

Echoes



Elders' Writings
Fort Resolution, NT
March, 2003

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Acknowledgements

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Foreword

Before the invention of the printing press and the introduction of books, there were storytellers. These individuals were living books, who stored stories, histories, knowledge and songs in their memories. Storytellers were the libraries of many societies, and cultures were preserved in their minds.

In the 21st century, each individual is still a living book, with many experiences, ideas and skills to share. The elders in our communities, who have stored more years of experience in their memories, are living books with more chapters than the young. Elders also have stories that reach back farther in time and recreate a time in history that younger people have not experienced.

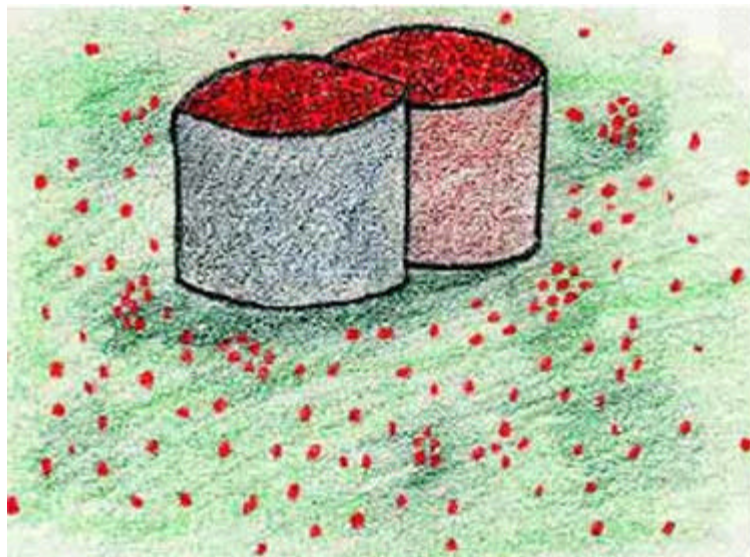
It is our wish this booklet will pay honour to our most valuable living books and encourage more people to write their stories for others to enjoy. We also hope that these stories will encourage more sharing, listening and reading of stories from living books.

Seasons

Back in 1930 before the snye closed, there was good fishing in the Fort Resolution bay. Usually in the first part of May, the Slave River water comes through there, and along with it comes the fish. Everyone from Fort Resolution used to go to Mission Island to make dry fish. The dry fish the people made there lasted all winter until the next spring.

The muskrat season usually began in the month of April and ended in May. The Delta was a good place for muskrats. Muskrat meat too was dried and you could keep it for months. When you needed to eat it, you could just soak it in water and then boil it with bacon and add potatoes. Boy, it tastes good like that!

Summer and early fall, people used to go to the delta to pick berries. Boy, there were lots of black currants and raspberries. We used to make jam with them so they didn't spoil. You boil the berries with sugar, and then you put them in a jar. Then fill it to the top with more sugar. You close the jar and make sure that it is closed tight. Then you leave the jam upside down, and that's how you keep it till you use it.



Late fall, cranberries were picked. All around Fort Resolution were lots of cranberries. The cranberries were kept in the cellar as long as it didn't

get wet. We kept them like that all year around until we picked more again. The berries were big back then, not any more.

During the fall, we also went fishing for our dogs because they were very important to us then. The dogs were used for all transportation throughout the year. Dogs are smart animals; once they know the trap line, they bring you right up to it and go again. They know when to stop. Even after the snow melts next year, they know exactly where to go. Dogs also carried goods, using backpacks. The dogs were also used when we portaged. If you didn't have dogs, you would have to do all the work on foot.

Winter time, everyone used to go trapping. We usually started in November and trapped for furs, such as mink, fox and wolf — you name it. Most of the furry animals that we find around this area. The animals were so much healthier. I guess that's why we got good prices for our furs. Or maybe because it didn't cost as much to buy things, it just seemed like we had more money.



Caribou used to come right into the town along the lakeshore. We used to use all the parts of the caribou; not much went to waste. We made dry meat with smoke and stored it that way. But ever since the sawmills came and the forest has been cut down, the caribou stopped coming. There used to be about six sawmills along the Slave River.

This is how we lived off of the land. There was no welfare until about the 1960s, and now hunting and trapping are hard because the land is being destroyed by pollution. Back then, we didn't need to treat the water; all we did was boil it and use it.

The birds are also dying off. We used to see all kinds of birds. They would sing throughout the day and night in the summer time, but now you don't hear them anymore. Nowadays you have to check the liver, kidneys, heart and guts of animals that you hunt for because they are being diseased by pollution.

The pollution comes from the outsiders. They brought all this new technology: mechanical motors, boats, planes and all sorts of vehicles going to and from the mines and wherever they decide to explore. They ruined our hunting and trapping grounds.

Take Pine Point mine, for instance. A lot of families from Fort Resolution used to trap and hunt there. Now there is nothing there, just big holes in the ground. The outsiders ruined the land, took what they wanted and left us with no benefits. We can't hunt or trap there anymore; they scared all the animals away.

Gene Norn

Hunting Trip

My husband and I went on a spring hunt every year with our children for forty years. Sometimes we just stayed at Rocher River year around and returned to Fort Resolution at Christmas time or during the summer.

One time we were coming back to Fort Resolution after spring hunt. I was really scared because this was my first trip traveling on ice and water with dogs and canoe. We traveled with dogs on the ice and by boats on the water.

We were at our spring camp at Taltson River, and we decided to return to Fort Resolution. It was in the month of June. We loaded up our furs, meat, gear and the children; and away we went. We portaged to Rat River and stayed there for three days. Then we went on the Taltson River and headed to Rocher River because the river was flowing.



We had a house at Rocher river; so when we got there, we unloaded all our gear, dogs, and all our fur. The kids went out to play, and work had to be done before our trip back to Fort Resolution.

Then next day, we headed along the Taltson River to Taltson Bay. We spent about two days there, just waiting for the ice to move on Great Slave Lake. The ice becomes a problem during this time because it moves in and out a lot.

The ice was too close to the land, so Ray said, "Let's go to the big ice." When we got there, we unloaded two canoes out on that piece of ice. There was water all around us, of course; we were in the middle of Great Slave Lake.

We continued on by canoe to Jean River; then we went to Stoney Point where we camped over night. The boys woke up about four in the morning because the geese were so loud as they flew away. We didn't sleep in a tent because it was so nice out. We just slept out in the open. We cleaned all our geese, ducks and swans. I wanted to stay another night to continue plucking the birds; but my husband said no, so we continued on to Jean River. We could have made it around the point, but we heard too much shooting. There were a lot of people from Fort Resolution spring hunting out that way.

We put our dogs and all the other gear in the canoes and went to Jean River. We camped there overnight, and this time we pitched up our tent. My son Raymond shot a goose over the open water, and we saw someone in a boat pick it up. Then when he got close, it was his older brother Arthur. He said, "Who shot this goose?" Raymond said, "Me." He was so happy.

The next day, we traveled on the water and got to the portage. We unloaded all the gear and everything, then rested there a while at the dock. Then someone with a truck arrived, and we caught a ride back to town. We all had wind-burned faces, just brown.



The scary part of this trip was the pressure ridges. The dogs tried to jump across them, and they just dove in the water. The lead dog got out of the water, and they just continued and pulled themselves out of the water. Then they pulled the sleigh across, and they just keep going. Even though we went across the narrow part of the open water, the dogs still had to go into the water. This was my first time traveling like this during this time of year.

We usually traveled by boat and carried all the gear. We never thought of using a life jacket, but we traveled only when it was calm. Most of the people traveled this way to and from Fort Resolution.

We stayed in Fort Resolution until September, and then we had to go back to our trap line until December. When we got to Rat River, we did winter fishing for our dogs. We caught lots of white fish and hung them all up for their winter meals. Then we would hunt for our winter food. I would make dry meat, two racks full of dry meat, until it got too cold. Preparing for the winter months was hard. The guys would save about three moose hides, and I would roll them up for the spring when it was time to make moose hide.

This cycle of hunting and trapping was a way of life for us. We did a lot of hard work for forty years of our lives together, and we enjoyed every minute of it. Then we settled here in Fort Resolution, but we didn't go on our hunting and trapping trips as much as we used to .

Doris Beck

Working at the Convent

In 1953, I went to work at the Fort Resolution convent. I was in my early teens, and I didn't think much of going to school, so my mother sent me to work there. She said that if I wasn't going to go to school, I had to work.



I worked from seven in the morning to seven in the evening every day. The pay was fifty cents a day, and only at the end of each month, I got paid fifteen dollars. With that money, I got to buy myself an outfit which cost me seven dollars. The outfit included a pair of shoes, pants, top and a hat to match. Hats were in style then.

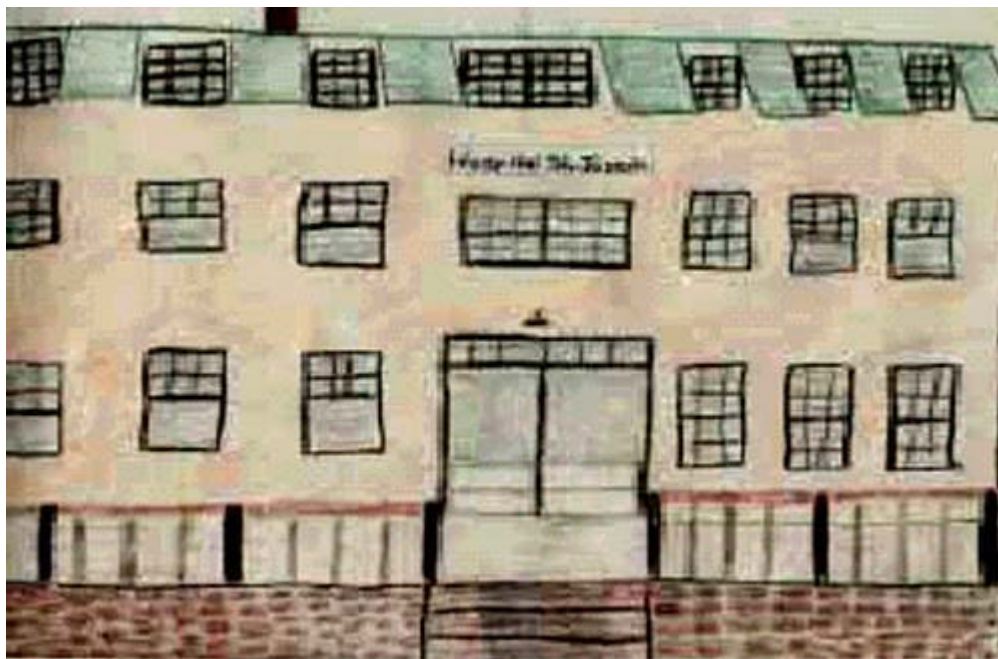
I worked there for about three years. After the first year, I got paid three hundred and fifty dollars. It was a lot of money for us back then. My co-worker and I thought that they had made a mistake in our pay and

promised not to tell anyone. We thought we had a big secret, but we soon found out that it was the new wage.

We got to eat all our meals there, so we didn't have to go home for our meals. We had good meals there, and every Friday we had fish. We didn't have to pay for our meals, so that was good.

I worked there until they shut down the hospital part of the convent. I don't remember when, but I was married at that time.

We worked very hard, doing just about everything. We served patients, cleaned bathrooms, dusted hallways, did laundry and packed it away. We had one break during the twelve hours we worked, so we took advantage of that. We would go to The Hudson's Bay Company and smoke on the way, or we would go and play on the swings.



When we got back to work, we would go to the kitchen to help do the baking. We would bake three hundred and fifty loaves of bread a day. We

would help peel potatoes and get all the vegetables ready for supper. If you were fast, you got to go down to the laundry room and help fold clothes and all the linen.

I also helped the nuns with the nursing part of it as well. I enjoyed taking temperatures and charting them. I enjoyed working at the convent so much that I was going to go with Sister Cardinal to Fort Smith to train as a nurse; but my mother said, "No". I couldn't go. You weren't your own boss at that time; you had to obey your parents.

My dad used to have to walk me to work because I was so scared of the roaming livestock. The cows and horses were all over the place, and it scared me. To think about it now, those animals were harmless.

We all had to work so hard for so little pay. I don't think anyone would do that today. Now everyone has a choice about what work they do and what pay they will get before they start work.

Mary McKay

My Journey to the North

I made my first trip to the north in 1993. I always wanted to see the northern lights since I can remember. We journeyed from Edmonton to the Northwest Territories. While we were traveling, we got lost and ended up in Maidstone, Saskatchewan. We drove to a service station to ask for directions to go north. To make it worse, while we were there, we ended up on a one-way lane; so we made a U-turn in the ditch and headed back to Edmonton.

On our way back to Edmonton, we got struck by lightning, and the emergency brakes caught on fire. The flames were inside the car. We jumped out of the car and poured water all over to put the fire out.



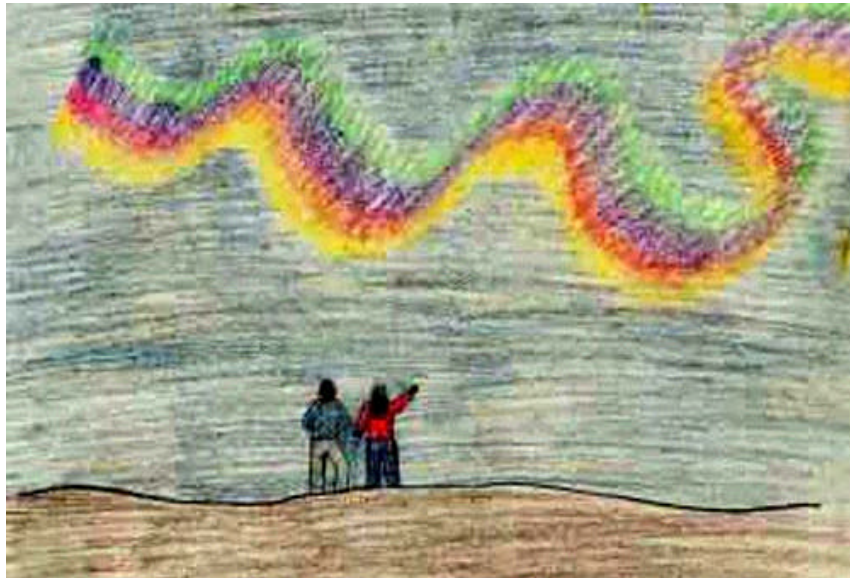
We had only one hundred dollars between the two of us. This money took us all the way to Little Buffalo River, where we ran out of gas. We slept in the car until a vehicle stopped and asked if we needed help, but he was going in the wrong direction. Just then, another vehicle came, and the driver let us use his mobile phone. Frank called his parents and told them we had run out of gas. His parents arrived, and Frank introduced me to them. We continued on our journey to Fort Resolution and stayed at my new in-laws' home. We immediately went to bed to rest.

The next day, we went to Dorothy and Angus Beaulieu's home, and Angus played the fiddle for me. I felt right at home, since my dad always played the fiddle at home.

Sometime after that, Frank's parents took us for a ride to Pine Point and to Hay River. I didn't have a jacket to wear, so I went to the Fields store and bought one.

On our way home, my father in-law shot a moose and missed. He blamed it on us because I had a red jacket, and we were also in a red car.

One day Frank and I decided to go for a ride on the mountain; he was taking us on a scenic tour. We were at the edge of the mountain, and our vehicle almost rolled over. Frank said, "Hurry up and come towards me." He was afraid we might tip over. This is where we sat, and I enjoyed the northern lights for the first time. It looked like they were dancing to a fiddle tune. It was the most beautiful sight that I have ever seen.



I love the summer time in Fort Resolution because that is the time we have cookouts. During these cookouts, I get to taste the wild meat, such as dried meat, fish, caribou, ducks and geese. The only type of wild meat that I don't particularly care much for is muskrat and beaver.

During my stay in Fort Resolution, I have gotten to know many elders and their traditional ways. The culture here is different, but easy to become part of. That is why I am still here today and love it.

Carol Vallette

