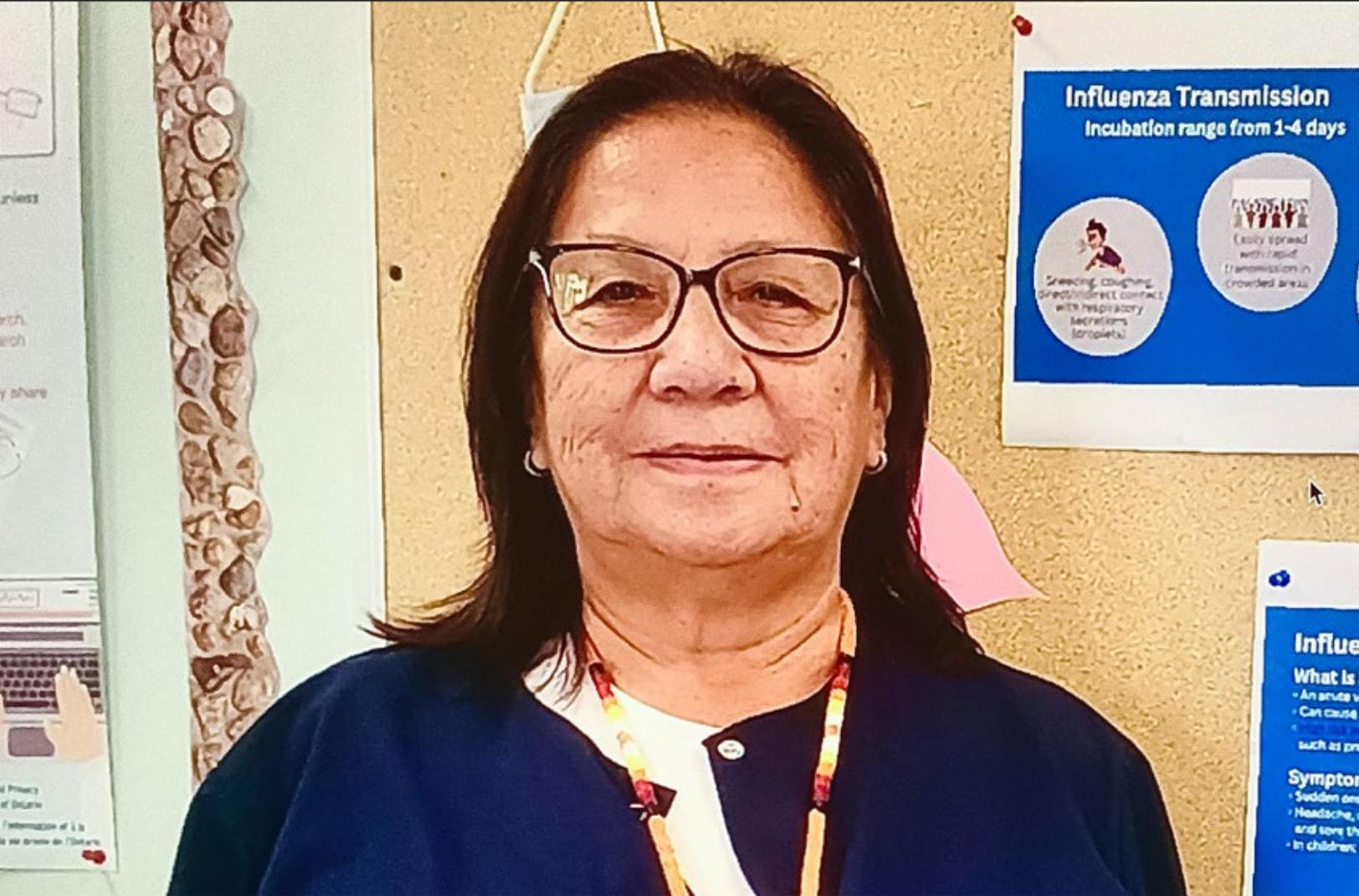




Sioux Lookout
First Nations
Health Authority

OTIPACIMO Storyteller



Community Sunlight: Nellie Beardy

Celebrating a career in nursing

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Message From

SONIA ISAAC-MANN, CEO & PRESIDENT

It is my pleasure to share an update for the Otipacimo, Storyteller Newsletter– 2023 Fall Edition. With the Dagwaagin (Fall) season upon us, Mother Earth has already begun to prepare for the winter months. It is a beautiful time of transition and transformation for all living things. We know that change is inevitable and just like the seasons, we continue to demonstrate great resilience and the ability to adapt and thrive.

This new season also signifies a time of change and transition for SLFNHA. We have honoured and wished former CEO & President, James Morris, health and wellness in his retirement and I have now approached the 3-month mark with the organization.

While leading the organization in developing innovative health solutions to meet community members' needs and designing organizational alignment and efficiencies, I also commit to reaffirming governance processes, developing a decision-making pathway with key decision points throughout the year and strengthening partnerships. We have heard the importance of First Nation inclusion in decision-making, so I also commit to strengthening communications and engagement processes so First Nations are aware of SLFNHA activities and have a voice in the way they visualize their health care system.

An overall strategic management framework has been developed that includes an implementation plan. This plan will guide the interconnected processes of operationalizing the 2022-2027 SLFNHA Strategic Plan and identified priorities: Community Ownership, Health Transformation, and Service Experience.

As I have become more grounded in the regional work, I have witnessed the gaps, inequities and access challenges that First Nations continue to face. The work that we will do will help to address the challenges and will take some time but can be accomplished. It is also important to recognize the strengths and accomplishments achieved to date while developing a health transformation strategy and plan moving forward. While there is much work to do, I would like to acknowledge and commend the First Nations leadership, Elders, tribal councils, partners and staff for the on-going commitment to contributing in unique ways to developing a strong health system.

We will keep the SLFNHA Vision, Mission and Values at our core as we continue to strive towards improving health service delivery and advocacy efforts.

Our Vision: Resilient and Healthy Nations supported on their path to wellness.

Our Mission: Transforming the health of Anishinabe people across Keewaytinook by providing community led services and a strong voice for their community health needs.

Our Values: We value respect, relationships, culture, equity, and fairness. We work to protect the Anishinabe teachings of love, courage, respect, wisdom, truth, honesty, and humility.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for a warm welcome and wish you all a safe and healthy season.

Kitchi-Miigwetch



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OTIPACIMO is produced by the SLFNHA Communications Department.

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Vision

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Mission

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Community Sunlight

Nellie Beardy, Public Health Nurse
Muskrat Dam First Nation



Nellie Beardy (nee Fiddler) grew up with her family on the traplines of Two River Lake and Knife Lake, close to Bearskin Lake First Nation. She was taken to Pelican Lake Indian Residential School at six years of age. In 1966, five families, including the Fiddlers, moved to Muskrat Dam permanently settling there in 1967.

She did not return to Pelican Lake school. Her parents decided to keep her home when she was around 13 years old.

“I had lost most of my skills and my knowledge,” she says. “So, they decided they would make me stay at home and, you know, re-teach me the way of life.”

With her mother’s guidance she would learn to master traditional skills like preparing and setting fishnets and running snare lines. With her father, Moses Fiddler, guiding logging, Nellie and her family would help to build the first cabins in Muskrat Dam.

In the Fall of 1973, Muskrat Dam had a small clinic established by Health Canada. Nellie’s older sister Elizabeth left the position of Community Health Representative (CHR), which Nellie would take on for the next seven years.

“Basically, we did it all the jobs that nurses had to do back then in terms of, you know, treating people,” Nellie said. “I had a lot of support from the Elders. The women, the older women of the community. They were so knowledgeable in work in midwifery. The Elders, the midwives, they taught me so much in how to work with young mothers and how to assist them in their delivery. Just working with the older women, like my Mom and the women of her generation, they had so much knowledge in traditional medicine.”

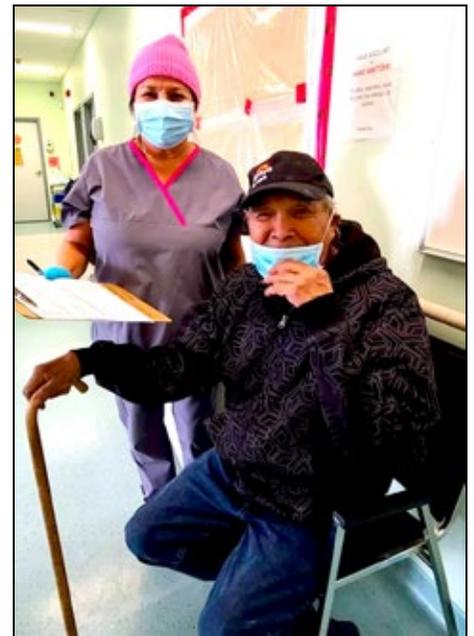
Nellie would not return to school until the late 1980’s. At this point her family moved to Sioux Lookout where she did upgrading, working toward a high school diploma gearing her academics to science, biology, and chemistry.

The Beardy family moved to Thunder Bay in 1997. Nellie’s husband, Stan Beardy was Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation and her son Daniel was pursuing a hockey career. Sadly, Daniel passed away in 2004. Despite the loss of her son, Nellie graduated in 2005 from the four-year nursing program at Lakehead University

Nellie began her professional career in Thunder Bay working in a long-term care facility. She later took on contract work with Shibogama First Nations Council, travelling to Wunnumin Lake and Kingfisher Lake.

Community Sunlight is a recurring feature article in Optipacimo that highlights and celebrates work of SLFNHA staff and partners in communities across Kiiwetinoong.

To suggest a person to feature in Community Sunlight, please contact the Communications Department at communications@slfnha.com



Left: Nellie Beardy with her brothers in front of Nellie Fiddler Memorial Clinic, which is named after Nellie's grandmother. From left, Bishop Morris Fiddler, Nellie Beardy, Roy Fiddler, Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, Nishnawbe Aski Nation.

RIGHT: Nellie assisting with COVID 19 vaccination in her community with Joel "Joey" McKay.

She was guided back to her home community following the advice of her father and her husband's father: Never completely break away or live somewhere else permanently.

"One of our Elder's teachings in our way of life, one of our beliefs is that if you listen to an Elder, listen to what they tell you, and you strive to fulfill their dream for you, then good things will come," she says. "I just realized that our communities, especially the isolated remote communities need consistent nursing. They need their own First Nations nurses. The Elders that don't speak the language prefer to work with me because I speak the language. I speak their Oji-Cree. They understand me and I understand them."

She returned to work in Muskrat Dam in 2007 and has worked in various roles over the years.

A highlight was in January 2020 Nellie was added to the special COVID-19 Pandemic Team consisting of physicians, paramedics, RPN's, Red Cross personnel, and another First Nations nurse. She was very proud to assist as the sole Oji-Cree speaker providing education and advice to the older population. She was vital to the delivery of the COVID-19 vaccine into the northern communities.

Although Nellie does not feel like an Elder, she uses her knowledge to advocate for First Nations people. To encourage the people around her, Nellie says: "I

always tell a lot of people that there are many different roles that are necessary in health care."

She feels that First Nations should have our own people driving the health care system in our own communities, and not relying on outsiders. This includes adding more appropriate cultural activities back into our communities.

"What I believe is that if you incorporate your way of life into healthcare then you are going to be a lot better off," she says. "You are going to be healthier (First Nation) people. That's what we want. We want healthy communities. We want healthy family units. Healthy family units build strong communities. We want to be strong communities but healthier."

After the rigorous time spent on a lifelong career, she looks forward to slowing her schedule and getting some much-deserved free time. As health care worker, she says it's a 24/7 job. In May 2022, Nellie decided to make another career change.

"Your priorities change as you're getting older. You want some free time, you know, to go out on the land. Go camping. Go fishing, go wherever," she says. "So, I took on the role of Public Health Nurse, I work from 9 to 5 and it frees up my time to do other stuff, like sitting at home watching baseball," she says. "I like that."

Truth and Reconciliation Week



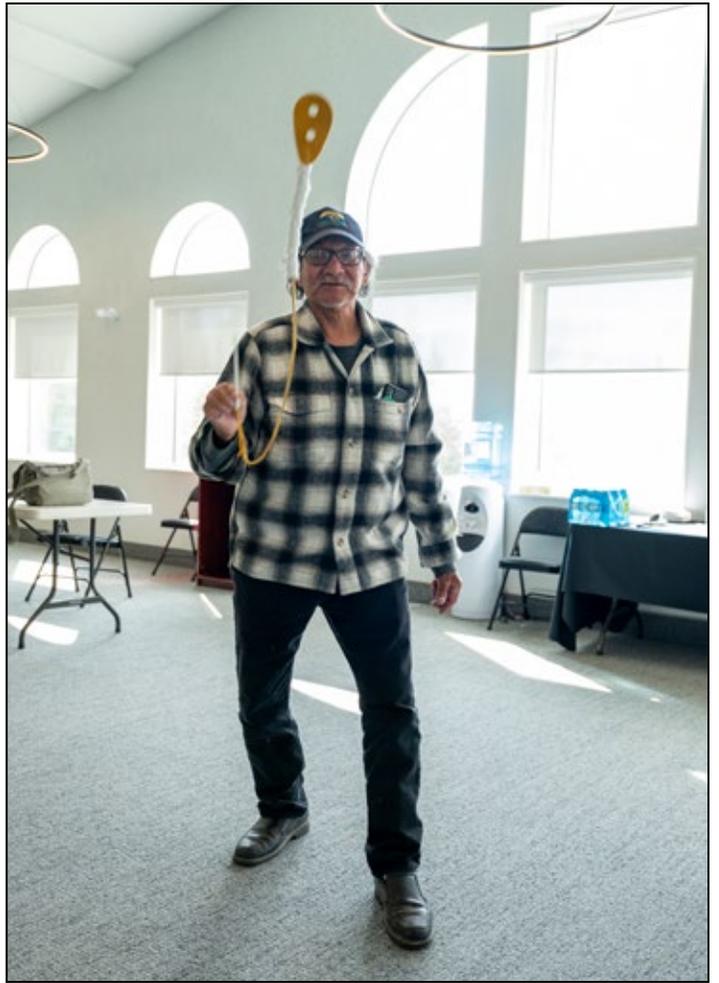
Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority (SLFNHA) hosted a week of activities September 25-29, 2023 in Sioux Lookout.

“As an Indigenous organization with a large presence in town, Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority felt it was important to do our part to bring awareness and attention to Truth and Reconciliation,” says Sonia Isaac-Mann, CEO and President of SLFNHA. “We also

wanted to honour the survivors of residential schools and the memory of the children that never returned from those institutions.”

The highlight of the week was the Remembrance Walk on Sept. 27 from the local OPP station to the Town Beach. Other activities included drumming, beading, medicine and canoe workshop, medicine bag making, traditional feast, and BBQ’s and information sharing.







Annual General Meeting Recap

Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority (SLFNHA) has concluded its two-day Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Thunder Bay, ON. SLFNHA would like to acknowledge the attendance of Elders, Chiefs, Health Directors, regional leaders, and front-line workers from across SLFNHA's service area, which includes 33 First Nation communities.

"Miigwetch to the delegates that made the long trip to be here with us this week. The desire to improve the health of our people is deeply shared. I appreciate the time given to discuss and strategize the future of health care in the North. We will continue to work together," says Sonia Isaac-Mann, CEO and President.



TOP: SLFNHA CEO & President Sonia Isaac-Mann addresses the delegation.

TOP RIGHT: Chief Lorraine Crane, Slate Falls First Nation.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Nishawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler.



TOP: Chief Russell Wesley, Cat Lake First Nation.

RIGHT: CEO & President Sonia Isaac-Mann, James Morris, and Mayor Doug Lawrence, Sioux Lookout.

FAR RIGHT: Chief Donny Morris, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug presenting an update on the Chiefs Council on Health.



RIGHT: Howard Meshake, Chair of the SLFNHA Board opens the Annual General Meeting.

FAR RIGHT: Chief Delores Kakegamic, Sandy Lake First Nation poses a question.

BOTTOM: Outgoing CEO & President James Morris at his Retirement Gala celebrating his career.



Student Wellness and Mino Bimaadiziwin

Q&A with JAMES CRITTENDEN, Youth School Counsellor



Tell us about yourself.

Boozhoo, Aaniin!! My name is James Crittenden and my Anishinaabe name is Mashkode-Biziki which translates to Buffalo and I'm from the Bear Clan. I work with SLFNHA as a youth school counsellor and I provide free counselling services at Sioux North High School. When needed, I also support students at Pelican Falls First Nations High School.

A little bit about myself... I grew up in a First Nations community called Chippewas of Georgina Island, a small southern Ontario Ojibwe community of roughly 600 people. In my free time, I like to read, cook, fish, make Indigenous crafts, get out on the land, explore nature, and spend time getting to know people in the community. I'm honoured to be working with the students from Sioux Lookout and the surrounding Northern First Nations.

As a youth school counsellor, how do you support students?

My role as a youth school counsellor is to provide students with mental health counselling that promotes wellness and Mino Bimaadiziwin (a good way of life). Students are invited into a confidential and non-judgmental atmosphere for one-on-one counselling that is tailored to everyone's path to wellness. I like to follow a two-eyed seeing approach when providing counselling services that sees mental health from a Western and Indigenous lens. The goal of counselling is to establish a therapeutic relationship where students feel safe to share their stories and work towards pathways to wellness. I cover a variety of topics in counselling such as anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, trauma, substance misuse, relationship issues, and grief.

The new school year is now underway. What kind of self-care tips can you share?

I understand what it is like to be far away from home as I moved away from my community for school and my work. I recognize how challenging it may be for students who have left home to be in school and I offer these words of advice for taking care of yourself while in school. Firstly, I encourage you to prioritize yourself by ensuring your wellness needs are being met while away from home. This can look like reaching out for counselling support, practicing self-care activities, building new friendships and making time to connect with family and friends back home. Self-care is anything you do to take care of yourself so you can stay physically, mentally, and emotionally well. Its benefits are better physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being. Ensuring you are getting adequate sleep, eating nutritional foods, engaging in some type of physical activities, nurturing your self-

compassion, spending time with others, practicing positive self-talk and finding time for entertainment are all ways of taking care of yourself.

If a student is struggling with their mental health, what can they do to get support?

Mental and physical health are equally important components of overall health and often youth feel anxious to reach out for support. Therefore, it is important for students to know that they have access to mental health counselling supports while in school. There are two of us Nodin youth school counsellors located at Sioux North High School, and we offer walk-in and sessional counselling to First Nation students. Students can reach out to teachers, guidance counsellors or request to speak with youth school counsellors when they feel that they need to talk with someone about their mental health. Students can be rest assured that youth counsellors are here for them and provide a confidential and safe place for them to prioritize their mental health and wellness.

What are some safe and healthy activities for students?

Planting seeds that grow into healthy long-term habits is important for our youth. From good eating habits to exercise to healthy socialization, positive youth development can have long-lasting effects on the next generation. Here are some activities that can help establish personal wellness and healthy habits in students, now and long into the future. Make exercise fun, take walks, explore trails, take up after school activities, prioritize sleep, spend time with friends, cook healthy meals, volunteer, try new things, journal your thoughts, dreams and personal goals and take time to unwind after a long day at school. Really find what brings you joy and incorporate it into your daily life.

Can you provide some positive words of encouragement for students and youth for the school year?

Just a note to encourage you on your way through your studies and whatever else is on your plate. Keep up the great work! I know school can be quite the grind sometimes, but it will pay off in so many ways down the line. Education is key to learning and knowing so much about the world, but just as important is knowing and learning about yourself. Sometimes things will seem hard and you might be discouraged. Please know that there are so many people who care and are cheering for you every step of the way. You are awesome, and you're going to do this. Keep putting one foot in front of the other until you get to where you want to go. Wishing you all a successful year of high school and remember to take care of you, because you're worth it!

Seeking help is a sign of strength, not a weakness.

If you are struggling and need support, help is available.

Walk-In and Scheduled appointments are available at Sioux North High School during the school year, with services offered year-round at Nodin's Queen Street office.

Or contact NAN Hope 24/7 by phone, text, or chat at 1-844-626-4673
www.nanhope.ca

“What’s Up Cuz?”

TYRELL MONIAS, Youth Facilitator

Isn't it refreshing to smell the Autumn aroma? Sunlight is getting shorter, and the air has a sharpness to it. Certain smells we recognize can trigger emotions and memories. This is called the Proust effect. Every Fall, I



remember the chaotic days as a little Oji-Cree kid of getting ready for school and making my way to class on the first day: new backpack, clothes, supplies, kicks, and a new season. After school, I played with my friends, walking down to the playground, and playing grounders. Blissful times and the Fall smell triggers that for me. Fall is my favourite time of year. I always look forward to Halloween and tons of turkey leftovers. Fall is also a time of departing. Indigenous youth across northwestern Ontario travel out of their community to receive an education. To every youth in Sioux Lookout, Thunder Bay and beyond, your strength and courage are the size of Anemki Wajiw.

Every Fall, I find myself reminiscing. Remembering where I came from, where I went, what I felt and experienced. These places these emotions all have one thing in common. They formed who I am. Like many others, I find myself dusting off the old memory stick I call my brain, almost relooking at them from the perspective of now. Sometimes, I cringe, I long, or I relish. These memories, carved into my brain, the edges have become dull and benign. No longer worrying about the messiness of that time. As the plants and trees drift away for the winter, we are only left with memories of what it is like with them, much like when people in our lives go to the spirit realm. Grieving what is lost, the times we spent together, the shared laughter, pain, and love. In the past year, I had lost an uncle and great-grandfather. I have great memories of them and will forever hold them in my heart tightly. Like the youth leaving their families, I must have the strength and courage to move forward.

As a youth facilitator, I want to share my experiences to connect with youth through our work at Raising Our Children. We often get insight from communities about topics and activities they see that will benefit their youth in the community. I offer workshops and activities such as archery, canoeing, crafting hand drums, and providing a safe space for youth to be themselves. We aim to support youth workers in the community and learn from them about their culture and how they support their youth. I'm only 1 of 4 other youth facilitators on our team, and we are always open to hearing from communities about their youth priorities.

“We aim to support youth workers in the community and learn from them about their culture and how they support their youth.”

This Fall, I am getting ready for the fall hunt. Geese, beavers, spruce chickens, and moose are also getting ready. Moose will begin their rutting season, socializing and growing their population. Geese wait till the last minute to leave the northern winter to get all the food they need for their journey. Beavers stay put in their lodge and harvest before the winter starts. What do you do? Like these beautiful creatures, we must prepare. I get my winter gear ready, get warmer socks, and the most essential part of preparing for winter is getting mentally prepared. The lack of sun, the muteness of the snow, and the sheer cold of northern winter aren't for everyone.

The cold is working fast, yellowing the leaves in our area. When walking out in the bush, it is a beautiful transition to see the summer green wash away. I briefly talk about grief and nostalgia, which are challenging topics. How we understand and feel it is different for everyone: the words we say, the thoughts we think, and the sensations we feel. Fall is a transition period, a time to reflect and heal. So, I hope to hear from you soon. Go out and enjoy the fall season, get some moose meat, finish your harvest, and stay warm.



Sioux Lookout
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