

*Biskakone:* In our ceremonies we have talks, and we let the spirits in the forest know that our intentions are to go out there and harvest the Waawaashkeshi (deer).

My name is Biskakone. I am a hunter from Lac du Flambeau. I hunt for the health of my family and I hunt for the health of my community.

After the deer presents himself to us and give us that shot, we ask for forgiveness for taking its life. We also speak of how it's gonna benefit our loved ones and our family through the feasting and the usage of its hide and its wiiyaas – its meat. I don't think anybody likes to see a spirit leaving. Then we remember that we're Anishinaabe, and this is what we do and this is how we live. We're suppose to do this. We're supposed to be in that circle with that deer and his life.

When he's gone, when he leaves, we take all his organs out and we keep the ones that we want: the heart, the liver, sometimes the kidneys. Once those insides, those organs and everything are out, we make an offering. That moment right there when you drag that deer up out of the forest and you're bringing it home to your people, that's my favorite part of the whole hunt.

That little trail right there that you create from where he fell, to me, that's a very sacred time. When a person has the ability to hunt, part of that responsibly of hunting is sharing your harvest with your people. We get the hide, and then we get all the different cuts of meat. Everyone else cuts the meat. Somebody would like it. There's an elder that likes the neck. I have another friend of mine, he likes the ribs, you know.

A lot of people love the tenderloins and the hindquarters and the shoulders, and we save the hooves sometimes. There's a lot to use on a deer. That venison, that Waawaashkeshiwiiyaas, there's medicine in there. All the stuff that we don't ingest today, all the natural things, the grasses and all the medicines that grow in your waawaashkeshi, he eats that. We eat him. He gives that to us.

We want to spread that medicine to our community and our elders, and give them that original food. Once the hide comes off the deer, the tanning process has begun. The hide can be used for many different applications: tobacco pouches, moccasins. Those hides are very, very valuable to Ojibwe people and a lot of other Native people.

Say a baby is gonna be born. We make their first moccasins out of that buckskin that we just tanned up. Or a wedding is gonna happen. A gift is gonna be made out of that to represent that new life with their partner. I work a lot with velvet and buckskin. When velvet was first introduced here in the 1700s, it became a big part of our dress in our Ojibwe territory, Anishinaabe territory. That represents a time when our art was as its most fantastic and glorious. That's when every family did it. Today, there's only a handful of people left that do that. When we first signed our treaties, there was land areas that we outlined, saying "We'll share the land with you, but we're gonna retain our hunting and fishing rights here, forever."

I credit our ancestors for preserving that for us today. The role here as Ojibwe people, it's an important role. We're the keepers of the natural world. It's our job to maintain this traditional lifestyle for our families, and for our reservation, for our elders, and for our babies. Without it, we wouldn't know who we are. We wouldn't know where we come from.