

Rita Vivier Cullen. (b. 1936)

Rita was born at Portage la Prairie, Manitoba in 1936, the daughter of Gordon Vivier and Beatrice Sanderson. The family lived in a road allowance house at High Bluff until her mother separated from Gordon and took the children with her to live in Portage la Prairie. There she supported the family by doing housework for such notables as Dr. Armstrong and Judge Forney. In 1954, Rita married Tom Cullen and they had five children.

Rita and her siblings at their road allowance house near High Bluff, Manitoba.



Rita's dad was born at Walhalla, North Dakota in 1897. Her paternal grandparents were Andrew Henry Vivier and Philomene (White).¹ Andrew or Amboise Vivier was the son of Alexandre Vivier (b. 1842) and Julie Wells, the daughter of Jean Baptiste Wells and Angelique Chalifoux. The family moved to High Bluff when the American authorities took all of their children and placed them in the Indian residential school. In response, her grandfather went to the school, kidnapped the children and moved to Canada. Rita's father and grandparents were all Michif speakers.

Her mother Beatrice was born in 1906 at Fairford, Manitoba. She was the daughter of Frank Francis Sanderson and Louisa Sanderson (two unrelated Sanderson families). The family lived at Reedy Creek where Frank was a farmer and limemaker. He was also a lay Baptist preacher (subsequently Pentecostal). Frank spoke the Michif, Cree, Sauteaux and Sioux languages and was in demand for his ability to preach in the Native languages.

¹ Scrip claim: Vivier, Philomene May; address: Winnipeg; born: 15 Aug., 1881 at Duck Lake; father: Charles White (Métis); mother: Josephite or Suzette Lecuyer; (Métis); married: 1896 at St. Eustache to Andrew Vivier; claim no. 1794



Rita Cullen: Photo courtesy of Shannon Allard.

Rita recently retired from a long career in administration with the Brandon School Division. She served on the Board of Directors of the Manitoba Metis Federation and represented South West Region on the board for ten years. From 1983 to 1998 she served on the board of the Brandon, Indian and Metis Friendship Centre; she was the president of the board for 13 of those years. As chairperson Rita organized cultural activities like youth drop-in programs and Metis music and dance groups. The Metis community recruited her for these positions because of her long service history as a community volunteer on things like the March of Dimes and the local community centre (where she ran the bingo fundraisers for many years). She was appointed chairperson for the board of the Metis Child and Family Service Authority in 2006.

On June 16, 2011 *Ka Ni Kanichihk* presented a Keeping the Fires Burning Award to Rita. This award honours *Okijida Ikwe* or “Big Hearted Women.” Big Hearted Women exemplify the seven sacred laws of honesty, courage, respect, humility, sharing, caring and love by sharing their knowledge, talents and experience to help keep their families and communities strong.



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