EDITED CREE & ANISHINABEK CASES INVOLVING GENEROSITY, HOSPITALITY, AND PEACE-MAKING  
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1. Buffalo Child (with example casebrief) .................. 2  
2. The Starving Uncle ........................................ 7  
3. Indian Laws .................................................. 9  
4. Foster Care Hospitality ..................................... 11  
5. Welfare as Reciprocity ..................................... 12  
6. Truce Making and Truce Breaking .......................... 13  
7. The Old Man Who was Left Behind ....................... 14  
8. The Breadmaker .............................................. 16  
9. Seagull .......................................................... 18  
10. The Fearful Winter .......................................... 20  
11. Morning Star ................................................ 23

I. Old Stories (When the World was New/ Constitutional?):  
   Buffalo Child (2)  
   Seagull (18)  
   The Breadmaker (16)

II. Older Stories (Consequences/Explanatory):  
   Morning Star (23)  
   The Old Man Who was Left Behind (14)

III. Newer Stories (Historical Problem-solving Experiences):  
   Truce Making and Truce Breaking (13)  
   Indian Laws (9)  
   Welfare as Reciprocity (12)

IV. Life Stories (Personal or Family's Problem-solving Experiences):  
   The Starving Uncle (7)  
   The Fearful Winter (20)  
   Foster Child Hospitality (11)
Case: Buffalo Child


An important aspect of the context is that, in this story, the buffalo are a people with agency, thoughts, and social organization.

This happened a long time ago. People were moving camp. The last family had a baby tied on to their travois, but the ties became undone and that baby boy slid off. He was full of milk and sleeping so he just kept on sleeping. The family was talking and visiting and they didn’t notice that the baby was left behind.

Later, that baby got hungry and began to cry. He cried and cried. Not far away, the buffalo were traveling and they heard him crying. The buffalo were curious so they decided to see what the noise was. A female buffalo found him lying on the ground crying. One of the young bulls wanted to kill the baby boy, “These are the ones that kill us, these human people!” But the others stopped him, they said, “This is a little child, he doesn’t know anything, and he can’t even run away.”

One of the buffalo raced away to get the chief buffalo, “He will know what to do.” The chief buffalo felt sorry for the baby and chased the other bulls away from the baby. He said, “This is a pitiful human life you have found. No one will kill him.” He called for one of the female buffalos, a cow that had lots of milk. The chief buffalo asked her to feed the baby so she lowered herself down so the baby could reach her milk bag. The baby began to nurse and then he slept. The buffalos used the cradle of their horns to lift the baby up, and that is how they carried him. All summer, the baby ate, slept, and was carried around. He got really strong and he grew fast.

A few years went by. Every once in a while, the buffalo would see some Crees and they would flee. The child rode on the back of the buffalo and he could run with them too. He had stamina and was really fast. His diet had changed to grass, flowers, and leaves. He thought he was a buffalo. By the time he was sixteen, he had long bushy hair, and he could only speak the buffalo language. Every once in a while, the Crees would briefly see a human running with the buffalo – just glimpses. They called him Buffalo Child.
One day, Buffalo Child saw his reflection in a lake, and he asked his father, the Buffalo Chief, “Why do I look like this?” The old bull told the young man that he was a Cree and that he had been found by the buffalo. After much thought, Buffalo Child left the buffalo people to search for the Cree. He walked and walked, and finally found some people. They asked him all kinds of questions, but he didn’t speak Cree. He stayed with the Cree, first talking with sign language and then learning Cree. He had to learn all the human ways of being and behaving. He saw buffalo meat on the racks drying and he didn’t like seeing his relatives as meat.

One day, there was a buffalo hunt that really disturbed Buffalo Child so he left the camp. He found some buffalo and he decided he liked the buffalo better because they didn’t talk all the time. He found his father buffalo and told him, “I was treated with respect, I respected them. But father I hated it, there was always buffalo meat hanging in the racks. They ate it – ate us. They slept on our skins on the floor. They live in home made of our hides. Buffalo is everything.”

The father said, “This is our life. Those people you saw, they come from the same creator that we do. Our work is to feed the people, we cover them, and we keep them warm. The people live by us. That is the reason you saw what you saw.”

The father continued, “But there is another law. They cannot kill too many of us. They cannot get greedy and kill too much. They can only kill as many of us as they can use. These Cree have to take care. They must treat us with respect and we must be good to them. We multiply quickly and there are many of us, but even then, we must flee when we see them.” “But I don’t like it father!” said Buffalo Child. “Let’s travel my son”, said the buffalo father. Buffalo Child learned much and became wiser.

Suddenly there was an attack and the buffalo were running. Buffalo Child’s father was injured, “Run my son, flee! Save your life” “I will not flee anymore”, said Buffalo Child. The father said, “Before I stop breathing, there is a special way you can roll over. If you roll over once, you will become a buffalo. If you roll over a second time, you will become a rock.” Buffalo Child was crying as his father’s breathing slowed. He rolled and rolled again, and he became a rock (mistasini). The Cree began to gather at this rock (near the Red Deer River), they sang and danced because the buffalo was one of the gifts they received.