

## How the Roundhouse Came to Be with Willie Wilson and Shishigo Gijig

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**Time:** 6 minutes 53 seconds

Transcribed by Tasneem Badshah and Christina Pasqua, 2020-2021.

00:08-00:46

**Shishigo:** This is part of Willie's story. But where we're sitting right now—we're sitting in the center of the Roundhouse, which is a very, very sacred place to Indigenous people. And I want to take this time to say that I've been privileged and honored to have met Willie, and not only that but that we joke, we laugh, we cry, we share stories from way back and the up-to-date things that are happening. And not only that but I also have taken Willie as my Elder. I'm following him now because he's teaching me a lot of things that I thought *I* knew as Anishinaabe Qwe (an Anishinaabe woman).

00:46-00:49

**Shishigo:** [Asks Willie a question in Anishinaabemowin]

**Willie:** [Responds in Anishinaabemowin]

00:49-2:04

**Willie:** Yeah. Now that you mention the Roundhouse, you will find in Indian country that, like our powwow grounds are round and if you take notice there, the walls, like this wall here, I think there's thirteen, I'm not sure. There is a odd number of walls in the roundhouse. And in this roundhouse, it's signified by, for an example North, South, East, West—each one of these poles mean that. And I should tell you this story. We had an Aboriginal administrator working for us, and the elders said that they wanted a roundhouse. So he went ahead and did all the planning, found the money to put this roundhouse together. We got the logs from our sawmill and every board, every—not every nail—but every board in here comes from our sawmill, from... so it is something that kinda circulates within our community.

02:04-02:46

But the funny story I wanna hear about, you'll notice that there is a floorway that goes right along the whole roundhouse. In the middle you'll see that it's

sand and gravel. Well, when the first time that the elders came here to inspect the roundhouse, it was all boarded all the way around. And the elders said, "This is no good. Where are you gonna dance? You're supposed to dance on the ground." So here he goes again, we have to re-change that, and take the boards away from there, put some gravel in here so that people will dance on the ground.

02:46-03:44

This is the centrepiece right now. We've had as many as seventeen drums in this circle, during a powwow or event. And we've had different events in this building. We've had the political organizations that came here, had their events or their [?]. So it turned out to be very good, you know. Actually, we don't only use it for ceremonial purposes, but we use it for other purposes, other than ceremonial. It was from that first, to do that, but then the elders said no. They said, "we have to share what we have." So now we can have all these events, have good-looking people like you to come and visit us in here. Yeah... [crosstalk]

03:44-04:27

**Shishigo:** And the beautiful thing about this roundhouse is when you come in through the entrance, there's tobacco offerings that you bring in here. And if you look, notice each pole has each nation, which would be there are four colours that we always proudly wear, which I don't have on today. That would be another thing that we always talk about too. And so, always been so honoured that I've just been able to come just flourish with love when I come to this place, especially with our elder, Willie. Because we have a lot of talks, not only talk about things that we don't have to talk about, but we get personal with each other and that's why we grow and we flourish and we know each other to the depth that we all became family here.

04:27-06:41

**Willie:** Our elders have really been a inspiration to us to do things the way we do things. And we really don't do anything until it's very thought out. I mean like, some of the young ladies and some of the young people that was here, I was trying to teach them about patience. [Shishigo laughs] And that's something, you know, we have to learn how to use. And, you know, we may ask the elders one thing but it don't come to us for a while, eh. Like this roundhouse here, it took at least seven or eight years before it came to being. And when it came to being, we knew exactly what to do. Where the

doorway was gonna be, where it should face, talking about the four poles that we have here that represents each of the four directions. We have in each direction an offering there, where you can put your tobacco offerings in all of the four directions. We have the eagle here. We have a lot of eagles in our area, that means a lot to us. And of course the turtle, of course is part of — we're part of Turtle Island. And you can almost tell how the turtle's back exactly where we're at right now. And so, you know, all these things, you know, you hear about them but you don't understand them. And what our purpose is to try and help make that understanding. That it's not only for Aboriginal people, they have the way we teach or we learn or whatever, we like to share that. So that you can take, you know, people can take that home and be part of something, like the offering of tobacco, the offering to the Creator, you know. Talking to the Creator, because if we don't talk to the Creator, we won't get things done, you know. I always tell the Creator, "I wanna be good-looking!", and sure enough, look at that! [Shishigo laughs]

06:41-06:47

**Shishigo and Willie:** [laugh and talk in Anishinaabemowin]

06:47-0:6:53

**Shishigo:** Is that it?

**Pamela Klassen [off-camera]:** I can't imagine a better way to end.

**Colin [off-camera]:** That's a pretty good ending, yeah.

(END)