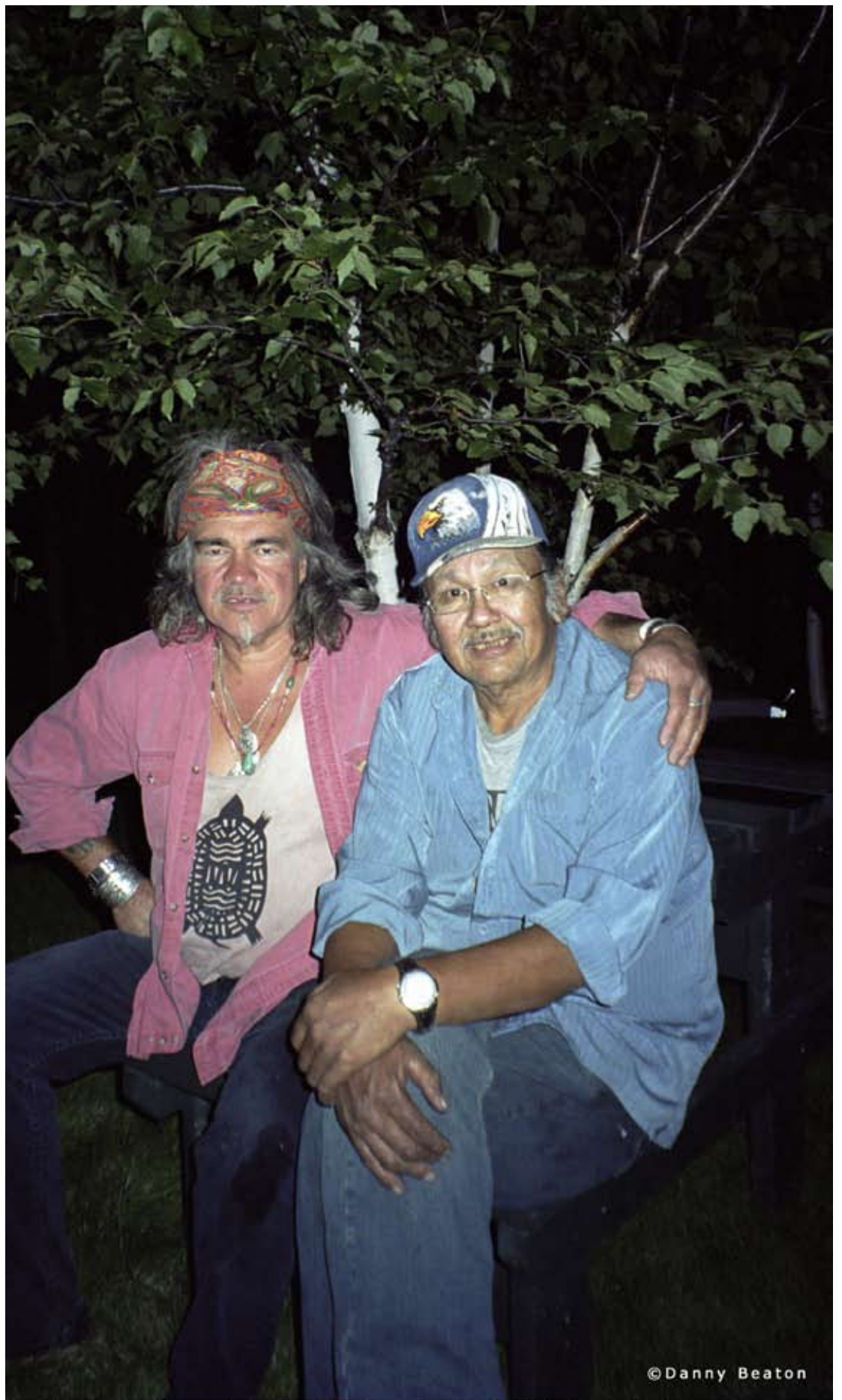
Today people are getting sick from all the chemicals; there are not many cures once you get sick. Spiritually and emotionally we can overcome it. Some diseases can be overcome by elders and ceremonies. But, physically once we're contaminated and are overcome by cancer, you're usually finished. If we go back to our old ways, that's the best medicine you can give yourself or to others. That's how I feel, that's how I see it today and there is no cure for what they have done to us already. Dioxins are in our breakfast, dioxins are in our lunch. Dioxins are in our homes and in the wild animals. It's above ground and in the water and now our animals and fish are deformed. When you catch a fish and take it out of the water, sometimes it will turn pink. When you see this my Algonquian brothers tell me it's mercury contamination. In some places which we call Cree territory the government has put up signs that can you not eat the animals.

I was out on the land the other day thinking of our people and thinking we must do our share to protect the environment. We must listen to our elders because they have experience in life. In the old days we used to move around, we moved in a circle, we never took from just once place, we made sure to take care of things, in the old days we always took care of things and we always took care of Mother Earth.

Thank you for listening



Matthews by Danny Beaton, Aug 2008, Cochrane Ontario
Sacred Mother, she has provided for the Cree Nation to survive



Danny Matthews and Danny Beaton by Alicja Rozanska, Aug 2008, Cochrane Ontario
ton and Danny Matthews speak out for Mother Earth

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