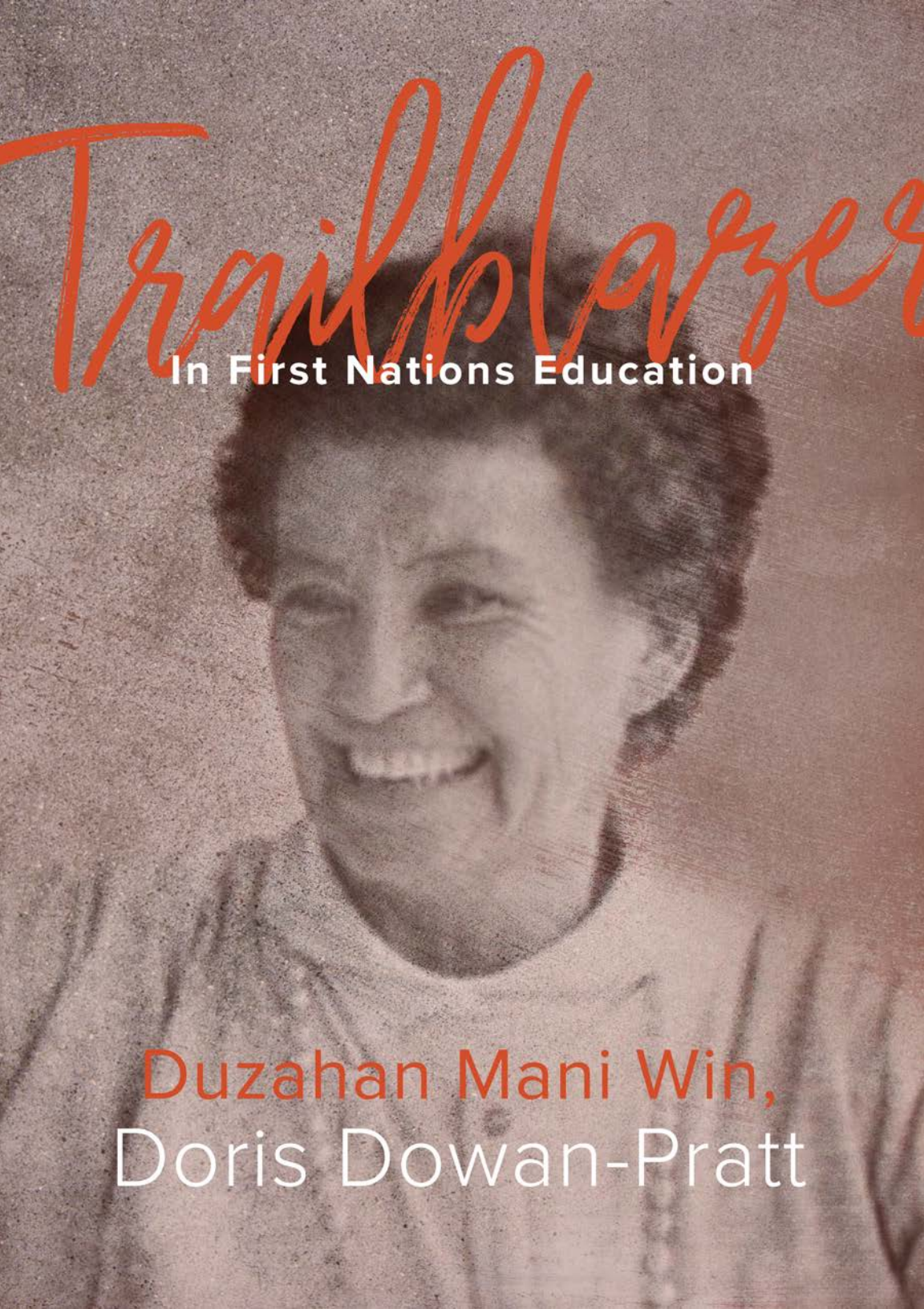
Trailblazer

In First Nations Education



Duzahan Mani Win,
Doris Dowan-Pratt

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Dedicated to the memory of the twenty-seven Cree children of long ago who never returned home to their families and who are buried in unnamed graves in the Elkhorn Residential School Cemetery, Elkhorn, Manitoba.

Let us never forget these precious souls.

To Annie, my cherished little friend who also died there of an accidental injury. Annie, I will never forget you, for you are never far from my thoughts.

Right: Crosses at

Interviews: Leona Devuyst
Editing: Ed Ledohowski, with assistance from Sandra Warlie,
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Cover: Amber Green
Interior book design: Leticia Spence, Ed Ledohowski

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Library and Ar  Canada Cataloguing in Publication
Title: Trailblazer in First Nations education : Duzahan Mani Win, Doris Dowan-Pratt

Names: Pratt, Doris, interviews with.
Identifiers: Canadiana 20200183273 | ISBN 9781927849668 (softcover)
Subjects: LCSH: Pratt, Doris, 1936-2019—Interviews. | LCSH: Pratt, Doris, 1936-2019. | LCSH: Indigenous women—Manitoba—Interviews. | LCSH: Indigenous women—Manitoba—Biography. | LCSH:

Language teachers—Manitoba—Interviews. | LCSH: Language teachers—Manitoba—Biography. | LCGFT:

Interviews. | LCGFT: Bi  hies.

Acknowledgements

This publication was made possible by the involvement and support of a number of individuals and agencies.

Elder Doris Pratt (Duzahan Mani Win) for sharing her life's experience.

Members and directors of the Boundary Trail National Heritage Region for supporting the project.

Leona Devuyst for initiating the project, applying for funding, undertaking the ten separate interview sessions, and transcribing the recordings.

The Province of Manitoba, Heritage Grants Program, and staff at the Historic Resources Branch, in particular Nicola Spasoff.

Ed Ledohowski who undertook primary editing of the transcripts, managed image files, and undertook publication layout.

All members of Doris' family for support and assistance.

Sandra Warlie for providing commentary and photographs.

Archives of Manitoba, Still Images Division, in particular Chris Kotecki.

MFNERC for assisting with edits, designing the cover and book layout, and printing.

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Preface

We share our mother's life story in the hope that her words will help reverse the stereotypical views of First Nations Peoples. She wanted to give the message of her Dakota People as proud, vibrant, hardworking, family-oriented, and community-minded. Our mother's Dakota language, culture, and spirituality provided a strong foundation. This foundation allowed her to maintain her identity throughout a life filled with many hardships, which included physical and emotional abuse in residential school. In spite of the obstacles she faced in her lifetime, she persevered and achieved so much—leaving an incredible legacy. She dreamed of great positive changes for the future generations of First Nations Peoples.

The Pratt Family

My Kunshi, My Friend

My name is Sandra Warlie. I am from the Bishop Paiute Tribe in Bishop, California. My Dakota name is Mahkpiya Iyojanjan Win Najin (Shining Cloud Woman Standing), which was given to me by the late Aaron McKay and his wife Sandra McKay in collaboration with my kunshi Doris Pratt.

When I first met Kunshi Doris, it was at the American Language Development Institute at the University of Arizona in Tucson in June of 2003. We met the very first day of class, and since then we have had a relationship like none other. To me, it was as if I had known her all my life. During the time we spent in Tucson, Kunshi Doris gave me the book called *The Prayer of Jabez*. She wrote in that book, saying, "This is the best gift that I know I can give you." She wanted me to ask God to bless me indeed, enlarge my territory, and that His hand would be with me. She once said, "Every day I ask the Great Spirit to give me a blessing and enlarge my territory." When we would talk, she would always ask me if I said my prayer and that I'm not to forget to pray it every day. She believes that's how I came into her life—God had enlarged our territory—because we met so far from our homes at that one moment of both our lives. God blessed us with such a close friendship of which I am honoured and grateful for. It was her dream to be just like her aunties, who gave so much of themselves. I have found that she was very giving, for her friends, her community of

Sioux Valley, and especially her family. She has given to me like my own family and provided a home away from home.

I have come to know my Kunshi Doris as a wonderful person who touched many lives. She was a humble person with a gifted spirit who was driven by a greater purpose. She was a passionate, hospitable and generous person who made time to help and pray for others even when she was in the hospital struggling with her own personal health problems. She was a strong person who was shaped through challenges she faced in her life. She used those challenges as stepping stones to gain the strength to do what she has accomplished in her life, not only for us here and now, but also for the many generations to come. Doris once said, "I work to prepare the next generation to take pride in their culture, history and languages." This work she did on a daily basis. With a phone in her hand, she could make things happen just by asking people to do what she needed to be done. When she asked me to help edit this book and provide pictures, I, without hesitation, agreed. It has been my honour and privilege to do what she asked. It has been sad to see her go, but I know she is in a better place. Kunshi Doris holds a place in my heart that only she can fill.

Notes on the Interviews

After the Truth and Reconciliation Commission published its findings, as a member of the Turtle Mountain-Souris Plains Heritage Association and the Boundary Trail National Heritage Region, I requested a speaker from the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba's office to come and discuss the history of the Dakota First Nations Peoples with members of our heritage group.

As researchers, we were interested in our region's often untold earlier history. In the late 1800s, while the Numbered Treaties were being signed in Western Canada and Indian reservations being established, the Dakota were considered American and were not included in the treaty process. They were, however, allotted reserves.

In the late 1870s, the federal government established Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation #60 on section 31-1-22, south of Deloraine. In 1909, that reservation was formally closed and families were moved to Oak River (Sioux Valley Dakota Nation) and Oak Lake (Canupawakpa Dakota First Nation) Reserves.

The phone call to the Treaty Relations Commission led to an interview with Doris about the history of the Dakota People; one interview led to the necessity of having another meeting to collect more information. In contrast to a question-and-answer

interview, Doris led the way in each discussion. She had been gathering her thoughts for years. After each interview, I transcribed what had been said and sent a copy to Doris for her review. By the time of the tenth interview, our meeting place was at Brandon Hospital. That's where Doris introduced me to her granddaughter, Sandra Warlie, who, along with Doris' daughter Evelyn, spent hours reviewing the story with Doris. In our editing work, we did not want to change Doris' original words, but during the interviews, she sometimes spoke so quickly and had so many thoughts coming at once, that some sentences were left incomplete. As a highly educated woman who had written many language books for students, sentence structure was important to Doris, so she took the opportunity to add a few more memories. Also, this was our chance to ask her about the many awards she received because of her trail-blazing work.

During many of our interviews, one of her children would drop by for a while. They worked quietly on household chores, but I knew that their attendance was at least partially due to their mutual concerns that, through the interviews, their mom/grandma was reliving the pain of past experiences. And, it was evident this was the case from Doris' posture and facial expressions. When the remembrances were painful, she seemed to shrink, especially when talking about her experiences in residential school; her arms entwined her waist, her eyes were downcast, her expression was dark. When the conversation was about her children, her activities with and for students, and her present-day work with Dakota-language teachers and her Dakota People, her eyes were bright, she smiled and motioned with her arms, she opened up like a blossom.

I felt that we were friends by the end of our first visit. Doris was inspirational in her determination to get her work done in spite of her health problems. Whatever the topic, her intelligence and strong speaking skills were evident. Her words grabbed my attention and my emotions. She stressed certain words that helped make me feel the pain and understand the dedication in her heart. Her story is important to all Canadians, and I am grateful that her Great Spirit helped us to record her words.

Tanyan ozikiya iwanka, rest in peace, my friend.

Leona Devuyst, Interviewer

Leona Devuyst asked if I would edit a Boundary Trail National Heritage Region project on the life story of the Dakota Elder Doris Pratt, and I quickly agreed, in part, to learn about an esteemed Elder. Through this project, I also learned about

First Nations histories in Manitoba, and in the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation, felt honoured to help preserve the unique perspective of a Dakota Elder. More, as a historian, I could see how Indigenous literature is often underrepresented in the local history section of bookstores. I believe that Doris's biography will help fill this gap.

The following narrative is an organized and lightly edited version of 10 recorded and transcribed conversations between Doris and Leona, which were completed during the latter half of 2017. The transcripts were ordered and edited to use Doris's own words as much as possible. I aimed to limit any repetition and organized the materials according to themes and timelines. Utmost care was taken to avoid altering or embellishing Doris's descriptions in any way. It was important for Doris herself to tell her story. If I succeeded in my goal to showcase Elder Pratt's stories as genuinely as possible, my fingerprints ought to be invisible. I am thankful for the trust shown in me to help Doris share her stories with a broader audience.

Ed Ledohowski, Editor

Doris Pratt and Sandra Warlie.

Biography

Doris (née Dowan) Pratt, Duzahan Mani Win (Walks Fast Woman), was a respected Dakota Elder and educator who lived in Wipazoka Wakpa (Sioux Valley Dakota Nation). She was born in 1936 on the Oak River Indian Reserve No. 58, known today as Sioux Valley Dakota Nation. Sioux Valley is approximately fifty kilometres west of Brandon, Manitoba, near the community of Griswold. After a lonely childhood due to residential school but a very productive adult life, Doris peacefully passed in her sleep at the Dakota Oyate Lodge in Sioux Valley at the age of eighty-three on March 6, 2019. She was laid to rest at the Dowan Family Cemetery located on the reserve. This book was in its final stages of editing at the time of her passing.

Doris' parents were Deamus and Bessie Dowan. She was the youngest of nine children, born on February 10, 1936, during a raging blizzard. Her parents thought for sure she was going to die when, because of the weather, the midwife didn't arrive; there was just her mom and dad. The other children were all in residential school. It was during the latter part of the Great Depression when all the families were poor. Her Grandpa Joe Ironman managed to make his way by horse and buggy to the small wooden cabin, and, soon after, baby Doris arrived. She was baptized because, in Mr. Ironman's words, "Baby very sick." A humble beginning to a long and fruitful life.

Doris' first language was Dakota. She learned English at a young age from her older siblings who were speaking English when they returned home from residential school. At age six, Doris attended the missionary day school on the Oak River Indian Reserve. Being the only child able to speak both English and Dakota, the other children considered Doris different, and they pinched and picked on her. By this time, her older siblings had already returned home from residential school.

At age seven, in 1943, Doris was sent to the Elkhorn Residential School. Although it was a mere eighty-five kilometres from home, Doris felt it might have been in China. To her, the school felt so far away because she couldn't go home to be with her mom and dad. Her accounts and memories of being at Elkhorn were not pleasant. It was a lonely childhood. Thoughts of being there still horrified her to the day of her passing. She tried to do what she could to right the wrongs of the residential school system, which attempted to strip First Nations children of their identity, language and culture. Doris gained her early education there and left Elkhorn Residential School at the age of fifteen because the school building was

condemned. She was then transferred to the Portage la Prairie Residential School, where she finished her eighth-grade education. She returned home to be with her parents and to enjoy the community of Sioux Valley.

At age seventeen, Doris decided to work in the nearby town of Virden, only to face new problems of discrimination. Doris worked for several women who eventually became her good friends. She cleaned houses until the age of twenty-five when she married Walter Pratt, whom she had first met at Elkhorn. They settled in Sioux Valley and had seven children: three daughters, Marilyn, Adele and Evelyn, and four sons, Rocky, David, Pernell and Alex. In 1961, she began working as a teacher's assistant in Oak Lake, which awakened her love of reading and education. Doris took the opportunity to further her education by applying for the IMPACTE program offered at Brandon University. Once accepted, she found pleasure in being back in school and challenged by the demanding university work, graduating in 1975 with a Bachelor of Teaching degree, only the beginning of what was to come.

Doris demonstrated a lifelong commitment to reviving her Dakota language and culture, along with a deep commitment to promoting the education of First Nations youth by motivating and helping them to succeed. In her career, she served as a classroom teacher, special education teacher, principal, university administrator, director of education, coordinator of the Brandon University Northern Education Program in Winnipeg, and professor at the University of Brandon up to 2013, teaching Dakota language and culture, lecturing, and writing.

When asked by her children, "Why are you still involved?" she replied, "The Great Spirit wants us to be involved with our families with whatever we are doing, until we can no longer do it. So, if I can contribute to my People as an educator who's been in the labour force forty years, then I am going to do that. I have things to offer to help other people, and that's what I want to do." Doris drew from the goodness of her heart and the concern she held for her Dakota People, working tirelessly to help pass on the Dakota language to younger generations. Others looked upon her highly as a leader in Dakota language and culture revitalization.

Doris' traditional education was comprised of teachings from her family and her community's Dakota Knowledge Carriers. She earned a Bachelor of Education degree and master of education from Brandon University. She also held an educational specialist degree in language, reading and culture from the University of Arizona after attending the American Indian Language Development Institute.

On October 26, 2017, Elder Doris Pratt received the Brandon University Senate Lifetime Achievement Award. The Lifetime Achievement Award acknowledges long-term service and volunteering commitment to Brandon University, in addition to continuing the principles for which Brandon University strives. Doris' other awards:

- *Maria Ross Memorial Award*
- *Our Aboriginal Grandmothers' Award, 2007*
- *Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Award, 2013, in recognition of outstanding and exemplary contributions to Doris' Sioux Valley Dakota Nation and to Canada as a whole*
- *Education Trailblazer Lifetime Achiever Award, 2014*
- *Brandon YWCA Women of Distinction Lifetime Achievement Award, 2015*

At the time of her death, Doris had received a nomination for the Manitoba Historical Society's Lieutenant Governor's Award for Historic Preservation and Promotion. A few months after her passing, in June of 2019, Elder Pratt received the Keeping the Fires Burning, an Our Aboriginal Grandmothers' Award for her significant contribution to the advancement of her Dakota People and her dedication

Doris' book launching of "The Dakota Oyate," Sioux Valley Elementary School, June 2017. Doris was honoured with a star quilt for her work on this book.

to safeguarding, nurturing, and transmitting Dakota Traditional Knowledge and Practices. In September 2019, the *Brandon Sun* posthumously awarded Doris the Community Leader Award in the Teacher category.

In recent years, Elder Pratt was a private consultant who specialized in the language of her Dakota People, having always been an advocate for its revitalization and ongoing daily use in the classroom and Dakota communities. She shared her love of the Dakota language and culture with her children, encouraging them always to take pride in their Dakota heritage. She guided revitalization efforts by creating the first phonetic alphabet for her Dakota language on which she based all of her documentation, resources and curriculum. The development of this phonetic writing system provided an easier way to read and write Dakota language for all ages. Over the years, Doris developed Dakota language books, tapes, and CDs published for classroom and home education use. The age level of these materials range from primary school to senior advanced studies in the Dakota language.

Published works authored by Elder Pratt:

- *Dakota—Our Language (book and CD)*
- *Dakota Language Retention 1980 History Tapes*
- *Dakota Word Dictionary (book, tapes and CDs)*
- *Dakota Sesame Street colouring books*
- *Dakota Word Search & Matching*
- *Dakota Okhanpi, Dakota Verb Phrases (book and CD)*
- *Dakota Names and History of Important First Nation Sites*
- *Dakota Wichoie Togye Kapi (idioms)*
- *Dakota A, B, Chi, Ch'i Wowapi (picture dictionary), 1982*
- *Dakota Iapi Ehdakub (Dakota dictionary)*
- *Dakota Spelling Program (grades two to five)*
- *Dakota Hankiktapi Anpetu Odowan (translated Christmas carols)*
- *Anpetu Wakan Wanzi Imahed Dakota Wichoie, Dakota Phrases of the Week (Year One–Three)*
- *Tokiya Da He, Where Are You Going? (Dakota vocabulary)*
- *Wi iyohi Wichoie (months and year events), 2005*
- *Ho Takuchiyapi Anaghapta Po, Hello My Relatives, Listen (John Starr interview), 2017*
- *Untuwe Pi Kin He, Who We Are: Treaty Elders' Teachings, Volume 1, 2014*
- *Dakota Imakhmakhapi Woyakapi: A Collection of Humour and*

Bravery (short stories in both Dakota and English), 2015
- *Echoes of Our Dakota Ancestors (stories and songs based on months of the year in the Dakota language), 2016*
- *The Dakota Oyate kin he (account of how the Dakota People received and befriended newcomers), 2016*
- *Keeping Baby Close, Making of a Moss Bag (story on the origins/uses of the moss bag and step-by-step instructions for making one), 2018*

Elder Pratt spent many years, up to 2015, translating documents, such as census forms for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. She was a recognized translator of the Government of Canada Translation Bureau, assisting in the translation of official census documents and Canadian election documents from English into the Dakota language.

Elder Pratt was a member of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) from its inception in 1988. While involved with the AMC, she participated at the Manitoba First Nations Education Directors' Meetings, the Framework Agreement Initiative Council of Elders Table, and AMC's Council of Elders.

Doris supported the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC) from the time of its establishment by the AMC in 1998. She assisted the organization in language and the development and design of quality curriculum to provide to the schools. Doris shared her Traditional Dakota Knowledge and Teachings through the publication of books for all ages of Dakota language learners. Doris also delivered keynote speeches at different events and provided personal interview videos. Over the past decades, Elder Pratt helped MFNERC achieve its mission to create a brighter and better future for First Nations children.

Elder Pratt was involved with the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba's (TRCM) Council of Elders Board from 2006 to her passing. As an Elder advisor, she contributed as a historian, language specialist, and teacher to the TRCM, purposely focusing on Treaty Knowledge and language used in research, language curriculum, and development. She was also a member of the TRCM Speaker's Bureau.

As Elder Advisor to the Sioux Valley Chief and Council from 2011 to 2018, Doris assisted them with the increasing challenges in governance and the advancement of education at Sioux Valley Dakota Nation.

Elder Pratt served as advisor for the DiversityCanada Foundation, helping them

to bridge the cultural gap between and among people of differing races, ethnicities, religions and walks of life from a First Nations point of view. She had also served during the years 2009 to 2014 on the Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services, Sioux Valley Child Welfare Committee (two years), and the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation Self Government Elders Committee.

Doris, up to her passing, was the educational advisor of the Sioux Valley Education Authority at the Tatiyopa Maza Wayawa Tipi, Sioux Valley Elementary School. There, she continuously developed curriculum for all grade levels, while providing support and guidance to the principal and director. She took the lead role in teaching and incorporating daily Dakota language words, conversation, and phrases at the school while also assisting in language retention and implementing proven language-learning techniques. Doris recently developed and implemented the Baby Recognition program in her community for all those born during the year, which involves the making and presenting of new moccasins to the babies. Elder Pratt instilled pride and motivation in students, teaching staff, and community members to help them succeed in their journeys.

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Elder Pratt was the Elder Advisor to the Sioux Valley Chief & Council from 2011 to 2018, working closely with them assisting with the increasing challenges in governance and the advancement of education at Sioux Valley Dakota Nation.

Elder Pratt served as advisor for the Diversity Foundation, Inc. helping them to "Bridge the Cultural Gap" between and among people of differing races, ethnicities, religions and walks of life from a First Nations point of view. She had also served for the years 2009 to 2014 on the Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services, Sioux Valley Child Welfare Committee (2 years) and the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation Self Government Elders Committee.

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Education Department at the Sioux Valley Elementary School: Tatiyopa Maza Wayawa Tipi. Where she continuously developed curriculum for all grade levels, while providing support, guidance, and words of wisdom to the principal and director and took the lead role in teaching and incorporating Dakota language words, conversation and phrases on a daily basis at the school assisting in language retention and implementing learning languages techniques that have been proven to be successful. Other recent season and culture-specific activities she had designed, developed and implemented in her community were the Baby Recognition for all new babies born during the past year and the making and presenting of new moccasins to them. Elder Pratt instilled pride and motivation in the students, teaching staff and community members to succeed and participate in their journey.

A Chance To Tell Our Stories

I've long wanted to tell these stories about my Dakota People because during my lifetime as an educator and my experiences in the schools, I have never read anything in social study books that really told anything positive about the Dakota People. The Dakota People made a huge contribution to the growth and development of Canada, but those contributions are not written in any book anywhere. They are never told, but I have seen what my People did and how they worked just as hard as any other people.

People today don't seem to remember that when the first settlers came here to Manitoba, many of them were treated well by the Native People. They worked with the newcomers, toiling alongside with mutual trust and respect. These are the stories that I want to see written and told to whoever will listen. That is why it's written in this book. All these things I've seen, I sometimes tell these stories to my children and my grandchildren, and they all say, "Oh, you have to put those stories in a book." I say, "I will, I will!" But I never thought I'd have the opportunity that I now have to tell some of those things.

I've seen and experienced racism all my life. There were also a lot of people who were kind to me, but it was not always genuine. Sometimes it was almost like I was made to feel just a little bit lower than them, even with those who were kind. Nonetheless, I've come through it all. I look back and say I didn't let that negativity motivate me in any way. But I saw it. "I know what you're doing. I can see that you're being racist." But I never let it hurt me or stop me.

Nowadays, everywhere I go, I want to tell our story of how my Dakota People made a contribution here in Canada. We were God-fearing people who wanted a good life, just as good as anybody else had. But, we never got it, because of those racist attitudes. We had a good life before the Canadian government and its Indian Act came into existence.

Children Were Taught by the Women

I remember my Grandma Jean Eastman (Kunshi Tanka, Big Grandma) was very much into the Dakota culture. I studied up on it and found it to be very strict going back many generations. These teachings were something we all grew up with. In my

community, the women were always with the children, so it was up to the women to teach the children what needed to be learned. Fathers were gone in our homes; they were always gone hunting somewhere. The women were always with the children, so that's who taught us.

We Learned on a Daily Basis

When we grew up, our grandparents never sat us down and said, "Today, there's going to be a lesson or teaching." It was a daily thing; we were told the conduct that was expected of us as a young person. As a young woman, I was always reminded that I was going to grow up to be a woman, but in the meantime, I was, first of all, a girl, and there's a way I must conduct myself around my relatives. They always reminded us of the proper behaviour, because everything in the Dakota culture is based on kinship, the relationship of the people and the family. We were always told, "This is your brother; this is your first cousin. You address them as this and this." It was done from the time we were very little.

The grandmothers did that all the time and instruction was an ongoing daily thing. If any of us children stepped out of line, they would quickly remind us of the proper behaviour. That was how they taught the children. As time went on, if something new came up, that was something new to teach or talk about. That's how it was. We heard it enough times so that when we were all grown up, we had internalized it. We learned very young all the proper things pertaining to the Dakota culture. But, unfortunately, all that kind of education ended with the implementation of the residential school system.

In residential school, my husband Walter and I were brainwashed to believe that our culture and Dakota language was no good. So how could my husband or I pass that on to our children at the time?

Undeserved Negative Opinion

One of the things that I find interesting is there's not very much written about the Indian People, in particular the Dakota People, and the contribution we made to Canadian history. We played a vital early role in the growth of Canada. My Dakota People still talk about the time before the locomotive, when the steamboat came up the river every other week or month. The Dakota People here in Manitoba chopped wood and piled it ready by the river because if the boat was to go any farther, it

needed wood. Since they didn't have coal back then, the steamboats ran on wood. So the Native People, whether it was Sioux or Ojibway, by chopping all that wood, helped that boat bring things for the settlers and everybody else. Tea or sugar, or who knows what else. We made a big contribution, beginning with all the steamboats and then eventually moved towards working in early agriculture.

A teacher friend of mine, Iris Cross, who lives a mile south of Sioux Valley, off the reserve, she told me that her husband, as a small child, saw for himself members of Sioux Valley go and camp out in their white tents on the hills across from his home. He said, "They were there to help the local farmers to bring their crops off the fields in the fall and whatever else needed to be done." The three Prairie provinces are known for being the breadbasket to the world, for the wheat that Canada produces that goes all over, even to Russia. My Dakota People were out there helping the farmers and were never given credit for that. They were good workers, my family included. That is not told anywhere. It is always the bad things that are told of what the Native People did and what happened in the past, but not why the Indian People retaliated. That paints a very bad and negative picture of all Native People.

This is one of the stories I want to be told, how the early farmers had the help of the Dakota People. At that time, without help, they would not have been able to get the wheat to market. Most of the things in the books and movies are negative about Native People, being wagon burners and killing masses of people. It is things like this that paints a very bad picture. They never seem to tell the positive things we did. I want the story about the Dakota told, not the story so much about Doris Pratt, but the story about all Native People and the struggle that we've gone through and are still going through. We need recognition in the textbooks. The school curriculum today has nothing like that in there that describes our contributions.

We Had a Good Life

We, the Dakota People have always been here in Canada. The Great Spirit put our People here to use this land. We had a good way of life on the North American continent before the newcomers came. People tell things that they want others to believe. But really, the Native People learned to coexist and get along on the continent. God provided everything the Native People needed here, food and water. We didn't have to go far. We had already learned to use what was here for us and to share with all the other tribes in the area. The Native People had their own way of worship and had their own way of planting and harvesting. There would not be so

many people here on the continent living well if the Native People hadn't learned to coexist with the other people who came. That's the essential ingredient; it doesn't matter who we are, everyone has to get along with other people.

Working for the White Neighbours

Early on, the homesteaders did not have money. They were trying to eke out a living, too, and they were needing help. They wanted to have dairy cattle, but they didn't start with hundreds of cattle. A farmer started with a few head of cattle, maybe ten or fifteen. It took years to make up their herds, and once their herds began growing, they needed more help. So these farmers, all along they needed help, to till the land and look after the cattle.

When my dad and my mother were young, just starting out, they were friends with the neighbours. The farmers needed my parents' help because they were starting up a farm, cattle or whatever. My parents went over to help one farmer often. My dad set up his tent, camped there, and helped the farmer, and my mother would babysit the little children. When my mother went to babysit, it was a common thing to do at that time, over one hundred years ago. It was a different time, yes, a different time.

Just like the settlers needed help at that time, so did Native People. They saw each other as equals, and they got along. There was no mistrust there, the mistrust came later. When those newcomers needed the help, everything was fine, and my People gave their help. The first ones that came made good friends with the Native People. The settlers saw it as these people helping them. They were just happy to be settled, and that's why they got along at the time, because there was mutual respect.

Unfriendliness Began to Appear

The greed started later. As the settlers became more established farmers, they began to think, "I have these many acres, but if I had these many more acres, another quarter section or so, I could have these many more cattle, and I'd have more land for my children." That was how the greed began to start, and coupled with the changed Canadian government policy on Indian affairs, it made it easier for them to acquire more land that was already settled by the Native People. As soon as the Canadian government could, they wanted to change the Indian's way of life. "Let's settle all these Indians in these different areas." Before we were free to go all over, we

were nomadic; we went where there was food, and when the weather changed, we knew where to go to find shelter and other necessities to survive the harsh winters.

But, those things changed after the settlers arrived, and of course, following them, the government arrived. After the land was settled, the government came in, looked the situation over and said, "Well, if we could get these Indian People out of the way, then we can bring more settlers and settle the whole land." When the Royal Proclamation was made in 1763, officials said it was going to be good for our People. So Canadian government policy developed, and the government grew; they were just deciding what they were going to do. All the things the Canadian government did, it was always to their benefit. Greed, greed is always at the heart of everything that's done that way. There was enough for everybody, but the government wanted the most for them.

So, who now mistrusts whom? Is it the white people who mistrust the Native People, or maybe it is the other way around or both. Things changed, settlers came in, and, once they saw the land and how they could use it, they got a few more cattle. They spread out and excluded Native People. With power comes unfriendliness almost. Some humans are that way. One is okay as long as they need help, but as soon as they get a little more power, then they will try to overpower others. If they had left it alone! Look at the world now! Look at Canada! Look at what they've done in the name of progress. Things were supposed to get better. It didn't get better.

After a century or two, the newcomers wanted not only to occupy the land but also to own it as their own. The Native People were willing to let the settlers come, and we would share the land together. But, what the newcomers wanted to do was not what we thought was going to happen.

Relations with Early Settlers

The Native People were the first and only ones here in North America for centuries. They knew the land like the palms of their hands. They knew where freshwater and wild game were to be found. It wasn't just the buffalo that was their food; it was all these other animals. They hunted only the game that was plentiful at the time.

Then the settlers came. The Native People didn't always see newcomers as enemies. My Peoples observed and believed that the settlers didn't seem to mean any harm,

but they did need a little bit of help. So, my People went to give them a hand and helped them. Whether the newcomers wanted to admit it or not, they needed us to guide them to survive in an unfamiliar environment. The Native People knew what to look for, what was needed to live, so we helped them. Those newcomers, they would not have survived on their own; they couldn't even have started to make settlements if the Native People had in any way turned against them.

But, at that time, there was mutual reciprocity of everything, and this is not seen now, and that's too bad. Neighbours helped one another during those years. This is how the Native People were instrumental in how the newcomers survived and became successful homesteaders when they first arrived on the North American continent and, more specifically, in Canada.

Somewhere along the line, the trust and friendliness began to change between the Indian and the white people. I think it had a lot to do with the movies. In the 40s, the Hollywood movies had a lot to do with the picture changing. Those people wanted to make money and more money. This greed changed the picture, because the movies started to portray Indians only as killing white people. Always "whooping" and riding down the hill, killing white people. Always seeing this, people are going to change. "Oh those Indians, that's all they ever did, go around, killing, killing, killing." It's always, the wagon train comes through, and from over the hill, there'd always be Indians attacking and killing." I know it's not an accurate portrayal, but someone is still going to be influenced by it. The movies showed a bad picture, and so the generations that have come later, the young people that we grew up with, were seeing Native People in a different way. "Oh they just came in and massacred and murdered and raped."

Quiet and Respectful Is the Indian Way

In the early years of my career, there was this one time I almost got sick. I went to a principals' conference in Winnipeg. I went with whoever went from Sioux Valley. I was the only female principal, and I was the only Indian there. I met a gentleman from Virden. When I went in, the other attendees kind of wanted to patronize me, because I'm the only Indian and a woman at that. They came in and, "Oh, come on Doris, sit here." Well, I sat with them. We had our sessions, and then we had our breaks. I had a lot to say to those directors, principals, and men mostly, but they were all too busy talking. The drone, it was just deafening. I couldn't stand it; I had to leave the room. I just couldn't take it.

When First Nations People meet, they would have all been quiet. If there's a meeting at the Band Hall with all the Indians of the reserve, you can hear a pin drop. Even now, today, if the audience is waiting for someone to come in and make an address there, it'll be quiet. I see this when we have elections. We're all quiet. We're all listening. Big difference.

The Indian is quiet, always has been, and is seen in a different way because of this quietness. In the Dakota culture, it is disrespectful and bad manners to stare at somebody or make eye contact. As Dakota People, we hear that from the time that we are small children. "Don't be looking at him; don't be looking, he's your brother, he's your uncle, he's your grandfather. We are to have the utmost respect for them. You don't stare at him." Every day, we were told that. We soon realized that to be staring, especially at our relatives, was not proper conduct. "Your place is over here, you're a young lady." These are what the outside world doesn't understand about our culture.

Epidemics

When the newcomers arrived in Canadian territory, they brought many diseases with them to the Native People who had no protection or immunization against diseases such as smallpox and diphtheria. Traditional medicines were not much use against those diseases. For centuries, Native People have had their own healers. As these diseases swept through the Native population, the healers began to look and see what's going to help to cure their sick. They didn't have surgeons back then, so their own healers had to go and test the roots and plants to see what kind of sickness it was good for, but to no avail. Many Native lives were lost. I look back, and I see that my Dakota People worked hard to help each other in every way.

Impact of Government Policy

Non-Status for Dakota in Manitoba

I was only in grade four, maybe five; I remember there was a book written about the explorers. They were talking about a French military officer and fur trader named La Vérendrye and how he came up from the Lake of the Woods, like one of the previous explorers in the 1730s. La Vérendrye wrote that, when he came to the Lake of the Woods, where the prairies start, the first ones he saw there were these "redskins," and they were Sioux Indians. This is important because of what the Canadian federal government was saying. Our Dakota People were here before 1867, but the Canadian government disagreed. La Vérendrye has proven them wrong. As young as I was, ten years or so, I remembered it; to me, it meant something. The first ones he saw were these "redskins," and it was summer, so they were going around without much clothes. So, therefore, they looked red. LaVérendrye, in particular, was the one that came farthest west in the beginning.

I was involved with the Miniota Historical Society. They put up a commemorative marker at a place along the Assiniboine Valley, where a big excavation was done. That was when the TransCanada pipeline was coming through in the 1960s. They came upon an Indian camp. Archaeologists went in, and, in the dig, they found this Sioux Dakota camp. The beads, the pottery, everything there was Dakota, our People, over a thousand years old. This historic find proved the Dakota has been here long before the Canadian government claims we were here in Canada.

Evidence of Sioux Dakota camps was not only found there; eventually, another identical camp like that was uncovered farther west in Saskatchewan, I forget the name of the little town, but they found the same kind of things there. So, that excavation was another one. That winter camp was found when the pipeline went through the excavation. Everything, the pottery and the beads they found in that camp were all Dakota, dating back at least a thousand years. A thousand years is a long time. However, the Canadian government tried to say, "No, Dakota were never here before the adoption of the Canadian Confederation," being the process by which the British colonies of Canada were joined into one Dominion of Canada in 1867. The Canadian government further said, "You Dakota don't have anything to do with Canada, with the land here. You are refugees." That, I dispute.

Dakota family near Brandon, 1874.

The Royal Proclamation

In 1763, there was a Royal Proclamation by King George III, setting out what could be done for government policy. The British and the French started fighting over who was going to have this newly British-claimed land in North America. But, at the time, the land was already inhabited by the Native People. Many different tribes had learned to coexist, well, for the most part. Those who wrote the history said, "Oh, they were fighting amongst themselves." Well, people don't always get along. But there were almost always constant wars between the countries in Europe as well.

The Native People trusted the white people when they came. The mistrust came after they had been together for a long time, when other things started coming in that created the mistrust. All these things that happened had a lot to do with the Canadian government policy, and it still does today, on how it affects the lives of Native People. The government sent in the Indian agent to establish government policy. They wanted to conquer and colonize the whole country, and in doing so, the mistrust came in because they started doing things to the Native People.

The government called it economic development. They thought, "Get those settlers in there to live on the land and make money for us." I don't know when taxes started, but a country can't have a government without taxes. All the policies the Canadian government made were what created all the mistrust. Our Native People didn't know at the time that was the government's purpose. But, the settler coming in wasn't worried about what the government was thinking. The settlers were just trying to find a plot of land where they could raise their children, make a living raising cattle, farm and live in peace.

Residential School and the 60s Scoop

The residential school system and liquor literally ruined my People. The Native children across Canada were removed from their homes and forced to attend residential school ten months of the year. This left only two months to learn of, or witness, examples of a traditional family life. While we were home from school, our parents disciplined with punishment instead of in the traditional way of disciplining. Since the Canadian government took the Native children away from their families, the children missed out on the opportunities to learn the needed parenting skills. This teaching traditionally came from the parents and grandparents of the children

as they grew up with them in the home and while often looking after younger siblings. Since the children were taken away at an early age and weren't allowed to return until their late teen years, they lacked proper parenting skills. Some residential school Survivors, as young adults, were unable to care for their own children. They had no concept of how to parent. That's where the 60s Scoop came into effect. Canadian government policy allowed officials from the 1950s to the 1980s to forcefully, without parental consent, remove or "scoop up" masses of Indigenous children from their families to be "sold" and forced into foster homes or into adoption to primarily white, middle-class families living in Canada and the United States.

Four of my niece's children were "sold" to the US for thirty-two thousand dollars, for eight thousand dollars each, and taken to Oregon, with the money going to the Child and Family Services agency. The four, when they came of age, hitchhiked and made the long trek on foot back to Canada. Just as they arrived here, their mother was on her deathbed from a car accident. She was only reunited with her eldest son before she passed and never reunited with the younger three. Their mother spent years hoping that one day, her children would be given back. My cousin Edith Antoine's son, Cameron Curly, was sold as a young boy to a bachelor in Kansas. This man had four boys in his home from the ages of very young to sixteen years of age. The man abused them all. When Cameron was sixteen years old, he killed this man and served many years in prison. Once released, he acquired a new name and identity and never was heard from again.

Change in Liquor Laws

Along with the maltreatment of the students in residential schools and the aftermaths of the 60s Scoop, there were also the effects of the 1951 Liquor Laws that contributed to the destruction of my People. Under a Canadian federal law (Canadian Indian Act of 1876) the government had control over most things having to do with the First Nations lives across Canada, such as Indian Status and reserve land, resources, and ceremonies. The government prohibited anyone to sell or provide alcohol to First Nations People, and also prohibited First Nations People to drink liquor—being found in a state of intoxication was punishable by fine and prison.

Evidence of the cruel effects of the residential school and the 60s Scoop became prevalent for some immediately after the significant changes and reversal of the old Liquor Law sections of the Indian Act. The reversal opened up the right to consume

alcohol and the right to enter licensed bar establishments for alcohol consumption to First Nations People. Alcohol became their addiction in trying to escape from their feelings of despair, misery, and just not caring about anything. Booze was what mattered to them. When people are in a position where they're not able to make an income, don't have a job to go to every day, then for them to cope, the only thing left to do is try to find the next drink.

The Canadian government's residential schools and their Indian policies of assimilation made us that way from the time we were children, causing parents to suffer the loss of their kidnapped children. The children were taken from loving families only to exist in a place where they were told they were trash. People need to understand that's what happened to the Native People, how the Indian Act legislation has negatively affected First Nations right across the country and down through to the present generations.

The Dakota Not Recognized As Canadians

The Canadian government didn't acknowledge the Dakota as Canadians when the Government of Canada was formed way back in 1867. The Dakota had it even worse than other First Nations, stemming from the fact that they had been aggressive and stood up. Once one stands up to the bully, the bully is not going to say anything good about their victims.

The federal government was the bully in this case, and the Dakota People were the ones who stood up and said, "No, that's not right!" That's the story that I wanted to tell. The government should have done things differently in the beginning and let all the people mingle; the newcomers and the Native People were getting along without their interference. Those first settlers who came survived because of the mutual respect they had for each other. The Indians could have killed them, but they didn't. My Dakota People watched them and decided, "They don't seem to mean us any harm. We'll befriend them, we'll treat them well." We made good friends with the newcomers and treated them right, but then they turned on us. Others who came did not share the same ideas. They saw a difference there, or whatever it was. They started seeing they could profit from some situation. That's what the Native People always looked out for.

Reconciliation

According to some First Nations people, there are a lot of non-Native Canadian citizens who are now saying, "I didn't know that's what the Canadian government

did to the Native People historically. That was disgraceful and wasn't right, I don't want to be part of that, we want to be friends with First Nations People; they're not bad people." There's a big trend towards learning about Indigenous People.

I sometimes speak at high schools and universities. I tell the students, "You know that this isn't right, the way the First Nations were treated. Now you can make a difference. You are the people who can bring about a change. That picture has to change. There is a great First Nations human resource that's sitting here at the welfare line."

While Canada chooses to gravely disregard this historical fact of the wasting away of human resources, I believe the present Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, sees that and acknowledges things are not happening that should be happening to correct that fact. But, he's only one man, and he's trying his best to change that picture. There are two ministers of Indigenous Affairs now. My hopes are that the lives of my People will improve with their help.

Years ago, there was no Child and Family Services (CFS), no senior citizens' homes, and no social assistance. We looked after our own children and the elderly. When the Dakota were busy looking after all the needs of their people, they were not going around murdering and raping. Our time was taken up trying to sustain life for our people, so that needs to be told too because there's a grim misconception. When the white people wrote the stories, it was like, "Oh well, we found them here. I think they were all killing one another, and murdering and raping and burning, and who knows what." Those are made-up stories that come maybe from the movie industry. The movie shows the Indians on a hill, coming down towards the wagon train, whooping. It wasn't like that. Our People didn't fight like that, meaning if our Dakota Warriors were coming over that hill yelling, the cavalry, or whoever, was going to take us out right away. We were stealthy and quiet about how we fought our wars. That's why we won. That's how Sitting Bull won the Battle of the Little Bighorn. We didn't come over the hill yelling, announcing our arrival. General Custer didn't even know that we were there, giving us the advantage by catching them unaware.

The Aboriginal People had learned to coexist with the newcomers and others who followed. They learned how to respect other people's territory and one another. Therefore, everyone was free to move around in peace to make use of the whole continent. This is where everything started to change. The Canadian government should have left us alone in the beginning, instead of ostracizing us and putting my

People on reserves, saying, "Don't go near them." They were making us look like we were different, and we weren't really different. It started out in a good way, and somehow greed came in and changed the picture. That's what I want to relay, too, because they should have left things the way they were in the beginning. When they first arrived, the new homesteaders needed our help.

The Dakota in Manitoba

Living on the Land, with the Land

My Dakota ancestors used the land as they saw fit, and it always provided healthy foods for us, such as wild turnip and wild onion. We fed ourselves on what nature provided. Nature was full of food. All of nature was there for us to use. Being very spiritual people, we asked the Great Spirit for guidance; we asked for knowledge, and we received it. We survived all that time because we learned how to use nature and what it provided. We couldn't see God, but we believed in his Great Spirit and that He manifests Himself in the sun. All these things are connected, and we understood how to live in harmony with the land and what it provided.

Some Dakota were more hunters, and some were more gatherers. But it was all food, and everybody had their own little corner where they had something they could bargain with for the trading of these things. Every area did. In the Woodlands, the Ontario Native People lived on fish and the Dakota lived on buffalo. That's how it was. It was sort of a harmonious shifting of the area.

Different tribes respected each other's territory. They were all Native Peoples. "This is mine where I am right now and you're over there. When things are depleted, I'm going to move over here." And so all the different tribes went around like that. "Well, I'm over here, so that's OK because you're over there." That's what had to happen in order to survive, and we looked out for each other.

Traditional Life

Now we see a lot of our people with diabetes, a horrible thing. That's the scourge of the First Nations, which came with all the different, new processed food. Before we ate wild meats, wild berries, and different roots. There is a wild potato that we picked, along with a wild turnip-like root, which was used in soup, and sometimes we had wild duck. The land was full of all these natural foods. It was like the Garden of Eden in this country. We knew where to find the food, fruit, and everything we needed to survive and look after ourselves; we didn't need a store. We had it all here to feed our families, to keep us warm and to clothe us. Everything came from the buffalo and nature. The diet was different. It was a different time. Ultimately, it changed; the government came in and forcefully wanted to assimilate my People and change us. That was where everything went wrong. We see it now; we see it all now.

Dakota Stories & Legends

The Dakota, like other Native People, don't tell legends in the summer. I believe it is like that in all the cultures; no stories or legends are told until the snow flies, which is in November. There are beliefs and other things associated with that. Those kinds of teachings are good teachings. For example, we used animals to teach lessons. Well, this animal did this, and it was punished because that's not good behaviour. There are all kinds of little stories like that on everything. That was how we taught the lessons of life that we needed to teach. We used animals most of the time. Some of the stories were just for the sake of humour. It was like entertainment, but there was still always a lesson in it. Each Tribe has its spirit. For the Dakota People, the spider is our spirit. The spirit of the spider could be bad or good. So most of the stories were about him, the kinds of things he did, the kinds of antics he pulled. There were lessons and a moral in every story. The Tribe's value system and what they really valued were tied up in these stories.

Our legends were fairly similar to those of other tribes because they have the same legends with a little difference. The Dakota had more in-depth ones. We have many stories and animal legends. For instance, there's a story about a spider marrying his own daughter or his own daughter-in-law. Knowing that it shouldn't happen, it's incest, but it's told so that won't happen. Things like that, things that are not acceptable in any culture are told as lessons.

Non-Treaty Status

After Confederation, the Dakota People had a tougher time than any of the other First Nations People. For clarification, the Tribe is the Sioux, which is the name the white settlers gave us. When I say Dakota, I am referring to my distinct culture and language. The Sioux tribe on this continent, meaning North America, had no division saying this is Canada and this is the United States. It was not there. It was one large continent. It was the Sioux People who mobilized all the other Indian Tribes to work with us, and we fought to keep the government out; we tried to keep the white settlers out of here. It was too late because they came in with guns, but we dared to stand and fight them. Likewise, the Sioux fought against the American government and won the Battle of the Little Bighorn in June of 1876, defeating General George Custer and the 7th Cavalry. The Sioux Indians defeated him with bows and arrows while the 7th Cavalry soldiers had guns and cannons to blow us apart so easily. In reality, we won our country back then, but the United States never gave the country back to us.

Starting in the 1600s, the French and English came into North America, and the two nations began fighting over Canada to see who would own it. The land now known as Canada belonged to the Native People, to all those Tribes that were already settled here. Montcalm, a French commander, and Wolfe, a British army officer, had a conflict with the English, winning the right to say, "We own Canada." Likewise, the Sioux fought and won the country back by wiping out the US Cavalry. Later, knowing that the Sioux were a fierce Nation of warriors, the Canadian government did not want to make a treaty with the Dakota, leaving the Dakota in non-treaty status.

Warrior Nation

The Dakota were seen as warriors. Every country needs warriors to keep people from coming in and invading their territories. Nevertheless, the newcomers came and invaded us; we fought and won, but they didn't give our country back. That's why the Canadian government treated us, the Sioux Indians, differently. We don't have a treaty for that very reason. They were afraid, and that's why they didn't treat with us, and then they put this label on us saying that we were refugees. They have no reason to say that because we were here; God put us here first. All the explorers, settlers and all others who came after were the ones who came in from outside. We were here. All the newcomers were the refugees. What a demeaning label to put on people. That's still on the Dakota People now. That's what we're demanding from the government. Take that label off us. The Canadian government ruined our people by putting that label on us. I demand that the label be taken off. The Canadian government says that the Dakota only came here after the Minnesota Uprising of 1862. But the Dakota were all over the North American continent for centuries. In winter, we went down where the weather was better. We knew where to go.

The United States doesn't want to say the Dakota People are American citizens. Canada won't say it. We're still at that point. We went wherever our food was; that was our life. The continent was our Garden of Eden. We went where food was plentiful; when we started to deplete it, we moved on to let it replenish once again.

The Canadian government made treaties with the Assiniboine and other Tribes here in Canada, but not the Dakota. The government aimed to get the Dakota on reserves, keep us quiet and give us a bit of supplies. They wanted to keep us at peace and from fighting back. We were the ones who stood up and said, "We don't like what you're doing. You're infringing on our lands." So we mobilized; it wasn't just ourselves, we mobilized all the other Tribes.

Dakota man on horse, circa 1884.

Dakota travois, near Milford circa 1882.

We wanted our continent back, but it was never honoured because they had guns.

A Spiritual People

The Dakota lived here for centuries. They knew there was a God or a higher being; they couldn't see him, but they believed He existed. That's how the Sun Dance came about. The Sun Dance wasn't done to worship the sun, we were worshipping to God. But we called it the Sun Dance, because that's how God shows Himself. He shows He's there and has all this power. Everything that grows and lives needs that sun, so that was why it was so important to us.

Often people say that the Indians carried on the "rain dance." Again, we were still praying to God when we needed the rain, and it was customary to dance. Water is essential for all life, and we were waiting for it to happen.

The Dakota are very spiritual; we were very, very close to God. We didn't see Him; no one has ever seen Him, but we certainly knew He was there, and we were afraid of Him. Even in the Christian Bible, it says in Proverbs, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." There was something there, and the Dakota People were very much aware of that. Now how that came about, it was just part of our life, so when the newcomers came, they saw us as heathens. To them, it looked like we were worshipping stones or whatever. It wasn't so. It was just a person's perception, based on how they think, and that's too bad.

The missionaries said that we were pagans because they didn't bother to find out the entire story. Little did the missionaries know the Dakota were already worshipping God before they and the settlers arrived here. We had the Sun Dance. The Dakota danced because it was a form of worship. There was a day set aside that brought attention to the sun. The sun is a giver of life. Nothing grew without it. No one could eat on planet Earth without the sun. People couldn't live or breathe without the sun. We saw that. We had observed for years and asked why that was. We noticed the seasons change; even the animals grew long hair when it was getting cold. It was always based on the sun. The seasons changed because of the sun.

If one watched what the Dakota do in a Sun Dance ceremony, it is the same as the Christians having Holy Communion. They have to confess; they have to be truly sorry for what they have done. The Dakota feared God. The Bible says fearing God is the beginning of wisdom. We didn't want to anger Him in any way, this Great Spirit,

Wakan Tanka. The other Tribes understand this, and followed the Dakota lead and began to practise the Sun Dance as well. It was the same with the war bonnets that our warriors wore; other Tribes believed in their true meaning and started wearing them also.

Women's Role

In the Dakota culture, the women were not part of the formal decision-making process. That was the men's responsibility; the women had control in the family with the children. It was all the children that we looked after, and not just our own, because the children are important to our survival as a Nation. The homeowner, that's the person who makes things work together on a day-to-day basis. The mother's role in the community, it's what she does with her children, not only to look after them but also to look after the rest of the community. There were no senior citizen homes then. So, we looked after the entire family.

The Dakota women didn't hunt the big game, but we could snare the little ones. It was also the women's responsibility to look after the gardens we had. God provided everything on the continent. We knew where to gather and harvest all the natural foods. It was all there; we respected it and looked after it. My daughter Marilyn grew up with my mom; she taught her how to pick berries and when to pick them. She was a gardener, my mother. Sometimes, I think of all her hard labour in the garden was too much for Marilyn; that's why my girl doesn't like gardening today.

Problems with Addictions

When I was having breakfast with my son this one morning, we were talking about the morning news where there was a story about the Seven Chiefs. They were talking about the different problems in their communities, and they declared a state of emergency. Each First Nations reserve was plagued with higher rates of unemployment, higher death rates amongst children and youth due to unintentional injuries, higher rates of suicide, poorer health, the lowest levels of education, inadequate housing, lower income levels, the highest rates of diabetes, drug and alcohol epidemics, and Missing and Murdered Women.

Our First Nations leaders were saying, "We declared a state of emergency urging the government of Canada to immediately start working with all First Nations to develop contingency plans to find some viable solutions to reverse the effects of all the social problems plaguing every First Nations reserve in Canada."

Lack of Farm Machinery

Sarah Carter, in her book *Lost Harvests*, told how the people from the Oak River Reserve (now called Sioux Valley) became so good at farming that we almost surpassed our white counterparts. Eventually, by the early 1880s, the Dakota farmers moved from subsistence farming to practising commercial agriculture. We even went out there and helped the white settlers with their farms. Then the government assigned an Indian agent and a farm instructor to every reserve. The Indians received a hoe and a team of oxen from the government when they promised to give farm machinery. We worked hard with just the oxen and horses. There was no nice high-powered machinery; it was manual labour all day. The Dakota farmers walked on foot to plant, to harvest and everything they did. That was our Dakota People accomplishing all that hard back-breaking work. And, when they finished, when the bushels of grain came in and they took them to the Indian agent to be sold, they were told, "Well, you brought in so many wagon loads, a third of your profit goes to the Indian agent, a third goes to the farm instructor, and you get a third." Understanding their reasoning to do this was unknown except for greed. The Dakota farmer worked hard all year to bring in the harvest, and the Indian agent and farm instructor took two-thirds of it and left the Dakota farmer with only the final third.

My Dakota People were not stupid, like the people seem to believe. My mother said that the Dakota farmers just left the oxen right there in the field and said, "I'm not doing this so that the Indian agent can take a third and the farm instructor can take a third, and I have nothing for my family but this little bit. No, I'm not going to do this." And, they quit, and yet they were the best farmers at the time. Sarah Carter captures that in her book, and history tells that was what really happened—how government policies were used to undermine our success and make it harder for my People to become successful. The government hoped that with just hand tools and hard labour we would conform to their restrictions that were set out to keep us down from the beginning.

Indian Act Leads to Restrictions on Agriculture

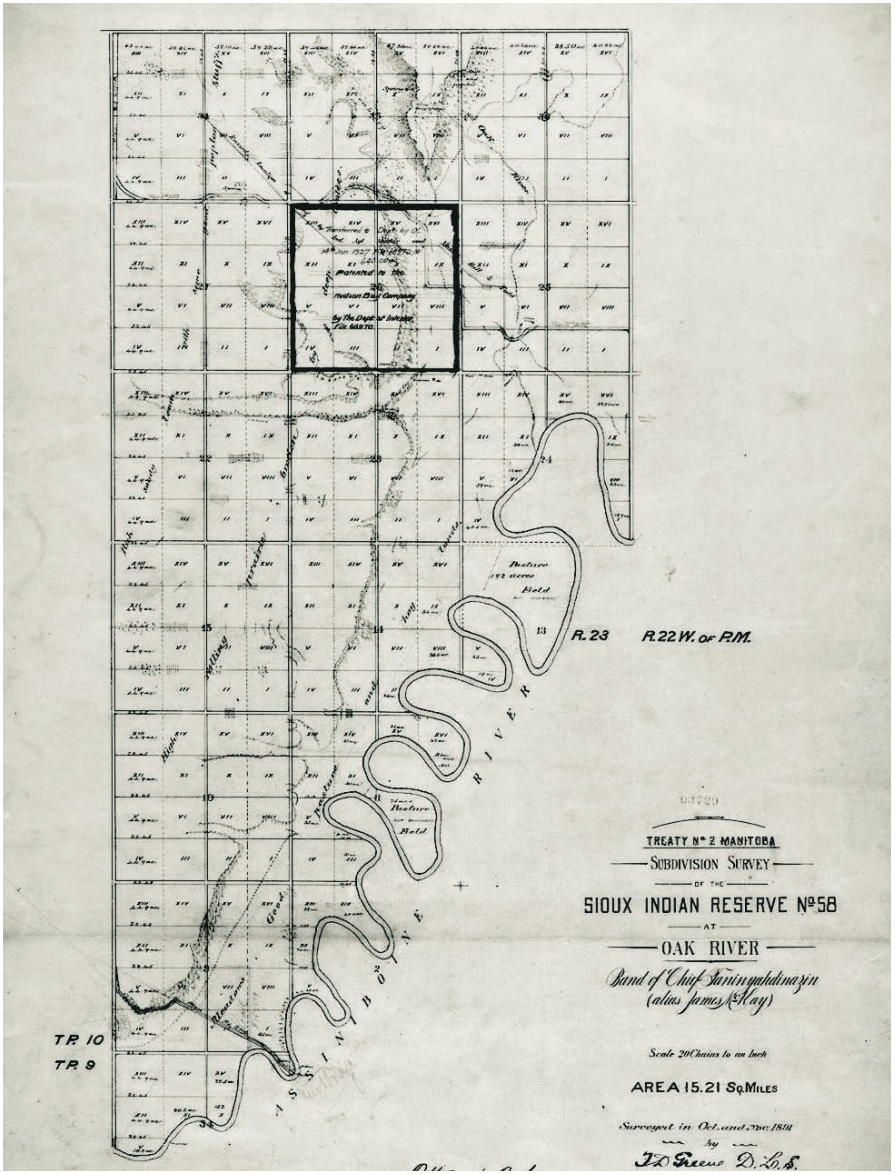
Sarah Carter also wrote that around 1891, as soon as the Dakota People here in Oak River became successful in farming, self-supporting, and profitable, the Canadian government came in and shut it all down, stopped everything and inferred that the people were not conforming to the agricultural policy of only subsistence-level farming. One would expect the government to be happy for the progress and initiative the Oak River People put forth, but no, they didn't see it

that way. The government worked so that an unequal footing was set, which began by preventing the Dakota farmers from selling their own grain. A strict permit system was implemented so that the farmers had to get permission from the Indian agent to sell their grain at market. The Indian Act gave the Indian commissioner, Hayter Reed, authority to instruct Indian agents to do all this. Other constraints stipulated that Indian farmers could only farm with a hoe and rake, imitating that of peasants of other countries, and produce only for their own family needs and not for market. At the same time, the government also instigated restraints on the Dakota farmer, preventing them from the purchase of any large farm machinery, including communal equipment, to produce larger crops, while the white farmers were allowed to get bigger machinery to enlarge their fields. It was terrible. See, I want to tell these horror stories of what the government has always done to discourage my Dakota People. This was wrong, but that is how the government is still treating our First Nations People today.

In hindsight, my People were really set up for failure from the beginning because initiative wasn't rewarded. For example, we could become good farmers and have healthy cattle, but in the end, we had to give so much of our profit away, it wasn't worth doing. If the government had done so much to hold back the white community settlers, they couldn't have been successful either. They pushed that and they only used the Indians for their own purposes, it seemed like. My Dakota People were historically hunters and gatherers. The government also restrained us by placing us on small reserves and not allowing us to go beyond those parameters that were set out by them. We were not allowed to follow or hunt the wild meat that we so much needed to survive.

Retaining Our Culture

The Canadian government also had policies against Native People having cultural practices at home. There were so many restrictions on everything we did. They outlawed dancing of any kind and any kind of entertainment. Indians were not allowed to practise our culture like we had done before, especially anything related to worship. They were trying to Christianize us, so they didn't want us doing all these cultural things, so they took it all away. There were no cultural events at home to go to. My mother had been raised in a residential school. She told us things about the Dakota culture. She would tell us, this is what our People did and for what purpose. Anything I know about culture is through her passing it to us children, but to actually practise any cultural events, it wasn't allowed.



Map entitled "Sioux Indian Reserve No.58 at Oak River." April 26, 1894.

Helping the Local Farmers

When I was at residential school, my mom and my oldest sister Irene, who had come home from residential school, worked hard close to home for the white farmers. They stooked fields by hand all day because they needed the money in order to look after themselves. My dad was over in the Alexander area working for farmers there. In a way, they kind of almost lived separate lives except on the weekends when they came home, but a whole week was spent working for the farmers, doing everything. That's how I saw my Dakota People. Don't ever say my parents were lazy. It makes me sad, it makes me cry to think my mom and dad worked so hard, so did a lot of our People. In the morning, they were gone at the crack of dawn. My dad left early Monday morning, he walked two miles to work. He wouldn't be back until Friday. Our People worked, and that's how we got along. I watched the old uncles, the old grandpas work just as hard.

Government & Church Divided the People

Just like the Indian agent worked to divide the Native People, the church had also divided the People. I see the remnants of that from way back, and I can't blame my People. That's the monster the government created with their Indian policies and the church-run residential schools that began in 1867, with the last school remaining in operation until 1996.

I heard on the news about the ten thousand, or how many thousands of, Native children in child care, here in Canada who were removed from their homes as part of the 60s Scoop. The 60s Scoop was another method to assimilate First Nations children. The government started closing the residential schools in the 60s, and as soon as they started that, the Child and Family Services (CFS) started taking the children in a different way—by saying the parents were not good parents.

First Nations parents, when they were children, went through the Canadian residential school system, so they didn't know how to parent. In a way, CFS was sometimes right that these parents weren't very good. It's because they hadn't been exposed to parenting while they were growing up.

People talk about these Murdered and Missing Women throughout Canada and the United States. It is no wonder; those were girls that were exploited, sometimes sexually; as children, they knew nothing. The root cause of this kind of oppression

for some of these women began and happened in nearly all residential schools. Not so in our school as far as I knew. I never heard anybody say that. But I was a young girl then, and somehow people didn't hear about those things until they were thirteen, fourteen or fifteen.

The Canadian government did not want us to be educated. At that residential school, we couldn't go beyond grade eight. We graduated when we passed grade eight, and we didn't have to go back again. But we needed to be educated. I'm not afraid of talking about that to anybody now, I have nothing to lose. I told the Canadian government representative, "This is what you did to us through your Indian policies." I know some of those people who work on those government committees don't even know the true story about the Canadian government's Indian policies and how they had damaged and destroyed generations of First Nations People from across Canada.

Held Back from Higher Education and Jobs

If the Canadian government had allowed for all the First Nations across the country to be educated beyond grade eight, we could have been the doctors, nurses and technicians. If higher education was allowed, maybe my Native People would not be experiencing joblessness, hopelessness, alcoholism, drug epidemics, despair, and high rates of suicide on every First Nations reserve here in Canada.

The government of Canada under Trudeau seems to be telling us that they're trying to improve the situation, but I have not seen much improvement over the past twenty years. There are very small, small improvements, but it needs to change. I said in one of my acceptance speeches for one of my lifetime achievement awards, "You know, I go every other day to dialysis, and I see immigrants working at the Brandon Hospital. They are the doctors, registered nurses and technicians. People are coming from different countries into our country, getting trained and getting good jobs. Meanwhile, my First Nations People are standing at the welfare lines every month."

That's what the Canadian government needs to change. As long as the government doesn't change its thinking and acknowledge that their Indian policies failed severely, this human resource that is sitting here with all the potential to do such jobs, it will go to waste. Ignoring us and keeping the doors closed to opportunity is not solving any problems. First Nations people could be working in these positions with the right training and educational support.

People have to say this was wrong. I attended many meetings with Sioux Valley's Chief and Council and Canadian government officials. At one of those meetings a few years back, I was called on to speak to the Canadian government representatives from Ottawa on behalf of my People. I said, "Why didn't you let us get educated? You should have let my People get educated. You didn't do that. Instead, the Canadian government said, No, we don't want them going beyond grade eight. "Why? Was it because you didn't want the best for us to begin with?" When I was finished, there was no response from the Canadian government representatives, none whatsoever. They just looked at me, listened to what I had to say.

Things have not changed over the years. My People are still in the welfare lines, they can't even go to work in those food services that any white high school kid could go and work at. Our People can't. As soon as they see one of our young people, the owners or supervisors immediately think, "Oh, that's an Indian. They're lazy. They'll either steal from us or do something." We hear all these negative things. Non-Natives are still putting a lid on us as First Nations people and holding us down. We're a long way from getting out of this mess. In the meantime, bad things happen because of racism, preconceptions, or misconceived notions of what one believes a Native person is before they get to know and understand them as a real person. As Native People, we feel racism and understand what it is. When it happens, we will not want to return or go there again if it is a terrible place to be. If all we're going to face is racism and being instantly judged and having assumptions made about us, we will just stay away. But this picture has to change.

Fortunately, some of our First Nations People did slip through the cracks in the government policy, and they went and gained a higher education. I knew a Native person who became a registered nurse, Betty Chalmers, and there were a few others, but these people are gone now. Now that could have been all of our People if the government had done the right thing and just gave simple encouragement to go ahead and do something. The older women would sometimes ask: "And what do you want to be when you grew up?" "I want to be a nurse," I said. "Oh, Doris wants to be a nurse." I, of course, didn't become one because I didn't have the education to become a nurse. I was dreaming then of this career, but that dream was stifled and ended because of everything else that I faced as a young person.

How the decision was made to send some students for further education is unknown to me. However, my own sister Irene had finished grade eleven at the time. She went to the town school with the white kids after grade eight. She did, and the odd one did. There were a few that were allowed, but then others weren't. It was not

a good system on who was picked or chosen to go on with their education. My sister Irene went to a high school with Annabelle Stranger and Ina Whitecloud, but she was Ina Pratt at the time. Those girls were chosen to continue their education and were allowed to go to school in town with the white kids. Now that may have been a horrible experience for them, because of racism, but they seem to have made it. They made friends there. I say that the government should have allowed us all to go to school as we had wanted. If we had the ability, let us do it. Don't just send us home. We were graduated when we were sixteen in the residential schools, and immediately we were told to go home, but most of the time, we didn't get even that grade eight education at the residential school.

Family Allowances Abuse

Following the end of World War II, the family allowances were introduced in 1945. It was a universal welfare program to assist parents in meeting basic needs and raising their children under the age of eighteen. The Canadian government abused the family allowance system when a Native family was involved. It became another way of coercing and manipulating the First Nations Peoples. It was used to ensure that the school-aged First Nations kids went off to residential school. The families received the allowances, but I think the bulk of the family allowances were sent to the residential school. I believe the mothers received the allowance before they sent the children back to school in the fall. The family allowance was just for the ones who were at home, the little ones, the babies. I remember when the family allowances first came in. It was five dollars. Oh, it was like a million dollars for me, but it was just five dollars, a piddly little amount.

My Early Years at Home

My Mother

My mother was Bessie (née Grant) Dowan. She came from Sioux Village, located near Portage la Prairie. My dad, Deamus Dowan (Takhcha O), died in a terrible car accident in the fall of 1974. My mom died two years later from complications of diabetes. It is very sad to think she had worked so hard all her life, raised nine children, and there, at the end of her life, she dies with such a terrible thing as diabetes. I'm diabetic as well, so I take medicine for my heart and for my high cholesterol.

My mother was sent to the Portage la Prairie Residential School. That is where she grew up. She was just at the crawling stage when her mother, my kunshi, Sarah Chaske, was forced to send her there. However, it was also out of need. They sent their children to be fed at the residential school since back then families were poor. My Kunshi Tara is buried in a small cemetery just off the south side of the Trans-Canada directly south of Portage la Prairie.

Those earlier schools were like orphanages. They took in very young children then. The school was on the reserve, so Mom was able to go home every weekend. It was a little different setting in the early residential schools. Being at home, my mother was able to learn everything about Native culture and became a proficient Dakota language speaker. This ability she passed on to her children. She knew all her relatives, felt loved, and was cared for by her mother. Because my mother spent so much of her younger life in residential school, she felt the residential school system was a natural process to include in the raising of her own children. She accepted this method as the way it was to be because she knew of no other way. This was at earlier times, but then the Canadian government started implementing all new policies that made the stay at day school longer. Then the government started building the bigger schools, turning them into residences rather than day schools.

Doris' mother, Bessie Dowan, with Doris' two oldest daughters, Marilyn in the back and Adele siting on her

My Parents Had a Hard Life

My mom and my dad had a hard life with nine children. My mom lost two babies within a year of each other, and then she lost two teenagers. Her first born was Olive. Olive came home from residential school because she was sick. Eventually, she just lay there and died at the age of seventeen in 1937. My mom's second born, Margaret, was fifteen when she died. They both were sent home from residential school very sick, wasting away, and nobody knew what it was and why they were dying. I was one year old when Olive came home.

Previous to my mother losing her daughters, she also lost her two little baby boys; Clarence was a month old and Harold died before he was a year old. Possibly the cause was the flu, nobody knows. Mortality was high at that time because in the 30s and 40s there was no doctor living on the Oak River Reserve to take the children to for medical attention. The doctor would only come once a week, but he came when they were dying. I was a little kid when my older sisters died. I didn't really know them, but I saw what my mother had gone through from their deaths. What a terrible loss for my parents to experience, in addition to the worries the Great

Doris' childhood home. Grandpa Joe Ironman standing on the buggy.

Depression brought. Yet they never complained. My other sisters were named Irene, Kathleen and Daisy. I had one brother named Roy.

Living through the Great Depression

I experienced the world and even came through the years of the Great Depression. The 1930s were really a difficult time of Depression. People were almost starving. Food was scarce for us Native People also, but the Indians had been here on our homelands for centuries, so we knew what to use and how to find it. Thank God for the overpopulated rabbits at that time. There were millions of them all over the prairie, so we had a daily diet of rabbit: rabbit stew, rabbit soup, roasted rabbit and then repeat that again and again. But, so what, we were being fed. We weren't eating ice cream, bologna or white bread—none of those things. We had fresh meat. That's what our People ate—wild meat. The ducks left in the fall, in September to October, but they were back in April. The ducks had a long flight to make, but they had fatted up somewhere, the Gulf of Mexico or wherever they wintered. During the Depression, they came back to where they were nesting. My Dakota People went looking for them, and when they found them, they said, "The ducks are back - food!"

We went from rabbits to ducks to gophers. The prairies were incredibly overrun with countless gophers years ago. Those gophers survived all those tough years of the 1930s. They survived, so that meant we survived. It was like an ongoing food chain.

In spring, there were muskrats to eat. We could sell the pelts at a decent price. The country used to be full of muskrats. We don't see muskrats now because they were just about wiped out then. They are slowly getting a little more numerous again. During the 1930s, the fur industry was booming. Some inventive person suddenly found uses for muskrat fur. The muskrat hide was made into muskrat coats. At that time, everybody had to have a fur coat. This was a way of showing wealth in the white world. The Queen's Guards had those big hats, which were made of beaver. My Native People didn't use fur like that, we didn't tan them just for coats—we used them, but we used them for food and other things. But hey, these people wanted the muskrats, so trapping muskrats was a way for us to earn some money.

Dad Worked for the Homesteaders

Dad was always busy working. As soon as he was thirteen or fourteen, he went to work for the white neighbours, the Wetterburns. Dad went to work over there because it was good to go and work for those homesteaders in the Tarbolton area.

He worked all the time as the farmer's helper. The Wetterburns provided him with a good clean bed every day, and Mrs. Wetterburn fed him well.

Dad also acquired some schooling while he was there. These were the days before there was a schoolhouse in that area, and so, Mrs. Wetterburn was home-teaching her children and educating them herself. There were no formal educational requirements yet, so she could teach her own children what she wanted them to learn. My dad learned to be very fluent in English, because of Mrs. Wetterburn and all the things she taught her children. My dad heard it all. He learned good things about personal hygiene, and afterwards, he was always very neat in the home. He wanted this and that just so because that's what he saw her do. He lived with them, and that was his life growing up.

Ration Books, Wild Fruit and Sugar

Throughout the early 1940s, when I was a child, the valleys on the Oak River Reserve were full of fruit. I could go down there and get any fruit I wanted to eat. My Dakota People were the ones picking the fruit and giving it to the white farmers. They were preserving them for the winter months.

During the World War II years, 1939 to 1945, everything was rationed as to just how much a family could buy. Each family was allotted coupons according to the size of the family. My parents needed little tickets or coupons to buy different supplies. We had no money. We didn't have use for some of those things we could buy with the coupons. The white farmers' wives were the ones who knew how to preserve their food for later use. They preserved and canned their fruits, vegetables, and everything else. They needed a great deal of sugar and salt to do all this canning. Sugar was especially scarce during that time.

Some of the farmers from the area came to the reserve where we lived needing a lot more ration coupons. Our People didn't need sugar. We didn't preserve fruit with sugar. Everything was dried, bagged, and kept in its own natural sweetness. I remember the farmers coming. They'd come and stand outside and talk to my dad, and they'd visit and visit, and at the end of the visit the farmer would say what he had come for. He'd say, "Oh, hi Mrs. Dowan, I brought you some eggs, a loaf of bread, and a quart of milk." The farmers were good about it. They always brought a chicken, eggs, or something like that. I noticed when someone wanted something they would get friendly. Soon, another white farmer would come and ask my dad, "We wondered if you had coupons for sugar?" Those coupons for rationing that

were allotted to our home didn't mean anything and were of no use to us. He always replied, "Sure you can have them."

My Dakota People helped the farmers in the sharing of the coupons. Nobody remembers all those stories, but I remember them. We were kids just standing there wondering what this washichu (white person) wanted. He brought eggs and milk, and we were right there drinking right out of the pail likely!

My mom and dad didn't go to town to buy sugar. They weren't interested in it. After a while, these farmers knew they could come to this house or to that house. It was fine for them come to the reserve to get our coupons to buy sugar; for them to always bring something was an indication of being a good neighbour.

Among my own Dakota People, it's customary to do the same; visitors never came empty-handed if they needed something. When one gives somebody a little tobacco among our People, that is like saying, "I need to get something from you, so I brought you this." Our People were always respectful in that way. I remember people coming, because they had heard that my dad had shot a deer, and they wanted a little bit of meat. Every time my Mom would say, "Yes, of course." She would accept whatever they brought. That's creating good relationships. One just doesn't come and demand something for free. That's how it was when the white farmers came. They brought something, and in return, they received those little coupons. As they visited and talked, they came to know each other well. These visits were the foundation of good relationships between the whites and the Indians during that time. They needed each other; when a person needs somebody's help, they're going to be good to them and treat them with respect.

We Looked After One Another

The Native People here at Sioux Valley looked after themselves and one another. When wood was cut down for firewood, it was shared to help take care of all our people. Everybody had a log house, warmth and food for the winter. We didn't need money, gas, or fuel for heating back then; we gathered everything, such as wild food and wild game. I know up to the 1940s, we didn't need anything like that from the government. The Native People, including the Dakota, have been accustomed to looking after ourselves on the continent for centuries.

In the 1940s, when I was a child, there was no Child and Family Services, there were no pensions, no senior citizens' homes of any kind and there were no welfare

services. There was no money coming into the reserve, we lived off the land. We lived the old way and didn't have to go to a store. We never left the reserve to go anywhere; we didn't have need because everything was right here for us.

An Orphan Raised by Neighbours

There was this boy from Sioux Valley that I knew. He's passed away now. His mother had three kids, and when she had him, I think she died in childbirth. Well, the baby was fine, so the mothers of Sioux Valley wet-nursed him; they took him to whoever had a baby, and they nursed him there. Maybe there were two or three families; back then they had big families. Because he didn't have a mother, the Dakota families raised him until he went to the Elkhorn Residential School at the age of four. He spent his whole life there. That was the only life he knew.

Grandfather Sharing Fish

My great-grandfather Charlie Dowan (Ite Wanzida) used to fish north of Sioux Valley. He lived on a parcel of land there, off the reserve. The government people couldn't move him. It was his land and he lived there until he died in 1943.

Soon after, the Indian agent who was assigned to Sioux Valley went and sold that land without our family's permission. That land was our family's land because my grandfather was there before anyone else farmed and settled nearby. Every spring he set out his fish traps on that small Oak River Creek. The fish came from who knows where, but the fish came, a lot of them down the river. He would set many of his fish traps, and they would be just full every day, so Grandpa would share his fish with the Dakota people here. He didn't sell it to the people, he gave it to them. He just said, "Come and get it." Yes, in the spring he fished every day. The Dakota Peoples filleted them and they ate them. The fish were good to eat. It was their major food for that month.

Grandpa Was a Lay Anglican Minister

My dad became a Christian late in his life. He had always been an Anglican. He worked for the church all the time. Then when the Mennonites came in, it changed him; he took a different view. He had arranged for a church to be brought onto the reserve. He started the reserve's Fellowship Chapel. We all followed what he did and

Doris' great-grandfather Charlie Dowan. His Dakota name was Ite Wanẓida meaning "One Face," a person of integrity. Ite Wanẓida was true to his name and passed that trait on to his children and then down to Doris' generation. They were known as a strong people who stood firm in their beliefs.

joined the Anglican Church, then the Mennonite Church, all of us. The Mennonites didn't seem to see us Dakota people any different. They would come right to the house and eat with us. They didn't seem to be horrified of our way of life.

My grandfather Joe Ironman, his Dakota name was Eitwe. He was really a devout Anglican and a lay minister dressed in an Anglican Church collar. He was at residential school around the turn of the last century and became an Anglican there. He baptized me when I was born. He read the Bible in Dakota. When I was about eight or nine on the reserve, he was still working as a missionary. They did a lot of work trying to change the people into all thinking like Anglicans. The Dakota People believed in the Great Spirit, so that is where their Sun Dance came from. They believed in God, too, and said, "Well, we will join them, too."

At first, the Dakota People were in favour of taking on Christianity. Believing in that, they all joined the Anglican Church. The Dakota People worked hard to keep the church going in Sioux Valley. The people did follow the Anglican belief for the longest time. Then they started to see what the system was really like. It was found out that the people in the Anglican Church were the ones working with the government to steal and kidnap our Dakota children away from our families to force us to attend residential school. That was what caused a great falling away, because the people of the Anglican Church told us all God is love, and then they came in and took the children. The parents and family members were in despair and anguish, left to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives. The Dakota, like all Native Peoples across Canada, trusted these people and could not believe how they betrayed our People and how they could legally kidnap our children. That was a terrible thing to do, and that needs to be told.

The Mennonites came in, and the Dakota People changed their beliefs and started questioning the Anglican Church and all the other churches on why they worked so hard to take their children away. There is no influence of the Anglican Church on the Sioux Valley Reserve anymore. Things changed. The churches and their ministers still come out to the reserve. There are a few devout ones that still go to church. But the majority wanted the old way back, the Dakota way. They believed in and they worshiped Him, Wakan Tanka (God), in their own way. That's what they did.

As I mentioned earlier, Joe Ironman, my grandfather, was a devout member of the Anglican Church and a lay reader. I remember he went in a buggy with Ms. Emma Pratt to gather food items from the farmers. They did this year after year. They would

have a Christmas dinner in Sioux Valley at the Anglican Church. Grandfather went all over the district asking for donations to put that meal on. That is how he gathered potatoes, maybe even some pickles, and stuff like that. They got the farming people in the district to make big donations, not monetary though, it was things they could use when they fed the people of Sioux Valley.

Those donations went a long way. When they had the meal, it was largely through the efforts of that old grandpa. He went in the district from house to house. It was a lot of travelling from here in Sioux Valley to the district of Tarbolton, to Kenton, all the families there. He went all over. I wouldn't call it "begging"—to him, it was asking for donations. He did that, and that is how we had a huge Christmas dinner for the people here in Sioux Valley. It was going on back in the 1940s and probably started in the 1930s. I don't know exactly what year it first began.

I remember as a small child waiting all day for this Christmas meal. It took time to prepare when the organizers are feeding hundreds of people. They cooked all these turkeys and all the stuff that was donated. There were a hundred people sitting down and eating. When the people finished, they went upstairs to a different part of the church. They wanted to stay there because there was a Santa coming at the end of the day. Once the first group was finished, the workers set for the next big group of people. They were feeding people all day because there were a lot of donations. They started feeding the people at noon or a little after noon. The feeding went on right into the evening before they finished.

When they finished feeding everybody, the missionary opened bails of things sent from Toronto or somewhere. The bails were used clothing and some brand new. They would distribute scarves, mittens, toques and sweaters. Wool was the item at the time, everything was real wool. The items were much-needed clothing. Everybody from the community stayed to see if they were lucky enough to be given something like that. We waited, and I remember my mother getting a scarf or toque or whatever it was. Finally, at the end of the day, nearly nine or ten o'clock at night, everybody headed home. It was a good Christmas day. Everybody got something out of it besides the meal. We gained our first introduction to Santa Claus and the idea of giving. So, Grandpa Joe Ironman played a major role in all that, making sure there was a big feast for everybody on the Sioux Valley reserve. There was not the number of members we have today, almost fourteen hundred members. Maybe three or four hundred is all they fed there at the Anglican Church. This continued on into the 1960s. And suddenly, they quit doing that.

Wasicuna's Turkeys

There was a man on the reserve by the name of Peter Wasicuna. He was my husband Walter's grandfather. He had always raised and had many turkeys. Peter didn't have to worry about anybody coming to steal them at all. At night, those turkeys would roost up in the trees all along the creek, where the playground area and cenotaph are today. Everybody on the reserve knew the whole lot of them were Peter's turkeys. Peter's wife had died, so he had to raise his ten daughters on his own. That man was very industrious and a hardworking man. One of his daughters, Julia, married, and she also raised turkeys like her father. The one year, the people talked about it that she donated twelve turkeys for the Sioux Valley community Christmas dinner. I heard others in the community talking about it, how this woman raised all her turkeys, and out of the lot she gave away twelve turkeys. It is a big thing when you raise turkeys and can give twelve for a donation for people to have a big Christmas dinner. It was something that the people never stopped talking about—that this one woman had given so much just for the Christmas dinner.

Those are things that our Dakota People did. The Dakota People are very giving, and it means a lot for them to do something like that in a big way, and somehow, they get satisfaction for doing something like that. I sometimes think about the ones who worked so hard to give those Christmas dinners. They worked hard doing most of the cooking and getting the food ready for the people to come and eat or to take a plate home. Those people were hard workers, and they were very devoted to the church. It was a good time for our People back then in the 1940s. I saw a lot of hard work and good things happen. My mother was always a part of that, too, taking the day to go down there to work for the whole day.

That shows how the people in the surrounding district, all white people, were willing to donate what they could when Grandpa Joe went farm to farm asking for donations. Most of the people were very willing to give something, and it showed that the farmers in the area were willing to do things for each other and for the Dakota People here in Sioux Valley, never mind who they were. I see now that kind of giving and working together doesn't happen anymore. I don't see that connection now, because the farmers in the district don't have anything to do with the people here on Sioux Valley reserve. Yet our membership has grown to almost two thousand people. Things have changed, and the Dakota and the non-Native people don't have things like that now, where we all worked together to make things happen.

Missionaries visiting Doris' parents during the early 1960s

Doris' husband Walter and their son Pernell.

Residential School Years

Taken from My Parents

Nobody can imagine the hell my siblings and I were put through as children when we were taken from our parents. I was with my parents until I was seven years old. I wasn't unhappy. I never thought, "Oh, I'm starving. I'm hard up for food. I don't have a wardrobe full of clothes. I don't have this and that." I was happy to be with my parents. Anything I learned, I learned from them, including the foundations of my spirituality and the Dakota language and culture that have been my guiding principles in all that I have achieved in my life. I was quite happy with my very peaceful life growing up in a little log cabin. All my older siblings had already returned home from residential school but never talked about what happened there. I had no sense of what to expect when, at the age of seven, I was snatched from all my happiness to be institutionalized into the Elkhorn Residential School system in 1943.

I was a very slender child. I spoke and understood both the English and Dakota languages. After my arrival at Elkhorn, I soon became an interpreter for the residential school supervisors and children. Sometimes the school staff didn't believe I was telling the Dakota children exactly what they were saying and the same with the children. Because of this, I was terribly mistreated by both the staff and the children. My ability to speak both languages soon became a dreadful experience for me just like at the Anglican day school back home on the Oak River Reserve. Because I was able to speak both languages by age six, the children there took it upon themselves to beat me up and put me on a swing where I could have been killed if I had let go or fell off, but I held on with everything I had. These were not nice things that they did to me, because they were trying to hurt me. It made me hang onto that swing as hard as I could. I soon realized the ability to speak both languages was not a good thing. The hurtful trauma has stayed with me all these years. In spite of that, at Elkhorn, I kept my Dakota language by whispering to the other children in the dark of night, knowing that if I was caught there would be harsh consequences to follow.

Not only were we referred to as "Indian trash," by the principal of Elkhorn, Mr. Dickerson, but some staff would also refer to us as "squaw," which was and still is often used as a slang word for an Indigenous woman or wife in North America.

Left: Residential school students in a classroom.

It was an English word used by non-Native people as an ethnic and sexual slur. The use of it is considered to be offensive, derogatory and racist. I consider myself as Dakota. However, all Native People have also been called Indian, First Nations, Aboriginal, and now Indigenous. It changes, but all the words mean the same. The term *Indian* came from the story of Christopher Columbus; when he arrived on the shores of North America and found Native Peoples here; he thought he had arrived in India. Natives found it derogatory to be named after Indians from the East when we are not. When I was little, they said "Indian." I didn't care what they said; they are going to say it anyway.

But even there at residential school, as human beings, we just wanted to know more, and we learned to adapt and cope with whatever horrible thing that was thrown at us. But I know, the older I got, I began to realize this was not right, and I would say to myself, "Why did this have to happen to us?" I was becoming quite a "loud mouth" and began to question why we were treated in such a disrespectful way. For this, I was often strapped and in trouble with the staff.

No One to Hold Me

There we were, all alone. What a lonely childhood we lived at the Elkhorn Residential School. We were sitting on the steps, or wherever. We're sitting there, because there was no family around. We're all alone. I knew loneliness was not a natural feeling; it was a feeling I never experienced before. A child needs the arms of their mother. I used to think, "If my mother could just hold me … I want my mom and dad." The worst thing for me was to suffer through my deep sadness and emotional void. Frequently, I just stood still, privately crying out to myself, "Where are my mother and father, don't they love me anymore?" While on the outside, I was hiding every tear and lonely feeling from the world. These feelings were never far from my thoughts and were burned in my mind forever.

All us kids, we only had one another. Sometimes one of the older girls would come and say, "It's okay, why are you crying? Sh-sh." We helped each other, and that was the only family we had. If I contracted a bad cold, a fever, I knew only my mother could soothe me and be there. In residential school, we didn't have anybody. Sometimes I'd go upstairs and go in a corner and just cry and cry and cry. But crying changed nothing. I could be sick with a high fever, but we were all alone and lonely. We had no one to explain why this was happening to us. I know, all those years, those were horrible years. That was the Canadian government's assimilation

Elkhorn Residential School, late 1930s. (Archives of Manitoba)

Doris Pratt (front centre), and a few of her classmates pose for a photo, Elkhorn, circa 1944. Note the flowers in her hand. Back row: Lena Tobacco, Martha Constant and Hazel Bell. (Pratt Family Photo.)

policies that brought all that about and it was wrong. They're talking about truth and reconciliation, well the truth will now be known. That was the government's Indian policy and residential school system that did that to us, erased our faith and hope that there was a better life for us. This system broke many Native children and families. I was eighty-five kilometres from home and I might have been in China or somewhere; it could have just as well been, because we couldn't go home.

A Climate of Fear

Fear is a great motivator. When I was scared, I didn't dare oppose anything the school staff said. I didn't dare say, "I don't like this." *Just be quiet.* That's why my Dakota People are so quiet. Fear of some punishment or who knows what. All the children, we did not want to anger anybody because we suffered so much already. We saw how other students who questioned the system were brutalized. What a lesson that was on keeping our mouth shut and not opposing the residential school system that was set up for us to be assimilated into a culture we wanted no part of.

My Dad's Only Visit

I was seven years old when I was forcefully taken to the residential school. Before that, I went to day school at the mission school on the Oak River Reserve. When I turned seven, I went to the boarding school in Elkhorn, where we were at school for ten months of the year. I never saw my parents the whole time. The first year, my dad came to school to see my brother Roy and me. He just came to the school one morning. We were lined up for assembly and they said, "Doris come here. There is someone here who came to see you." And there was my dad, sitting in a chair by the front door! I was speechless, thunderstruck. I went over to him and I sat on his knee. My brother and I were shocked into silence. We didn't really speak.

After a brief visit with my dad, I was sent back to wherever we were working that morning. In the mornings, we weren't doing academic work. We were cleaning something, polishing, or washing the floor, even as little as we were. There I was, working at whatever and thinking, "Oh, I'll be able to see my dad at noon." I could just hardly wait to see him. Now I was starting to get my tongue back and think about what I was going to say when I saw him. I didn't say anything when he first came. At noon, I was waiting and waiting for them to call me, so I went to the office and asked, "Where is my dad?" The lady said, "Oh, he's gone now." Way later, at the end of the school year when we came home, I asked him, "Why didn't you stay there? I came and they said you were gone." He replied, "They asked me to leave." I

saw him all of what ... to me it was all of a minute. I often wondered, "Why would they ask him to leave? Was he dirty? Did he smell? What was it?" They didn't allow him to stay. My mother never came to visit at the school.
I only saw her during the two-month summer break.

I remember wanting my dad so bad, standing there at the old slightly fogged window with cracked panes on the second floor of that cold school. I would be there at the window and I'd look, by this time of the day it was late afternoon. With my hands touching the glass window, while they were cupped to the sides of my eyes, I would think to myself, there's something there travelling, my dad would come, he'd come from that direction when he comes. My eyes just squinted and strained on the railroad tracks where they met the horizon, my heart pounding, wanting so bad to see my dad walking, coming closer. It was just like I'd see somebody coming but then I realized, no, it's not him. I'd stand there for a half hour or so watching, but nobody ever came, no matter how much I wanted it to happen.

Mealtime

At mealtime, we all had to get into line and march into the dining room together. Then we had to stand there with our heads bowed while the grace was said. They told us what to say during grace, so after a while it's in our head. Then it was, "This is your meal, eat it and be quiet. Say grace and sit down. Don't speak, just eat it." Maybe I would be so hungry, this was not enough to fill me. If I was at home, my mother was not going to withhold a second bowl, a second slice of bread. But there, it was this and only this and be happy with that. To even dare to ask was almost a sin. To ask for a second helping—we never did. We knew right off, this was our meal, whatever it was and no matter whether we liked it or not, we ate it. At the time, if we were to have liver, it was not fried like now with a nice batter and whatever. The liver was baked in some oven with nothing on it to make it taste better. We did not get all the extras, because the school was feeding four hundred kids.

Separate Dormitories

At the Elkhorn Residential School, there were five dormitories. The girls were all together. If I remember correctly, it was C, D, and E for the girls and A and B were the boys' dormitories. About thirty students all slept in one room. We were kept separated. I couldn't even visit my brother and speak to him. The same in class, the students didn't mingle. We were divided by age and separated, girls on one side and boys on the other.

Classwork and Chores

We started with a half a day of work and a half a day of academics. Later, as I grew older, academic times were increased, so sometimes maybe you went to academics in the morning. Then, in the afternoon, maybe we were in the sewing room, learning to darn socks. There were three hundred to four hundred kids there, and we had to do all our own mending. We learned how to mend things, how to darn socks and make our own clothing. Nowadays, nobody needs to know how to darn socks. There's so much clothing, jackets and shoes around now, one just needs to buy new clothing instead of mending and making their own. It's different times now.

At school, classroom work was staggered with chores. The older ones, they worked in the school. They were the cooks and the laundresses. While some were working in the kitchen and making cookies or doing whatever, others were working in the laundry room washing and folding clothes. We did all this work and only went to school half a day, so we were not going to get our grade eight education in a timely manner. It would take us at least sixteen years to get it, because we weren't going to school full time. The sewing we had to do, the mending of socks or mending clothes. Oh, that was hard.

The boys were given different work assignments. There were about eighty or so heads of Holstein cattle at the school. The boys learned to go out and milk the cows, and clean the barn, because there was always manure. They learned those kinds of jobs and how to work hard. They had a farm instructor there who was teaching and also helping them. There was an engineer there, also. I don't know what exactly he did, but he also had a lot to do. The boys, they were out there farming, looking after the chickens, and doing barn work. They weren't taught how to hunt; the school system was taking that away from the boys. I don't know if they had pigs, but they did all the milking of the cattle and caring for the other animals. They did things like bring in the hay and get things ready for the winter. They did that type of work and the girls did the other work. So, we couldn't go to school all day; it was half-time school and half-time working with chores like that.

That was the way the day went. In order for the school to run, everybody had a place, a little task, and we each played a part. For the girls the morning work was often doing the baking and getting food ready for the evening meal. Trying to feed that many people, preparing each meal, was an enormous task. The older girls there often worked in the kitchen, and sometimes, the younger ones were there just as helpers. But there was always a role for everyone and then of course, half a day was

academics.

That was a different time. The days were often full of drill and repetition. The school instructors wanted us to know this and that. I did learn many things, very important things that have helped me all through my life. Not everybody took these opportunities. But I tried to learn, in spite of all the injustices and cruelty that happened there because of those government policies. I always made my way; I adapted and coped with whatever came my way. Talk about true grit, I learned to hang in there and do the best I could. Keep moving forward, one step at a time.

Letters Home

We were allowed to write a letter home once a month, but the teacher wrote on the board what we were allowed to say. First of all, they taught us how to print the address: Indian Residential School, Box 173, Elkhorn, Manitoba. And then, "Dear Mother and Father: I am well. How are you?" We all made exactly the same letter and sent it home. So, it was a lesson on how to write and penmanship and all that. But we couldn't write what we wanted to. The letters were censored. I couldn't tell my mother, "I'm lonely. I'm lonely. I cried last night because I want to come home." If I did write that, they wouldn't send it. Even if I had said that, we couldn't go home. We either wrote what was on the board or they wouldn't send the letter home.

All the lessons that we did, in the sewing class and things like that, it was all meant to show somebody in the outside world what a good job the school was doing. It wasn't really meant to give us any kind of skill or whatever. They were doing it to get a good name for themselves and the school. The white citizens would be thinking, "Yeah, they're doing a really good job with those Indian kids."

A lot of kids stayed for the summer. There was always a group who stayed there at Elkhorn. If they couldn't get them home to the north, they just stayed. For the ones who did go home for the summer, in the fall, like it or not, we were forced to go back to Elkhorn. We knew when we left home we were not coming back till next summer. So, suddenly, when we realized we're not going home again, we were all crying. So, those were difficult years.

Sewing Class

One of the things I remember was the sewing classes for us girls. No one can properly thread a needle nowadays. We all learned to sew by hand and how to make a hem and everything else involved. The sewing mistress who was teaching us had grown up sewing by hand, so she taught us how to do it. "Here's a hem. Now, you're going to sew it like this." If I didn't do it right, I'd take it apart and do it again.

We learned to sew to perfection, some girls at the school, there were probably twelve to fourteen of us. Every year the Brandon Provincial Exhibition was held. Many people sent things in for judging and display. They probably still do that. At that time, the school sewing mistress sent samples of the work done by the kids at the residential school for judging. We made an entire outfit, a tunic with a shirt under it and a little tie, and the whole bit was entirely made by hand. Being some of the best in the show, they received a good prize for that.

Lashed for Stealing Bread

In my first year of residential school, this man came into the dining room. We hardly ever saw this man. He was the principal, Mr. Hiltz, but we didn't know that. He came in and said, "I want to talk to you all about something very serious." I was just a kid of seven and was listening, trying to get the gist of what he's talking about. He said, "We've taught you things you need to know as a child, things like, 'It's wrong to steal.' So don't steal." I never heard him say that before, but that day he was saying it.

We came to find out, these boys went out, and apparently, they stole something. The principal continued, "There are three boys that disobeyed." He called their names, including this one boy by the name of Adam. He was a big sixteen-year old boy, probably ready to leave the residential school that year. The principal said, "Yesterday, these three boys were assigned to go into town with the truck and help to bring bread from the bakery." The bread must have come from Brandon on the train, and then from the train they brought it to the school in a truck. The boys were hauling the forty-eight boxes full of fresh bread from the truck into the school and down a flight of stairs. There was a kind of dark alley down there, and they took the bread to the pantry where they stored it. These boys were hungry, big sixteen-year old boys are always hungry. They took some bread, squashed it, and put it inside their jackets. They finished their delivery downstairs, came upstairs, and, of course, they devoured all the squashed bread. Not only them, they probably shared it with who

knows how many others. The kids were always hungry, and a little nibble of bread would hold them until the next meal.

The principal made a big deal out of stealing the bread, and then he said, "Now he's going to get twenty-five lashes," or twenty or whatever. The principal whipped Adam on the hands over and over. The boy was crying, and after a little while, he fell down to the floor. The principal quit hitting him when he fell. All of us little children were lined up there and were made to witness this brutality. I felt like crying; I felt like somebody was holding my throat, but I was powerless to say anything. I felt like if I even breathed an extra breath, I could be the next one. That boy was just writhing in pain. His hands must have been like hamburger. Immediately after the thrashing we were marched out of the dining room, mealtime was over. The principal wanted to make a long-lasting example of him, returning Adam the next evening to receive the same strapping of the hands for us to witness all over again!

Seeing this kind of brutality would traumatize any seven-year-old child into submission. I was petrified! If I dare say anything, the next one could be for me. It was devastating. Little children should not be made to see things like that. I told this story to a graduating group of social workers from Winnipeg. Those girls were crying when I told the story. I was beyond crying, because I did all my crying back then. When someone hears of this kind of brutal beating of a young boy, it stirs their emotions, because this is not supposed to happen. Little children should not see things like that or other cruelties that we were forced to witness or experience.

A lot of children did run away from residential school. I ran away when I was only eleven. When they caught us, they asked, "Why did you run away?" I replied, "I just want to see my mom. I want to go and see my mom." So, they took us back to the principal's office pulled our pants down and gave us a vicious strapping across our backsides. The punishment did not fit the crime. There's no crime in wanting to see your mom. For that, we were severely beaten.

Playground Death

When I was nine years old, I usually played with another little girl my age, who was my good friend Annie. We were just little kids and very close friends. Like I said, the other children there became the only family I had. Annie, she had the bed next to me in the dormitory. On Saturdays, the students were expected to clean the school. We had that duty from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., washing the stairs from top to

bottom. But there were those who got out early and they went to play outside.

There were swings out there in the yard. Great big pillars, so the swing could really go. I don't know what Annie did. I wasn't there and didn't see it. Somehow, she fell off the swing. It was going so high and she fell and broke her neck. The school staff didn't know she broke her neck at first. She was just hurt. She was bawling and screaming in agonizing pain. Some of the other little girls walked her back; she barely made it into the school. She was crying the entire time and they took her upstairs. By noon, she had passed away. When we went for our lunch, they told us. The principal came and there again he was reading the riot act, yelling, "I told you not to do this, and this, and this, and then somebody went out there and did it! You kids didn't listen to the rules, now she is dead."

Yes, that's what he said. We were all standing there. I was just so terrified because somebody died. Yeah, death came to us there in that cold, lonely place. That Doctor Johnson from Virden came and he pronounced her dead. I guess they put the body in another room, who knows what they did. It was almost dark when the hearse came around to pick up the body. We were all standing along the fence when this vehicle pulled up. Those hearses were from the 30s and the wheels had wooden spokes, so when they were coming we could hear it. As the hearse came closer, we could see it was pulling an eerie looking long black truck-thing. These men got out, wearing these long black overcoats. It was all so frightening. Into the school they went with the casket. We waited a good half hour or more, then they came down with Annie, she was leaving. They took her away and she was gone. All we knew was that she had passed away. Somebody died. Now, that's frightening for a nine-year old to see and experience for the first time.

Right after that, the school staff took us to chapel and had a service. It was almost like a funeral service. We were all so frightened of this death and then we had to go into this church service. It even added more fear to the spine-chilling incident. When we left there, we had to go straight to bed. Next to my bed, where Annie's bed had been, it was gone. They had taken her bed out. Annie always slept there beside me in that bed and we could talk to each other in the dark. She was gone. The bed was gone and I was just extremely terrified. That night, I grabbed the sheet and put it over my head. I almost smothered myself, lying there under the covers like that until I fell asleep, and sleep didn't come for a long time, because somebody died, my best friend.

Elkhorn Residential School swing set.

What a terrible introduction to death. At home, our parents protected us from anything to do with death. We never went to funerals; we weren't allowed. Long ago, children weren't allowed at funerals. I don't know about in other cultures, but children in our culture never went to funerals, only adults went. So, here we were, and this terrible thing happened. I didn't get over it for the longest time. That happened in late September, and so all that fall and into winter, the sadness I felt just never went away, never.

Captain Miller and a Few Kind Teachers

There was a nice man by the name of Captain Miller. That's what we knew him as at the residential school. I think he was possibly a lay minister with the Anglican Church—the Anglicans have all these different levels of clergy. I think he was on the church board, like he was a member of the church army, I guess. This fellow visited the children regularly, but he wasn't a priest. Anyway, he became attached to the kids, and we liked him. He was kind of red-headed and he always had this little moustache. Captain Miller was nice; he was a kind man. "Captain Miller!" We would be jumping all over him because he was so kind. We didn't do it to anybody else, just him. There were also some good and kind teachers there at Elkhorn, but there were more who weren't. They were paid to carry out a system of which they soon became part. They were not expected to get too close to the children. They were only there to teach us their religious teachings.

We had this school nurse; her name was Miss Beanland. She didn't always dress as a nurse, but on the days that she had a little clinic, she would examine all of us for I don't know what; then we knew her as a nurse. She looked after the sick and over time, we started to look at her as if she's the one that's going to cure us, or make us better. Often, the staff would ask us, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" So it was, "I want to be a nurse," because the only ones I saw in school were the nurse and then the teacher. But now I think, "Why even ask us that?" When they knew we weren't going to be allowed to acquire the education required to be a nurse or educator. When they asked us what we wanted to be, who even knew there were hundreds of different possible occupations. We didn't know of any of them, we only knew what we saw at the residential school. I just knew my hope was to be like Miss Beanland, a nurse someday.

Another one of those who were kind to the children was the cook Myrtle Scott; I developed a close relationship with Mrs. Scott. As a student, I was invited to her home some Saturdays to play with dolls. After she moved to the Okanagan Valley,

I received cards at Easter, Valentine's Day, etc. After Walter and I were married, we tried to have yearly visits with her. Just before Christmas, 1964, a period of hard times for our family, Mrs. Scott sent me a parcel containing expensive emerald-coloured material. The material was sewed by a missionary's wife to make a beautiful dress. After Mrs. Scott passed away at the Westman Nursing Home, her nephew Grant delivered to my home a set of Royal Albert dishes named Senorita, patterned in black lace.

Mrs. Scott still provides me with a very bright and happy memory of life at the residential school. There were some good Christian teachers who loved the children. One special teacher was Ida Oakey. There were some good people who helped shape my life in lots of ways, but the many hard, negative experiences still dominate my memories.

Oh, What a Mean Woman

All these awful things happened to me in that residential institution, that's the way it was. All of us children had to go to bed at 7:00 p.m. Once we were down, we couldn't talk. The whole dormitory had to be quiet and we had to be sleeping. In the dormitory, there was a chimney pipe that came from the basement all the way up through the roof. My bed was right beside the chimney where the warmth came up, it was a warm place to be and I liked that.

I had just been going to school that year. I was about eight. I woke in the middle of the night. I don't know what time it was. Miss Hover was a short grey-haired woman with a bobbed haircut. She came in and I was abruptly awakened because somebody was hitting me, really hitting me. I had always been a very slender child. I was not a plump child by any means. I was just a thin little girl and she started hitting, just hitting me all over with a rubber-soled running shoe. Now in 1944–45, those running shoes had rubber soles and it was just hurting, oh she hurt me. She just literally pounded me, and she was viciously yelling at me, "There, now are you going to sleep?" Well what could I say but "yes." The answer was, "Yes," otherwise she would keep pounding me. To this day, I don't know why she did that.
Oh, I was hurt. I was in excruciating pain all over. She hit everywhere on my body, and being only a seven- or eight-year-old girl, that severe beating stayed with me for some time afterwards. I looked at her with tears in my eyes; I was sobbing and crying after she left the room. The thing I always remember was as she shuffled out of the dimly lit cold room, the back side of her dress was all up. I could see her bloomers and everything. She must have come straight from the washroom. Miss Hover had

heard somebody twittering, somebody whispering in the room, and she rushed in with the running shoe and beat me. The person who was whispering was away over there maybe, but she heard it. It wasn't me, but I got the beating. Oh, what a mean woman.

On Sunday, we all had to get dressed for the day. Miss Hover was in charge of us, so she marched us. At 1:00 p.m., we all lined up, the little children and then the big ones. She marched us down the road and then down the highway, a good mile, and back. We went and it didn't matter that there were sun dogs in the sky. It was so cold; the little ones were bawling and crying when we arrived back at school. She didn't care if our hands were just frozen, she marched us anyway. Oh, she was mean. Now you hear, the wind chill is whatever and skin will freeze in just a moment. No one will allow the children to go out in that temperature nowadays. Here we were marched down the highway. Miss Hover made sure we did that every Sunday in the dead of winter. She was bundled up, dressed in a long coat, gloves, and a warm hat.

There were many supervisors at the residential school. Some looked after the laundry, somebody looked after the sewing room, and there were some other supervisors. There was a girls' supervisor and there was a boys' supervisor. I don't know all what they were, but there were the odd ones who were kind. Most were so mean. They were the ones who made life so unbearable in residential school. I had to tell that because it was what happened. No one knows. Our parents didn't know we were being treated and tormented like that, and I know we weren't the only ones, others were beaten as well. It was a consequence of whatever, because they didn't obey the rules or did something they weren't supposed to.

Forty years later, when we had our reunion in 1990, we were talking, "Do you remember Miss Hover?" Oh my God, I mean that's all the Elkhorn Survivors remembered her for, being a mean woman, mean and wanting to hurt the children. She always called us "Indian trash," mimicking the principal, Mr. Dickerson.

Some Terrible Things

The administration and staff did some terrible things to the children in these residential schools. When I think about it, I don't know if I should be talking about this. I went to Elkhorn with some of my cousins. My other relatives went to Birtle and some went to Brandon. In our school, I didn't notice because I wasn't part of that, I was too young. But I know that in some of the schools, in particular it was Brandon Residential School, when girls had their time and their periods, they were

Staff of Elkhorn, 1927.

Group of young women doing an exercise routine during the annual Field Day at Elkhorn. July 7, 1939.

given ... I don't know what it was, some kind of pads of the day. So, when the young girls had their time of the month, the supervisor came and said, "Here's your bag of rags." When the girls were finished, they were made to go down into the laundry room and wash all the blood out of the rags.

It didn't happen in Elkhorn, but when we were going to these residential schools terrible things happened. The other Survivors told the authorities years later. My cousin told me, she said, "I want to tell my story, but I don't know who to tell it to." So, she told me. She said, "Do you know how it is, to be washing days of dried blood, soaking them and the smell that came off them, and we just couldn't even eat for days," she said. What a terrible thing. With such a normal part of being a human being, it is not understandable why the staff would be so inconsiderate to treat the girls in such a manner and make them do such things. The staff could have found a better solution to manage this, but obviously, they just didn't care.

The Night Watchman

I remember the night watchman Mr. Barrett. He came every night after we went to bed, nine, ten, or whenever. He arrived late at night because he looked after the school. He went throughout. There were only three floors, but there was the girls' side and the boys' side, and he wanted to make sure that the school was secure. He wanted to make sure that everybody was sleeping I guess, and he made sure the doors were locked.

He had a long string of keys. Sometimes, if I'd lay awake late at night when all was still, I would hear him. When he came to our room, he would unlock the door and look around. The other girls and I caught him one night, because we noticed this one child always had lots of candy. "Where did Mary get this candy?" We questioned her, but she didn't say much about it. Then we found out that it was Mr. Barrett who was coming for favours.

We wanted candy, not that we cared what he was doing. We were little children, didn't know anything about sex or whatever. We just knew that he was giving Mary candy and we wanted to be part of that. Imagine us waiting until late into the night when he made his rounds. When he came in, we yelled, "Mr. Barrett, we want some candy, too!"

We were there with our hands out. He'd say, "Give us a kiss; give us a kiss." We just pounced; he was standing there with a bag of candy that was meant, I guess, for

Mary, but we were the ones there. "Please Mr. Barrett!" He wasn't going to give it to us; he wanted this kiss. Well, we just dove at him; he was an old man. We grabbed the bag; he was trying to hold on to it, and we just scattered the candy all over the floor, Oh my gosh! I think, "Was there sexual abuse there?" I don't know, I will never know. All we wanted was the candy. But now, I know that's what it was. Things like that happened there and they weren't good, no matter at what cost.

Going into Town

Sometimes we were allowed to step away from residential school and go into town. When we walked down the street, we could feel the people looking at us. The town's people would say, "Look, look at them." I guess we were something to see. We didn't want to be stared at, but we wanted to get some candy or whatever, more than not wanting to be stared at. As soon as we started walking, everybody was looking; everybody was talking. When we went into the store to get that candy, the man behind the counter was looking to see if we were going to steal the candy, just watching us. I know we felt that the town's people saw us different because of that. We were watched the entire time we were in the store. We picked up on this discrimination on our own. Our parents didn't tell or warn us of this treatment. How could they? They didn't live there, and we didn't see them for ten months out of the year.

Watching the Trains

I have strong childhood memories of trains. I guess it was what is called "progress" to bring all kinds of cargo across the country. At the residential school where I grew up, I remember seeing the train often. There was a train station at Elkhorn. At the time, it was a fuel dump for coal and water. The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) trains that were crossing Canada on that line came and stopped there to resupply. There were passenger and freight trains bringing all kinds of things. I remember going upstairs looking and looking at those trains as they went by. After a while, I knew the time when they came. If it was 3:00 p.m., there'd be one from the west. I'd wonder when the train came by, where it came from. As little children, when we all, at one time or another, looked down to the rails; we wondered if somebody might be coming, and we were looking, hoping that some person might appear on the horizon and it would be our dads or some family member coming to take us away from here.

At the time, there was a short little local train that went from Brandon every morning. I guess it was mostly carrying mail and things like that. That train stopped

at Alexander, Griswold, Oak Lake, Virden, and Elkhorn, then on to Broadview, Saskatchewan. It took all day to get to Broadview where it turned around and came back again in the evening. So, I guess, the one time my dad came to visit us at the residential school, he must have got on early in the morning and he went to Elkhorn. He got off the train and it went on. After our visit, he must have gone back to wait for the evening train to take him back to Griswold.

Attending the Portage School

In 1951, I was transferred to the residential school in Portage la Prairie. The Elkhorn Residential School building was condemned, and all the children had to be moved to other residential schools in the province. Some went to Prince Albert School. Some went to the Presbyterian residential school in Birtle. This is where my future husband, Walter, transferred to. I don't know where my friends went. But my mother had gone to the school in Portage. That's where she grew up years before, during the early 1900s. She wanted me to go there. So, she sent me and that was the worst decision she made, because I didn't know any of the kids there. I had left all

Railway tracks with the Elkhorn Residential School in the distance.

my friends I had grown up with, and was sent to a totally different area where there was only a few Dakota. It was the worst decision, but there I was, over there in just another strict residential school.

Then my mother, when I was 15, she said, "Don't go. You don't have to go back there anymore." Unbeknownst to the Indian agent, she kept me home. I got a good education then because that's when my dad took us hunting. We learned everything about snaring rabbits and all that is involved in preparing the meat to be cooked or preserved. I learned lots of things there. I watched my aunties making willow baskets so they could sell them in town. They also picked berries all summer and sold them as well. I saw and learned how our own people lived and provided for themselves.

The Whole Thing Was Unchristian

All the residential schools had to be self-sufficient for the most part. The school had to make sure it had enough students to support itself, so that the government didn't have to throw a whole bunch of money at it, if it wasn't a self-sustaining school. The schools had some government funding, but some were also church-run schools. Those schools were supported by the different church affiliations and their congregations. For instance, from Toronto or somewhere, they sent bales of clothing and all kinds of things to those schools. That was their duty to the church to help operate these schools, to change all those Native kids, to assimilate them into their religion. There was a battle between those churches as to who was to run the schools. There were schools run by the Catholic Church and the others run by the Protestants. The Catholics were trying to get as many converts and congregations as possible. The whole thing was so unchristian. Just think of it, it could make one want to become an atheist. It wasn't only the Catholics, but it was also the Methodists and the Presbyterians.

My Native People thought, "No, I don't want any of that. These churches ruined our People. I don't want any part of it." No one should be teaching kids from the time they're little, that their hearts are black with sin. They're small, innocent children. They don't even know what sin is. But in school, from day one, they are taught that they are full of sin and they need to do everything to repent. When I think of it, who snaps on the light at 6:00 a.m. every morning and makes us jump out of bed and kneel on a cold floor by the side of the bed to pray? We didn't even know what the prayers meant. This was not a good way to introduce religion to little children, but that's what we had to do. After a while, we were so conditioned to it, we just did it without thinking much about it.

I wonder if the nuns honestly believed that they were acting in a Christian manner. I'm sure there were some good ones; there must have been some. They were so indoctrinated into the different individual churches. They no doubt actually thought they were doing what God wanted them to do. I always questioned in my own mind, "Is there a God who honestly wants these people to do things like that?" Was God saying, "I want these people worshiping me and singing out praises to me all day long? Otherwise, they can go to hell." Yes, we were taught about all that, too. If we didn't do all the praying, worshiping, and singing, we were all going to hell. Whatever they were trying to teach the children at such a young age was confusing, and it played a large part in the devastation of my Native People.

Anybody in his right mind would now say, "This is not the way to do it. What you're doing to the Native People, this is not right." But no one questioned it at the time; no one stood up for the Native People and especially the kids. No one said, "This is not the way to do it." But the Government of Canada just let it happen as a part of their great plan to tame these "savages." They let it happen for years. Sometimes we're here and we don't know of the bad things that are going on over there. The main thing I remember feeling from the horrific devastation the residential school system wrought was that we could never feel good about ourselves.

Misguided Government Policy

If all of us little Native girls could learn to sew to perfection, we could have learned all the skills to become nurses, doctors, and engineers. Unfortunately, the Canadian government just didn't do right by all First Nations Peoples in Canada. They had a golden opportunity to take all these human beings, treat them decently, with dignity and as equals, and help them get a good education. Eventually, they would have become productive citizens contributing to Canada and the greater society in general. Not only having the restraints on our education, the government wanted to keep us down economically, to stop at grade eight; and not to move ahead. The government knew that if we all were more educated, we were going to see all these injustices that they did to us. Instead they said, "Okay, now that you have grade eight, you can go out and clean people's houses and be seamstresses." Did they not have a better future thought out for any of the Indian students, except to go back to the reserve? Fortunately, some of the Native people were ready for more than that; they learned all these skills and became very good at them. Then bang, "Go home, you have enough skills; that is it, you're done." They graduated us at grade eight. There, end of story, all First Nations children are no longer the Canadian government's problem.

I still feel I had obtained a good education academically, because we had some good teachers at the residential school. We were all treated the same; it didn't matter whether we were very smart or if we had learning disabilities. Children adapt quickly and, like today, one could put children with disabilities together with more accomplished students who would in turn help the slower students. Students learned better in an environment like that, with the acceptance of all students as equal, despite the fact that some had these different disabilities. They helped one another. Even though the system didn't mean for it to be that way, students helped each other, so they learned better. Back then, there was no special education for those with learning disabilities.

Kitchen scene at Elkhorn, 1930s.

Residential school students with nun.

Residential school militia.

Elkhorn students sawing firewood, circa 1927.

Barn at Brandon Indian Residential School with horses.

Residential school students with nun.

Residential school dormitories.

Elkhorn pupils in "Scottish Regiment" military uniforms prior to a Dominion Day parade in Elkhorn, July 1, 1927.

Back Home on the Reserve

Finally, Home to Stay

When all the children came back home from residential school, we were a bit lost and said, "Okay, what do we do now?" But we didn't care about education or anything at that time. We were just so happy to be free. "I'm free now. I can be with my mother all day. I can just wallow in happiness because I'm not going over there to that dreadful place anymore. I'm home and here's my mom." I would spend the whole day with her, and we'd often go for long walks.

More importantly for me, my dad had horses, and oh my, it made life so good. I jumped on the horse and learned to ride it bareback. Eventually, I became an expert horsewoman, and being the only girl to enjoy being outdoors rather than being in the house, earned my nickname "Cowgirl." I would ride all over the valleys. I grew to know where I could go and where I shouldn't go. I learned to know almost every tree in the valley, and there were all kinds of creeks and ponds. There was so much to see. I'd see all those different bugs, toads, and all the things that live in the water. Seeing all this, well, that was education too. It was like science class. I couldn't learn all this from books as easily as I could from nature. To me, life was not ever boring.

Summer Berry Picking

I loved to go berry picking. When I was young, fruit was plentiful. So much that sometimes I didn't even have to go home to eat because there was my lunch right there. In June, there were strawberries; in July, there were saskatoons and raspberries. There were also wild pin cherry trees. There were gooseberries. Nobody now knows what a gooseberry even looks like anymore. There were also black currants and fruit like one wouldn't believe. Sometimes, I would find an area just full of berries, especially the saskatoon bushes. Sometimes they'd be just hanging in bunches, almost like grapes. That's how we were rich with fruit. We had a creek close by, a quarter of a mile away or so, and every summer Mom would have us go with our ice cream pails and buckets to pick saskatoons. Over the past twenty years or so, for some reason, there were almost no saskatoon bushes left, but last year there were saskatoons. So, my son and I drove out there. I can't walk around anymore like I did when I was young, so my son went in, and I waited for him while he picked and picked. We were able to freeze quite a bit. I was very happy to have saskatoons again. It reminded me of past happy times.

Muskrat Trapping

I remember once when I was fifteen years old, I heard my dad tell my mother, "I'm going to take the girls with me for muskrat season." So, we went out to the Lenore area. We walked over and back. Back then, we didn't know, like today, if there's a blizzard coming or not. Needless to say, we had big snowstorms then, in the 40s and 50s. Oh, the drifts were as high as walls, and maybe even higher. We don't get that kind of snow anymore. We went out there and trapped muskrat and could eat it every day, it was that good. My dad could skin the muskrats in no time flat, and eventually I learned to do the same. That was something to be proud of, and I was.

Home Again, What Now?

In the 1950s, when I got back home, I was just a fifteen-year-old girl. I should have been going on to a higher education and trying to follow my dream of becoming a nurse, but that dream had already ended when I "graduated" and was sent home. So I thought to myself, "What is the next best thing?" I had to make a living. I had to have some money. At this time, my dad said, "I'm going to get work." He was going to take my brother Roy, who was seventeen or so, along with him. He took him to teach him how to work and to work hard, so they went to work for a farmer. The farmer knew I rode horses, so he would always come and get me. He'd come and say, "Could you go and get my cattle? They got out last night. They are way down there about five miles away to the west." I went and brought them back. I did chores like that for him all the time.

Adjusting to Reserve Life

When I came home from Elkhorn, I was rid of all that negativity. That kind of a life was over there. At least over here in Sioux Valley, I'm with my parents. Nobody is going to scold me or whip me. My parents didn't even want to scold us for anything, because we had been away from them; we were their children. But there was still a disconnect that had formed between us as children and our parents when we came home because we didn't come home enough, only two months out of a year, until we were around sixteen years old.

The whole brainwashing, or whatever, it had taken its toll. When we came back home from residential school, we were different. We no longer had the views we had when we left, and the closeness we had with our parents and grandparents, it was all different. They looked at us as if they thought, "So this is what it has done to you."

We now talked English all the time and children love to chatter; it was all in English. I remember my grandma did not like us talking English when we came home for the summer. When she came to visit, she said, "Talk Dakota. Don't be talking that language." Our grandmother said this meaning the English language. But inwardly, I was thinking, "What now, what is she saying?" I mean, we're getting mixed messages. Here's ten months of the opposite of that, where they were saying, "Do not speak that language." The school staff said this, meaning our Dakota language. It took us a little bit, but not long after we got home, we thought, "Hey, this is our mom and dad, our community, our home. We'll speak our own Dakota language now. I didn't want to speak English in the first place, but they forced me to. Here I'm going to talk Dakota." I did and I was happy. At least for two months, we were back in our Dakota culture. It was too regimented in school. One wouldn't raise their children like that. A child should not grow up the way we had to at Elkhorn Residential School.

We didn't have anybody coming in every morning who would throw a light on and expect us to jump out onto a cold floor and recite some prayer that we didn't even understand. Even though we didn't know who we were praying to, we just jumped out of bed. We're half-groggy, and we don't even know what we're really saying. Time, after time, after time. Then all of a sudden, we came home and we could throw all that out the window. Nobody was going to get us up to pray, so the heck with it. Our two months at home were beautiful; we were with our mom and dad. They didn't want to scold us, because they had lost us for so long. Here time didn't matter, where before if it was at 7:00 a.m. we had to jump out of bed! Now I could laze here. My dad never said anything about us getting up. He let us sleep till whenever. We were happy. Then we got up and did whatever had to be done that day. Life was very different in terms of the pace and what we had to do. We didn't have to eat three meals a day; we ate when we were hungry, and isn't that the way it should be? But then when we went back, we were back over there and were doing the same things again. We went back to residential school, and we quickly learned what was not accepted over there.

At residential school, there was nobody to talk to us about our problems and fears. No one provided any kind of explanation or support for what was happening to us. Since then, everything has changed; we would have everybody supporting us now. As soon as something happens today, the whole world is there, every doctor, therapist and specialist. It was frightening, especially when people died. I still have that awful fear that comes over me, like I had that first night when my good friend Annie died. The fear has stayed with me all my life. Yes, and so look at the scars it left not only

on me but on all the other children who grew up there in that residential school. Bad things happened, children died there, in the infirmary, and no one even knows their names. Today, there are twenty-seven graves there in Elkhorn at the little fenced-in cemetery, at the west end of town, not far from the site where the Elkhorn Residential School once stood. We don't even know what their names were. Those children who died there, never having a chance to return home to their families, are the ones who paid the greatest price.

My dad, he was a hunter and a trapper. He got along without needing anybody to come in from the government to give money or food. His life was that, every day living a subsistence life and providing for his family. He farmed toward the end of his life. He used horses to do all the plowing and hauling. Later on in life, he acquired a tractor. Just the same as the other Native people, they weren't going around looking for alcohol to amuse themselves during this time. All those things came in after the residential school catastrophe. Those students were brought right down to almost nothing. Those young people came out of a residential school and they went home. But again, the government policy changed. For centuries, my People had lived without alcohol. All of a sudden, the government said, "Oh, you can go home now." The turning point was 1956. They opened up the liquor laws. Indians could now buy liquor; we could take it to the reserve. You know when you have people so in despair. They grabbed it. We all did. I did, so did every other kid coming out of residential school. It gave us courage; we could forget our problems for a little while.

Pitching Sheaves at the Neighbour's

In 1951, I pitched sheaves in the field when I was fifteen years old. I was telling my children, "All that hard work has come back on me. Now, I'm seeing the effects of what my poor body has gone through. We got up at 5:00 a.m., and my dad was already over there at the farmer's yard, getting the horses watered and feeding them, bringing them out, putting the harness on them, and getting them ready. When my mother and I arrived there, the horses were standing there ready to hitch up to the hay rack."

First of all, my dad and my brother Roy, they went out to help with the seeding part of the crops. When my dad went there, that farmer said, "You know what, if your girls want to come and work pitching sheaves, I won't give them the eight dollars a day like I'm giving you, but I'll give them four dollars a day." Being as young as we were at the time, my dad had negotiated our pay.

My sister Kay and I worked later in the crop season doing the harvesting part. Our workday started at 7 a.m. and finished at 7 p.m. My sister and I worked for twelve hours and received four dollars each for the day's work. "Oh my gosh," I thought, "I'm going to work. I want to have a nice new coat for winter. I want to have nice new shoes." My dad would say, "Well, I sent for a coat. So there, I'll go to town and get it for you." Four dollars probably was worth working for, in those days. Oh, yes, four dollars went a long way; it was like a million dollars to me. My sister Kay and I were paid at the end of one month, so we waited, we had patience. There was something to look forward to.

At noon, we all came to the house. I lived for dinner hour; we'd shut down everything and go to the house. The farmer's wife would have a big table set up and was all ready for us. All the workers sat down to a beautiful meal, my mom, my dad, the farmer, the other farmers who were there helping, and whoever else. We didn't have to worry about whether it was good for us or not. It was all good. There were lots and lots of vegetables, cauliflower, tomatoes and potatoes. I liked all the food because they were such good cooks. At harvest time, the farmer's wife usually had a helper, a young girl usually would work cooking potatoes and eggs or whatever. The farmers all had their own food, killed their own pork, beef and chickens. After we finished that tasty dinner, we rested a while and then worked all afternoon. I became really good at pitching sheaves; I was tanned brown and grew muscles from working hard manual labour all day long. In the evening, we went home. Me, I went straight to bed, I was so tired, I fell asleep, and before I knew it, it was morning again.

Needless to say, it was hard work, and there is nothing wrong with hard work. The young Dakota people were so busy doing this back then; there was no time to be getting into drugs and smoking up marijuana or anything like that. Young people growing up now have no idea about hard work. Today, they could go work at Burger King, and they want their pay immediately. We didn't even see that.

As I see it from where I am now at Sioux Valley, all the farmers around here, in the Municipality of Woodworth, especially all these farmers north of Oak Lake, they needed the First Nations people to help them out. I remember Wallace Pratt took his family, and they worked for another farmer in the same area. After a while, the farmer came to know us, and, because we worked hard the last summer, when the spring came he hired us again.

Pitching sheaves was hard work, but looking back, I would rather have been sitting at a desk trying to learn about medicine. I worked hard. I worked really hard. No

one does work like that now. The farmers don't come to ask for help, because there is mistrust. Those farmers back then, they trusted us and we trusted them.

I remember we worked and worked, but had lots of fun pitching sheaves and whatever else. It was late August; along the fields, there were fruit trees, chokecherries like one wouldn't believe. We got to know which ones had the nicest and sweetest fruit. We could eat all the chokecherries we wanted. We worked for the McDonalds. I still remember, at lunchtime we'd put our pitchforks down and go and wash up like everybody else. The farmer and his workers, we all went in together; all sat around the same big table and ate the same food. When I look back at all that, I think, "Oh, those were the good times."

The farmer's wife, Mrs. Beatrice McDonald, was a wonderful cook, like all farmers' wives, or at least most of them. She prepared a good meal, and she didn't see us as different. We were all working for her husband; so, we were working for her, too. This was like sitting at a banquet. It was always a good meal. When everybody was finished, we all sat back for twenty minutes or so and then went back to work for the afternoon. It was just the way it was. Mrs. McDonald and her husband were just trying to make a good living for their family by farming. In order to do that, they needed us girls, because the hard manual labour had to get done. So there was mutual trust. Everybody got along and everybody accepted one another. There was acceptance and we all knew it. The McDonalds or anybody else weren't looking down on us; I would know if somebody has an attitude or has that kind of feeling toward me or my family. If they did, we wouldn't want to have been there. We wouldn't be sitting at his table if anyone thought we were different. There was a lot of laughter and teasing and all that. Good times in the 1950s. I remember that era when it was like that, but that was also the era of when the Indian agent came in. To the Dakota it was just another government policy.

My Aunties

Back in the 1950s, we used to have big snowdrifts, lots of snow. The snow was so high and so packed, we went everywhere with a sleigh and horses. That was our mode of travel. I also saw my aunties go out into the snow. Sometimes, they went knee-high in snow to pick willow saplings on foot. They went way out down in these valleys, in just their moccasins and sometimes with rubber boots over their moccasins. Those aunties, in their fifties and sixties, went all day picking these willow saplings, brought them back, pulled the bark with their knives, scraped them all, until they were all nice and white. They used the willows to make the

most beautiful willow baskets. Possibly these baskets can still be found in private collections or in the museums.

After a long week of making baskets, every Friday, my aunties caught a ride on the bus. They took their baskets to Brandon and to all those small towns in between, to sell them. People needed baskets in those days, for laundry or even for eggs. Everyone had chickens back then, and they had to collect eggs every day. I was greatly influenced by those women. I saw them do all that hard work, create those beautiful baskets to sell. With the money they got, they bought whatever they could, and came home in the evening.

Once they were home, they shared what they had acquired with the rest of the community. There was my Auntie Alice McKay, Ida Eastman, Minnie Runnerearth, Margaret Williams Sr., Auntie Annie Antoine and many others. They all did the same thing. The entire community was influenced by them in one way or another. These hard-working people, they influenced me deeply, I wanted to be like them because they gave of themselves. What they earned they didn't keep; they kept some for their family, and then they shared. The way they shared then, people don't do that now.

At that time, the Indian People never questioned anything when they were growing up. It was pointless to try to object to anything. The Indian agent and government policy laid out what we could do. Anyone who dared to object could be jailed! The community learned to survive in the system; no one could buck the trend and get outside the system.

Story of the 1903 Whitewater Lake Blizzard

When I was about fifteen, and back at home. I very much liked reading. I wanted something to read, anything to read! And though I was educated enough, there was no library in our home. I remember we would receive the *Free Press Weekly* and also the *Western Producer*. They weren't like newspapers; they were more like a magazine. Everybody had one in their mailbox, and it seemed to come every two weeks or so. I was not interested in agricultural articles, but it was something to read, so I sat there and read the articles anyway.

Once I came upon this story about a severe blizzard that killed a whole herd of cattle at Whitewater Lake, which is not far from where we lived near Griswold. The article said that there was a big blizzard in September 1903, and all these cattle

Margaret Williams weaving a willow basket. Margaret and other Dakota women weaved baskets during the 1950s.

ran into a lake and either froze or drowned. It stated that the "moccasin telegram" carried the news of the stampede almost as quickly as the news today, and so the Indians from North Dakota and from the reserve at Griswold—that's us—soon arrived at the scene.

When I finished the story, I asked my dad, "Have you ever heard about this story?" He said, "Oh yeah, I heard about that, the people talked about that." He said he was a boy of five when that happened. He said, "There is a special process how we used to preserve meat—fire, smoking, and then the sun. One has to know just how to do that, to make these big blankets of red meat waving in the wind."

Now that my children are grandparents, too, I told them about this story. They didn't believe it. They said, "It's too early! No one ever heard of weather changing like that in September." But I said, "There was a time a way back when, in the early 1900s, when there was a *big* blizzard." They looked at me, funny-like and said, "Get out of here!" I always remembered that! I said to myself, "I've got to find it, that story that was in the paper." I see the importance of writing things down nowadays. I was trying to find it, knowing nothing ever happens by chance.

A couple years ago, I happened to be watching the TV in the morning, the news, and all of a sudden, it mentioned Whitewater Lake. It was about all those rivers in Manitoba, the Souris River, the flooding in past years, and all the things that go along with that.

I thought, "There is still a Whitewater Lake! That's the same one I read about so long ago." I was excited about that, and I said, "I'm going to try to get a hold of this Leona who talked to me last fall." That's how it started with the chance to tell my story, and here we are now. I finally obtained this story, and I was really happy because I wanted to tell my children.

The Dakota knew how to preserve food. They worked fast with their knives preparing meat for the entire winter. The other Native people near the lake told each other quickly. They didn't include telling Sioux Valley, but the men somehow found out. They gathered their supplies and went sixty miles away to Deloraine, Manitoba, in wagons and on horseback, taking two days to get there. The water was cold in September, which preserved the meat, so the chance of the meat rotting didn't happen right away. The men pulled out what they could work in a day's time. The Dakota were experts at preserving meat. They were able to salvage a lot of those cattle. I was interested in this because 106 head of cattle dying all at once was the

A "Picture Postcard" with the caption "BOISSEVAIN. MAN, Snow Storm September 13th, 1903." (Archives of Manitoba)

worst agriculture disaster in Manitoba history, and the Dakota knew exactly what to do. The men dried, cooked, and bagged the meat for the journey home.

Bringing Tripe Home

This story reminded me of a time I went to Calgary. We had the opportunity to bring home some tripe, or tanigha', which is considered a delicacy to us. In one day, we cleaned three bags of tripe to take home. It was springtime, and somehow one of the bags began to rot or smell bad. I opened the car window and threw it out. After we travelled home to Sioux Valley, one bag of tanigha' went on the Greyhound bus to Brandon where my mother-in-law, Suzie Pratt, would be there waiting for it. She was just happy to be bringing it home. The final bag of tanigha' went with me on the plane. The bag was with my luggage in the cargo area of the plane. We took off from Calgary and headed toward Brandon and, all of a sudden, the plane started the process of preparing for an unexpected landing. As I sat there on the plane, I was nervously fidgeting, worried that the flight crew had discovered my bag of tripe smelling horrid or being something of a threat to the flight. Feeling as I was, time seemed to slow to a crawl. Eventually, we were notified why we had made an emergency stop, and it wasn't because of my bag of tripe. It was safe and I was

relieved, and away we went again.

I told one of my professor's wives about this story. She had a good laugh and added that she and her husband liked to cook tripe also, but her husband didn't want the neighbours to know they liked to eat cow guts or tripe, so he wouldn't tell them. The wife laughed, and told him, "Why try to hide it, I am sure they can smell it."

Selling Fence Posts to Local Farmers

In the springtime of the 1930s, 40s and 50s, my dad went with my brother Roy and all the men on the reserve who wanted to go and cut fence posts for the farmers in the area. The farmers were saying, "This is my lot, no trespassing." But there was no way to keep any trespassers out. That is why they needed the fence posts.

Oak wood is really sturdy, good for fencing, tough as nails and would last forty to fifty years. There were a large number of oak trees in the valley. Farmers in the Municipality of Woodworth wanted posts to fence off their land. It took many, many days to gather that many posts with only two horses and a wagon. My dad was a good worker and took pride in his workmanship. He would spend four or five days himself getting these posts ready for sale. He made sure that each oak post was sawed straight, even and the same size; all of them were six, seven or eight feet long. He used a sharpened axe to shave off the post to make it straight and sharpen one end, and he loaded them in a wagon after he had gathered one hundred posts.

That was a time that nobody remembers any more. My dad got them ready after days of work and then went with the wagon with one hundred posts. The farmer bought them for five cents each, five dollars for a wagonload of one hundred posts. Then he went on to the store and bought five dollars' worth of groceries and brought them home.

Those farmers wouldn't have had any posts without the help of the Indians. Even then, the Indian was taken advantage of for their labour, because the posts were worth more than that, maybe eight cents, but not five cents. Imagine one hundred posts for five dollars! Now, that doesn't look like a "lazy Indian" who would do that work. That is the true image I am trying to get told.

Working As a Domestic in Virden

We'd learned in residential school to be sure to take care of our home. So, after I

came home, I began to think, well, at least I can do that! I went out and found work helping these ladies clean their homes and doing whatever else was needed. I look at my hands now, and they're just about all worn out. Using chemicals in water over all those years did that to my hands.

During the oil boom of the 1950s, I was now around the age of seventeen. With careful consideration and thirty-five cents from my father, I decided to move to Virden to find work. Discrimination was commonplace in those days, so I was not surprised when café owners turned me down for my job inquiry in rude and humiliating ways. But I was raised to be strong both physically and mentally, for my father was a strict disciplinarian. While there, I worked for some quite wealthy people. I was just a young girl then, and they accepted me into their home. Sometimes, I lived with them and I was part of their family. I got along with them really well. They seemed to like me; they didn't have to lift their fingers to do anything. Also, every week, I went to clean some other ladies' houses. These ladies were very appreciative and among the most elite in the town. These were people who had wealth, maybe they weren't all that wealthy, but they were not poor to afford homes like that, where everything was always nice and in its place. They needed someone to help them keep it clean. If these women had children, they couldn't care for them on their own. They had money; they were only too happy if somebody else came in and helped them.

These ladies became good friends of mine. They were good people, most of them. But I still think that most rich people had a discriminatory attitude. I remember there was this one rich woman in Virden who I went to work for. She always treated me fairly with everything. She and I talked a lot, and we got along really well. But she still sometimes had an attitude—I could feel it. It was as if she was a little notch higher than me. It would come out when other people came in the house to visit and there I was cleaning the counters or whatever at the time. She would say, "Oh yes, and this is Doris. This is my Indian girl." I didn't think that was necessary. One time I told her, "I don't think you needed to say that. They can see that I'm an Indian. They don't need to be told." She didn't say it anymore. It was stuff like that which was uncalled for, but they treated me well. I had my very own room in their house to sleep in, and it was always a nice room just like theirs.

Yes, I was treated quite well by most of the people I worked for. Some were social climbers. I could tell these people were a little different. I was just a few years older than the daughter of one of my employers; she was going to a girl's school in Winnipeg, where I think she attended grades ten, eleven or maybe even twelve.

I believe that girls' school is still there in Winnipeg, Balmoral Hall it was called. Because her daughter and I were almost the same size, she gave me some of her daughter's really nice clothes. I didn't have to buy them; she gave them to me. With all the extras I received from this lady, I was always well dressed. I'd come home to the reserve, and everybody would think I'm this hard-working girl from the outside. "She's gone to work, look at her, she's all dressed in the latest fashion."

There were a number of women who did this, gave me some nice clothes. So I had the best wardrobe. Oh yes, they tried to treat me as well as they would anybody else, and I usually never felt belittled by them in any way. But attitudes were sometimes still there. It's sort of like a family dynamic where the family can be kind of rowdy, but then when somebody else shows up at the door, all the children become these well-behaved kids. With that lady, when her people showed up, she sort of wanted to show her superiority.

I remember another lady who was really good to me. She was very kind and she trusted me. At least, I thought she did, but then there was this one time that made me think perhaps not. I noticed there was money that was left on the counter. I think it was a two-dollar bill, which Canada still used at that time. But I'm sharp. I saw it and I thought, "No one leaves their money around in the open. She's trying to trap me." I took the money, and I went straight to her, and I said, "Here's your money; you left it over there. Here, you should take it." She replied, "Oh I see," Then she took it, but I could sense that there was mistrust there.

Groceries for Home

When I was going out house cleaning, I think I got fifty cents an hour to do the housework and other chores. I would work eight hours, so that was four dollars a day, and if I worked the full week, at the end of the week I would get twenty dollars. I remember I'd get off the bus and I'd run to the grocery store, and I'd think, "My mom and dad, they need all this stuff." I'd use some of my money, maybe ten dollars, and get it for them. My ticket home was seventy-five cents, and a pound of lard was five cents. I also bought macaroni, beef, bread, canned soup and cans of mixed vegetables. My parents would be so happy. My mom would immediately put something on. It was something to eat a big meal together. They never asked me for it. They never had to say, "You have to contribute this." My siblings and I just knew that we had to. I grew up understanding this.

There's no such understanding now. Things have changed. There's something about being poor, there was nothing unless you worked. But I didn't know how poor we were. We didn't know at the time. All we knew was that if we worked hard, by the end of the day, there would be something. So we did it.

The "Jail Bird" Incident

One of the places I worked at, the lady's husband always said, "If I saw one of your Dakota People walking down the street, I'd say, Oh, those God-damn Indians." He said it to get me, and he'd laugh like he really didn't mean that. It was the same with the Dakota kids. He said it because he knew I didn't like it.

One of my employer's sons was involved in a very bad car accident where people died. He was sent to jail for causing their deaths or for being involved. He was sent to jail for six months; then he returned home. This one day, he said to me, "Oh, hi, Indian." I thought, "There you are, sent to jail. You brought yourself to your situation, and yet you think you are so much better than me." I said back to him, "Oh, hi, J.B." The boy said: "What did you say?" I said "Hi J.B." He asked, "What does that mean?" I replied, "Jailbird." He immediately cried to his mother, "Mom, did you hear what she said?" "Oh, what is that?" she asked; the son replied, "She called me jailbird." I said, "He's calling me Indian, so he should have a label, too!"

He didn't call me that ever again.

Marriage, a Family, and New Opportunities

My Marriage to Walter Pratt

In 1962, when Walter and I moved to Sioux Valley, the area where I now live, there were not many homes on the reserve. We lived in small board houses. The band office was over where the current daycare is. The school was always there where it is today. We would have to travel to Griswold to pick up mail and groceries, about a twenty-kilometre round trek.

Hard Times and Happy Times

I met my husband, Walter, at residential school. He was there the same years I was. He and my brother Roy, they grew up to be friends; they were always together. Walter was born into a prominent family of hereditary chiefs. I was twenty-five to thirty-two years of age when I had my children, Rocky, Marilyn, Adele, David, Pernell, Evelyn and Alex. My kids' coming was a happy time for me. Walter and I never lived with anybody. I would help the ladies clean their houses and my mother-in-law, Susan Wasicuna Pratt, would babysit while Walter worked as a farm labourer.

I wanted to raise my children to go to an integrated school, thinking maybe life would be better for them, but in reality, it was not true. My children went to the Kenton, Oak Lake, and Virden schools, but the racism was noticeable all over and was always there. It was the older kids or lighter-skinned kids who would pick on the darker-skinned kids. Once our kids were integrated into elementary school, they had the power to stand up to bullies exhibiting racial behaviour. They were out there to defend themselves; they had it in them, meaning they thought, "I'm not letting any racism get me here. You're white, you call me an Indian." So the white kids were always scared of the Indians. In the elementary school, they were ready to fight all the time if they had to. Oh yes, our kids weren't taking it sitting down anymore. This change wasn't because the parents became tired of the discriminatory treatment of their children; it was because the children, on their own, said they weren't going to put up with this treatment that was to make them feel a bit lower than the bullies. So the attitudes toward Native children began to change to having a little more respect for them.

Left: Doris and youngest son Alex, 1970.

Two of my children, Evelyn and Pernell, went on to obtain university degrees, and three obtained a few years of university but chose other fields of work that didn't require a degree. Marilyn and David both chose health care-aide professions, and Alex obtained community college education in the autobody trade and recently in the social work field. As parents, we were able to instill the importance of education in our children and the importance of maintaining the Dakota language and culture. Of greatest importance is they all have a spiritual foundation, which is their guiding force in life that we as parents were able to instill in them. Unfortunately, the effects of residential school impacted our children in different ways, and two of our children predeceased me due to the negative impact addictions had on their lives.

My hope is that the next generation will overcome the negative impacts of the residential schools and become successful in all areas of their lives. Opportunities have improved somewhat; conditions in our communities must improve to a point where they are at par with the rest of society in this great continent.

A Job As a Teacher's Assistant

A lot of my life was a struggle; there were good parts and bad. Riding horses, going to work with my dad and being with my mother cooking, preserving food, helping wash clothes, those were happy times. I loved to help her to get water with a horse to make life easier for her. Times were few and far between when I was with my parents.

I had all my children and was basically a house drudge. I was having babies, I didn't have electricity, I had to boil the water and wash clothes by hand. It was a very different life, a hard life. All of a sudden, I was accepted, and I went to work as a teacher's assistant. Oh my gosh, what a difference!

It was my husband's auntie who got me started down this path. She said, "You know, there's this opening for a teacher's assistant (TA) at Oak Lake. You should apply." At the time, my youngest boy was still in kindergarten. But my husband was at home, and he could look after him, and my mother-in-law was there, as well. I wasn't yearning, like, "I've got to get out of this house." No, it just happened. A lot of stuff just happened to me. There really is a Great Spirit! And that higher being knows that all my life I have tried to be faithful in my beliefs. No missionary had to tell me there is a God or whatever. I knew as a small child that there's something more than what I see. I didn't have to see anything or hear anybody speak of it. I had nothing to go on, but I just knew it.

I was not one to bellyache about bad things. Things happen. But what can I do about it? I just didn't complain about my life and tried to make things livable for myself. Then, all of a sudden, this opportunity came around, and I just took it and went on from there.

That's the story of my life in a way because I've always had the attitude of "just do your best, and even though there are going to be hard times, and cruelties and injustices, just keep on plugging away." I always believed there was a better way. There's something better." It was part of being on a good road. So, when the opportunity came, I took it. Fortunately, I was told about the TA job opening.

I've always had the ability to write things down. We learned to write in residential school. "This is how you write a sentence. This is a paragraph. You begin with a capital letter and end with a period. You put the date on." I took a piece of foolscap and I wrote a letter. "I am interested in the position that you have advertised." Very short, but it was effective. I was eventually awarded the job and hired as a TA at the Assiniboine School in Oak Lake working with a kindergarten teacher who was previously here at the Sioux Valley School. She was nice, a French woman, Mrs. Yvonne Duzois. I also used to work for her here on the reserve. She had foster children and I would sew for her; sometimes, I would go and help clean her house or I'd babysit. She and I became good friends. I was not there too long, half a year or so.

It didn't take many months for me to establish a rapport in my position. I grew to know and like the ladies and the teachers at Oak Lake; they accepted me very well. Perhaps that was because all the kids they were teaching were from Sioux Valley. Their classrooms were about seventy-five per cent Native children with a few little white kids. Being mostly Native People that's probably why they hired a Native TA, and that was me. The students at the school were from the agricultural community of Oak Lake and the surrounding area. I think it was January that I started working there. It was nice. I enjoyed it. All of a sudden, I had a good income. I wouldn't say I was rich, but at least I had something for my children at home. They started going to the same school where I worked. That was fine with me.

A Chance to Improve My Education

Then another opportunity came. Mrs. Duzois said to me, "Doris, there's a new program at Brandon University called Indian and Métis Project for Action in Careers through Teacher Education (IMPACTE) for Indian and Métis people. You should look into it and apply." I thought to myself, "I'm an Indian; they won't give it to me."

I didn't say that, but I thought it. But she insisted and said, "I want you to go and apply for that; I'm going to take you tomorrow." I said, "Okay."

Mrs. Duzois took the time to drive me to Brandon University. We went and met the head of the program and talked a little about it. Mrs. Duzois was asking, "Is there any chance that she can get in this year?" I knew she was really rooting for me, but I didn't care. It didn't matter to me. I had a job as a TA, and I didn't think beyond that.

Afterwards, out of respect for Mrs. Duzois, I filled out the application, and I sent it in. And sure enough, a month or so later, I received a letter from the university, and it said, "We're sorry, but your application was not accepted because we just had so many applications for our first year. Thank you for applying, good-bye." So that was the end of it. It was like saying, "Better luck next time," I guess. I just thought, "I knew it." It was a defeatist attitude. "Why bother? I'm an Indian. I'm not going to get this. Somebody else will, but it won't be me. I knew it wasn't going to happen, anyway." I thought that! So, I just accepted it and tried to forget about it, and I went on. In September, I went back to the school as a TA, and that whole year I worked with the teachers, made good friends there. I was able to go back and forth to Oak Lake from home on the school bus every day along with the children, so that made it even better as I didn't have to provide my own transportation.

In the spring, one year later, when our year was coming to a close, all of a sudden, lo and behold, I received another letter from Brandon University, and it said, "We are doing a second intake of students, and you have been selected. On such and such a day, we'd like you to come for an interview and fill out an application." I applied the last year—I didn't apply this year. I went again. I didn't think I would get anywhere with that. I thought, "Well, I did this last year; it's probably the same thing." But I went anyway. Then the university sent another letter, and it said, "You have been accepted into the IMPACTE program for the second-year intake. You are to come to the university on July the 1st, or whatever date they gave. I couldn't believe it. So I went and did everything they asked me to do. I took some tests to see if I could do university courses, and I made it through everything. Mrs. Duzois was just so happy for me that I was now going to be enrolled in a Bachelor of Teaching training program. That's where it all began.

I bought myself a little second-hand car. Cars were not very expensive back then. I then found out there was another woman accepted from Sioux Valley to the same program. The first time I met her, I said, "I hear that you've been accepted. You

know, you can ride with me, I have a car." She said, "Or that's good because I don't have any way of going." So we rode together and went through Brandon University together and got our degrees. I didn't really plan to increase my own education nor did I set out to become a teacher. Going to school at the university was hard. I just worked away on it and prevailed. I know people in my life, especially good friends like Mrs. Duzois, who had an influence on me, on what I have become and strived for in life. I've become who I am because of those people, the bad ones, too. Their influence helped me to grow and strive for a better life, not only for myself but for my children, as well.

It just sort of happened, I thought, "This is a different thing." I liked it here at the university, because, all of a sudden, I was learning things. I've always wanted to learn things. I've always liked to read. I already talked about that story I read in the paper in 1950 about the Indians in 1903 at Whitewater Lake, and how it made me very interested in what happened. It was more than we ever acquired at residential school. Going to university was very interesting for me. I met different people. This was university, and I was starting to see that everybody's view counts.

I started reading books—books that we could never get a hold of before. All of a sudden, I was exposed to a whole different world. I liked what I saw, so I was willing to do the difficult work. I always said in my mind, though I never told anybody, that within me, I know I can do anything. It went from there on. I never, ever intended, "Oh, I'm going to be some great teacher and help the world." Those thoughts came about later because I was getting an education, and with an education, I thought about those kinds of things. I soon learned and proved an Aboriginal student could do academic work just as well as everyone else. I graduated with my Bachelor of Teaching degree in the spring of 1975 from Brandon University. It was hard for me to accept my success, but I knew I was just as capable as my classmates, and most of all, I was their equal.

Special Education Teacher

I learned to be strong. I had come through a lot. There's a book written, part of it about me and other residential school Survivors. It was written by Dr. Agnes Grant at Brandon University. It's called *Finding My Talk*. I tell her in there that when I went to work in Virden for the Fort La Bosse School Division as an elementary school teacher, I went through all the things that racism can throw at a person. But inwardly, I always thought, "I'm just as good as you. You can say all you want to; I know that we're equals. We're human beings together."

Picture of Doris unveiling a plaque for the current Sioux Valley elementary school; Tatiyopa Maza Wayawa Tipi opened in 1987 with Doris as principal.

I was hired as a special education teacher for the primary classes. It seemed like the other teachers were not happy with that. It was like, "How can this Indian be here? She's the expert, isn't she?" Just because I was doing special education, it didn't mean I was an expert. I acquired that position because I had some extra training because many of the reserve children at this time were being labelled as special needs cases. I chose to focus on special education and also felt I could be of great service to my people in this capacity. It took me the next four years to get all the experience necessary, and one just doesn't acquire it all ever in one's whole life, it goes on and on. It was that the other teachers accepted me, and yet not really as a professional. I was their colleague at the same level; they all had teaching degrees. I did, too.

Years later, I went back as a principal of the Fort La Bosse School. Those teachers that I had known twenty years before, their little school had just dwindled, and I was a principal of my own school and they came to work for me. I didn't lord it over them, I just thought, "Gee, you just never know how life happens, how life can make you see things differently." Even the principal and his wife from that first school came to my school and worked under me. You just never know when life will deal you a hand like that, and I got an ace, but I knew that ace hadn't come free.

Principal and Director of Education

While I was employed as a special education teacher in 1974, my dad was in a terrible accident, and two years later, I lost my mother to complications of diabetes. I was once again without my parents. This was a very hard, sad and very difficult time for me to get through. However, I once again prevailed and slowly regained my confidence and continued on by accepting a principal position at Dakota Tipi Reserve. With success at this job, I applied for a teaching position on my home reserve. This led to an administrative position, and eventually I became the principal of the Sioux Valley Elementary School, working hard to expand and update the entire school. Once that was accomplished, I moved on to work at Brandon University as the centre coordinator for the Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP), training Native language teachers to teach their Native languages in the northern Manitoba First Nations communities. I worked using my experience in Dakota language at this centre for a period of three years.

I then continued to push my boundaries and returned to Brandon University to obtain my master of education degree in 1997. Upon graduation, I returned to Sioux Valley as director of education. During this time, I was instrumental in the

development of the BUNTEP program on the reserve with an enrolment of thirty students. This program continued to train students up to the year of 2012.

From there, I once again moved on to help launch the idea of building a high school on the Birdtail Sioux reserve. I eventually accepted the position of director of education for the Birdtail Sioux Band to help accomplish their vision of a new high school for their students. I found myself wanting to learn more about teaching Native languages, especially my own Dakota language. Up to this point, I had completed language books and projects, but felt I needed to learn new techniques and approaches to have a greater success in moving toward developing new fluent speakers and teachers of the Dakota language. I enrolled in a PhD program at the University of Arizona through the College of Education where I began to attend the American Indian Language Development Institute during the summer months beginning in 1999 and eventually acquired my Educational Specialist Degree in Language, Reading and Culture from the University of Arizona in 2003. The time that I spent there in Tucson, Arizona, was very enjoyable. I met many good friends with the same interest in language revitalization as I had. The days went by fast, even though it was hot as blazes, but I didn't care.

Through the years of improving my education, I have found my formal education challenging. However, I will always continue to promote the philosophy that First Nations People can achieve their goals through hard work, and that a good education is the key to success and the advancement of all First Nations.

Not Bad for Indian Trash

In 2015, I received the YWCA Women of Distinction Gala's Lifetime Achievement Award for the Westman area. When I went there that night to the Keystone Centre in Brandon, I arrived with the principal of the school where I was working at the time as the Elder advisor to the Sioux Valley Education Authority. The place was jammed packed with many people there supporting the other recipients. We're sitting there, and, of course, the master of ceremony (MC) called all the other category winners to the podium, one by one. They were immediately allowed to speak, and it seemed they had rehearsed what they were saying, thanking whomever and so forth.

When the MC called me up, my friend pushed me to the podium in my wheelchair. I didn't want to be walking, because I'm too slow to walk all that way. I was the last one coming up. It was announced that I was getting this recognition. The MC had the microphone, and she wasn't really going to let me speak. She

suddenly looked at me and said, "Oh, did you want to say something?" I thought, "Well, we were allotted this time where all the other category winners had the opportunity to speak; you didn't ask them if they wanted to speak; you just handed them the mike, and it seemed they all had prepared something." I replied, "I haven't prepared anything, but yes, I certainly would like to speak."

The MC reminded me so much of a teacher from the Christian Anglican Church's residential school in Elkhorn, where I acquired all my early education. Every Sunday, it was her turn to be a supervisor; otherwise, she was a classroom teacher. She didn't do any supervision till Sunday in the late afternoon and evening hours. She never failed to say to us children every Sunday, "You know that you are Indian trash, right?" I remember thinking, "I wonder what Indian trash is?" I remember that and never forgot. I finally got ahold of a dictionary and looked up the word, and there it was, the word *trash*—it was garbage! I thought, this can't be true.

How could this Christian lady and these residential schools be built, so that we can become like her? Why would she call us trash? She said it, but I certainly didn't believe it. I'm not trash, end of story!

When I arrived at the podium with the microphone in my hand, the first thing I said, was, "Not bad for Indian trash, eh!" The people there, I'm sure, were wondering, why did she say that? So, I told them that when I was a little girl in residential school, we had a supervisor at school, and she always told us we were Indian trash. And I said, "So here's my Women of Distinction award. From trash, not bad, eh?" Perhaps I shouldn't have said that, but I just had to. It came to me without even thinking. I had not prepared any speech, and that woman reminded me so much of that teacher.

I then thanked all the people I rubbed shoulders with to get to where I am today. I named them all; all these different people: my aunties for giving so much of themselves; my favourite teachers; the people I worked for, and friends that I knew. That was my speech, because, to me, that was important, to mention these people by name. I could have ended my speech by saying, yes, I was strongly influenced by "some people," meaning white people, but I didn't say that because it's a racist remark to say that nowadays. So, I said instead, "Yes, I was influenced in my life by a few of the 'colourless' people." That acquired a big laugh and a standing ovation! Yea, everybody rose to their feet. I wasn't expecting them to do that; I was just trying to tell my life story as it unfolded. To me, those were important stories to tell, to make people think.

Too Much of a Good Thing

Throughout my life, I have always learned some lessons the hard way. Talking about working at the BUNTEP program and Birdtail Sioux reserve reminded me of the following two stories that taught me a great lesson that I want to share. One day, Oswald came to bring me some moose. He said, "This is just half, but you have to come for the rest." This meant I had to go and pick up the other half of the moose. I was standing there looking at all these packages of meat, thinking who was going to help me. Marilyn? We were putting packages of moose into any freezer we could find. Oh my gosh! What was I going to do with all this meat? I had asked for the meat months ago. By the time it arrived, I was in the process of moving to the BUNTEP Centre in Winnipeg. I told the students there that I had so much moose meat, I didn't know what to do with it. Knowing that they were good cooks and familiar with this kind of wild meat, I asked if they wanted some. They all became very excited with my offer, the ones from the Interlake from the north especially. "Yeah bring it, yeah we'll cook it." The BUNTEP students had moose every week, moose steak, moose roast and moose ribs.

Thinking of all the work that was involved just killed my appetite right there. I thought to myself, I'll never ask anybody for a few steaks again, I asked for a slice and I got four hundred pounds of moose. On top of all that, I had to pay four hundred dollars for the processing. I didn't mind, it was a year's worth of food. I never told Oswald until way afterwards. I said, "Oswald, I wanted only a moose roast or a couple of steaks." He replied, "Oh, I thought you wanted a whole moose; that's why I brought it." I couldn't figure out why he thought I needed an entire bull moose. I never asked for any moose again from him, but a least the ones in Winnipeg loved and enjoyed every bite. I thought they may have become tired of moose, yet they never said a word to me.

This also reminds me of when my son, Pern, did this same thing to me. He said, "Mom, you want some meat?" Well, I thought, "This is my son, he is giving me some elk or deer." He said, "I shot two of them." I replied, "Good, give me some, then." A few weeks later, he came and told me that the man wanted his money. I asked, "For what?" He said, "The guy butchered and packaged it all up, and we have to go and get it in the truck." The two elk were all packaged; sausage, roast and hamburger; every cut of meat I could think of was there. I bit my tongue as we drove out south of Brandon to pick it up. Pern went in and came out with a cart full of elk. I said, "Where in Sam Hill are we going to put all that?" I had to go and purchase a small freezer, and again we looked everywhere for people who had freezer space.

We decided to take some to Birdtail School where I was working at the time. My daughter Marilyn also worked there as the cook, so she cooked elk sausage all winter for the kids. They just loved it. Even the adults from the community asked if Marilyn was coming that day to cook elk sausage. Some of them returned right at lunchtime to eat with the kids.

That's part of the story of my life. Every time I asked for a steak or roast, I paid dearly for it. After looking back on it, those were good times. Everybody came together to enjoy all the meat. I was glad for that. Later, when anybody said anything about moose or elk, I didn't want to buy any, nor did I want anything to do with it. I learned my lesson the hard way.

Doris' son Stephen Pernell Pratt passed away August 12, 2008, at the age of 43.

Doris and her children: Back row, Elroy (Rocky) Pratt, Evelyn Pratt, Alex Pratt, Adele Dowan and David Pratt. Front row: Marilyn Hall and Doris Pratt.

Doris with her daughter Evelyn, Evelyn's granddaughter Avia, and Evelyn's son (and new dad) Blake, July

Doris with great-grandson Reid Tacan, 2013.

Doris pictured here with Evelyn's daughter Charmain Tacan, Charmain's daughter Bryana Windy Demas, and Evelyn Pratt.

Doris with her son David's daughter Dana Pratt and Dana's sons Colby Pratt (left) and Trent Pratt (right). Dana graduated with an Educational Assistant Certificate from the Winnipeg Inner City program.

Doris' 78th birthday in February 2014. Marilyn, Evelyn, and Sandy (pictured) planned a surprise birthday

Doris with Janell Taylor, Jennifer

Director of Education Birdtail Sioux First Nation School retirement party speech. Beulah, Manitoba 2004.

Doris with her son Pernell's daughter Jada Pratt-Daniels and Jada's daughter Charlie Red Fox Daniels, 2012..

Book launch for "Keeping Baby Close: Making of a Moss Bag," December 2018 at the University of Brandon. Back row: Sandra Warlie, Evelyn Pratt. Front row: Marilyn Hall and Doris Pratt.

Doris with her great-grandson Ethan Hall.

Elkhorn Survivors Reunion and Book

Recently a person passed away at Canupawakpa, also called Pipestone. He was one of the ones who went to school with us there in Elkhorn. I was thinking, "Oh, most of the ones that went to our school are gone now."

The first time I went back to Elkhorn Residential School was in 1990 during the Oka crisis. A land dispute between the Mohawk People and Oka, Quebec, this conflict was the first well-publicized fierce encounter between First Nations and the Canadian government. The school was already demolished. It was just a pile of rubble, but we went there anyway, together, a number of us. The other students are mostly all gone now. There were a lot of emotions. It was a very emotional time for some people.

A lot of people came, and Heritage Manitoba, from the provincial government, helped us with cleaning up the little forgotten cemetery there for the children who died at the Elkhorn Residential School. They got all the Aboriginal inmates from the Brandon Correctional Centre to clean up the cemetery. Manitoba Hydro had a sophisticated camera that can look right into the ground, so every grave was found and marked. There were trees, like a hedge that went all around the little graveyard. We knew exactly where to start looking. We put up a white cross at every grave and a larger white cross with a marker that says that this is put here by the former students of the Elkhorn Residential School. It was erected in memory of the students who died there. At least we showed a little respect, although it was very late in coming. We didn't know their names; we just knew they were Aboriginal children. Their parents, wherever they are, didn't know why their child died there—if it was because of illness, or some kind of physical abuse. Who knows what it was. Imagine, children, little children, dying alone far away from home. The worst part was that they died there, never to return home and to their families again. We were just little children. We were crying, sometimes wondering, "My mom and my dad, where were my mom and my dad?" It was a horrible time.

Twenty-six years later, a couple of us went back to Elkhorn after our first reunion in 1990, during September of 2016. From Sioux Valley, there are three of us last Survivors of Elkhorn Residential School who are still living. Doreen Johnson was eighty-six, and I think Muriel Pompana was eighty-eight, and me, I was eighty. Muriel couldn't go, but Doreen and I went, and many young people. They brought

nice flowers that were placed on each of the graves. The entire graveyard and surrounding area have been well kept, mowed, and cleaned all these years by the family of Mr. Tutthill, who worked as an engineer looking after the boiler room at the residential school.

A day before I was to make this visit to the Elkhorn Cemetery, I was honoured by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs at their annual meeting. In my speech, I spoke of this return visit. I was to travel back to Elkhorn, Manitoba, where I attended residential school for all those years as a child. Being snatched away from my parents, legally kidnapped, and incarcerated like all the other children. I alluded to the horrific life we had at Elkhorn. All the Manitoba Chiefs who were present had no idea of the specific details; some were horrifying events that my generation endured in the residential school. Most of these Chiefs were of a younger generation and didn't attend residential school. They were raised by their parents at home safe with their families. They had no idea what the struggles were; we were all innocent children. We were family to the older Cree boys and girls. They became our brothers and sisters. It was the older Cree girls who would tell us, "Oh, don't cry, shhh, don't cry, it will be OK, don't cry." Some of those older Cree girls were kind to us little kids. It was sad, but we had to be a family to each other; there was nobody else.

The school population was made up of mostly Crees from the north and some Ojibway People. I wanted to share this with those Cree Chiefs also from the north. I wanted to challenge them to begin taking upon themselves and their communities, as we the Dakota have done, to continue to carry on the remembrance of their little Cree children of long ago who suffered so much paying the greatest and most unforgettable price. I do not want them to forget the unnamed who are buried in this little cemetery so far from home. I will never forget my good friend Annie who also died there in that cold and heartless place. Annie is never far from my thoughts.

There were quite a number who went in 2016. We went to the cemetery, and we put flowers on the graves. Doreen said a nice prayer over the food and spoke of the little children there and their families. The ambience of those present was sorrowful. Nobody mentioned a word of it, but it was felt by everyone, despite the fact those little children died so long ago.

Residential School Reunion Book

Captain Miller wrote a book on the Elkhorn Residential School. This book made it look like, "Oh my, they have a wonderful school." It was not. The students were not at the heart of the matter there. The book was called *The Spirit Lives On: The Story of the Washakada Indian Home, 1888-1918, and the Anglican Indian Residential School, 1924–1949*. The author was Harry Miller. We called him Captain Miller; he's passed on now. He lived in Melville Saskatchewan, but he worked at the residential school as a young man. When we decided to have a reunion in 1990, Captain Miller wrote the book for us because of the reunion. Harry put together some stories about the residential school, as much as he could.

That residential school book, it will show you all the happy faces. The story will tell all the good parts. "Oh, we trained these little Natives to be civilized!" But it was like we were a regiment in a military academy or something. It was do this, that and that. We almost felt like we had to salute at every corner. We didn't, but we felt that way. I look at the photos in the book that was published about Elkhorn Residential School. It makes us look as if we were a happy lot of kids, but it wasn't that way at all. Look at that, we are all sitting here in groups, all dressed the same, made to smile when we really didn't feel like it.

There was also another separate book Harry Miller authored, the story of our 1990 reunion and how that turned out. We were like family to one another. The Canadian government took our parents away, and we were all together at this horrifying place, sharing the same experiences. It didn't matter whether it was Cree or Ojibway or Dakota, we all had our parents taken from us.

Harry Miller, who had been there at the school for years, got in touch with most of the people who worked in the Band offices, to bring some of the Aboriginal People for the reunion. It wasn't as well attended as we would have liked. Well, it takes money to travel. For that reason, a lot of people didn't come.

My son Alex was at my house one day when Leona Devuyst came for an interview. He said, "Mom, how can you talk about it; doesn't it even bother you?" I said, "When I am telling it, I try not to think about it because if I think, the hurt will be there all over again." But even back then I didn't let myself cry. What was the point? Yes, it hurt something terrible. It just wasn't me, it was hundreds of other kids, Cree, Ojibway and Dakota.

In a small way, I can help by taking flowers in the spring. June is a good time to take them to that little forgotten graveyard. I want to go with Doreen again. We can get Billy to take some flowers.

Elkhorn Residential School ruins.

Government Control on Reserves

The Indian Agent and Farm Instructor

The Indian agent had nothing to do with the schools, other than making sure that all the children went to residential school. His job was at the reserve. Every parent was forced to send their children. He was the one that enforced that whole system and made sure all the children went, and if they didn't, the parents were jailed. The Indian agent ruled with an iron fist. On the reserve, he made life hell for the people there. They couldn't move without his permission. They couldn't cut wood or do anything where it meant they might make a little living. He was right in there, to make sure that he got his share and was in total control of everyone there on the reserve.

There was also a farm instructor to oversee all farming operations on the reserve. He was supposed to be helping the Indians learn how to farm their land. When the crops came off the field, the Indian agent and farm instructor each took a third, leaving only a third of the crop for the Dakota farmer. The Native People weren't that stupid, so they said, "OK, if they're going to do that, we're not going to farm." So, they quit farming. They all just shut it down. There was nothing the Indian agent or farm instructor could do to force them to farm. In the meantime, the Indian agent found two or three men that he selected to work for him. He paid them well. They worked for him for years, the entire time he was here, but they worked for him out of fear, and of course they would say his system was good. They ran a band farm. This idea of farming divided the people on the reserve. Those three men who worked for the Indian agent, they had a big plot of potatoes, wagonloads of them, but he would have the whole reserve to look after. Therefore, he would make sure he gave each family a little of his potato crop.

The government sent in bacon and stuff like that for the elderly. The real elderly, like seventy years and older, were given rations, like beans and tea. They were given a slab of bacon every month; at least they were given that. The elderly were not getting an old-age pension at the time. When food came in, the government sent it to the Indian agent, and he, in turn, distributed it to the elderly, and the rest of the people had to look after their own families.

Non-Treaty Status Refugees

Both the Canadian and US governments referred to the Dakota People as refugees. That is what they always called them. My People who had no home here or there and yet they were on the North American continent: this was the Dakota homeland. The Canadian government didn't want to give them recognition or Status, but the Dakota People were here when the first explorers and the new settlers arrived.

The First World War broke out in 1914 to 1918. The Canadian government conscripted those refugees from Sioux Valley or Oak River Reserve at the time: John Taylor, Fred Essie, Manus Merrick, Sam Dowan. These Veterans' names should have been on the cenotaph as well as Zephen Sioux, Norman Chaskey, George Blackface, Rufus Williams, John Doota and Herbert Hapa. There were at least ten Dakota men who they conscripted and then told, "If you volunteer, go and fight on behalf of Canadian Armed Forces in this First World War, when you come back, you will be given your own land." This was a war fought with horses, on foot and hand-to-hand combat. Some of the Dakota soldiers who lost their lives were John Taylor, who left a wife here in Sioux Valley and Leona Noel's grandfather. My dad's brother, my Uncle Sam Dowan, came back from the w[illegible]ithout an arm. Norman Chaske came back without a leg. The Dakota soldiers w[illegible]ll at Vimy Ridge, where there were 10,602 casualties and wounded, just in this one battle. The German forces just came with all they had; however, it was a Canadian victory, which came with a heavy cost.

Indian Veterans Not Recognized

The Canadian government did not compensate the returning Dakota soldiers with land, farm equipment or any supplies to start a farm, which was promised if they would fight for Canada. These Dakota soldiers of World War I have not, to this day, received any kind of recognition for their service. The cenotaph at Griswold, Manitoba, has all the soldiers' names on it.

Again, twenty-five years later, during World War II, the Canadian government took these refugees with no Status once again. The Dakota men who volunteered to fight were Alfred Antoine, Lawrence Antoine, Norse Tacan, Philip Wasicuna, Harry Whitecloud, Ray McKay, Henry McKay, Frank Hapa, and John Sioux, who was a prisoner of war in Germany. None of them were given any recognition as Dakota People and for their valiant contributions. They were just refugees, Dakota with no

Status, and not considered or acknowledged as Canadian citizens at the time, but Canada used them to fight in these wars.

The Canadian government continued to promise land entitlement, farming equipment and everything they would need when the men returned from war, but nothing was ever given for their sacrifices, and the promises were never kept. What the returning veterans received was a wee little tractor the size of a bug that could only plow a garden, and that was about it. They never received the land that was promised them. They just came back and sat on the reserve. In addition, these Dakota warriors never received or even knew if they were to receive any war heroism medals of any kind for their sacrifices and service. The Indian or Aboriginal veterans also were denied access to Veterans Affairs and veterans' benefits. Because the Indian was subjected to restrictions of the Indian Act, they were not allowed to enter the Legions where liquor was served, even though the Indian soldiers fought and died right alongside their non-Aboriginal comrades.

This treatment of the Dakota veterans was wrong. That is something that the Canadian government and Canadians need to be aware of. These Dakota soldiers fought valiantly for their Canadian country as they always had. Our veterans did not get fair treatment. That is what the War of 1812 was all about. If the Dakota warriors had not gone and fought for the British during the American Revolution, we would all have been Americans.

The contributions of the Dakota warrior men were something to be talked about. Those sacrifices, too, are a part of our history in the 40s that needs to be written as a part of the story, as a lack of recognition for the Dakota warriors and their contributions. It was wrong of the Canadian government to call the Dakota People refugees and to continue to use them in the same way as Canadian citizens to fight for our country, even though they were not considered Canadian citizens. Once again, the promises were never kept. These are the true stories. All my life, I never saw anything positive in any social studies book about my Dakota People or any other Native People. It was always the Indians were "wagon burners" who massacred innocent people.

The Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, still to this day, commemorates Remembrance Day in honour of the fifty Sioux Valley Dakota soldiers who were killed in combat

fighting in Canada's wars since World War I. Each year during this ceremony, fifty flags are raised, in honour of each of those fallen soldiers.

Helping the White Neighbours

A teacher friend of mine, Iris Cross, who lives a mile south of Sioux Valley, off the reservation, told me that her husband remembers, as a small child, seeing members of Sioux Valley go and camp out in their white tents on the hills. They were helping the local farmers bring their crops off in the fall and whatever else that needed to be done. The three Prairie provinces are known for being the breadbasket to the world, for the wheat that Canada produces that goes all over, even to Russia. My Dakota People were out there helping the agricultural people right alongside the white people and were never given credit for that. They were good workers, too—my family included. That is not told anywhere. Telling the good things gives a perspective opposite of the stories told in the movies, books and whatever else.

The Dakota People have always been here in Canada. The Great Spirit put our People here to use this land. God provided everything for Native People, and that's how we lived before the newcomers came. The first settlers had the help of the Dakota People to survive in harsh conditions here during the winter. The newcomers, after a generation or two, wanted not only to occupy the land, but to own it as their own. The Native People were willing to let the settlers come and together would share the land. But what the Dakota wanted to do was not what happened, so after a while there was resistance against the Canadian government's bringing more settlers in and occupying the whole land with the new settlers.

After the Minnesota Uprising, some Dakota were hanged, some fled south and west. Other Dakota People went north to our nomadic hunting grounds, including the Oak River Reserve area. There is evidence the Dakota were here long before the Canadian government claims and archeological finds proves them wrong. The Dakota were not refugees from the US; they already lived in Canada on their historical hunting grounds.

Coexisting

We, the Dakota People, had a good life on the continent. People tell things that they want others to believe. But really, the people had learned to coexist and get

along on the continent. The Dakota People learned to get along with all the other Tribes. The First Nations People had everything they needed here, food and water; they didn't have to go far; they had already learned to use what was here for them and to share with all the other First Nations here. The people had a good way of life. They had their own way of worship, and they had their own way of planting and harvesting whatever they needed. They had a good life. There would not be so many people here on the continent living with each other if they hadn't learned to coexist, living side by side. That's the ingredient, it doesn't matter who you are. Everyone has to get along with other people.

Can't Eat the Fish Anymore

When the white settlers came in, sat down on the land surrounding Oak River Reserve, and made their homestead, they were saying, "Well, we want to settle the land." However, this land was already settled by my Dakota People. Then the settlers came in and said, "No, we're going to settle it, our way. That means you Indians have to get out of our way. You're wasting the land just roaming on it; you need to learn how to become farmers and use the land."

Even going fishing, we can't do that now. The farmers have put herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers of every description onto the land, not to mention anhydrous ammonia. They've raped the land till it can no longer produce year after year. The farmers need to let the land rest; it has to rest. Summerfallow, we always did that, but that was some years back. But the farmers keep putting on all these chemicals. They're still doing it. Then the rains and the floods come, and all that filth goes into the river, and fish aren't worth eating now. They are unhealthy. Anyone could kill themselves eating out in the wild. Even the cattle, standing there; some are given steroids. So nature isn't nature anymore. The Native People didn't do that.

Limited Education

When I was young girl of fifteen, I wanted to get an education. At that time, the government had a policy that said, "Yes, they can go to school, but only to grade eight. Don't let them go beyond that." A grade eight education is very limited, a very basic education. The government in Canada could have said, "Look, we have a resource, all these Aboriginal People all across Canada, thousands and thousands. We will educate them. They will become nurses and doctors."

As a child, if anybody asked me what I wanted to do, I would say, "I want to be a nurse." At residential school, the nurse came once a week. She was in white and had a little hat, and it set her apart. She really stood out and she was a woman. So I wanted to be a nurse, too. I could have been a nurse, but our education was limited, and that's it. They didn't want any of us First Nations children to go beyond that limited education. As soon as they started doing that, they were playing around with human lives. It's like they put a lid on us, a lid on getting an education. Honestly, sometimes I think, "How did I get it in me to want to learn more?" I wasn't thinking, "I want to be highly educated." I just wanted to learn more and more and more of everything." Human beings are inquisitive, and we want to know about things. The Canadian government, with their Indian policies, put a lid on everything, right from the time we were small.

I see now the government's whole idea was to assimilate the people, so they had to get some who would go out there and mingle with the white. How they did it, I don't know. That was why it was only a select few. How they selected, I don't know. But they did, we were only children. It was an assimilation process, and they encouraged some of the boys to be ministers. Yes, they would pick one. We had Danny Umpherville; he was a reverend, and that's because the residential school staff wanted him to be one. They were going to change these Indians, and one way was to train selected students to become ministers so they could change us all on the reserve. I guess I can see that now, that was a part of the whole plan because they had ministers; almost every one of those Indian schools produced a minister for the church. At the time, I was a kid, and I thought, "How wonderful, one of our people is a minister." It seemed that was a big calling at the time.

A Dynamic of Success

One of my nieces is semi-retired now and lives on a farm near Virden, Manitoba. One of her girls worked right through, and she's been a registered nurse ever since she finished school. She works out in Vancouver in one of the hospitals and does a lot of public relations work and nursing. She's a very smart woman. She's been gone from the farm where she and all her siblings learned to work so hard daily, picking fruits, vegetables, and weeding the garden. All of a sudden, she finished her grade twelve and university education and went away somewhere to be a nurse with a title and living in the big city. So, when she comes home to visit her mother and people come to the house, they kind of look at her differently now. When you do things that

show you're bettering yourself, some people appreciate that, but others look at you as if you're a little different. You're just a notch above everyone now, by being successful.

Sun Dances

The Dakota Sun Dances and all our customs were sort of continued under the cover of darkness, because, under the Indian Act, they were disallowed. That was to help to make Indian People into white people. They didn't want the Native People to do any kind of dancing or sing any kind of songs. The Sun Dance is like when one goes to church and has communion, yet they didn't allow them to follow their customs even though it was their belief system. They could be punished and/or jailed if they tried to practise any of those things. They were terrified of that Indian agent. So terrified, they wouldn't attempt anything like that.

Residential School, Religion and Assimilation

The residential school was something put together by both the Canadian government and the churches because they wanted to assimilate the Indian People into their white society. They didn't like the Indian's nomadic way of life, and they seemed to think we were savages and heathens because we lived a life as hunters and gatherers, which was unacceptable to them. In spite of this, we showed that we could learn all these new things. It's a different way, but we can learn it. But this wasn't the government's way of thinking; they thought, "Well, we'll assimilate the Indians. We have to try to make them like us because they're not useful to us the way they are. They have to learn to forget the Native way of life. We'll start with taking away their language."

The churches played a big role in this mission. They came in, and I know, in the end, did a lot of harm. I sit here as an Elder sometimes thinking about all that. Yet we're all supposed to be God's children. The school staff wanted us to worship this God, but I always questioned where He was while residential school staff and administrators were mistreating and being cruel to us children. Do you still want me to believe that? Look at all the abuses that have happened to my Native People—atrocities of all kinds. The church is preaching that their God is a God of love, while the church was mistreating us and doing all these horrible things to hurt us.

The priests were responsible, too. I don't like talking about it, as it's still very traumatizing. We're singing "Jesus Loves Me, Jesus Loves Me," but He's not there, and my mom is a way over there. I wanted to see my mom. I want her to hold me.

I wanted my dad to come visit me. I went to residential school when I was seven. I thought I was coming back the same day when they loaded us up in the truck and went out to Elkhorn, like day school. But they didn't take us back home. The days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months. Then, all of a sudden, we're going home!

My brother Roy and I came home every summer for two months, hardly enough time to get to know everyone again, and suddenly we're going back to school again. Each summer, I had the worry of having to go back again, but that was the government's Indian policy. If I didn't go back, my parents or I would be jailed. I had no voice in it because they're going to come and get us. It was like my brother and I were runaway prisoners or something. Even though we hadn't broken any laws, the Indian agent was going to come and get us one way or another.

Discrimination

I had aunties and uncles who lived in Portage la Prairie; they worked every day. They went to the south air force base there. My Auntie Betsie (née Dowan) Dunkan worked for all those people, she couldn't speak English, but she had a house to clean every day. It was almost like what one would see on the movie *The Help*. That's how we were treated, the same discrimination and treatment the black people experienced. That's how the people off the reserve treated us.

I know the discrimination the people faced. I've been through it, too. I was treated the very same way. I did the very best I could; that's what First Nations People had always done. First Nations People treated these newcomers with respect and dignity and did everything for them. Not so the reverse! How the newcomers and people from off the reserve treated the Indian People was totally the opposite.

The first homesteaders appreciated the First Nations People and their help. It was the second generation who changed. In the late 1800s, they were becoming the owners of land and wanted more. But they wouldn't have got any more land if the Indian People hadn't helped them make a success of their smaller plots to begin with. The First Nations People helped them to be successful, and at that stage, they treated each other equally. That's what I've been trying to say. Then the farmers got greedy for more land. At the same time that they got greedy, the government acted to give them the land and put the First Nations People onto reserves.

A Dakota Warrior Nation

The Dakota warriors were trying to be aggressive. They were saying, "Hey, wait a minute, you're not coming in to take over our territories. If you take over, how am I going to feed my People? This is part of our hunting grounds; this is where we go for our food." Usually, people talk about the disappearance of the buffalo as simultaneous to the disappearance of the Indian People. My People were made to disappear onto the reserves and told just to be quiet and don't make any fuss, and the Indian agent will look after you. It was a dictatorship. It was a terrible system. Almost as bad as Idi Amin, who murdered his own people. In a way, that's what the federal system tried—to do away with our people. Somehow, it was never meant that as First Nations People we would be successful. That's what bothers me so much. We were never meant to have success and be productive for our own People. The government wanted us to do things for them and only them, but never supplied the means for the Native People to be successful.

Message for the Federal Government

Our Dakota and all Native People are smart people, I told this to the Canadian government representatives from Ottawa at a meeting. I said, "You've made a mistake, don't do it again." One hundred and sixty years ago, the federal government decided, "We'll get the Indians to sign the treaties and be at peace because actually we are scared of them." All those treaties "keep the peace" in their wording. In other words, "Don't try to fight us, just stay still, and the Canadian government will look after you." But the Canadian government did not look after the Dakota People; I see the evidence. That's the monster that Canada created, where all the Indian Reserves across Canada are now social messes. All the addictions, suicides, inadequate health care, diabetes, poverty and so forth, that's all because of the federal government and their Indian policies. They made that, so they're the ones who are going to have to find a solution. I told this to the federal government.

Consciously, they had our grandfathers, our ancestors, put their thumbprints on the treaty papers, and as soon as they had the thumbprints, the Canadian government had power over them. They were now going to keep the peace. They could do whatever they wanted to. They took over. The next day, they legislated the Indian Act. There is no Act for the Irish, for the French, nor for the English. They only created one for the Indian People.

It's called the Indian Act, whereby the Indian students could not get an education beyond grade eight. I told them, "You should have done the right thing. All Native People are part of the human race also. If your policies had allowed us to be like everybody else—go to school and get an education—if the Canadian government had treated us fairly and given us the opportunity that everyone else had, the government would not have the problems that they are facing on every Indian reserve in Canada today."

I go to dialysis every other day, I see immigrants who had the opportunity to come here. They're working in the hospitals. It should also have been my Native People. I said that right to the federal government representatives when I attended a meeting between our First Nation and the Canadian government officials. I told them my thoughts; they all listened intently. I told them that if anything had been done, in fairness, for my Native People, we wouldn't have these welfare lines. We could have been specialists, lawyers and engineers. Our People are smart. The government

policies treated them as if they were less than human, less than anybody else. And 160 years later, the Indian Act policies have brainwashed the people off the reserves to where some employers say, "Oh, he's Indian, he doesn't come to work. He's lazy; he'll leave with the first pay cheque." You know all these things are not true.

I remember when our People had their own community, we looked after our elderly. As I said, seniors didn't go into homes for the elderly. They were looked after at home until they passed on. Children never went to foster care; there was some other relative who was right there to oversee all the care they needed. We did not have alcohol and all of those damaging things. That was brought in by non-Natives, others not from our community.

The making of homebrew, and all that, was what created all these problems—government policies and greedy people and white farmers who wanted the land. "We want this land, make sure that the Indians are sitting over here, in this little spot. We're going to take the rest and get rich." Yes, get rich they did. They've made progress, and we're all sitting here in a social mess. As Dakota People we are wondering when we're going to die because of that hole in the ozone layer. The white men and farmers ruined everything because they've brought in all kinds of fertilizers and herbicides and pesticides and insecticides, all that going into the ground. They've ruined everything.

Look at all the diseases Native People have now. See what happens when one does things without asking the Great Spirit on which way to do certain things and asking for guidance, what and how do I do it. "How am I going to govern my People; how will I look after them?" No, the white farmers just did it for greed. The government and churches also brought in missionaries to try and fool us into thinking, "God loves you, just sit there and keep singing his praises." Native People did not feel loved by a Great Spirit when He let all these people do everything possible to destroy our traditional ways. These were the missionaries, these were churches that abused our People; the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, they were allowed to *abuse* the Native People because of the Indian Act and its policies. I see all these problems stemming from that.

My Call for Justice

That is what I witnessed in these eighty years. I lived through it, and I'm fortunate that, in spite of all that, I've come through it. In my mind, I thought, "I'm going to do this. I'll show that I don't have a pea brain, that my brain is as clever as yours. I

can get good marks; I can go to school; I can do this." That's in my mind, I thought, "I've got to show that." I guess that's why I have the four degrees, because I don't like what the government and their Indian policies and the people of Canada did to my People, and all these labels that characterized the Native People are not true. I'm living proof of it, and so were my People. They're all gone now, those hard-working people. Yes, the government's creation is there. They're the ones on the welfare line; that's what the government of Canada has created.

One Saturday in October 2017, I went to Brandon University to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award. In my acceptance speech, I said, "You know we were only allowed a grade eight education, government policy brought that about. But In spite of that, I can still have a good life." I was talking to this lady after, she came, and she said, "Oh, I like what you said in your speech." I said, "The thing I want to get across when I talk about that is for you to say, 'That should never have happened. We never want that to happen again. That should never have happened.'"

This whole thing that's happened to my First Nations People, it still continues. If the Canadian government had allowed little Native children to be part of the rest of the world, go to public school, learn and mingle, there would be more success stories of Native People advancing in this world.

That didn't happen, because the government had to have Indian residential schools, forbidding the Native children to attend public schools. I told that straight to the federal government in August of 2017 when I went to the meeting. That's the same thing I want to tell the rest of the people, tell them, when I have an audience. The Canadian government needs to change their Indian policies because it never changed, and it's so slow in happening now. Natives can go to university now and get educated, but we're still looked down upon by the rest of the population. They look at an Indian as if he's an alien or something. When I went to university I wanted to go into the classes where there were more whites than anything. I never told anybody that I wanted to prove that my brain was the same as theirs, the same as anybody else's. My mind wasn't so different that it had to be in residential school. I went and acquired four degrees. I could go to the university and get this degree, for *me!* I wanted to prove that I could do this. It could also be all people like me; those First Nations People should have been allowed to do that also from the very beginning.

When the Indian residential school system ended, the government created schools on the reserves. In 1961, the government officials decided, "Let's mingle the Native children in, and put them into the integrated school. They'll go to the public school."

So all of the Native children were bussed from the reserve to the different outlying areas; some went to Fort La Bosse School Division, Rolling River School Division and Brandon School Division. The children were bussed there for a number of years, possibly ten years or so.

With the declining farm populations, the town schools started to be threatened with closure, so that's when the superintendents would say to the principals of the reserve schools, "I need some of your Indian children to come to the town school."

The Department of Indian Affairs was always right in there. They gave a certain amount of money to help Fort La Bosse build the Assiniboine School in Oak Lake. The division paid part, and the Department of Indian Affairs gave them money so that the children from reserves could go to those schools. Some parents weren't happy with it because now the children had to take lunch every day; whereas, if they were at the reserve school, they could go home at lunch. It created a hardship, and the racism was just stark there. It was right there. My Dakota People, now we've come a long way from residential schools, and we're saying, "No, we're not going to put up with this racism anymore. If you're going to be racist, we're not going to send our children to your school." At least the children grow up happy in their own school. My children, my little family, they all went to a public school. At the start, they had good years. They made good friends because they went to Kenton. The little kids were not racist; they made good friends.

Avia (Kunshi's girl) is 5 years old in this picture and just graduating out of Nursery.


2019

Conclusion

In my life, with my Bachelor of Teaching, Master of Education and other degrees, I said, "I'm going to do it." I never planned to become an educator or principal; it just came into my life. I said, "Okay, I am going to give it my best." In my mind, I always told within myself I could do this, I will do it and I did.

It has always troubled me that somebody came here from another continent, landed here, took over the land, and kept taking and taking. It is like a visitor, I invited you into my house, first you have taken over my kitchen, now you have taken my living room over, and now you have taken my bedroom and now my washroom. Eventually the visitor has taken over my entire home and left me nothing. So, in fact, now the visitor had said, "Here's the door, out you go, I am here now." The visitors came in and just took our land. It has always bothered me all my life, and I never told anybody that. I just felt there was something missing. So when I had the opportunity, I wrote my first book on the Dakota Oyate and how the Canadian government always looked down on us as refugees. It was as if we didn't ever belong on this continent. Maybe we belonged to the States, but, no, the United States said, no, we don't. It was back and forth where nobody really accepts the Dakota. Maybe all First Nations went through something like that, but the Dakota more so than anybody else in Canada. There we were, the Dakota, no acknowledgement as citizens from either country. That is why we Dakota People didn't have a treaty with the Canadian government. And if there was a treaty, the Dakota did not want to be a part of it. It is only in the last few years that Canada has now acknowledged our Dakota People. Things like that bothered me, and this is why I want to include this in telling my stories.

Our Voice

We all have a voice. The Great Spirit gave us a voice to use it. When we as human beings see injustices, when we see that something isn't right, we need to say something. But if we're quiet, we're a part of the injustice also. If we are trying to profit from something, then we don't have a voice. The people of greed let all that happen to my First Nations People. Now it's, "Oh, First Nations People are a burden on the tax, they're this, they're that."

Non-Natives say the Indian is a drunk. All he can do is be a drunk and crawl around down Main Street in every city. The first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, was an alcoholic. He was the one who started the downward spiral of First Nations People. I don't give him credit for anything. He ruined Nations and Nations of People, and it's still ongoing. Macdonald believed Indigenous People, whom he called "savages," did not belong in Canada. Therefore, he was very instrumental in authoring the Canadian Indian Act, including acts and policies to assimilate the First Nations People by developing the residential school system and opening up our historical homeland to squatters. Macdonald thought he knew what the best was for First Nations People without even asking First Nations People what we thought was best for us. These policies are the root to all the problems we see today on First Nations reserves across Canada. Like I said, these First Nation Chiefs' announcements about the problems on the reserve, these problems started with Macdonald. His Indian policies were the root to all the social problems that are still today getting worse by the minute. The common motivator is greed.

After eighty-three years, everything is within me; I have all my experiences and all I have gone through. I'm not the most clever scholar in the world, but I have rubbed shoulders with lots of people who have influenced me in who I am today. When I tell these stories, I tell them because I don't like how all this came about. I want to go back to when we, as a Nation, could care for our children with no outside influence, before the Canadian government came in and stole the children away to "save them from their own families," when there was no reason to do that. Our People looked after their children from birth on and always had them close. That was how my life was until I went to residential school at age six. In a way, I am telling these stories, so people will know what happened to the Dakota People. I want the people to understand the contribution the Dakota made to the growth and development of Canada. This is the first step in educating those who will listen. So when opportunity presents itself to tell these stories, I have to think about it spiritually within myself and ask the Great Spirit for guidance in what I am to do and tell. When they took us away, they took away our identity, culture and values. They tried to turn us into members of the dominant society.

A Plea to My Dakota People

Culture and language are one. By taking our language, they also took our culture. In order to reverse that process, we have to use the same vehicle that took it away,

the vehicle of communication, which is language. Language is embodied in who we are as Aboriginal People. The Dakota language has long lingered amongst the Elders who knew it as their first spoken words. My Dakota language now reaches a critical point in its existence. If we do not converse in our Dakota language within the confines of our homes, our schools, our communities and our countries, we risk the loss of a precious commodity that cannot be recovered for our descendants. Language—the written and spoken word—is the foundation of every culture; connectively, we as Dakota People, we can reconstruct this foundation. Use the language at every opportunity, be it in conversation with Elders or toddlers: the repetition of common phrases will ensure the retention of this rich and vibrant language and see that it is expanded rather than eliminated. When we talk to our youth, we need to use the Dakota language. This is where our language will come to reside for all time. The coming generations cannot share what they have not learned. Let our language be our gift and our legacy.

Duzahan Mani Win

Doris on her birthday, 2019.

In a powerful voice, the late Elder Doris Pratt shares stories about growing up in a vibrant Dakota community, the negative impact of government policies on her People, surviving residential school, living and working among non-First Nations people, and the Dakota Peoples' strength moving forward.

A mix of biography and history, this work challenges stereotypes of Dakota Peoples, shedding light on this proud, hardworking, community-oriented People. Dakota language, culture, and spirituality gave Doris the foundation to stand with pride in her identity and overcome many obstacles in her life. She worked tirelessly to revive the Dakota language and culture and rose to become an education director and writer of Dakota resources to support the generations to come. Though she received numerous lifetime awards for her work, Doris' aim was helping her People regain their Voice.