

MURRAY WHETUNG

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Writer/Editor

Karen Richardson
Memories to Memoirs
Bancroft, Ontario
613-332-6400
k.rich5@live.com
www.memoriestomemoirs.org

Layout/Design

Waddington Resource Management
Combermere, Ontario, Canada, K0J 1L0
1-613-720-4889
kent@kentwaddington.com

Production

Bayberry Lane Design
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1-613-756-2580
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Introduction

Murray Whetung (wee-tung) a respected Ojibwe Elder, lives at 100 Murrayville Road, Curve Lake Reserve, Home of the Anishnabe of the Great Ojibwe Nation #35, near Peterborough. I arrived to interview him on a midwinter morning after a storm that left a heavy blanket of snow all round. A widower for 8 years, he lives in a modest brick home with his cat and walks with a stoop. Murray is a clean-shaven man with a brush cut, neatly dressed in khaki shirt with epaulets, a wristwatch, olive wool pants and deerskin moccasins.

At lunch he served me a hearty beef stew he cooked himself. We ate at the large dining room table that seats his many children and grand children. As we talked, his phone rang several times and three people dropped in! He's a personable man with a sweet smile, gentle manner, understated humour and quiet strength. An easy conversationalist with a great memory, retiring to his gliding chair with tea, this is the story he told me ... (K.R.)

Life is Good

“Nigi chinandom gaw shi mino oongazyan gaw bumi bimadizyan. Gee bi minowangoz yong gaw peeck shkin neeg yong. Dush ka gee meengoo yon owh Cobe gaw chi shpandogzid qua ga minik binogeeug yoanh gid. Opchigu nigeewannishing pee gaw nigushid. Nidi mino wan gwandom dush awshi miniwah gaw quw shawanmid owh. Dabanigad magwah gee oxy yan baboon nung. Ndaw manandom dush kinah dubinoo-geemug, gah wih odubuinoogeemwan chi minwangooz wad punae.”

(For translation, see end of story.)

We Never Asked the Old Folks

My brother Cliff said “We never asked our old folks enough before they passed away.” So I thought it would be a good thing to do my life story to pass along to my great grandchildren. I was born in Curve Lake Village, in the house where Whetung Tea Room is now, on November 30, 1921.

My Father the Chief

Dad retired after 30 years as Chief (1913 to 1943) when I was about 21. This news clipping I have from those days says he was “the most colourful Indian figure in the county.” (He used to rent a suit of native regalia for special occasions, because we had lost our culture so much, we had none on the reserve anymore.) He was so popular, he was re-elected 10 times in a row!

Grand Council, 1928

It was a great honour for the family, but since I grew up with it, I didn't think too much about it at the time. When I was about 7, there was a Grand Council meeting here. Indians from all over North America came, from as far away as Arizona and New Mexico. It must have been a very historic meeting.

Indian Lore & Conservation

Dad knew Indian lore and the way of the wilds so well, that he could forecast the seasonal weather and was an avid fish and game conservationist. I have a photo of him with a 32 lb. Muskie someone caught that he had mounted on a wall plaque.

The Post Master

He was also the Post Master for 30 years and a member of the Curve Lake United Church. Dad was bigger than me. I was 5'9" till my back bent over. (Just got tired I guess.) Now I'm 5'7. He passed away in 1948 with a stroke, maybe related to his diabetes. He was 70. I was 27 and fairly close with him. It was pretty sad.

The Flu Epidemic

Dad's sisters and brothers were William, Albert, Robert, Harriet, Maud, George, Daisy, Bertha and Star, but I only met my Uncle Albert. The rest died fairly young, some in the Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1919 that soldiers brought home from WW1 with them. So, I guess I'm lucky Dad survived. But that was all before I was born.

Village & Woodlots

Around 1887, local native residents were allotted a village building lot of about 8 acres (Chief Joseph Irons got 10 acres) and a wood lot, roughly 48 acres. We became an official reserve in 1898. Dad would be about 20 then. Grampa left his land to his children. Dad and Uncle Albert traded their woodlots on Curve and Buckhorn Lake, so they could hunt closer to their homes. Dad's woodlot, which is where I live now, was pretty rocky. But Albert farmed on his. He was very close with his money. My cousin Bill (now deceased) leased his land across the road from me for a subdivision. Now his daughter lives from the proceeds.

Grampa Loved Checkers

My father's father was Dan Whetung Sr. The newspaper said he was Chief too, but we checked with the reserve archives and found out he was not. He had a grocery store, post office and taxi where the Whetung Art Gallery is now. He loved playing checkers so much that if he was winning, he wouldn't stop playing, even if there were customers standing there!
(Laughs)

The Curve Lake Stage

Grampa used to run the Curve Lake Stage too, till about 1926. It was a 1917 Buick I think. I was only five. It had heavy wire screens on the windows and a covered deck with benches on either side. He used it to take people and mail off the reserve. Later, my father ran the stage with a different car.

Our First Travel Agent

In the early 1900s, Grampa ran steamboat cruises and was a fishing guide, the reserve's first travel agent and he was also a teacher (says this news clipping). Grampa died in 1930 at 81, about 11 years after his wife. I was only 9 years old when he passed away and don't remember much more about him.

That Indian Agent

But I was told Grampa was always writing to the government complaining that the store run by Mr. Kennedy, the white Indian Agent at Mission House on the south side of the reserve, was unfair competition. I think he was subsidized by the feds. But, Grampa never got an answer. The post office was in my father's store, but you see, any mail to the government had to go through the Indian Agent first! Of course, it was not in Kennedy's interest to let my Grandfather's mail through!

Gramma from Hiawatha

I never met my grandmother, Elizabeth Anderson Whetung. She was born at Hiawatha First Nation on Rice Lake in 1853 and she died in 1919, 2 years before I was born. She probably died from that Spanish Flu too. She was 66. I went down to Hiawatha (this was a few years ago) to find out more about her, from an old woman I knew named Lucy (Potash) Muskrat. She was 103 and said "You know Murray, I can't tell ya' anything about what happened back then. I'm goin' to bingo this afternoon and that's all I can remember!" I'm sorry I don't have any photos or tales about Elizabeth and I wish I knew more about the Andersons.

Four Josephs

Well, there were two Joseph's in my direct line. Grampa Dan's father was Joseph b. 1817 and his father was Joseph b. 1767. Dan also had a brother Joseph. The earliest Joseph's wife was from Sioux Lookout, but later I think our family was from Wolfe and Grape Island near Kingston, before we came to Curve Lake in the 1820s.

Nine Generations

Another Joseph Whetung (his father and my father were first cousins) did the family tree. He lives in Peterborough and is still working on it. I have a copy. He traced back 9 generations to 1767 and births up to 1980. Today we have relatives at Alderville, Six Nations (Oshweken), Hiawatha, Tyendinaga, and as far away as Vancouver, Calgary and Colorado Springs. The family names are too numerous to mention.

The Family Farm

My father had a small farm with a team of horses, cows, pigs and chickens. About half of it (4 acres) was a huge vegetable garden. This was all where Whetung Ojibwe Crafts & Art Gallery stands now. *(Editor's Note: Visit www.whetung.com).* I remember my mother telling me that when they were first married, she never knew what Dad would bring home, a horse and buggy, or a pair of cows to milk.

Muncie Residential School

Dad was born in 1878 and his father was a teacher, but he went to Muncie Residential School around 1883 to 1888 till Grade 3. That's the other side of London. Brantford was closer, but it was for folks from another reserve. The farther the government could send you away in those days, the better to break your native heritage. Dad never talked about it, so I don't know how bad things were for him there. But it must have been hard for him and his family to be separated. He was just a little boy. This is how we came to lose our old ways and language.

The Indian Agent

Kennedy was also the reserve Teacher, Minister, Judge and even had his pupils working on his farm! He arrived with the clothes on his back and left many years later with 200 cattle. I guess he helped himself to the band funds. He also ran a general store at Mission House, on the south side of the reserve. When Dad finished Grade 3, he came back to the reserve. He was only 9, but he helped the Indian agent in the classroom. The agent left the reserve a while after that, long before my time.

“His” Story

Of course, the times were such that I learned no Indian history in school. What I know, I've read in books myself. Sometimes I find one that fascinates me like *“People of the Whistling Waters,”* about the Crow Indians. But our history is mostly written by white folks ~ that's why it's called “his” story. When I was growing up, my parents had already lost the old ways. But I'm glad that one of my sons, Wesley, is with the Midewin Lodge (the old Ojibwe religion) in Shawanaga, north of Parry Sound.

The Great Ojibwe Nation

Near as I can understand, back in the 1600s, the English and French were at war. The Iroquois took control of the St. Lawrence River, near Montreal

where our people, the Ojibwe traded for supplies. They killed us and sold our furs to their allies, the English! We are known as the Great Ojibwe Nation, because there were so many tribes spread out over such a huge territory. The Iroquois had already killed most of the Hurons in southern Ontario. A few Hurons escaped to Manotick (man-aw-tik) near Ottawa. The others went west to Lake Huron and Superior.

How We Came to Curve Lake

Well, after 20 years of fighting, the Ojibwe finally fought the Mohawks off. We lived along the shores of Lake Ontario and Erie, but the Methodist Missionaries moved us north to Alderville, Hiawatha and the rest of us to Bridgenorth, just south of here on Chemong Lake. It was a portage that shortened the 3 day trip round Deer and Stoney Lake and by Katchewanook to 1/2 day by canoe!

Noisy Black Ducks!

Our camp there was too busy with settlers coming in, so a small band of Anishnaabeg moved to a more private spot at Curve Lake, which was then known as Mud Lake. The area was known as the Kawarthas, which means “Bright waters and happy lands.” The reserve is 400 hectares. Our family goes back on this reserve as far as when it was started in 1829. That's 176 years! Our last name was shortened from Agjewhetung? Can't spell it! Whetung means those “noisy black ducks” in the rice beds of the lake.

People I'd Like to Know

There's so many famous Indians from the old times I'd like to have met, like that Shawnee/Creek Indian Chief Tecumseh! His name means ‘panther springing across the sky.’ He tried to stop selling Indian lands to the United States, commanded a federation of tribes and during the War of 1812, he helped the British Sir Isaac Brock save Canada from the American invasion. For this Brock promised him some Indian territory in Ohio. But Brock was killed and Tecumseh never got his land.

A Welsh Mom

My mother was Muriel Jones. She was from Buckhorn, but her family originally came from Wales. She had dark hair and brown eyes. She was a good mother, looked after the house and kids, volunteered in the church and worked in Dad's store. Dad was 14 years older than she. He was 36 and she was 22 when they married. Mom survived Dad a long time, 35 years. She was 91, just short of her birthday, when she died in 1983. They are both at Curve Lake Cemetery. It's called "Yeshmoonwin" which is Ojibwe for 'resting place.'

Learning to Swear

When I was only about 4, I was watching my father repair the road one day and heard his buddies swearing and I thought it would be fun to go home and repeat all the curses I just learned, to my mother. But, she never let on that she heard me! (*Laughs*) That's the kind of woman she was!

Sister Marj

I had two older brothers and one adopted sister, Marjorie. I was the youngest and she was the oldest and we all got along pretty good. She was my father's sister Daisy's child. When Daisy died, my parents took Marj. Her siblings stayed with their father Robert Doogan, who was living with his parents. I guess there wasn't enough room for them all. She was the oldest child in her family too. Marj married Bert McCue. They both passed away now. She died just a few years ago.

Floyd the Miner

My oldest brother Floyd was a miner up north in Kirkland Lake. I spent one summer as his guest in Sudbury. We got along well together. There was only 6 years age difference between us. He died very young from stomach cancer. They didn't have the treatment you get today. I had it last year too. I guess it runs in the family. He was only 27. It was 1943, just before I

went overseas to war. Of course, he died before going into service. His wife was Dorothy Taylor. They had one son, Jack, who still lives here on the reserve. He owns a lot of property and has a marina.

3 Buckets of Nickels

Cliff's a 'snowbird.' He spends his winters in Las Vegas in his motor home. He's not much of a gambler, but his wife won 15,000 nickels once. That's \$750.00 in 3 buckets! Cliff and I were pretty close. When my father was old, he asked me what to do with his land. I told him "Cliff is the businessman, give him the store. I'd be better off with the woodlot." So that's what he did. Now I've divided my lot into 13 two-acre lots for my kids.

Cliff the Businessman

My brother Clifford ran my father's grocery store after Dad retired, until the early 1960s. Then he started the famous Whetung Ojibwe Crafts & Art Gallery there in 1966. His wife was Eleanor Irwin and their children are Michael, plus Valerie, Vicki, Cindy and Timothy. Michael runs the gallery now. It's one of the finest native art stores in North America.

Charlie, Ruby & Pearl

Mom's sisters and brothers were Charlie, Ruby and Pearl. Charlie had poor lungs. He was with the 93rd Battalion of Peterborough and was gassed during WW1. One day in London, he asked why everyone was running in the streets. "The King is coming!" But he went instead for a drink and was put in jail a few days! Pearl's husband Mr. McKenty had a summer resort at Scotchman's point on Buck Lake. They didn't have any kids, so when he was dying, I went to look after the cabins. Ruby's husband was Mr. Hunt. They had 3 kids (Gordon, Ruby and Faye) and a nice farm at Lakehurst.

Grampa Jones the Carpenter

Mother's father was John J. Jones, a small man from Wales. I was there during the war and was amazed by how long those Gaelic names are, names as long as the train station! He came to Montreal as a little boy (1860s?) and grew into quite a carpenter ~ made some very nice furniture. I used to have some of it, but I gave the last piece, a dresser to my grandson ~ Dean Seymour (my daughter Joanne's son).

Granny Jones' Chicken

On Sundays, there was nothin' else to do, but go to church. Mother used to play organ and piano there. Once in a while we might go over to Buckhorn on Sundays to visit her parents. When I got home from overseas during the war, I heard someone talking about a woman who died. I asked who? They said "Oh, that was your Grandmother, didn't you know?" I never knew her by name, just knew her as Granny. A nice little woman ... I really liked her cooking. She used to feed me "fricassee" chicken.

St. Vitus's Dance

When I was about 4 years old (before school), I had what they used to call St. Vitus's Dance (Chorea) for one winter. I couldn't control my hands very good, sort of nervous stiff twitching. It's an inherited neurological disorder. I'd lose my balance and fall. My brothers used to tease me for knocking things off the table and having to clean up. The doctor gave me some exercises and ice packs for my back and Mom rubbed me with vinegar. She even had me knitting too, socks and mitts to get my coordination back, I suppose.

Don't Bother Them Witches

My Dad's family was pretty well Christianized by the Methodist Missionaries, so I didn't learn much about Ojibwe life, except fishing and hunting. My father knew a lot of native lore, but he didn't talk much about it, because it was taboo in those days.

There were some people on the reserve who still knew the old ways, healing herbs and so on, when I was a boy but the Missionaries called them witches! So folks avoided them and that was sad for them. Even my father always told me, never to make them angry, because they might ... you never knew what! Imagine, we believed those awful things about our own people back then. *(Sighs)*

Salt and Pepper

I had a buddy when I was a kid. Dalton Jacobs was his name. We were friends till the last. He died last winter. They used to call us Salt and Pepper because we were always together. He was "Salt" and I was "Pepper" and we were always trying to see who could jump the farthest or the highest, like young boys do. At school, my favorite subject was ~ girls! My daughter Mary says I have to beat them off with a stick, even now! I was a whiz at math, like my father, but generally, I wasn't a good student. I had to work at it.

Summer Vacations

Come summer, I was never home, always outdoors. It was my favorite time of year. I think now Mom might have worried where I was. I was always out around the lake, fishing with spears or hunting squirrels and chipmunks with sling shots. We boiled them in pots down by the lake and they tasted pretty good! When I was a kid, I loved that book "*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*" by Jules Vern.

Fishing was Easy

My father also ran a summer resort called Whetung Fishing Lodge, where the art gallery is now. Fish were still abundant, so we always had lots of Perch and Sunfish to eat. We'd catch a whole pail in a little while and five or six of us boys would eat the whole thing in one afternoon.

Ponies in Pennsylvania

Some Americans named the Shearers, came to the fishing lodge every year for July First. They were good friends with my father. I played with their sons and they took me back to their farm near Pittsburgh with them every year for a visit. They were well to do. Their Uncle Mr. Parks was the District Attorney in Allegany County and he would buy me clothes so I could dress like their sons. I learned how to ride a pony down there when I was about 10 years old. I still visit one of their sons, Tom, who has a cottage on Pigeon Lake here.

Trapping Muskrats

Around 1930 thereabouts, when I was only 9, there were maybe only 300 of us on the reserve, like a small village. Everybody knew everybody and there was no paid work, so people went hunting. Some went to Lindsay and Dunsford to trap muskrat with steel traps. That was the big thing.

Deer Hunting

By then, there weren't many deer left, but now they are thick again, thankfully. In those days, we had to go up to Catchacoma on Mississagua Lake to hunt them. I had a 44-40 rifle and shotguns and Dad had an Army muzzle-loader gun with a bayonet on it.

Boarding in Peterborough

Well, back then, there was no school here on the reserve after Grade 8, (now it's only to Grade 3) so for high school, I had to go to Peterborough Collegiate. They called Grade 9 and 10 on the reserve 'continuation work.' But I finished Gr. 11 at the high school. So, I boarded with my father's friends the Fosters in an old frame house in the city, till I was 16. It was a big change, leaving all my friends, but I was home on weekends.

Culture Shock

At high school, the white kids called me "Chief." It was a bit of culture shock and I felt like an outsider. I was the only native kid in the school at the time. Not many of my friends went on to high school, but we were lucky that Dad had the money to send us. My brothers went before me. Cliff was so smart, he was a bit of a 'nerd.' He skipped a couple of grades, so was way ahead of me.

The Apples

Still, I finished Gr. 11 in a commercial course in electricity and I did the lighting for all the shows that came into town, because they used the high school auditorium. At home, my friends all called me "College Boy," but I didn't mind. Seems I got teased in both camps. They also used to call us 'Apples' ~ meaning we were native, but had "white" insides because we had lost our native culture and knowledge.

Fired for Eating Strawberries

Well, after that, I went to work in a canning factory with Dalton, near St. Catherine's. We didn't get break time in those days. But one day, we went out back to eat some strawberries, in a room with empty cans. Everybody did it, but we were the only ones caught and we got fired. Somehow, we thought that was pretty funny.

My First & Last Love

Now, what do I "have" to tell you about my first love? She was also my last! (*Laughs*). Elva Taylor was one of the local girls. (I don't mean Elva Crow Taylor, who that local road is named after.) We called her "Cobe." That's Ojibwe for the 5th daughter of the 5th daughter, who ties the generations together. We started dating when I was about 16. I was just finished high school and back from Peterborough and she made up her mind pretty early about me.

The Long Trek

I was 21 when we married. It was Feb. 15, 1943 in the dead of winter. There was a snowstorm, so all the roads were closed and we had to walk a mile across Curve Lake in deep snow, to my brother's car but it was stuck there in the snow bank. A farmer had to tow it a mile from the lake to the main road with a team of horses, so we could drive it to the Minister's house in Bridgenorth!

Carnation Milk for the Babies

By then, I was in the Army and home for a long weekend, only 96 hours. It was a small wedding. My brother Cliff and my wife's friend Elsie May Taylor came along, just the four of us. Then we went to Peterborough for lunch and got some Carnation Milk to stock my father's store for the village babies. Afterwards, we had the reception and a big dance up at the Curve Lake Community Hall. It's not there any more, just the church. Everybody left with a piece of wedding cake Cobe's Mother made.

Signalman Whetung

When the war came along, I was building electric motors at General Electric in Peterborough. By winter, all the young men on the reserve had gone into service and there was nobody left my age. I tried to get into the Air Force, but they weren't taking more recruits. By the next August, the Army took me. In November, I was training as a Signalman at Vimy, near Kingston, Ontario. Comes a telegram for me to report to the air force in Toronto! I went to my audience with the Colonel who said "Signalman Whetung, you are not available for the Air Force. *You're in the army now!*"

Cruel Bagpipes

Then I was sent to a holding station in England at Cove Camp, near an experimental airport at Farnborough. When we got to France, the first thing I remember seeing was a German prisoner in a barbed wire pen. One of our soldiers was walking round the

outside playing the bagpipes "at" him. That German stayed as far away as he could. I thought that was really mean. (*Laughs*)

Cable to Brussels

We didn't have to fight since we were a work crew, laying underground communications cable from the beach where we landed, all the way to Brussels, many miles away and that took a long time. I never did fight myself. In Belgium, Holland and Germany we just fixed the existing cables.

That Itchy Soap!

My daughter Mary's favorite story about me in the War was about me taking a shower in the rain in France. We had gone weeks without a bath and it started raining, so we pulled out some soap for a shower, but the rain stopped before we finished! God, that soap was really itchy afterwards.

To Smithereens!

Well, one day I was going up a telephone pole, but the officer said, "No, we don't have time. Better go back to the exchange and we'll check the line there." Back at the exchange, the lines went dead. So we returned to the field, to see what happened ... That telephone pole was just a pile of slivers and the one next to it same thing, hit by German shells from the other side of the ridge. I have a lot of other war stories to tell, but too many for now...

Home from War

I went into service in August, 1942 and I was out in November, 1945. That's 3 years and 3 months. The day I got home, I ran into all my friends at the corner of Buckhorn and Curve Lake Road. They were all on their way deer hunting. I said "Save me a boat at the shore and I'll meet up with you after I drop off my pack at the house." There were six out hunting for a week. I shot 3 deer the first day and we gave the meat away freely, to the poor and the elderly.

Wannabee Chief

Well, Cobe and I had 13 children over a 21 year period, starting in 1945 and ending in 1966. So there were always babies and little kids in the house. We had a joke that with enough children I could be Chief, but that never happened! I did actually run for Chief of the reserve once, but lost by two votes! Actually, I was glad I lost. It's too much work and not much thanks. *(Laughs)*

All My Children

Anyways, there's Joanne, Dixie, Dan, Althea, Elmer ~ then I get mixed up about their order ~ James, Lorenzo, Wesley, Lovinia, Mark ~ then I'm not sure ~ Oh! Mary, then Arnold, and Christopher. Is that 13? Did we get Wesley in there? Who's missing? *(Laughs)*. Nope, we got them all!

Chief After All

So where are they all now? Dixie and Mary are here on the reserve. They come and go looking in on me. Joanne is in Kemptville; Dan is in Toronto and wants to go back to B.C.; Wesley is in Shawanaga; Mark is in Kingsville (near Leamington); Chris is in Nephton and Althea's daughter is a lawyer in Calgary. The rest are here on the reserve. I also have 27 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren! So I guess I am Chief after all! *(Laughs)*

Cobe was Special

Everything about Cobe was special. She was good tempered with me, but could be very cross if she wanted. She liked to look after older people and was a very caring person. She also liked to play darts and won the Southern Ontario Legion Championship. Nobody could ever beat her. She was also my personal secretary, organizing everything for me.

Cobe's Side of the Family

Cobe's father was Horace Taylor. He was in both World Wars, but didn't go overseas the second time. Her parents never married. Then her mother married Mr. Cummings, a Dutchman and they had 9 more children ~ Mary, Joyce, Austin, Noble, Shinnian, Marian, Ida, Tootsie and Debra. I have this Book of Remembrances that tells Cobe's side of the family. She was Mormon and they got a lot of information from Salt Lake City. Her family includes the Taylors, Yellowheads, Goose, Hannigans and Qwiinawiish families and so many others.

I Only Play Radio!

Stories, about the kids? There are so many ... Oh, here's one. When Wesley was in high school, the kids worked summers on the reserve and he saved his money for a 10 speed bike. But come fall, he wanted a fiddle instead. I told him to check prices at the music stores in Peterborough. He needed \$50 more, which I gave him and he taught himself to play. Then someone gave him a guitar, and a banjo and now he has several violins. I only play the radio! *(Laughs)*

Lou-Ada Manor

Well, somehow even with so many kids, we got always got along. Luckily, I always made ends meet, cutting cord wood or logs. Then I worked for Lou Cadesky, a millionaire who had 7 farms. He imported bulls from Scotland and raised purebred, shorthorn cattle. In winter, I drove his cattle transport truck to Guelph. I also liked riding his Quarter Horse. He had a big cottage on Pigeon Lake, so over four summers, I ran the speedboats for his visiting friends. It was my favorite job.

Life in New Jersey

About 1952, Cobe's Aunt Audrey in New Jersey had another baby coming. Audrey wanted us to go look after her twins, while she was in hospital a week, so Cobe's sister Joyce Coppaway looked after our kids. Our son James was a baby at the time. It was a good holiday for us and then we came home.

Moving to New York?

But then I got a job down there working for winter on the gas pipeline near New York City for good pay. In summer I worked with Audrey's husband, Jim Pendergast as a mechanic for a trucking company. So, I was gone for a year, thinking I might move the family down there, but in the end, I didn't think we would like living in the city.

Stay Out of Politics!

After returning from the States, I worked with Redpath Construction in Lakefield for about 8 years excavating basements, clearing farmland, what have you. That was 'till about 1961. But I was also on Band Council intermittently between 1949 and 1980. It was a 30 year period, but not continuous, maybe only for a total of 10 years. I got so frustrated, I had to quit. So my advice is "Stay out of politics!"

A \$60,000 Pretense

Towards the end of my term on band council, the DIA (Department of Indian Affairs) gave us a lump sum of money for education, and the Indian agent demanded \$60,000 of it on some pretense. Luckily, the federal Minister of Indian Affairs, who had an office near us in Peterborough found out and stopped this.

Transition to Autonomy

We took over our own administration here on the reserve in 1967. At least, we were getting contracts from the government, ~ roadwork, handling the school

money and so on. This was the transition to more autonomy. Whatever it cost them at Indian Affairs, we could do it for less. Some were good jobs in administration, social work and bookkeeping etc.

Dead Pheasants

I remember too about this time, Hiawatha Reserve was having a pheasant hunt as a fundraiser. They had raised all these birds for the event. But the day before the event, someone shot about 75 of them and the Chief was fit to be tied, because he couldn't charge anyone for 'hunting out of season' since they were domesticated birds! That was the end of that fundraising event.

Resigning the Legion

Well, there was some protest here at Curve Lake against the federal government back then, so we went to Ottawa by bus. I still belonged to the Legion, ever since the War was over, but when you join ~ you swear to uphold your government and I figured since I was protesting, I should resign and I never went back to the Legion, although they kept sending me things in the mail.

A Crooked Outfit

I'd like to change the government. We've got to get rid of the party system and start over without them. The government is a crooked outfit ya' know. I learned a long time ago, not to trust them. I've seen a lot of corruption in my time ~ in band council, government and the church! I saw that program on TV recently about Oka and it made me so mad, I couldn't sleep all night ...

A Mechanic at Coyle's

You know, I was a mechanic at Frank Coyle's Trucking in Lakefield for about 8 years. I fixed old cars on the reserve a long time and took some courses in that at night school in Peterborough. We repaired a

lot of heavy equipment, gravel crushers, swing shovels, bull dozers, big trucks. When I hit 48, I realized I couldn't do this heavy work much longer. So I left around 1964. Then I found work as a machinist at Outboard Marine in Peterborough. They taught me how on the job. The kids swarmed me every night for the newspaper comics when I got home. Well, the company was "downsizing" by 1980, so I took 'early retirement' when I was about 60. It was the same year I retired from Band Council.

The All Native Circle

Then I got more involved in the church, filling in for the preacher. After some of our women came home from Presbytery meetings crying about the prejudice they faced, I went instead ~ had a tougher skin I guess. In 1986, we started the All Native Circle Conference to help native people get into positions of power in the United Church. Even some of our own people resisted this out of fear. I was one of the founding members. The group was nationwide with headquarters in Winnipeg to this day. When I was a kid, I always wanted to travel around the reserves, helping people and when I was elected as an Elder to the ANCC, now was my chance!

A Tie Vote

I tied the vote three times with Gladys Taylor who also lives here at Curve Lake. It seemed like God wanted us both! There's lots of places a man is not welcome and vice-versa. So, Gladys was elected with me! We worked together 2 years and traveled across Canada ~ spent most of the winter in Alberta. They were having financial troubles with Ministers there. We had a hard time getting Gladys a license to do communion service, because the Church didn't want women doing this, especially not native women – few of whom were ordained.

Gladys Taylor

I always looked up to Gladys when I was little. She was about 7 years older and crazy, like young girls are. She married my wife's Uncle ~ Dick Taylor, the only Uncle on Cobe's mother's side. Gladys influenced me greatly. She was just such a good woman. But she got throat cancer and passed away about 1994. I do miss her. She was always helpful, a leader, a teacher. I was in the Army the same time as her husband, Dick Taylor, but he was in the artillery far away from where I was

The Business Side of Church

I wasn't good at lay counseling but I was better at the business side of Church. ANCC did mission work across Canada. I thought we were going to be stoned out there in Alberta, where the Minister was cheating on expenses. In B.C. the native folks sat way at the back of the church complaining they didn't like the way things were run. So, we taught them church management skills and a year later, one of them was Chair of the B.C. Conference!

Australian Bushmen

One of the high points of my life was in 1990, when the World Council of Churches was meeting in Australia. We didn't qualify as ANCC reps, but they took us as guest observers. We were at the conference a week and then got to fly round the country with the Ministers. Meeting the Aboriginal Bushmen was amazing. They didn't get "used" very well, just like here. It's a sad thing. They were really good people. One old guy said to me "I own 60,000 acres of land here. There's an English man living there on a ranch and thinks he owns that land!" Sound familiar?

Corn Soup Seeds

I also went with a class of Ministers to Guatemala in 1993 for two weeks in winter. (It was just after we built our new house on the sugar bush my Dad left me with 200 maples trees.) I thought Central America was

hot, but in the mountains, the water froze in the pots overnight and I only had a sweatshirt. I took some of our corn soup seeds for the natives in those high villages. They were very poor, but resourceful and really glad to see we took an interest in them.

Francis Sandy Centre

Then I trained at the Francis Sandy Centre, a theological retreat at Five Oaks, near Paris in western Ontario. He was a Chippewa native from Christian Island, a lay pastor who wanted to train natives to be Ministers. Sandy died in the early 1990s. I trained there after he passed away. I was there about 3 years from 1995 to 1998.

The Other Book About Me

They gave me a native beaded necklace for being one of the founding members. A woman named Carlson from the prairies wrote a book about native people in the church. There's one chapter in there about me, but I lent it out or lost it. I wasn't happy with it because there were a lot of errors in it.

Bats in the Belfry!

Well, I was involved in the old Curve Lake United Church restoration too. It was built in 1906 and by 1990 had to be demolished. The Band Council didn't want the debt of rebuilding it and didn't want to involve religion in council matters. So the backhoe just leaned up against the eaves and the whole thing went down so fast "in a cloud of dust." There were a lot of bats too! By 1992, it was rebuilt with a loan from the United Church and finally the reserve accepted it as a donation, on the condition that it be run as a community church, for all denominations. Now the Temple of Praise, United Church, and Pentecostals use it and a daycare centre rents the basement

Carrots for the Village

Yes, I believe in the afterlife. I even had an odd dream once. My friend Vern Page of Peterborough was in the Mormon Church, where my wife used to go. He gave me 3 truck loads of carrots from his garden and that fed the whole village all one winter! Well, he was having heart attacks once a week. I dreamed he had another and died and that Cobe and I were at the funeral home and I went for a walk in the yard by the river and came to a bridge.

It's Not Your Time

... I wanted to see Vern, but a big voice said, "Stop! Don't go any further!" So, I sat there a long while. I suppose minutes are longer in heaven! *(Laughs)* Then the voice said, "Don't cross that bridge. It's not your time." I saw a woman nearby and asked her if she heard that voice. She said "No, but you better do what it said," and she walked off. Vern hasn't had a heart attack since! He's still alive. But I myself pret' near went across that bridge!

The Oxygen Tanks

Well, then Cobe started having heart attacks too. A European doctor took one look at her and said she's got "Crest," a problem with the lungs. She said "I use that for toothpaste!" *(Laughs)* There's no cure for it, a hereditary disease passed from mothers to daughters. Cobe's mother was on oxygen before she died too, but they didn't know what it was in those days. Cobe got along quite a while on those oxygen tanks with wheels.

Just Gone

But one day in 1997, I was out getting my hair cut and when I came home, Dixie was here with her. She said "Dad you better go in and see Mom. She's not doing well this morning." About 20 minutes later, Cobe could hardly speak, and then not at all... and then she was gone! It was a pretty sad day when I lost her. I was a widower at 76. That was 8 years ago.

A Big Adjustment

It was a big adjustment for me, still is. The church and my kids mostly keep me going. They drop in a lot, come and go and then there's my cat Calvin (Hobbs). But the long evenings are lonely. All I need now is the CBC radio, a cup of tea and someone to keep me company, all the better. I used to like watching Archie Bunker on TV. And I'm a pretty good cook. I used to cook on weekends for the family. Did you like that beef stew I made for lunch? I'm very good at eating. *(Laughs)*

An Alderville Minister

The year after Elva passed away, I finished training to be a Lay Pastor and became Minister at Alderville First Nation. They had a canoe-paddling event there this year called "Pulling Together," to bridge cultures. Even the police joined in. Next year it's in Nova Scotia. Once I got to Alderville, everything fell into place. I really enjoyed visiting with people to help them. I didn't want to leave that. But after my operation last year for stomach cancer, I knew I couldn't do it anymore.

An Elder in Residence

I was also Elder in Residence for a week at Queen's University Theological School, where I taught future ministers the native ways... You asked me what an Elder is? Helping people through their troubles, whatever it takes.

(Editor's Note: Anishinabek News says an Elder is someone chosen and respected by their community, as a moral role model, a humble and wise advisor, a nonpartisan counselor, who has knowledge of local history and native culture, and does good works and service to others.)

Meetings, Meetings, Meetings

Now, a typical day is clipping my whiskers and a lot of folks dropping in and I keep busy with meetings. I'm on the board of the Residential School Survivors

in Winnipeg, lobbying the federal government to hurry up and settle all those abuse cases. I'm also on the Management Board of Queen's University, Theological Centre. We managed to get lay pastoral counseling accredited.

Why Speak English?

Well, my mother didn't speak Ojibwe when I was growing up so we always spoke English at home. But I wasn't good at English grammar in school. I learned Ojibwe from the kids on the reserve. Dad explained some Ojibwe words if I asked him and I spoke Ojibwe pretty good. I could talk in English, but I thought why?

Dixie Didn't !

Cobe and I always spoke Ojibwe in the house. One day, we had a call from the teacher about Dixie saying "What's your idea of sending me a child who can't speak English? How will I teach her anything?" We didn't know her sister was translating into English for her. I told her not worry, just leave her alone with the others kids and she would learn pretty fast, and she did. Today, they are more accepting of multiculturalism and heritage languages in the schools than they were back then.

Reviving Ojibwe

Cobe spoke Ojibwa well. She trained as a teacher in college at Thunder Bay and tutored, an hour at a time on the reserve for a while. I can still carry on a conversation in Ojibwa. Some folks can understand me, but most can't answer me in our language. So I'm with a local group who are writing stories for children to teach them Ojibwa ~ with no English translations! But I have a little trouble spelling in Ojibwe. I have an Ojibwe bible that was done in Manotick, a few years ago!

Jeremy's Gone

Well, my grandson Jeremy Whetung (Arnold's son) was killed in a car accident a few weeks ago. He was only 14 ... He used to clear my walkway of snow and mop floors at my son Elmer's general store after school around the corner from me. Anyways, Jeremy had dinner here and was driving home. Everyone has tragedy in life. I'm reading a book about grief ... I can't talk about this anymore right now. (*Drifts away*)

A Champion Wrestler

... My daughter Mary's son Clay just won the All State Wrestling Championships in Georgia. The band office neon sign at the 4 corners here is still flashing the news about it! He lives with his brother Cole and father Russell Gray in Georgia. Mary's separated now and living back here on the reserve.

Those Moose Hide Mitts

I know so many great native leaders today. There's Stan McKay, a Swampy Cree who was Moderator of the United Church ~ See these moose hide mitts? (*Editor's note: with fringe, beadwork rose, rabbit fur trim and wool interior.*) Stan gave those to me a few weeks ago when I was in Manitoba, visiting the Brandon Residential School in Gladstone, which is going to be a museum. I was on his Advisory Committee. And there's Alf Dumont. He's an Ojibwe United Church Minister and his brother Jim Dumont, who helped establish the Midewin Lodge at Shawanaga where my son Wesley does nutrition and diabetes prevention with the kids on the reserve.

The Old Ways

I'm a native Elder now, but I'm not much on advising folks, about that 'wisdom' stuff, unless they ask me a question. You know, the main thing is to enjoy your self. As for my grand kids, it's up to them if they want to go back to the old native ways. I've been to the Pow Wow here, at Alderville and out on the prairies too.

Used Ta Be

So ... there've been a lot of changes on the reserve, since I was a boy ~ the population has more than doubled and there's a lot more paid work You could cut wood, or trap before, but there's not that much land here – maybe 30,000 acres (the size of 300 – 100 acre farms). We are better educated now too. It didn't use to be that anybody went to high school. It was a big deal when I was young. I'd like to see them bring high school back to the reserve today.

Folks Keep Leaving

Did you know that famous Canadian Author, Drew Haydon Taylor grew up here? He was failing because the teachers couldn't read his handwriting, so his Mother saved up to buy him a typewriter and now he's famous! Once they're educated, a lot of folks like Taylor leave the reserve to get work. Cliff's son, my nephew Timothy Whetung is a Judge now in Port Hope!

Times Change

I was at an Elder's Summit last fall. They said it took 500 years to nearly destroy our native culture. Luckily, I am alive when it is blossoming again. We're supposed to get self-government here soon. But have things changed? Fifteen million dollars from government, yet I'm still suspicious of bribery ...

The Family Reunion

Looking back, I've done a lot and it's good that things turned out this way. At least, I still have a purpose and know where I'm going, but I wonder if I'll outlive my cat. (*Laughs*) He's 9 years old. At 83, I still feel good and I'm still driving. We're planning a Whetung family reunion this summer. My brother Cliff will probably be the oldest one present, then me. I'm looking forward to seeing a lot of folks there and I'm going to set aside a box of mementos for my family ...

Translation of Ojibwe Quote:

“I’ve had a good life. We had fun when we were young. Then I was given Cobe, a very special woman. We had many children together, but I was lost when she left me. Now, I feel good again, since the Saviour felt sorry for me last winter, when I was sick. I hope my children, their children and their children have as good a life as mine.”

(Murray Whetung)

Edited & Transcribed by Karen Richardson
www.memoriestomemoirs.net
613-338-2484 or krich@hughes.net

MURRAY WHETUNG

OJIBWE ELDER

Curve Lake First Nation

