

Early Indians practised conservation

OHSWEKEN — Did you ever wonder why there were so many millions of bison (buffalo) on the western plains long ago? Early explorers and settlers thought they were only there by chance. In fact, they were there in such numbers because of centuries of care and conservation by the Indian tribes that harvested them for food and clothing. It was like a giant cattle farm without fences.

The fathers and big brothers who brought home the bacon, so to speak, had a much more interesting task than the white settlers. In doing their job, they got to ride horses, whoop and holler and shoot arrows at the bison. Then after a successful hunt they got to dance and feast with their friends. With millions of bison living on the lush grasses of the Great Plains, it was fairly easy to have a successful hunt before the white man began to kill the animals off for short-term gain.

The white settlers did not seem to realize that the Indian males were doing the same thing that the white males were doing for their families, only in a different way. They too, were providing a living — and a very good living — for their families but they were also hav-

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ing fun doing it. The white settlers, sweating behind their plows, seemed to resent the freedom and the relatively easy way of living the Indians had developed. They did not see that the natives had developed these resources over many centuries by killing only what was needed. Nowadays, it is called conservation.

Another misconception is that the natives did not believe in developing the land. On the contrary, they developed it on a long-term basis. They always tried to develop the land and its resources so that it would still be there for several generations in the future. It is a concept that loggers who would like to clear-cut all the trees in a forest don't want to hear about.

As we become more selfish and greedy, we

act more and more as if this will be the last generation of humans. The noted scientist Dr. David Suzuki recently voiced his fears in this regard. Giant corporations are advocating unlimited development for short-term gain at a time when many of earth's resources are fast drying up. Dr. Suzuki rightly questioned this kind of policy by so many already-developed countries.

Long ago, the natives also practised holistic medicine. They believed you could not have a healthy body without a healthy mind. Their lifestyles generally encouraged healthy minds and freedom from ulcers. As long as they practised conservation of the earth and its resources, including the animals, they knew the earth would take care of them. Many Indian cultures believed the earth was their mother. It was where the atoms that made up their bodies came from and where they would return to when they died.