

MI'KMAQ FAMILY MIGMAOEI OTJIOSOG

Raised in a small town, Catherine Anne Martin sets out to explore the deep roots of her Mi'kmaq traditions in the heart of Cape Breton. Like many young First Nations people today, she is looking to the ways of the past for guidance in raising her children.

She takes them to a Mi'kmaq summer gathering at Chapel Island-a Mawio'mi. For decades, the Mi'kmaq from all over the Atlantic provinces have come here to celebrate Ste. Anne's Day, to renew friendships, share stories and gain spiritual and cultural strength from the richness of their heritage. At Chapel Island, Catherine learns anew that for the Mi'kmaq, raising children is a sacred task to be undertaken by the parents, the extended family and the whole community.

MI'KMAQ FAMILY/MIGMAOEI OTJIOSOG provides a valuable resource for both First Nations and non-First Nations audiences who are looking for ways to strengthen and explore their own families and traditions.

The **Serigraph** on the cover by Alan Syliboy, a Mi'kmaq artist from the Millbrook band, represents the Mi'kmaq family in the pre-European petroglyphic tradition.

Director & Researcher: Catherine Anne Martin
Producer: Shelagh Mackenzie
Executive Producer: Marilyn A. Belec

Produced by the National Film Board of Canada, Atlantic Centre in association with Health Canada.

This video is cleared for public performance and classroom use providing no entry fee is charged. Unauthorized duplication, cablecast or broadcast is a violation of Canadian copyright laws.

VHS 113C 9194 086 Running time 32:20 minutes. Printed in Canada

For sales or rental information call 1-800-267-7710



Closed captioned. A decoder is required.



Mi'kmaq Family
Migmaoei Otjiosog



VHS
113C
9194 086

Mi'kmaq Family Migmaoei Otjiosog



*"These children are only loaned to us;
we may claim them, they're ours, but
the babies are loaned by the Creator
... You as a mother or a father
must watch over them at all times."*

Sarah Denny



MI'KMAQ FAMILY MIGMAEIO OTJIOSOG

Migmaeio Otjiosog means

"Roots so deep they can't be pulled..."

Each new generation faces the challenge of raising children. Though we may live in times very different from our grandparents, we all have the same responsibilities as parents; to nurture and protect our children, to help them live by the society's beliefs and guidelines, and acquire the skills they will need to survive as adults.

When Mi'kmaq people speak of "*the old ways*" of child-rearing, they are referring to customs, values and practices which existed before European settlement. The Mi'kmaq were the first of the First Nations people to feel the impact of European culture. The Indian Act, the policy of resettlement onto reserves and the residential school regime all further weakened the fabric of Mi'kmaq society.

Now, however, as a matter of survival in the face of the social, cultural and economic problems facing them, First Nations people are rediscovering the old ways and once again passing them on to the next generation. Many traditional child-rearing customs of the Mi'kmaq are shared by all First Nations people and can provide valuable lessons today in the areas of nurturing, discipline and the meaning of kinship and social support.



Catherine Martin & son,
Photo by: Theresa J. Martin



Mi'kmaq Petroglyph,
Mi'kmaq Chief's Insignia

SUGGESTED RESOURCE MATERIALS

Parenting Programs used by
First Nations and Inuit people:

Positive Indian Parenting

Raising the Children

Our Sacred Gifts

Nobody's Perfect

Parents Teaching Virtues

Available through Mental Health Services,
Health Canada

Mi'kmaq Past and Present: A Resource Guide,
available through the Nova Scotia
Department of Education

Study Guide written by Wendy Lill.
Designed by Nibby Graphics, Anna Nibby-Woods

Educators consulted in the preparation
of this guide:

Marjorie Gould,
Mi'kmaq Education Authority

Mary Rose Julian,
Curriculum Co-ordinator,
Eskasoni Elementary and Junior High School

Josephine LaPorte,
Education Liason, Membertou Band Council

Donna Lameman, Principal,
Mikmawey School, Chapel Island

Helen Sylliboy,
Eskasoni School Board

Resource Consultants from
Health Canada.

POST SCREENING QUESTIONS

- 1 This film looks specifically at Mi'kmaq child-rearing traditions. Are there different child-rearing traditions in your culture?
- 2 Catherine Martin has gained strength and pride and new direction from her ancestral traditions. So has Joel Denny. Consider your heritage. Can you think of values from the past which can support you today?
- 3 Whether we realize it or not, we ALL tell stories in our families - to entertain, to teach lessons, to tell of the past or to just spend quiet time together. What stories or legends reflect the traditional culture from which you come?
- 4 Families come in all different shapes and sizes and stories often evolve to fit the needs of the family. What are some of the favorite stories in your family?
- 5 Catherine Martin lives in a mixed racial family. How do you maintain the traditions of two cultures without ignoring one?
- 6 The Mi'kmaq have incorporated aspects of other cultures into their traditions - for example, the blending of Christian and traditional Mi'kmaq spiritual beliefs. What are the challenges facing those families who are trying to integrate old ways into new realities? How can traditional First Nations parenting skills work in today's context?



PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONS

These questions can be useful tools for focusing the viewers on what they are about to see.

- 1 Choose five words to describe your family, then draw pictures to illustrate each word.
- 2 What supports are there for parents and children in your community?
- 3 Do you think that everyone has the responsibility to teach children in the community?
- 4 In this film, the filmmaker seeks guidance in raising her children. Can you think of people outside your immediate family whom you would seek out if you needed help?



CAST OF CHARACTERS

Ben Sylliboy, Grand Chief of the Mi'kmaq nation, lives on the Waycobah (*Whycocomagh*) reserve.

Murdena Marshall is a grandmother, communicator and a teacher of Native Studies at University College of Cape Breton

Sarah Denny, lives in Eskasoni, and is a cultural officer for the Micmac Association of Cultural Studies. (She has over 70 grandchildren!)

Joel Denny from Eskasoni, is Sarah Denny's son and an accomplished singer, dancer and drummer.

Noel Doucette is the Chief of Chapel Island reserve.

Jean Doucette, with her husband Noel, has raised twelve children and many grandchildren.

Catherine Anne Martin, her husband Frank and their children Natalie Dawn and Thomas Gabriel

The filmmaker wants to thank Mrs. W.J. Milliea from Big Cove, N.B. for teaching her the word 'Otjiosog' and honouring the film with this name. According to Mildred Milliea, 'otjiosog' is an old word for family and is related to the Mi'kmaq word for root, 'otjipesg'. As Mrs Milliea explains, "the family is rooted, we are rooted from our parents, grand parents and the roots go on and on". The word 'Otjiosog' is spelled in the Pacifique way so the Elders will recognize it. The word was found in a Mi'kmaq legend about a Mi'kmaq family.

Welalin,

Catherine A. Martin

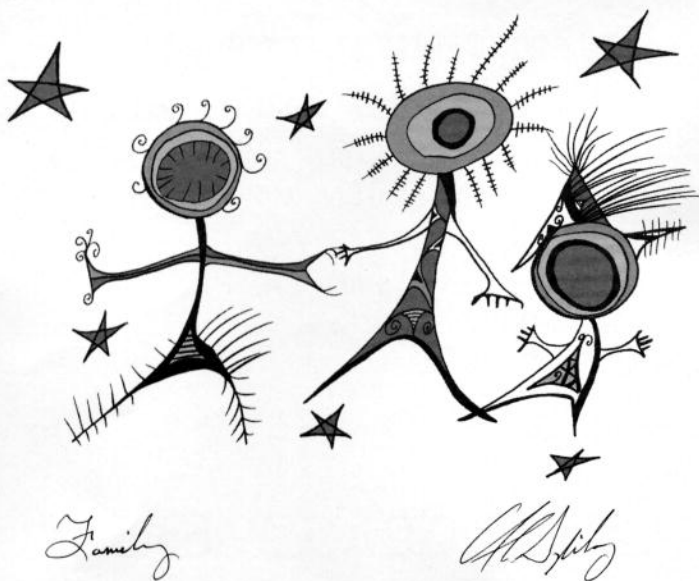
CHILDREN ARE GIFTS FROM THE CREATOR

The spiritual beliefs of many First Nations people help protect children and are good indicators of the importance attached to children.

- Traditionally, the Mi'kmaq believe that all life was created by one all-powerful being, the ultimate Creator.
- Every living thing - plants, animals and humans - have spirits and must be treated with respect.
- The responsibility of parents is to nurture their children's spirits so that they will in time, return to their Creator, pure and whole.

"These children are only loaned to us; we may claim them, they're ours, but the babies are loaned by the Creator ... You as a mother or a father must watch over them at all times."

Sarah Denny



NURTURING

"My mother would always be singing."

Joel Denny

The traditional Mi'kmaq ways of child-rearing are rich in nurturing and love.

- Parents work at developing the seven spiritual virtues in their children - love, honesty, respect, humility, truth, patience, and wisdom which is the last and most difficult to attain.
- Children are breastfed and kept close to their mothers.
- Parents talk and sing to their babies even while the babies are sleeping. Older children as well are comforted by the chants and lullabies in their mother tongue.
- Children are encouraged to spend time with elders and help them.
- Children are allowed to sit in on adult conversations and activities.
- Children are encouraged to develop new skills at their own pace.
- Physical growth and development are recognized and celebrated around such milestones as a child's first tooth and first hunt.
- Traditionally, Mi'kmaq people listen with their hearts and eyes, as well as with their ears. When parents listen with their hearts, children feel understood and they begin to trust.

**Mi'kmaq
Hieroglyphic:**
*"Wikmawaq-
his/her family"*



**Mi'kmaq
Hieroglyphic:**
*"Mijua'ji'-
child"*

DISCIPLINE

"We see discipline not as discipline but as direction. So instead of scolding a child and punishing him and sending him to his room, you don't do that. You hope that through his experience, that he has learned something from it and always an Elder will use a legend to point out the child's behaviour."

Murdena Marshall

Living in small communities, where individuals depended on each other for survival, children needed to learn to get along with each other and share responsibilities. As the Mi'kmaq try to bring their traditions into the present day, the lessons of the past are as relevant as ever.

- Co-operation is stressed, not competition.
- Children are taught the values of respect and responsibility through legends about nature.
- Respect, planning, realistic expectations, clear rules, consistency and sharing are the elements which help maintain harmony and balance in a home and community.
- Everyone must understand and accept the consequences of breaking the rules of the community.
- Discipline is carefully tailored to fit a child's level of understanding.
- Self-control is considered to be the best form of discipline.
- Children are corrected in a gentle, indirect, non-confrontational manner.
- Children are respected, never belittled.
- Discipline is never separated from teaching the right way to do things.

STORYTELLING

"Legends play a very important part in character building."

Murdena Marshall

Storytelling is a traditional teaching method which First Nations people have struggled to hold onto amidst the dominant society's system of teachers and textbooks and classrooms. The Mi'kmaq ways are passed on by word of mouth. Through telling of stories and legends, children learn about proper relationships with other people and the environment. They learn to be good listeners, good observers and to respect the power of words.

In First Nations culture, teaching is not relegated to the classroom. Parents, other family members, elders, storytellers and orators all pass on knowledge to the younger generation.

Mi'kmaq Alphabet — Phonetically

A	P	S	O	G	J	I	E	N	M	T	L	TJ
AH	PAY	S	O	K	JA	E	A	N	M	TA	L	TIJ

Vowels - A, E, I, Ô, O

Consonants - G, L, M, N, P, S, TJ

Mi'kmaq words, pronunciations and meanings for:

Mi'kmaq	Mi'k/maq	My kin
Otjiosog	O/tjio/sog	Family roots
Mawio'mi	Mawi/o'/mi	Gathering
Potlotek	Pot/lo/tek	Chapel Island
Msit No'kmaq	Msit no/k/maq	All my relations
Welalin	We/la/lin	Thank you

THE EXTENDED FAMILY

"We have a built-in block parenting system because everybody's so worried about your children and everybody's looking out for them."

"If you're sick, everybody comes over, if you're in a jam, everybody comes over. And then they hold you up while you're going down, whether it's financially, spiritually or emotionally or even physically. They're all there holding you up."

Murdena Marshall

Children have a sense of belonging because they are part of a large clan, or family grouping.

- Traditionally, Mi'kmaq families were identified by names of animals. For example the Sylliboy clan name is 'Bear'. Understanding one's clan lines gives a young person ties to the past and direction for the future in terms of marriage and interactions with members of the community.
- In the Mi'kmaq tradition, grandparents often raised grandchildren while parents were busy with hunting, trapping and fishing. The same thing happens today in many families as grandmothers and grandfathers, uncles and aunts keep a watchful eye on children.
- Children can be corrected by anyone in the community but it must be done with respect and gentleness.
- Through customs and ceremonies, children learn to be part of the family and to feel secure. At naming ceremonies, children are given carefully considered names which foster a sense of belonging and continuity.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

"It's a matriarchal society. I always believe in that because we are the keepers of the language, the oral traditions, the history, the prayers. We teach our children to follow behind us."

Murdena Marshall

Because women are the givers of life, they are held in high regard in the Mi'kmaq community. The mother is considered the head of the family. The role of men in Mi'kmaq society has traditionally been that of hunter. Women have been responsible for raising children, gathering food, making clothing, basketry and crafts. The unwritten law amongst the Mi'kmaq is that women direct the affairs of the community.

THE GRAND CHIEF

The Grand Chief of the Mi'kmaq nation oversees the spiritual needs of the Mi'kmaq people and is assisted by a Grand Council which meets regularly. Originally, Grand Chiefs were selected along family lines. Grand Chief John Denny Jr., who died in 1918, was the last of the hereditary Grand Chiefs. The Grand Chief is now chosen by the Grand Council.

**Mi'kmaq
Petroglyph,
Chief's Insignia**



**Mi'kmaq
Grand Council
Crest**

THE CHIEFS

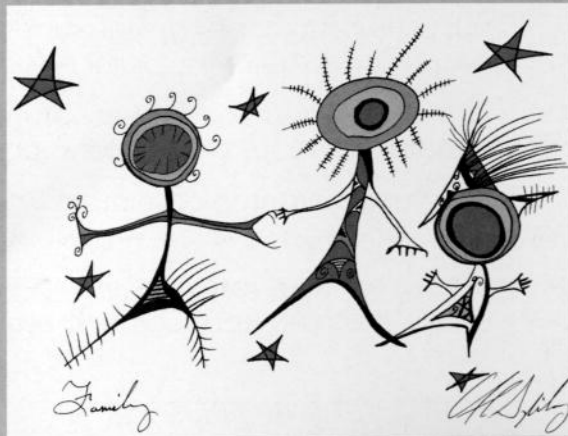
As the elected leaders for each reserve, the Chiefs serve for a period of two years under terms of the Indian Act.

STE. ANNE'S MISSION

By the end of the eighteenth century, virtually all Mi'kmaq had been baptised in the Roman Catholic religion. Today many Mi'kmaq are now trying to reintroduce and strengthen their native spiritual traditions.

Each July, thousands of Mi'kmaq make an annual pilgrimage to Chapel Island to celebrate Ste. Anne's Day. The event lasts for three to five days and is an example of the integration of native spirituality and Catholicism. In a recent Ste. Anne's day celebration, a First Nations priest used an eagle feather and sweet grass within a Roman Catholic mass for youth. Sacred Mi'kmaq teachings were shared during the service, including a pipe ceremony and a naming ceremony. The Mission to Ste. Anne used to be held at Malagawatch until the community was completely disbanded in 1942 during a government program of centralizing reserves.

"It is said that it has never rained when they bring Ste. Anne out for her procession."



RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

"The hard time was once you settled down in bed and then you'd start missing your parents and you'd cry in your bed for hours...and you didn't want to end up being a sissy so you had to hide your feelings with the other boys."

Grand Chief Ben Sylliboy

The Federal Government of Canada operated a system of Indian residential schools from the late 1800's to the 1970's as a means of improving the educational and training opportunities for First Nations children. Mi'kmaq children from the Maritimes attended the residential school in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. Here the children were separated from their families for months, sometimes years, and were forbidden to speak their mother tongue. Once grown, many found that they lacked parenting skills and were unable to pass on their language and tribal knowledge to their children and grandchildren. Many Mi'kmaq believe that the residential school system was responsible for breaking down the fabric of Mi'kmaq life.



The Shubenacadie Residential School.

CREDITS

Director & Researcher:	Catherine Anne Martin
Picture Editor:	Kimberlee McTaggart
Cinematographers:	Kent Nason Les Kriszan
Assistant Camera:	Dominique Gusset
Sound Recordists:	Arthur McKay Jane Porter
Production Assistants:	Barry Bernard Todd Stevens
Narration read by:	Catherine Anne Martin
Narration written by:	Wendy Lill Catherine Anne Martin
Sound Editors:	Jane Porter Antonia McGrath
Music:	Lee Cremo Sarah Denny Joel Denny Micmac Choir K'itpu Singers
Re-recording:	Jean-Pierre Joutel
Technical Co-ordinators:	Wayne Cormier Claude Cardinal
Unit Administrator:	Jane Boyle
Producer:	Shelagh Mackenzie
Executive Producer:	Marilyn A. Belec

Produced by the National Film Board of Canada,
Atlantic Centre in association with Health Canada.

© 1994 National Film Board of Canada

P.O. Box 6100, Station Centre-Ville,
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3H5

Running time 32:20 minutes.

