

Transition

Manitou Mounds Boost Rainy River First Nation Economy

by Raymond Lawrence

It took Rainy River First Nation members three decades of working and waiting to finally see their vision become reality. But the end result has surpassed their expectations.

Developing the Manitou Mounds National Historic Site and on-site cultural museum has been a great teacher for the northwestern Ontario First Nation. The site represents some of the oldest archeological finds in Canada. Up until the late 1960s, the series of burial mounds and interconnected sites were slowly being demolished. Museums at that time were not yet sensitized to First Nations' concerns. They removed artifacts from the Mounds despite the fact these were the burial sites of the First Nation's ancestors.

When it was deemed a national historic site, hopes were high that the Mounds would provide several things, including employment, preservation of the people's cultural history and protection for the site. The Rainy River area is already popular with Canadian and American visitors, who come for its magnificent lakes, rivers and campgrounds.

The First Nation involved all its members in the development process for the site. In particular, it focused on the Elders, tapping into their traditional knowledge to draw together a site that would adequately represent the people and their cultural history. Throughout the process, one of the biggest hurdles was cash. However, the First Nation was finally able to negotiate an extensive cost-sharing agreement that brought



Archival photographs are a feature of the historical interpretive centre.



The Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung Historical Centre

the federal government (Parks Canada) and the provincial government into the action. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development contributed towards exhibits and displays in the historical centre.

For the grand opening of the Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung Historical Centre on May 14, 1999, they expected 800 people, and about 1,200 came to see what the site was all about. During their first season, they had 6,000 visitors.

"It's our history from our perspective from our beginning; we start with our creation story when man first came on the earth and we walk you right through to the present day," says **Stacey Bruyere**, the site's Executive Director.

"I think the people were expecting more of a museum, rather than a

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guided tour. They're impressed with what they do get — it's a combination of an historical, archeology and nature tour," she says. Most of the visitors are families. "They can come here for a day, have a tour, go through the galleries, have a meal and just spend a nice day together."

"The site is quite open so it's really a free place where kids can run and play and also just ask a million questions. Whatever people want to talk about, we'll talk about," Bruyere says. The guides do a lot of their own research, speaking with Elders, reading books

on trees, plants, wildlife, history and the area. "To be a guide you really have to love it...loving the culture, being proud of the history, and wanting to be associated with this place."

The site has 12 year-round employees; during the peak season, that number climbs to 21. As well as providing jobs, development of the site has pumped millions into the local economy through wages and contracting. "Local businesses

have been very supportive and have been wanting to form partnerships with us," Bruyere says.

Rainy River has been sharing its experience of developing a major heritage attraction with other First Nations. "For the most part, people don't realize that something like this takes years of planning and requires expertise," says Bruyere, who advises them where to start and how to proceed.

For more information about the historical centre, telephone (807) 483-1163. ♦

Raymond Lawrence is a freelance writer of Ojibway and European ancestry.

The Gas Station Employees Who Took Over

by *Raymond Lawrence*

If I ever owned this place..." At one time or another, most people have said something along these lines. But for two Couchiching First Nation members, that wish became a reality.

After working a collective 24 years at CC Complex, an on-reserve gas station and store in northwestern Ontario, cousins **Cathy** and **Colleen Perreault** got together as partners to buy the business.

Experienced in virtually all aspects of the operation, they were dedicated, hard-working employees. **Tom Bruyere**, the previous store owner and the two cousins' former employer, believed they were ideal candidates for taking over the business. The local band council agreed, and together with Bruyere, pitched in to help the two women.

Although not a franchise, CC Complex sells Esso products which bring in clients with Esso cards. This accounts for about 20 percent of their business. However, most of their clients are local, on-reserve people who want to support the on-reserve business that provides employment for as many as 20 people. There are seasonal booms

in business in the spring when the fishermen take to the waters in search of bass and pickerel, and then later in the fall when hunters arrive. Many of these seasonal clients are from the U.S.

When the Perreault cousins bought the business in 1995, they were ready to climb into the driver's seat. "As an owner, you have to be there a little bit more often and you've got to put in quite a bit of your time," says Colleen Perreault who had worked 14 years as an employee with CC Complex. "We have a very good staff but you have to be there for them."

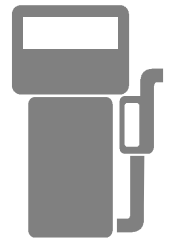
"I was clerk, gas attendant, and I had signing authority," she says of her own time as an employee. "I was more or less the right-hand man, and it was actually Tom Bruyere who suggested that we take it over and where to get the funding." The two cousins were able to access federal funding through Aboriginal Business Canada and band loans. "I was more excited than nervous at that time, and I think I can talk for Cathy too on that."

The women admit they found their first three months as owners exhausting; they were there to all hours of the night until they got the hang of everything new that came with ownership.

In June 1999, they opened a Chester Fried Chicken operation in the store.

Unlike a franchise, they pay no fees to a parent company. They had to buy their equipment and continue to use the seasoning mixes that give their product its unique taste. Aside from that, the booming new business is theirs to run as they please, without having to pay franchise fees. "That all happened so fast, it was unreal. It brings in a lot of different people who come just for the chicken," says Colleen Perreault. The fried chicken operation has an added plus. Once customers are in the store to pick up their order, they usually make other purchases.

The Perreaults draw on their families' support and involvement, including having their children and other family members working with them. "Both of our husbands are now quite involved and that's happened just over the past year. They were always around but didn't have the input like they do now... they both want to see something bigger and better. They've supported us all the way," says Colleen Perreault. ♦



Thunderchild Outfitters Ltd. Attract American Hunters

by Diane Koven

In just three short years, the Thunderchild First Nation has built a thriving outfitting business on its land near Pierceland, in north-central Saskatchewan.

Thunderchild is an independent First Nation, not involved with any tribal councils. It has an executive committee that establishes laws and codes at monthly band meetings. In 1997, with the approval of its membership, the First Nation established Thunderchild Outfitters Ltd. Using funds from its Treaty Land Entitlement settlement agreement, the community bought a former hunting lodge. Through a Regional Opportunities Fund grant from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the First Nation was able to construct a high fence and feed plots to contain the white-tailed deer that attract the hunters.

One of only a few Aboriginal outfitters in Saskatchewan, Thunderchild Outfitters has targetted the "executive hunter," says **Harold Jimmy**, general manager of Thunderchild Investments, the band's economic development arm. "Many of our hunters are senior corporate executives and successful businessmen, people that take their enjoyment of hunting to every corner of the world. They have money to spend and they want the best." The aim is to make the hunters comfortable and provide them with a superior hunting experience. For this, clients are willing to pay \$3,750 U.S. for five days.

In order to attract American clients, Thunderchild has hired a U.S. booking agent which filmed a hunt featuring celebrated hunter **Jay Novacek**, former tight end for the Dallas Cowboys.

One of only a few Aboriginal outfitters in Saskatchewan, Thunderchild Outfitters has targetted the "executive hunter."



The film will be appearing on the ESPN TV sports network and will no doubt attract new business. One of the film crew remarked that he almost fell asleep at the blinds because he was so comfortable, prompting Jimmy to remark that "we are toying with the idea of having as our motto: 'If you don't succeed at the hunt, it is because we made you too comfortable.'"

Already business is booming through word-of-mouth advertising. "We have bookings into next year," confirms Jimmy. Five First Nation members are working for the outfitter, and more will be needed as business increases.

"The hunters take very little meat from the deer that they kill," says Jimmy, "so the meat goes back to our band members. Thunderchild Investments pays for the processing of the meat and distributes it to our members, which makes our Elders very happy."

The company is beginning its fourth year of operation. "The first three years, we took our profit and invested it in equipment," says Jimmy. "We still realized a small profit last year out of our gross revenue of just under \$500,000 and we hope that this year will be a big year."

None of this happened without hard work. Jimmy is quick to emphasize that the success of Thunderchild Outfitters Ltd. is due to the efforts of the grass-roots people, the First Nation members who helped to establish the company and those who keep it going. The leadership, past and present, also deserves to be commended. The chief and council, while they have a representative on the Thunderchild Investments board, stay at arm's length from all business transactions and decisions.

As general manager of Thunderchild Investments, Jimmy also oversees the First Nation's other areas of economic development, including Thunder Oil, Thunderchild Agriculture and a couple of ranches. The community prides itself on its economic diversity and independence, and is reaping the success of its policies and hard work. ♦



Pash Travel Adds Event Planning for One-Stop Customer Service

by Raymond Lawrence

Inadequate travel and transportation services to the Northern Quebec Cree communities in the mid-to-late 1980s inspired **Marsha Smoke** to start a travel agency tailored to Aboriginal people.

A member of the Alderville First Nation in eastern Ontario, Smoke felt it was critical to have a partner from the area she intended to serve. So in the early 1990s, she and Quebec Cree **Steven Pash** teamed up to launch Pash Travel. From there, the Val d'Or-based company took off. It has added a new office, and branched out in a new direction, while continuing to build on its strong, service-based reputation.

"The clients were the Cree of Northern Quebec. I was most comfortable with that area but also with the understanding that it was going to be an Aboriginal travel agency servicing Aboriginal people across the country," Smoke says. "We have a client base now that is national, and we also have more localized clients in the Ottawa area with vacationers. We get a mix of leisure travel now and have been working in Aboriginal tourism for quite some time." Smoke was the founding chair of Aboriginal Tourism Team Canada.

Pash Travel opened its Val d'Or office in 1990. About two years later, the company developed its second office in Ottawa as a full-fledged

operation, hiring more people. Only about 20 percent of its business comes from the two cities in which it is based. The rest comes in from across the country.

The services provided by Pash Travel's staff of 12 stay in demand. "The main advantage, particularly with Aboriginal people, is that we know the communities out there, and say if you wanted to get to an isolated community, we can usually get the itinerary relatively quickly...we don't have to hunt around for it, and try to figure out who flies there. We also give you pricing options...our agents are trained to look for the best available fares." In this way they are able to offer money-saving advice to clients without affecting their own profits. "In the 10 years that we've been in existence, we've saved Aboriginal people millions of dollars by providing that kind of advice," Smoke adds.

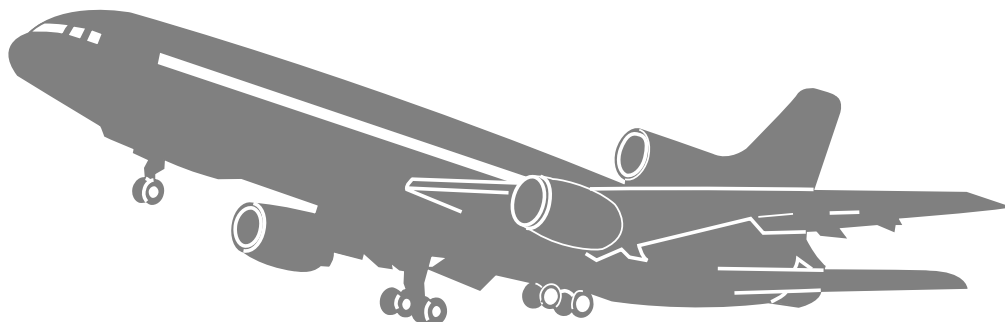
Pash Travel is also fast becoming a broad-based service provider, the proverbial one-stop shop that now includes events and conference planning, as well as all travel arrangements. Wintergreen handles all aspects of events planning and arrangements for conferences. Operating in the same building as Pash Travel, Wintergreen not only makes it much easier for clients to host an event or arrange a conference, but also brings in more business for the travel agency.



Marsha Smoke started her travel agency with **Steven Pash** in the early 1990s.

Although Wintergreen has been officially operating for a year, Smoke did this type of work over the past 10 years until the demand became too much for one person. "It was taking away the focus from the community work that I like doing," she says. "I'm the type of person who has to be in the community." Setting up Wintergreen has allowed her to remain in a lead position with conference and event planning, and to hire people to carry out the balance of the work.

For more information about Pash Travel and Wintergreen, telephone (613) 830-7129. ♦



Better Prices and Service for First Nations Insurance

by Michael Fisher, Saskatchewan Region

North Central Insurance Brokers (NCI) Ltd. in Saskatoon specializes in administering and servicing First Nations-specific insurance requirements. In its 12-year history, the company has brought their First Nations clients a level of service previously unavailable.

"Their needs weren't being met," says **Karen Smith**, CEO and part owner of NCI. "First Nations were paying higher rates and getting poorer coverage and inadequate service from the existing brokerage force."

This was due largely to a general "lack of knowledge" throughout the industry that Smith and her First Nations partners hoped to remedy. They established NCI in 1988 with a mandate to strive for fair insurance practices; provide a high level of client service; and promote customers' insurance awareness.

Through the company's efforts, there have been dramatic improvements in the quality of insurance delivered to First Nations people. "We've successfully lobbied the insurance industry for better rates," Smith says. "The average housing rates on-reserve have been reduced by 38 percent since 1994 and school premiums have almost been cut in half."

As well, the level of coverage available from insurance companies has increased. Until recently, First Nations were unable to "receive replacement costs on their houses; they were given a depreciated value after a loss," says Smith. "Everyone else in Saskatchewan got replacement cost, but they wouldn't give it to the bands."

NCI also administers the First Nations Housing Insurance Pool, the first self-insuring initiative among Aboriginal groups in Canada. "With the advent of the insuring pool, we're able to provide better pricing and a better product to our own people," says Chief **Dennis Meeches**



Photo credit: Doug Cuthand

Peter Gardippi and Karen Smith are co-owners of North Central Insurance Brokers.

Annie Sanderson is an Assistant Account Representative at NCI.



Photo credit: Doug Cuthand

of Long Plain First Nation (Manitoba), the pool's president. "It's an investment in our future in the insurance industry."

Chief Meeches says that NCI was chosen to administer the insurance pool because they are leaders in their field. NCI addressed "the First Nations market when other insurance companies wouldn't," he explains. "They realize that this is a very important industry to our people."

NCI works closely with insurance companies to design coverages for a wide range of clients, from individual homeowners, tenants and First Nations communities to schools, child and family services and day-cares.

"We go directly to First Nations communities and make sure their insurance needs are addressed," Smith says. "We make sure we do our job."

NCI offers training courses to ensure their customers are comfortable with every aspect of their insurance purchase and are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities as policy holders.

In 1996, the company relocated to the Muskeg Lake urban reserve in Saskatoon to offer easier access

and better service to their clients. Since the move, NCI has grown "unbelievably," says Smith, adding that the company started with only two employees and now has 18. "We have the largest number of First Nations employees of any brokerage firm in the country."

And the company is quickly expanding its service to other provinces. It opened a branch office in Winnipeg on March 1, 1999 and plans to do the same in Alberta sometime in 2000, with Ontario to follow in the near future.

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's Economic Development Opportunity Fund helped facilitate NCI's recent expansion.

Although increased competition has followed the company's enormous success, NCI is confident their business will continue to prosper. "Every year we have a major brokerage firm trying to take our business, and every year we've been successful in not losing accounts," Smith says. "We do the very best we can for [our clients] and they have faith in us." ♦

Bigstone Cree Nation Majority Owner in Profit-Making Joint Venture

by Wendy MacIntyre

Situated in an oil-rich region of northern Alberta, the Bigstone Cree Nation didn't want development opportunities to pass them by. When a non-Aboriginal oil firm, Petrocare Services Ltd., came to the Wabasca-Desmarais area with a view to setting up a sub-office, Chief **Mel Beaver** took action.

In the spring of 1997 Chief Beaver met with **Jim Bissell**, Petrocare's Maintenance Manager, to discuss mutual opportunities. The meeting was the spark for a joint venture, Bigstone Ventures Ltd. (BVL), that today employs about 60 full-time workers, 75 percent of whom are Bigstone Cree members. BVL is also bringing in a healthy return for the two partners.

"Mel Beaver put us in touch with his development officers," says Bissell, who serves as BVL's Managing Director. "From there, it snowballed. We signed an agreement and the company was working within a few months. It's really good news," he adds. "BVL is going gung-ho, and it keeps on going."

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development contributed towards the company's start-up costs. Initially set up to manufacture oil tanks, BVL has branched out into pile driving, mechanical construction, pipelining, oil tank set up, general welding and general maintenance.

"There was a cash flow right away," says Bissell, who stresses that BVL is a "true joint venture," with a board of directors on which the Bigstone Cree



Bigstone Ventures Ltd. manufactures equipment like this "enviro" tank.

and Petrocare have equal representation. The board sets the direction for growth and expenditures. The Bigstone Cree have majority ownership in the venture.

An added advantage of BVL is the specialized training that workers are undertaking. "More than 25 people are indentured in the provincial apprenticeship program," says Bissell. "The end result will be the development of our own in-house journeymen."

"The employees do it themselves," he explains of getting on to the indenture program. "It's their ticket. They can take it anywhere in the world they want." In fact, the BVL crew is increasingly in demand for work on large projects in other parts of Alberta, Bissell adds.

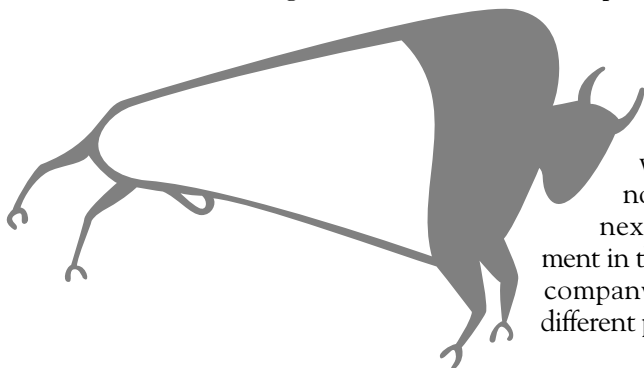
Petrocare will be working extensively with Aboriginal groups in the future, says Bissell, who describes Canada's northern regions as "the next generation of development in the country." He and his company are very aware of the different populations dynamics in

these regions, he emphasizes. "There is a different majority, and that majority is Aboriginal people. If we want to grow as a company, we have to develop a track record of developing real partnerships with Aboriginal people. You have to go and meet with the band council on a straight-up partnership basis."

Bissell, who grew up in the Wabasca area, believes it is essential for non-Aboriginal companies to understand the cultural dynamics of northern communities. Development companies have to learn the same sensitivity when it comes to Canada's northern regions, as they do when they go to a country like Venezuela, he says.

"Our people understand it," he says of Petrocare's awareness of northern communities' perspectives and culture. "It's a totally different spin. If you're working in the north, you should know something about it."

"We want to develop partnership ventures that lead to profit," he says. "And if we're sincere, it will work." ♦



"Talking Tree" House Builds Treasury of Aboriginal Books

by Wendy MacIntyre

In May, Rosemarie Moffitt will hit the pow-wow trail to sell her wares: an inspired selection of books by and about Aboriginal people. Moffitt, who started her Winnipeg home-based business, "Talking Tree" House, two years ago, says that mainstream bookstores simply don't carry the titles she has available.

"It's just a passion with me," she says of her collection of Aboriginal titles. She has 300 to date and hopes to have 500 different books in stock by the end of the year. The books cover every possible subject from archaeology, history, health and philosophy to contemporary novels, traditional stories and teachers' guides. Moffitt's research on the Internet has turned up about 2,000 books by and about Canadian Aboriginal people, which she plans to stock in "Talking Tree" House eventually.

"It's really exciting," says Moffitt, who orders books for libraries and schools, as well as selling at pow-wows and conferences. "My motto is: 'Education is everybody's business.' That's where the greatest need is."

In her goal to promote Aboriginal authors and Aboriginal content — "books that are well-written and informative" — Moffitt is guided by the recommendations and discoveries of Aboriginal readers and teachers. She found out about *Hey, Monias!*, for example, from an Aboriginal teacher who ordered 20 copies for his class. Moffitt enthuses about this book by a 17-year-old Métis youth, based on his five-year diary of experiences with foster homes. "Things like this happen so often for me," she says about encountering this book. "It's like magic."



Rosemarie Moffitt started "Talking Tree" House two years ago.

She was also thrilled to find out about Kevin Morrisseau's *Into the Daylight: A Wholistic Approach to Healing*. "This book only came out within the last six months," she says. "I bought 20 and within one weekend at a pow-wow, they all sold."

"People come up to my table, and they see a good selection. I'm able to talk about at least 10 of these books. That's what makes a difference."

Originally from Northern Ontario, Moffitt is a member of the Gull Bay First Nation. Backed by a B.A. in Psychology and a Master's degree specializing in government policy and program development, she has built her business on her wide-ranging career experience. Moffitt has worked with the Donner Native Study Program at the University of Toronto, the Native Council of Canada and with the

federal government, including the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Public Service Commission. She moved from Ottawa to Winnipeg to become Director of the Community Counselling Certificate Program at the University of Manitoba. Moffitt is currently developing curricula for a mature students program at Anokiiwin, an Aboriginally-owned training institution in downtown Winnipeg.

At the same time, she is keeping "Talking Tree" House going, constantly adding new titles.

With her upcoming Web site, Moffitt will soon be able to introduce the treasures of her "talking trees" to a much wider base of customers.

For more information about "Talking Tree" House, telephone (204) 257-8713. ♦



Southern Ontario Aboriginal Tourism Unites Front

by Raymond Lawrence

With its well-developed tourism base, large population, and abundance of existing Aboriginal tourism businesses, southern Ontario is the potential setting for major Aboriginal employment and solid entrepreneurial opportunity.

Until recently, southern Ontario's Aboriginal component had no united front. That changed with the formation of the Aboriginal Tourism Association of Southern Ontario (ATASO). The association's president, **Barry Parker**, says there are several major benefits in linking the various tourism businesses in one industry. He notes that the association has already caught the eye of government and the non-Aboriginal tourism sector.

Marketing and packaging of tourism products are critical to business success. Parker hopes that marketing will help increase partnering with the non-Aboriginal tourism industry, while strengthening and expanding the client base for Aboriginal tourism.

"We're focusing on industry development so we'll have businesses working together so they can collectively reduce costs, increase revenues and create awareness of tourism so that people will

look at it as an opportunity for work and to create business," says Parker. Bringing together the various components of tourism — transportation, accommodations and attractions — and effectively marketing them, will mean more visitors to sites, increased visibility and increased revenues at reduced costs.

"We're as good as any other product or service, but the difficulty in dealing with the balance of industry and government was there was no conduit to work through to actually facilitate a relationship," he says. "So with ATASO we've actually created that conduit, which is actually between Aboriginal businesses, and through that we can work with the balance of industry, government, and with our markets in a way where we can participate effectively."

"We have to make sure that our products are market-ready and that they provide good quality and value through unique experiences. We have to maintain health, fire, and safety standards so people feel secure. If the balance of industry is going to work with us, we have to be as good as they are. In terms of foreign markets, we have to be

export-ready and accessible," Parker emphasizes. This includes dealing with international tourists during their normal business hours, even though in southern Ontario it might be 3:00 a.m.

Although several European countries present lucrative potential, Parker says there needs to be more focus on the U.S. and our own Canadian market. "We have to let the rest of Canada know that we are extending a welcoming hand to our products and services. What do we have in Canada that is as truly exceptional and unique as the Aboriginal peoples and cultures and that differentiates our products?"

"Tourism is business and this is all about good business sense and the more we practise good business the more we will be rewarded," he says. "Broader exposure will come down to effective marketing and promotion of Aboriginal tourism in general and in specific projects that we can promote and deliver on."

Parker concludes with a crucial point: "We ensure that tourism has no negative impact on culture, community or the environment," he emphasizes. ♦



Barry Parker is ATASO President.



This is the final issue of *Transition*. In April, DIAND will introduce a new newsletter called *Circles of Light*.

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MY OWN PERSON

Doris Greyeyes

Master of Business Administration

Cree Assiniboine

by *Fred Favel*

If there was another name for enthusiasm, aggressiveness and ambition, it would have to be Doris Greyeyes. With her vibrant personality and her charming ways, she has left her signature wherever she has travelled — far from her beginnings in a mud-plastered log house on the Prairies. Her energy has no limits and her objectives are admirable. “My role is not to do for people, but to provide opportunities for people to do it for themselves.”

Doris M. Greyeyes (Bellegarde), born on the Little Black Bear Reserve, Saskatchewan in 1945, was the sixth of 12 children. It took hard work and perseverance to feed this large family. The family farmed a quarter section in the File Hills area between Fort Qu’Appelle and Melville — primarily grain farming and cattle ranching. Her father cut and sold wood in the winter months. Her mother, with the help of the farm cream separator, shipped cream to be sold in the neighbouring town of Melville. Home was a log cabin insulated with mud between the cracks, a common sight in those days, particularly for country folk without the wherewithal to build with new lumber. “I had a very happy childhood,” says Greyeyes. “I can remember watching my parents mud-plaster our home and whitewash it.” And there were threshing bees when the neighbouring farmers would work together to harvest each other’s crops in the fall. Her mother prepared food for these workers. “I remember my mother getting up at three in the morning and baking 20 loaves of bread a day.” Greyeyes followed their industrious example when her mother bought her a doll carriage. Wanting to contribute as a productive worker on the farm, she hauled manure in it, much to the chagrin of her parents.

At the age of six, Greyeyes was sent to the Lebret Indian Residential School. “My father believed that we needed to find our way wherever we went. We had to be proud of who we were, wherever we went, and that was very important, but we also needed to be able to live in the white world.” Greyeyes endured the cutting of her hair, language censorship and strict discipline. “What was most devastating about residential school was the fact that I was forced to learn another way of life and devalue my own culture. This was not a good feeling, and I learned very early that there was something wrong with this.”

But she never gave up on schooling and, after graduating from Lebret in 1963, she enrolled in the College of Nursing at the University of Saskatchewan. She passed her first year, and went to work at the Fort Qu’Appelle Indian Hospital. “I became very disillusioned. There was a lot of alcohol in those years...I remember people coming in with their heads open...it was awful. I thought, nursing is not for me!” She stuck it out for another year.

1966 was a year of big changes. She married her old school chum, Marcel Greyeyes, a physical education instructor with the Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry regiment. Sadly, her father died accidentally at the age of 56. And she moved to Edmonton to the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology’s dental nursing program. With her previous nursing experience, she was able to complete the course in one year. “And so, I ended up cleaning teeth and that was actually quite nice, but I think I’m a big-picture thinker, and that’s a real small cavity to work in.”



Photo credit: Laurel Lemchuk-Favel

Continuing to meet challenges face on, Greyeyes and her husband bought their first home in Edmonton. Purchasing a house off reserve in those years was an incredible accomplishment. The couple was establishing roots, but a permanent home life was not in the offing for a military family. After the birth of their first child, they were on the move again to Camp Borden, Ontario, and then to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Greyeyes, determined to finish her schooling despite the moves, entered the University of Regina, forty miles away. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Sociology in 1977. Following her graduation, she became part of a small group of women who founded

the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. She took on the challenge of setting up the college’s administration system. “In the northern areas particularly, there were a lot of people from the community who were teacher’s aides, and although they didn’t have degrees, they were indispensable. A lot of them wanted to start getting trained and get the academic qualifications as well. Ninety percent of our classes were off campus. My role was to ensure that we had instructors in all of these different locations and that they were kept up to standard. I travelled constantly from one end of the province to the other, bringing in instructors, supervising registration and meeting with instructors. It was an awful lot of work.”

Then the family was posted overseas to Canadian Forces Base Baden Soellingen in West Germany. This was their home for seven years. “The forces were beginning to look at people from the ranks becoming officers but a lot of people didn’t have their Grade 12.” Greyeyes first took a position as an adult education instructor and later became an elementary school administrator. She also found time to host a show on the base’s radio station. Greyeyes reflects, “We travelled a lot and I think that’s the best experience we ever had as a family.”

Back in Canada again, Greyeyes began to work on her Master’s degree in Business Administration. Her graduation from the University of Saskatchewan in 1992 was a happy family affair, as her two daughters graduated with Bachelor of Commerce degrees. Then looking to her future, Greyeyes

reflected on her past. “I decided, I’ve got a little bit of education in the health field, a little bit in social development, some in education and business, so after 10 years of university, I wanted to do community development and that’s what I do now.”

Today she works for Health Canada’s Medical Services Branch, Alberta Region as the Health Educator, Treaty 6 First Nations. Her work takes her to more than twenty communities throughout the province. She is also chair of the National Aboriginal Diabetes Association, which was formed in response to the alarmingly high rates of diabetes among Aboriginal people. “My role is not to do for people, but to provide opportunities for people to do it for themselves.” Greyeyes’ professional philosophy mirrors her personal belief in the internal power that stems from faith in yourself, a power that “starts from within.” “It doesn’t come from the outside,” she says. “It was given to us.”

Fred Favel is an Aboriginal writer and communications consultant.



Photo credit: Alex Campbell Photography Ltd.