**Our Life is Called Bimaadiziiwin:**

**A Story in Photo Voice**

**Introduction:**

This is not my knowledge, this is what was told to me, this is what makes me, me. We cannot separate traditional practices from everyday life, these are everyday practices that are very significant to our everyday living.

What we call traditional medicine, was once called Indian medicine, and most American Indians will recognize Indian medicine other than alternative, botanical, herbal, and any other names like that. Traditional medicine and cultural healing was always given at a special time, for one person, for a special purpose.

We need people who understand our lifeblood, what you might call “genetics” because white medicine affects us differently than Indian medicine. Our people are dying from Tylenol, which is what is almost always given to us for everything. We need more practitioners and the education to become the health care providers for our people.

**Early Days:**

When your mom, or your grandmother, or your aunts ask you to come down the road with them to get firewood or to come with them, they would tell you to listen and be quiet. I was their worker. As a child, my job was to pick berries, collect medicine and food. Little did I know, I was acquiring a rich heritage, something that could not be replaced. What I do today now is teach my family in the way that I was taught.

Currently there is a rise to return to the original language of our people, so that words for health and Indian medicine, so that daily activities and ceremonial practices are learned and are expressed in an original way that our Creator intended. Our elders remember how these words were said, that was our instruction, that today we now call story telling.

**Food Practices**

All food is created to sustain life, my aunts would collect butter and maple sugar, so that we could have it. We picked and dried berries for tea, food, and dessert, potatoes, arrow root, cat tail flour. To this day, I still recall what a pail of frogs smell like.

During the early time. We didn’t have the luxury of separating food for ceremonial use, or anything like that. In ceremonial practices to this day, we still pray for our food because that food is what is going to sustain life. Later if you needed it for a purpose, you bring what you have, and that was the best you had and that’s how it was presented to others. We are taught all food is good, it’s what you did with your body is what mattered.

We didn’t have gluten free, diabetic food, nutritionists, dieticians, GMO, or whatever. Likewise, nowadays there are so many people telling us our food is bad. Because our reservation is too far from a city, we rely on commodities, some of us are very grateful for them, and then there are those who say the commodities are bad for us. When I remember my relatives who didn’t have enough food each day, I feel pity, because that’s not how we were taught to be. My grandmother had to be sent away because her mother could no longer feed her.

**A Cultural Lens:**

If researchers who really want to help can see through our eyes and hear our words for what we are really saying. Its best to know the historical background from those who know. That is where the learning begins. I hear of large grants, large amounts of money, even small money being given to the tribe to find out why we have chronic disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart problems, cancer, but yet, the questions they ask us don’t reflect me as Anishinabe people.

**Healers**

A pharmacist, I am told, is also a healer, they are a medicine person, they have something that can heal me or help me. If I say my heart is beating fast, the pharmacist can tell me what medication would work for me. Since he knows I am probably using Indian teas and eating ceremonial feast food, then the pharmacist can speak directly to the doctor to get my order made. We need more pharmacists, more healers on our reservations. We need to know what we say to the pharmacist is important to them, because we can’t always see the doctor, but we can always see the pharmacist more frequently, they can also look up our traditional or Indian medicines and find a different approach to our health and wellness.

**Bimaadiziwin, Cultural Health Belief**

If research or best practices can assist in this process, I would like to improve the accuracy of data that assist a researcher can use that makes them feel as if they were walking down those roads with my mother again. For example, I could show you the plants because while they may grow in other places, they are not always the same. As I get older these teachings and medicines that I learned when I was young, have not changed. However, I fear that without some kind of intervention, that knowledge of how to understand our cultural beliefs through stories like this will be lost. Our way of life treats health, wellness, spirituality, and happiness as one. Our life is called Bimaadiziiwin.