I am dedicating this paper in memory of my dear mother. She passed away from this world one year ago in this month of October. And now for just a few minutes I would like to reflect on life itself.

Her death made me look at life a little differently. It made me realize how life is so precious, so beautiful, so sacred. Yet, it is so mysterious and most difficult, in fact unbearable at times, not realizing how fortunate we are to be in good health and to be alive for our families, our communities and for people around us. Each one of us leads our lives a little differently, and therefore, we are a little different in a very small way.

Our conception and our birth are so very similar, we are actually not different as human beings. In this conception, we are cloistered in our mother's womb for nine months, during this same period, a bond is growing between the mother and child. The bond that has developed is carried on throughout a whole lifetime. Then, at the end of this lifetime, the bond is taken away, and only the memory is left behind. But the instillment remains.

As I reflect back, I can see that as we grow away from childhood and into adult life, we see, and appreciate things that we didn't understand while we were growing up.

My paper today is my mother's reflection on me, and my Micmac Catholicism. I can look back to the very impressionable years of my life as a child and recall many memories, but her devotion and faith is the clearest in my mind. I can see a little girl kneeling down on a spotless kitchen floor in front of her mother, who sits on a handmade wooden bench. The child's hands resting on her mother's lap folded in prayer, is fervently saying her bedtime prayer. The prayer is said in complete Micmac for not a word of English was spoken at that time.

Sunday was a very special day for us in our community. The observance that was placed on a Sunday weekly mass could be compared to our feast
day celebrations today. There was no priest in our community even though one would come once a year or at the most three times a year. But we observed Sunday as the most spiritual day of the week. My grandmother and my mother would prepare our Sunday meal on Saturday night so that after we came back from the Church the meal would be ready. I can still visualize my mother holding my hand (pemgelisgenit) as we walked together to church.

Many people would leave their homes at the first ring of the church bell. They would all congregate outside the church, talking and laughing, the men would be standing on one side of the church and the women and children on the other. At the sound of the last ring everyone would enter the church and the celebration of mass would commence.

The choir along with an elder, usually all men, would begin the prayers, the elder saying the Rosaries, with all five decades and all in Micmac. After all Rosaries were said, the choir would begin singing the mass in Micmac, beginning with the entrance hymn, Lord Have Mercy, Gloria, Credo, Holy Holy, and Lamb of God. The complete mass would be sung along with the offertory, even though the priest was not present. The collection was taken up at the singing of Credo. Once the prayers were all sung the elder, who was a prayer leader, would say the last prayer, which had beautiful and most meaningful scriptures in it. There were four or five prayer leaders, who took turns in leading the prayers.

Once the service was over every man, woman, and child, would once again congregate outside the church and wait for the chief to come out. He would stand in front on the church steps to lecture and make announcements. This lecture was more or less a sermon, teaching moral values and how we should conduct ourselves. Once he stepped down then the celebration of this service was over. Then everyone went home, where the meal was waiting for them.

Another special event that took place was on St. Anne’s day. St. Anne is the patron Saint of the Micmac people (miigemag) and her celebration is a happy and joyous event.

The celebration of this event begins on July 26th, the feast day of St. Anne, and ends the following weekend with a picnic. The preparation would begin one week before all this is to take place. Men prepare the grounds around the church. They start by getting poles that would hold little flags for the procession path. A little ways from the church stands a big cross with a fence around it, and a gate that is opened for this occasion. The women gather and arrange fresh flowers and plants. Next a table is set up where the statue of St. Anne will be placed.

Everybody in the community would come for this feast day and the mass is sung in the same manner as Sundays, with the exception of certain
hymns that are dedicated to the patron Saint. (For this occasion natives from other reserves would come and join in the celebration.) A special invocation hymn is sung (St. Anne Alasotmelseoin) during the procession to the cross. At this time the Chief, crucifix in hand, and usually four little girls with white dresses who have recently received first Holy Communion carry the statue of St. Anne. More prayers and singing are said and the Chief speaks to the congregation.

Once again another procession hymn is sung (notaotigemoet) as the procession returns to the church, and there again the elder will say the last prayer. It is only after all this solemn and prayerful celebration is over that the picnic would begin. The picnic lasts for three days and is filled with fun and laughter. Activities such as dancing, Bingo, games and good times are enjoyed by all, including non-natives from the surrounding area.

The next event takes place in the month of October. These are the evening prayers that are said every night. The rosaries are said and mysteries of our Blessed Mother are sung by the choir. These evening prayers are held in the honour of our Blessed Mother and are also held in May of each year. On the Feast day of the Blessed Virgin in May the celebration takes place in the same manner as the Feast day of St. Anne. Special hymns and invocation hymns for our Blessed Mother are sung at this time.

On the 2nd of November another solemn celebration takes place to honour and pay our respect for the dead. The ritual takes place at night where we pray and visit our dead at the graveyard. In late afternoon of this day people start going to the graveyard to light candles on their late loved ones' grave. This is a time for grieving and sadness for this is the time of remembrance. This is the time when the mass is sung for the dead, different hymns altogether. While the candles are all lit outside, the praying and singing is taking place inside the church.

After this is over, the procession takes place and everyone proceeds towards the graveyard, while the hymns for the dead are sung. At this time it is dark outside and many people carry lanterns and flashlights. More prayers are said where the cross stands in the graveyard. Some families gather around the graves of their loved ones who had just passed away. It is most striking to see this in person. We have kept this tradition, once a year we celebrate with our parish priest.

Christmas time to me didn't have the same effect as it did the other occasions. At Christmas there would be a crib set up the side of the altar, and a procession would take place, where the baby Jesus would be laying. There were a lot of beautiful hymns for this occasion. The church would all be decorated beautifully. And the midnight mass would be sung, along with the procession hymn (notjootagatiog).
The next special event is Lent, which had a strong effect on me, because when I follow the stations of the cross, I would relive our Lord’s sufferings. At this time an elderly man leads four or five young boys. One of the boys leads the four with a cross, and one carries a little box that makes a noise when it is time to kneel or stand up and the others carry candles. They come out from behind the altar as soon as the hymn for this purpose is sung, \((\text{oestao-olg-nap-imtemeoanetj})\). When the singing is finished you can hear the noise from the box. The old man will then kneel down and recite the prayers of our Lord’s passion on the cross. And it continues on until all fourteen stations are completed.

This follows Good Friday and for me this was the most striking event. My mother would prepare us and remind us the sacredness of Good Friday. There were many things we weren’t allowed to do on Good Friday that we normally did any other day. Such as we could not comb our hair, we could not make any noise or shout or play. No music was allowed, and we didn’t eat until we came back from the church. This was the day when we would quietly get up, making no sound, very peaceful and very solemn, while getting ready to go to church.

The church bell doesn’t ring on this holy day. Only the sound which sounds like a loud yell that comes from blowing of the Conch. It is a large sea shell that was used for this occasion only. Some young men were really talented for blowing this Conch.

On the front steps of the altar, lies the crucifix covered with purple cloth. The service begins by a prayer leader who says the rosaries. Then the hymns for Good Friday are sung, which tell about the account of our Lord’s suffering and death.

When this special hymn \((\text{tjogitaago eloioiog})\) is sung the chief silently goes in front of the church where the crucifix is placed, followed by all the men. He then kneels down and unveils it, and he kisses the crucifix in a form of a cross. Then everyone follows on their knees. Usually the women and children get down on their knees starting from the back of the church and slowly move to the front right behind the men. When the last of the men goes, a different hymn is sung for women and children. It usually takes two hymns to be sung, \((\text{oegosit-oestaoolg})\), and \((\text{seesos geeeg-igaatagonigtog})\).

At this time you will see women, who normally braid their hair or have it up in a bun, let it all down, long and straight. The services end with a last prayer by an elder.

Holy Saturday arrives with much more activities, there is an air of waiting and anticipation since for 40 days there has been fasting, prayer, and just being quiet. On Holy Saturday, women start to bake, clean house, and prepare for the celebration of Easter Sunday. The Micmac believe strongly in the Resurrection of our Lord on Easter Sunday.
Women are preparing for the coming of the *olpaatosg*, some time during the night. *Olpaatosg* are a group of singers (not the choir) who go around singing all night, they go into every home, singing and praising the Resurrection of our Lord.

At the dusk on Holy Saturday, the *olpaatosg* will assemble along with an elder and young men who wish to follow. On the east end of the reserve the first house, and elder will say a beautiful hymns of joy. Beginning from the first house they go into every home and sing the same two hymns, until the next morning at dawn, usually at the time they are at the west end of the last house of the reserve.

In conclusion I want to say, to the best of my ability, I have tried to give you this paper of my experience on Micmac Catholicism.