



Speaker: **Joan Morningstar / Mississaugi First Nation, Canada**

Joan Morningstar resides at Mississaugi First Nation, Ontario, Canada. She was a drug and alcohol counselor for 21 years, until she changed her career to be employed with Mississaugi First Nation as the Traditional Student Mentor for the Secondary School in Blind River. She had to leave her job in February 2018 due to cancer. She is now hoping to regain her walking, speech, fine and gross motor skills to enjoy her many hobbies and outdoor activities. Currently, she is working with physiotherapists in rehabilitation, and her days are spent in exercises monitored by professionals. She is also campaigning for the Blind River Refinery and Incinerator to be shut down permanently.

Bonjour. My name is Joan Morningstar. That's my government name, and my spirit name is Zhaawan Aankwad Ikwe, South Cloud Woman. I live in Mississaugi First Nation. It's about five miles West of Blind River, Ontario. We're pretty well located between Sault Saint Marie and Sudbury in between, about the middle.

In the early eighties, Cameco, back then named El Dorado, moved there and they put up a plant. While they're building it, they brought in a bunch of men. Steelworkers and everything they built at the plant. So there were trailers used as bunkhouses. I was hired to work there. So I worked there, and it was pretty good to work there. Then I got laid off and there was no reason why they laid me off, because nothing changed. So I was laid off for around two weeks and was given no reason. So when they called me back. I noticed that some people were different. They were not really making eye contact with me and not really talking to me. And I had a friend there, and I asked her: "What happened?" I said, "It seems different here". She goes, "oh nothing", and she walked away quick. So I went back to work that day, sat down, and was cleaning the last room. And I heard music, so I thought I had left my radio on in one of the rooms. There were 10 rooms per trailer. So I checked the rooms, there was no radio on, so I went back to the room, I sat down on the chair, and I listened, and I could hear the music. It was faint at first, but after a while, it got louder. I could hear the drums. Then I heard men, women and children wailing, crying, and a lot of sorrow.

And at that moment, that's when I got told that I started crying, because it was so sorrowful. So after that was over, that evening after work, I went to talk with my mother-in-law, and I told her what happened, my experience. And she said: "It sounds like they disturbed something there, maybe a burial ground." She said: "Go back and talk to your friend and see if you can get some information." I said okay, so I went back and I sat down with my friend, and I said: "Tell me what happened here", because there was a lot of things happening at work. And so she looked at me and looked around. She looked back at me. She said: "They told us that if we told you, that we would get fired." She said they excavated, that there was a burial ground. She said they had helicopters here



and lights hooked up 24/7. She said they took everything out. She said the archeologist and everything was there. So with that, she got up and left.

And I went back that evening and told my mother-in-law: "Yeah, they did dig up a burial ground." So she told me to make an offering. And go there and make that offering with food and tobacco and that. I said okay. So that weekend, me and my husband then we went by canoe. We parked along the bank. We had to climb up on the bank as we had snuck on the land of Cameco. We got to the tree line. And we walked in. And that's when we could see all the indentations where they had done the digging. The rectangles, squares and everything on the ground. So I met them, could still feel them, and I talked with them. I thanked them for reaching out to me. And I could hear the drums and singing and everything again. I sat down, I started crying. And then we put our offerings and then we left and went back and talked to my mother-in-law. And she told me: "They reached out to you." She said: "Try to bring our people back home."

So that's, that's been, you know, since, well, 1982 that I started this, and now it's 2021.

And now, I feel motivated again that maybe this time, I'll get them home with their sacred items. Because I know when our people get buried, they get buried with their sacred items. I don't want them hanging up no more in the museum or nothing. They have to be buried again. And I just want to bring the people home.

Joan, how far away is the refinery and the incinerator from your reserve here?

Well if you go from here, it's 1.6 kilometers, but there's people on the other side of the highway that live closer. But you don't see none of that information in Cameco's reports, because they always say we refer to Blind River, being the furthest of our community. It's like Mississauga First Nation is invisible to them. They got an emergency evacuation plan for the golf course. They got an emergency evacuation plan. There's a high school yard over here. They got an emergency evacuation for that. But no mention of Mississauga who live right on their doorsteps. Basically, we have no emergency evacuation. If their bells went off today, do you think I could hear them? And because I've got disabilities right now, I have cancer from what I believe was caused by that refinery. I've got lung cancer, and from the lung cancer, the doctor said it was the first time they had seen cancer attack the motor skills. The fine and gross, the talking skills and the walking. I'm doing better than I was last year.

Do you think that's because you're so close to the refinery, or do you think it might have something to do with the incinerator that they put in as well?

Well, when they had that fallout way back in 1991, I think, or 1990, there was over a hundred and some Gallon K that was released. And I remember waking up that morning. Our car was white, it was all covered with this yellowish stuff. Yellowish, greenish stuff. It was all covered. So I went out there, and I took some off the car with my hand. My husband then came out too to look and we



didn't know what it is. But right now, I got cancer, he has cancer. He's my ex now, but he got cancer. The woman, my friend that lived next door to me. She got cancer and died. The young girl that lived across the street from me, her kids have multiple health issues. And then this other friend, down the street, her daughter got breast cancer. The guy that worked at Cameco, not far from there, from where I lived. He died of cancer.

It's all over the community, aye?

It's people been dying about every 3 months with cancer from here and from Blind River. I just heard another guy from Blind River.

Joan, thank you very much.

Disclaimer

This transcript is at the responsibility of Peace Boat and may not be completely the same as the original testimony. The original testimony was presented online at the World Nuclear Survivors Forum 2021 on December 2-3, where over 30 nuclear survivors from five continents around the world shared their voices with more than 1000 people. The Forum was hosted by Peace Boat in partnership with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). The stories and panel discussions are all available for viewing on demand via Youtube or on our website here: <https://nuclearsurvivors.org>