

Eagle Feather NEWS

FREE

Batoche an emotional celebration

Descendants of the Canadian, First Nations and Métis casualties of 1885 shared a hug of reconciliation at the Commemoration and Reconciliation Ceremony. (Photo by John Lagimodiere)



Casualties of 1885 battle honoured

By **Andréa Ledding**
For Eagle Feather News

Back-To-Batoche 2010, commemorating the 125th anniversary of the battle, was a truly once in a lifetime event – but many people plan to return.

“The weather co-operated, the upgrades to the site were significant, and people had a good time,” noted Bob McLeod, Western Region II Area Director for Métis-Nation Saskatchewan, adding the entertainment was just as good as Craven, but at 10 per cent the cost.

Upgrades to the site included additional washrooms/shower houses, free wireless, and more food concessions than ever – usually worked by volunteers from locals like Leask, Yorkton, and CUMFI.

Other than a few tense moments on the last day, when a bank of clouds came from the west and it looked like a tornado might just drop out of the clouds before the final procession to the cemetery, the weather couldn’t have been much better.

On the Sunday, the Veteran’s Memorial Gardens

were opened – and the veterans were honoured by everyone, including Shannon Loutitt’s youth honour runners – many of whom completed the trek from Saskatoon to Batoche in moccasins the day before.

The reconciliation ceremony in front of Batoche cemetery was well-attended and filled with beautiful moments – including Andrea Menard’s acapella rendition of “Peace In the Valley” and a group hug from descendants of the first casualties of 1885, Assiwiyin, Isidore Dumont, and McKay.

As the names of each of the fallen were read, descendants stood and everyone else paid their respects. The new gates to the cemetery, beautifully inscribed in French and Michif, were read aloud, and commemorative medals were passed out to everyone in attendance, before returning to the Back To Batoche festival site.

The permanent main stage building was added onto late in the week with a temporary outdoor stage for some of the bigger acts, including country star Michelle Wright, who drew a huge crowd Saturday night.

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Welcome to our
Justice Edition
Coming In September:
Education Issue
CPMA #40027204

11th annual Day of Mourning remembers victims of sex trade

By John Lagimodiere
Of Eagle Feather News

Ashayla is 18 years old and has already lost 20 friends or family members to overdose, murder or suicide.

It is for those 20 people, and the many others who have gone before, that Ashayla spends her time helping to plan the Day of Mourning, an event to honour the children, women, and men who have lost their lives through involvement in the exploitation that is the sex trade in Saskatoon.

"I do it cause I know how it is living in that kind of environment," said Ashayla, one of eight youth on the committee.

"I have lost friends because of drugs or because they were prostituting. My mom was like that. I like helping. It makes me feel good."

Just over a decade ago, a group of at-risk Saskatoon youth who were inspired by the tragic death of one victim – a 14-year-old girl exploited through the sex trade and murdered in Calgary – to honour and remember all such victims, those lost on and to our streets.

Every year since, youth gather at EGADZ to organize this Day of Mourning. Through the efforts of these committed young people, August 14 is officially recognized by the Government of Saskatchewan as the Day of Mourning to honour those who have lost their lives to murder, suicide, overdose, and disease related to the sex trade.

The youth organizers of this event are young people who have all been touched, directly or indirectly, by the people whose lives have been lost.

They do it to remember the victims, to support the families left behind, and to give strength back into the community. The event also helps to educate people about the root causes of the sex trade, while educating high-risk youth about the very real dangers involved.

"You can change if you really want to change and you have to keep your mind on track," added Ashayla who is also a mentor in the My Home program.

"Egadz offers a lot, and we offer this day to show how serious prostitution, drugs and violence really are."

The day is about togetherness and those lost. It is always a very emotional evening.

"I get a lot out of it. A day to remember them and all the good times you had with them that are gone," said Ashayla.

"It's like they are there with you but not really, but everyone else is around and they are going through the same thing as you. You're celebrating their life. People don't usually think of the friends we lost as people.

"They are not much different just because they had a drug problem or because they lived like that. They are not any different than us."

This year's Day of Mourning events begin on Saturday, August 14 at 6:30 p.m. in Pleasant Hill Park, at 21st Street and Avenue U South in Saskatoon.

There will be greetings, prayers, memorials, blessings by Elders, music, and a candlelight vigil and a march down 20th and 21st Streets, through the area where the sex trade is most prolific.



The Day of Mourning committee is made up of Ashayla, Jessica, Mike, Ally, Desiree, Michelle, Susanne and Lesley. Don, Trina and the rest of the crowd at Egadz help out as well. The event is made possible with support from Affinity Credit Union. (Photo by John Lagimodiere)

"Egadz offers a lot, and we offer this day to show how serious prostitution, drugs and violence really are."



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File Hills Police Service relates to community

By Michael Bell
For Eagle Feather News

It's a hot, windy day in Fort Qu'Appelle as the noon hour lunch rush starts inside the A&W restaurant. The cashier takes orders from customers, gives orders to the staff. Automated cooking machines beep, greasy Mozza burgers are stuffed into paper bags, another pick-up truck appears at the drive-through window.

The restaurant noise contrasts with the gentle voice of special constable Willard Thomson. He sits at a table, his hands folded together as he remembers a recent call to a traffic accident.

"It was the morning of the 26th, about five o'clock," Thomson says.

On that June morning, a young man from Carry the Kettle First Nation died when his vehicle rolled over on the Trans-Canada Highway near Summerberry. Since Thomson is a band member of Carry the Kettle and stationed there as a special constable with the File Hills First Nations Police Service he accompanied the RCMP and members of Victim Services to notify the family.

Before arriving at the family's home – Thomson knew them personally – he arranged for an Elder to visit and comfort the family. When the details of the crash became official, it was he who informed them of the death.

Supporting them as best he could, Thomson also made an offering of tobacco to the family. At some point during that day, the family wanted to visit the site of the crash. Thomson and an RCMP constable escorted the family as they drove to the site. When they arrived, he put safety cones on the highway and directed traffic to ensure the family's safety as they performed a smudge ceremony in the ditch. In the days following the accident, Thomson checked in with the family and went to the funeral.

Thomson's story is an example of how the File Hills First Nations are policing themselves in new and creative ways. For the first time, Saskatchewan's first and only self-administering First Nations police force can now hire special constables.

The special constables will help the File Hills First Nations Police Service become more culturally sensitive and community-based, Chief of Police Ralph Martin said in an interview at his office at Okanese.

Each special constable is a band member from the community in which they are stationed. Four are already on the job. Willard Thomson is stationed at Carry The Kettle, Victoria Ward is at Peepeekisis, Frances Delorme is at Star Blanket and Alicia Keewatin is at Okanese. A vacancy currently exists for a qualified individual from Little Black Bear First Nation.

The four special constables went through three weeks of training which included standard police training, such as self-defence, use of pepper spray and the baton, crowd control, traffic enforcement and appropriate police conduct. The special constables have suicide and crisis intervention training coming up in the fall.

The training also includes Weyesawana: the protocols and methods of applying the laws of the Creator. The trainees met with local Elders and other knowledge keepers who explained traditional teachings. Ongoing training will include teachings on sweat lodges, round dances, feasts, powwows and language.

An important part of the special constables' work will take place in schools and through community programs.

Martin tells the story of a young man in the community who has medical issues and has trouble making it to his health appointments in the city. When his medical issues go untreated, his behaviour becomes a public safety issue. So as a preventative measure, Martin will sometimes assign a special constable to drive the young man to his appointment so he gets treatment. It's a non-enforcement activity that contributes to public safety and the well-being of the community, and the special constable is in a position to perform that role.

The special constables work as regular police officers of the Police Service, but with a few key differences. The most obvious detail is that special constables are not permitted to carry firearms, but do have handcuffs, pepper spray and a baton.

Their uniforms are similar to sworn police officers, but the hat and pants have a light blue stripe instead of a red one. Also, they are not permitted to engage in situations in which they or others could be harmed, such as vehicle pursuits.

"They are members of the Police Service, with specialized roles," Martin said. He added that the special constables are full-time employees with benefits, working 10.5 hour shifts.



POLICE CHIEF RALPH MARTIN

The program is the creation of Chief of Police Ralph Martin and the File Hills Board of Police Commissioners.

"It's the only one like this in Canada," Martin said.

When the File Hills First Nations Police Service was created, their ability to engage with the community was limited, Martin explained. The number of police officers was too low for the needs of the community. It was also difficult to recruit officers to the police force because wages were higher in other jurisdiction.

"There was a gap," Martin said, drawing



Willard Thomson's style of policing stresses the importance of cultural sensitivity and compassion for the people he serves.

(Photos by Michael Bell)

on a piece of paper on his desk to explain the point.

"This is the police over here, community over here, and we weren't engaging with the community. We didn't have enough regular cops. Regular cops are really expensive. And you don't need a regular cop to take a family from their home, take them down the highway, and allow them to have a smudge."

What Martin realized is that within the Saskatchewan Police Act, the Corrections, Public Safety, and Policing Minister can appoint individuals to work with police in a specialized role. With input from the board, the Elders and the community, they

developed a job description and duties and pitched the idea to the government.

The special constable program was made official in March 2010. There is currently a two-year commitment for funding from both federal and provincial governments, according to the provincial government. The program is being watched with interest by government.

"We can also use this pilot program as a model for developing similar peacekeeping programs on other First Nations in the province," said Yogi Huyghebaert, Minister of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, in a press release.

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Editorial

Letters from Inside

We can't believe the overwhelming response we received when we asked for letters from inside. Inmates from the Saskatoon Correctional, the P.A. Pen and Pine Grove and one former employee of the system sent us letters of boredom, death, overdoses, sexual abuse, crooked or negligent guards and they all paint a picture of desolate corruption.

Some respondents talked about the poor food, mould on the walls, leaking ceilings and life in the hole if you complained. Not one letter said anything good about jail. Most said the experience just made them worse. "Life behind bars is a life I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy, especially if you are going in at the age of a kid" said one writer. "You instantly become ... someone you never were. Cold."

There was also much frustration and a feeling of racism from the system and the guards. "Let's build brown jails cause these white jails ain't helpin' the situation," opined one writer.

One former worker from the Regina Correctional Centre exposed abuse of overtime, described a parking lot of BMW's and SUV's for guards who take trips whenever they want, read the Internet or play games at work, ignore prisoners, are screamingly racist and that the entire organization is like that from top to bottom. No wonder many writers complained about coming out of a crowded jail with no training, no ID, no post release plan and with no treatment for their addictions. Most were back in jail shortly after being released.

Most people owned up to the fact that they made the decisions that got them sent to jail and most admit to difficult lives of foster homes, violence, sexual abuse and ultimately drug and alcohol addictions that led them into jail.

Thanks to all that sent in letters. We send you our thoughts for a speedy release, a good recovery and health and balance in the future. We hope you are with your families soon. Due to space consideration (and long letters) we could only run three letters. You will find them beginning on page 15. Please go to www.eaglefeathernews.com to read all the letters in their entirety.

Emotional Back to Batoche

Back to Batoche this year was the most emotional week of my life. Watching Shannon Loutitt and her honour runners arrive on the Saturday night after the Trial of Louis Riel play was inspiring. Arriving at close to midnight, Shannon and her runners entered the main stage at full pace, even after 100 kilometres of running. They were operating on pure emotion. They hugged, and collapsed and cried. You would have had to be a stone not to have cried with them.

The next day the young Honour Runners were present at the dedication of the Métis Veterans Gardens and Monument. The runners each presented the veterans with beaded tobacco pouches and the youth were presented with sashes from the veterans. One youth, Brandon Sand, had volunteered to wear a sash as he ran, a sash that was to be presented to a veteran.

Brandon ran 70 kilometres the prior night, and as he limped up to the front and presented Veterans Association President Alex Maurice with the sash, I got chills. Alex Maurice was visibly shaken, and as he said, "For a guy who used to jump out of airplanes, I can't believe the emotion I feel." Everyone felt it.

It was then over to the National Historic Site for the Reconciliation Ceremony. After reading out the names of all that fell in 1885, descendants of First Nations, Métis and Canadian Soldiers who had passed got together on the stage and hugged. It was beautiful. Then Andrea Menard sang "There will be Peace in the Valley."

Her voice filled the area and there truly was, for a moment at least, peace. Each attendee then received a commemorative medal.

Walking to the car after, we met a couple fellas from the States. One was a Métis guy originally from southern Manitoba, but his family had left the area because his mom had been raped. He had lost his Métis roots and an old Elder from South Dakota told him if he wanted to get reconnected, he had to go Back to Batoche. We asked if he had received a medal. He said he had one for himself and one for his daughter.

We asked if he had one for his mom who had suffered. He said he didn't because he did not want to be greedy and did not know how many they had. Immediately my wife unzipped her purse and gave him an extra we had for my sister. He held it to his heart and wept. We did too.

We swapped email addresses and talked family tree, and then we realized our families were intertwined and we were cousins the Métis way. Day two of the event and already the family tree grew.

The rest of the week was a blur of jiggling, neckbones, burgers, horses, big outdoor concerts and more family. I could not be more proud of the organizers and the show they put on for the estimated 60,000 visitors that came that week. This year's back to Batoche was one for the ages. And for the memory book.

Rank Comix

Adam Martin



Back to Batoche, Fastball championship photos at:

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THIS ISSUE...LAST ISSUE...PAST ISSUES.

Reconciliation means mending Wahkootowin

It is interesting to note that I have received more response from my last column on Reconciliation and Back to Batoche Days than I have for any other column I have written over the past several years.

Some agreed with me, others agreed in part, several disagreed, and one was downright nasty. One of the comments was from an instructor teaching an adult class in one of the Native communities. He said he used the column in his class and had one of the liveliest discussions of the term. He didn't realize how deeply his students felt not only about reconciliation, but also about Batoche and being Métis.

"They didn't discuss Métis identity," he said, "but they talked about what it meant to be Métis and it was quite moving."

Opinion, discussion, and debate are very important to a community and a people's good health, and certainly for this writer it is the purpose of commentary. If a column can provoke a classroom of students to voice their opinions and put words to feelings about nationhood and their place in it, then I have done my job.

But I do have more to say about Back to Batoche Days. Too many of our people don't know the history of Batoche or the events that lead to "resistance" or what governments call "rebellion" or "war." Our people don't know the names of the families who were involved or what happened to them or how the rest of the

Métis and the First Nations people were treated as a result of 1885.

They don't know the punitive consequences of racist policies and legislations that were imposed on First Nations people, or the government neglect that rendered Métis people invisible in their homeland. But worse than all of this was the animosity that divided First Nations and Métis; this was when wahkootowin was truly broken.

An example of unknown history is the Tourand family of Fish Creek, on whose land the battle took place. It wasn't until Parks Canada, in partnership with the Batoche community and the Gabriel Dumont Institute, worked together to rename the battle site from Fish Creek to Tourand's Coulee and commemorated Madame Tourand by hosting a mini conference in 2008 and inviting the Tourand descendents to tell their family's story, and celebrating with them, their survival.

As a result of this gathering several writer/historians are looking at Madame Tourand's story and her heroism in the face of such incredible loss. We learned not only of her life but also of her strength of character. She lost a husband and three sons as a result of the battle, and one son was sentenced to Stony Mountain

Prison. Her farm was burned down and her animals killed, but she rebuilt her farm and went on to buy a second one, and was at the time of her death, a thriving businesswoman and cattle breeder.

Again in that same year, the same partnership hosted another mini conference and gathering to honour the Women of Batoche. Historians and community people were invited to give academic papers and oral histories about these nameless women who gave so much during those hard times.

It has been recorded that more women and children died in the following year as a result of the battle than soldiers killed on both sides. There are so many sad stories, but more importantly the stories are about endurance and heroism, about women like Madame Vandal who, when learning of her husband's death, fled Batoche for Cochin, to join family. She traveled on foot, carrying her crippled adult daughter on her back. Mrs. Vandal was in her seventies.

Another woman, whose name is lost, fled to Montana where she became a housemother to a home for orphaned Métis children, many of them from Batoche. The home was founded and funded by Gabriel Dumont and other old

Métis buffalo hunters. So many stories that shaped who we were: stories and names of heroes, who can help shape who we are today.

The very name "Back to Batoche" is a power of its own. To come home from wherever we were dispersed, to walk ancestral land, to feel the spirit, and the spirits of place all help to bring a "soul peace" that cannot be described, only felt.

"Back to Batoche Days" would do great service, and bring reconciliation and honour, and mend wahkootowin by bringing all the families home to tell their stories of survival. The celebration would honour them on the last day by walking 10,000 or 75,000 strong to the mass grave. This would be pretty darned awesome.

This kind of reconciliation and power would bring us justice on many levels. For sure, it would be noted by political parties. Ten or 75,000 people are votes. Votes are power.

"These people are together, united and focused. We better pay attention."

More importantly, ten or 75,000 people walking together would change the way we saw ourselves forever. We would not have to talk about identity or pride again. Because it would be there in our hearts and we would feel it every hour of our lives.

And who knows where the kind of passion would take us? Further, I think, than government handouts, divisions and agendas.



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The long road through darkness into light

It was foretold long ago that the First Nations would walk through darkness into light. The darkness would lead to a time of great danger. The "fury of the storm" would pass and those who survived would merge into a new people sitting in the ancient lodges of the First peoples. All animosity would be gone, the darkness lifted.

This little known prophecy was made by Cree mystic Paspaschase at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Then, as now, the two worlds of the First Nations and the non First Nations peoples are intertwined and the time of darkness is upon us both.

The statistics make a lie of the adage we are all the same. First Nations people fill the jails. A Saskatchewan First Nation male child has a greater chance of going to jail than graduating high school. There are now more children in foster care than there were at the height of the residential school era. During a three month period more children died in Saskatchewan foster care than Canadian soldiers died in Afghanistan.

There are people who inject poisons into their bodies like the fangs of a rattlesnake. Saskatchewan has the highest rate of intravenous drug use in Canada.

Strict boundaries kept by the ancestors have fallen among so many. There are the broken people who live in a world turned upside down. Adults have sex with children and close relatives.

Children take on the role of parents. There are youth who awaken with the coming of night and sleep with the coming of day.

Old age pensioners are exploited by their families. It is the young people who die before their old people. Suicide, murder and disease take a toll. Aids is spreading like a wild fire. People sell their bodies for sex and numb their pain with drug induced artificial feelings. Serial family death, like the rage of small pox is growing. Gang members call themselves warriors but have no idea what a warrior really is.

Among the broken people, respect no longer means caring, but rather it has come to mean fear. People who are kind are seen as weak. Victims of violence are statistically highest among First Nations' people and people must be safe before healing can begin.

Old Bill Creely from Sakimay, when he was still alive, once said "the last ones who still love one another are the traditional people."

Traditional need not mean attending ceremonies but rather upholding the best of First Nations' values. A good Indian is a good person and there are many good people living quiet lives even amidst the chaos.

Change is boiling away like a strange medicine. Whether it heals or harms is very much a personal choice.

Paspaschase, as a younger man, fasted by Manitou

Lake, south of what is now called Lloydminster. He went under the water into a spiritual realm where he received knowledge and spiritual powers experienced by only a very few.

When he emerged and returned to his people he could not speak for many days. Then he smoked the pipe and came home to another reality. He never spoke about what had happened.

Paspaschase was either a close companion or half brother to my great grandfather. There was a time they quarrelled and my great-great-grandfather become so angry he bent the barrel of a rifle with his bare hands so they could not use it against each other. People back then as now had problems.

Chief Paspaschase entered Treaty Six and took a reserve near Edmonton where the University of Alberta now is. This valuable land was taken from him under threats of violence from settlers eager for instant wealth. Paspaschase foresaw his people, even children, dying from clashes with the worst of the settlers.

He left treaty and with the remnants of his band found sanctuary in the mountains where his people could survive.

His kindness was rewarded by a wealthy Métis benefactor named Arneault who had heard the old chief was living in dire poverty.

He sent for him and provided his family with land and a home. It was at this land near Saint Paul, Alberta that Paspaschase experienced his great vision of the future.

Every event he spoke of up until the present has come true. When asked when the time of the last great change would happen he cryptically replied, "be guided my grandchildren when the leaf buds, the time is at hand."



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No typical response to loss of loved one

The death of a close family member or friend can set you off on an emotional roller ride that can last months, even years.

Grief researchers say that we experience grief in a series of stages. Personally, I find grief is like a roller coaster not a series of stages, full of ups and downs, highs and lows. Like many roller coasters, the ride tends to be rougher in the beginning; the lows may be deeper and longer. The difficult periods should become less intense and shorter as time goes by, but it takes time to work through a loss.

Even years after a loss, especially at special events such as a family wedding or the birth of a child, we may still experience a strong sense of grief. If you are experiencing any of these emotions following a loss, it may help to know that your reaction is natural and that you'll heal in time.

However, not everyone who is grieving goes through all of these stages – and that's okay. Contrary to popular belief, you do not have to go through each stage in order to heal. In fact, some people resolve their grief without going through any of these stages. And if you do go through these stages of grief, you probably won't experience them in an orderly fashion, so don't worry about what you "should" be feeling or which stage you're supposed to be in.

There is no typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss. Our grieving is as individual as our lives.

While loss affects people in different ways, many people experience the following symptoms when they're grieving. Just remember that almost anything that you experience in the early stages of grief is normal – including feeling like you're going crazy, feeling

like you're in a bad dream, or questioning your faith.

You may experience shock and disbelief right after a loss; it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth. If someone you love has died, you may keep expecting them to show up, even though you know they're gone.

Then there's sadness a deep sadness which is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.

There's also a feeling of guilt you may experience feel guilty about things you did or didn't say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings (e.g. feeling relieved when the person died after a long, difficult illness). After a death, you may even feel guilty for not doing something to prevent the death, even if there was nothing more you could have done.

Many people experience anger even if the loss was nobody's fault; you may feel angry and resentful. If you lost a loved one, you may be angry at yourself, God, the doctors, or even the person who died for abandoning you.

A significant loss can trigger a bunch of feelings. You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure. You may even have panic attacks. The death of a loved one can trigger fears about your own mortality, of facing life without that

person, or the responsibilities you now face alone.

We often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but grief often involves physical problems, including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and insomnia. The single most important factor in healing from loss is

having the support of other people. Even if you aren't comfortable talking about your feelings under normal circumstances, it's important to express them when you're grieving. Sharing your loss makes the burden of grief easier to carry. Wherever the support comes from, accept it and do not grieve alone. Connecting to others will help you heal.

Turn to friends and family members and know that it's okay to lean on the people who care about you, even if you take pride in being strong and self-sufficient. Reach out to your friends and family, rather than avoiding them, and accept the help that's offered. Oftentimes, people want to help but don't know how, so tell them what you need – whether it's a shoulder to cry on or help with funeral arrangements, or meal preparations. When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can quickly zap your energy and emotions. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time.

Face your feelings. You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it

forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss only prolongs the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and many other health problems.

It's important that you express your feelings. Write about your loss in a journal, or you could write a letter saying the things you never got to say; make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life; or get involved in a cause or organization that was important to him or her.

Look after your physical health. The mind and body are connected. When you feel good physically, you'll also feel better emotionally. Fight stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Don't use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood.

Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either. Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.

Plan ahead for the days that will trigger your grief; anniversaries, holidays, and birthdays and be prepared for an emotional roller coaster ride, and know that it's completely normal. If you're spending with other family members, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on ways to honour the person you loved (e.g. feasts, memorial round dances).



Muskeg Lake makes tough decision, Elders facility closed

The Muskeg Lake Elders Home has closed its doors. The 30-bed facility opened in 2007 but due to financial constraints, the band recently made the tough decision to shut down operations.

Muskeg Lake Cree Nation Chief Cliff Tawpisin says a lot of thought went into making a very tough decision, which was ultimately that it was no longer financially viable to run the care home.

"If you talk to our urban representation, it's a matter of ensuring it's sustainable, but when you take a look at the community itself, many of our people were employed here," Tawpisin explained.

"So the economics are definitely going to be affected. We had over 50 employees in the facility itself."

Fifteen of the beds were provided by the Prince Albert Parkland Health Region, while the band provided for the other half.

Tawpisin points to a moratorium on operating funding for long-term care homes from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs as a contributing factor to suspending operations.

Twenty-five of the beds were occupied by Muskeg Lake Elders and there were also Elders from other First Nations living in the facility.

"All we're asking is that we care for our Elders in an institution in a First Nations community that is sensitive to their needs. You know, understanding their cultural, physical, spiritual and emotional needs, but also providing care in their own language."

The band had a review done by Meyers Norris Penny, and even if the 15 beds subsidized by the health region remained operating, there would still be a cost to Muskeg Lake.

"Through the study that was done by Meyers Norris Penny, operations would cut by 40 per cent, but there would still be

a \$250,000 subsidy that we would have to provide at that point to ensure that we would remain open and operational."

While the care home has shut its doors, Tawpisin still remains optimistic that something can be worked out. He's hoping to eventually sit down with the

provincial and federal partners to work out some kind of funding arrangement.

Until that happens, Elders hoping to be near their families and surrounded by others speaking their language will be relocated to care homes within the P.A. Parkland Health Region.



The 30-bed Muskeg Lake Cree Nation Elders Home was opened in 2007.



MN-S Senator Nora Cummings and President Robert Doucette were prepared for the Grand Entry and Honour runner Brandon Sand presented Alex Maurice with a sash that he wore as he ran for 70 kilometres. (Photos by John Lagimodiere)



Métis Elders proudly share history with guests from far and wide

• Continued from Page One

Several new cabins acted as pavilions for B.C., Manitoba, Alberta, and Ontario, where they had displays and hospitality. On Wednesday Louis Riel's sword, on loan from a collector in B.C., was stolen from the B.C. pavilion, but it eventually turned up.

Three large tents housed the artisans, workshops, arts centre, and a resources, networking, and communication centre. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission had an area set up with teepees and cabins, and collected stories all week. There was rodeo, softball, horseshoe, wagon rides, children's activities, workshops, and high quality entertainment combined with competitions, all week long.

"We come here every year," said one couple from North Battleford. "We're not Métis, but we love the music and it's a good family atmosphere with the no alcohol or drugs policy."

Security was vigilant about checking vehicles and dumping alcohol, and other than people singing too loud and too late around their campfires, there was no major trouble.

Marcien Caron, who lived in the historic East village area until he was 14, and now lives in Alberta, brought a huge collection of photographs to the Elder's lodge, and many people enjoyed making connections there, and telling stories.

"We didn't have a lot, but we had everything we needed," said Caron, reminiscing about carrying water from the river for their huge garden, and hunting for other food. Someone mentioned they were still digging up bullets from the Gatling gun in the 1940s, from the Caron yard and garden.

People were as likely to be from the U.S. or the Maritimes as from North Battleford or Saskatoon. And while many had roots or ties to the Métis nation, others came out of curiosity, or because they enjoyed the camping and entertainment.

Competition was fierce in the "Métis Got Talent" – singing, dancing, fiddling, skits – but

eventually three finalists, including fiddlers Curtis Poitras and Dallas Boyer, performed on the big outdoor stage Saturday night before the Asham Stompers and Michelle Wright.

On Sunday, Kiara Goulet took first place in the "Mini Métis" jigging contest, while Ashton Bouvier from Beauval was first place in Juniors. Roderick Thomas of South End led in the Golden category, and Joedelle Kiplin of North Dakota and Lance Boucher of Alberta were the first place Adult winners. Then the judges put on a jigging display!

In fiddling, Victor Rose won the Golden Age category, while Rajan Anderson and Scott Cornelius took the Youth and Novice as the only entrants. The three finalists for the adult category were Darla Daniels, James Steele, and Chris Tootoosis. Steele won the Sterling Brass memorial fiddling competition earlier in the week, and wound up second behind Tootoosis in this one.

The \$10,000 first place square dancing prize was taken by the Northern Lights, followed by Muskoday Blue Thunder, and the Edmonton Métis Traditional Dancers.

The solemn commemoration of the fallen of Batoche began with the one km walk to the cemetery, and then led with a prayer and reflection from Father Guy Lavallée.

"This is sacred ground," said Lavallée. "Out of the ashes come the new strong bones of nationhood."

He added that the fallen summoned everyone to come this year and every year that their spirit and vision remain, and that their values can be transmitted to the younger generations.

"The Métis nation was built on the shed blood of people like this. All of us are brothers and sisters."

Veterans and leaders spoke in Michif, adding their prayers and hopes, and the descendants of Isidore Dumont spoke of the duty to pay respects to the fallen.

Lisa Shepherd, on behalf of the Métis women, spoke of the "importance of teaching our children and taking our rightful place."

Clem Chartier, head of the Métis National Council, noted that each year the Métis nation grows stronger, and it must continue to struggle for the same rights the fallen of Batoche died for.

"As leaders, we are finding true reconciliation by taking our place in the governance level, and taking our rightful place in this nation."

And if there was a disappointment at

Batoche, perhaps it was this. An attempt to make it into the Guinness Book of Records by having more than 888 people playing the spoons fell short ... by 31 people.

(Editors Note: *Andréa Ledding collected stories at Back to Batoche, too, for a book. Please send her more at Batoche1885@gmail.com*)



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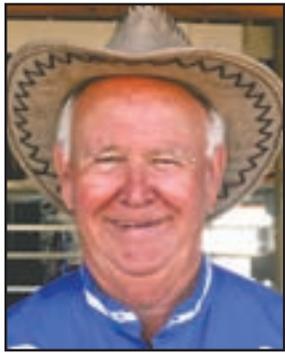


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“The Best Thing About Batoche was ...”



“The people - to see the turnout - the entertainment is unbelievable – just as good entertainment as at Craven and the cost is 10 per cent. People mix, talk, meet old friends and new – they’re coming back and bringing more people. It’s been a super week. The weather co-operated and the site development has really paid off.”

– **Bob McLeod, Saskatoon Area Director for MN-S, Minister of Economic Development**

“Horses. And sleeping.” Dad Carl adds that seeing all the people and visiting with family and friends is also great, and he especially enjoyed the play, Batoche, the Musical.

– **Tyler Trotchie-Head – Saskatoon**



“The jigging. And my mom was in Batoche The Musical. It all sort of reminds me of a powwow - only it’s a different culture.”

– **Chloe White, Walpole Island First Nation, near London, Ontario**



“We’ve been here seven or eight times, they sure built up in the last year. We’re here with our two daughters, and five grandchildren - three of them are great-grandchildren – and we love it. We hotel, and they camp. We have meals together, swimming at Rosthern, and we’re taking Batoche historic site in this afternoon.” (They also did demos of sash making on a loom, and had rosaries and necklaces made of wolf willow seeds.)

– **Mary & Lorne Conway - Turtle Mountain, MB**



“Reconnecting with relatives. Making all those family connections. And the Métis from Quebec being here has been great, too.”

– **Robert Pilon, Oshawa, ON**



“Everything! Entertainment, food, people - I was here five years ago and there’s such a big difference, since!”

– **Margaret (Allery) Hiebert - Roblin, MB**

Congratulations on another successful BACK TO BATOCHÉ!

Mark Hanley, CMC
CERTIFIED MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT

m.hanley@points.ca
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Hi, I'm Nettie Wiebe.

I haven't had the chance to meet most of you yet, but I want you to know that I want to meet you, talk with you, and most importantly, hear what you have to say.

You can get in touch with me at nettie.wiebe@ndp.ca or check out my webpage at www.nettiewiebe.ca.

Congratulations on the 125th Batoche Celebrations!

Nettie Wiebe

NDP Candidate
Saskatoon-Rosetown-Biggart

www.rndp.ca Also join Nettie Wiebe on Facebook!

“We would like to thank each and every one of you who have made our journey to the 125th Anniversary Celebrations an enormous success. You have guided us, you have questioned us, you have challenged us, you have cared for us, you have walked with us and you have prayed for us and with us. You know in your heart who you are and we THANK YOU for your support. May you always cherish your time spent together with friends and family at the Back to Batoche 125th Anniversary Celebrations.”

– **The Batoche 125th Anniversary Planning Committee.**

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2010 - The Year



Métis Did you know?

Did you know? During the World Wars many Métis women took over the hunting and trapping roles. Some of these Métis women continued to trap even when the men returned.

Did you know? The CCF government in Saskatchewan created several Métis Farms in the 1940s. This is the only recognized collective land base granted to Métis in Saskatchewan.

Did you know? La Loche is the end of the highway in northwest Saskatchewan.



Year of the Métis

Back to Batoche:



A Brief Journey Through Time

Every year, Back to Batoche, draws in thousands of visitors from across the Métis Homeland and beyond. Ever wonder why it is held during the third week of July when the Métis component of the 1885 Resistance lasted from late March to May 12, 1885?

In a sense, Back to Batoche actually predates the 1885 Resistance by one year. In 1884, Batoche-area Métis inaugurated St. Joseph's Day, July 24 as a Métis national day. St. Joseph is the Métis' patron saint, and not surprisingly the celebration focused on a mass and a country fair with music and dancing. Men participated in horseracing, shooting, arm wrestling contests while women displayed their embroidery, quilting, rug hooking, sash weaving, and crocheting. St. Joseph's Day was celebrated at Batoche until the 1930s, but was discontinued due to societal breakdown.

On June 26-28, 1971, the modern Back to Batoche celebration was inaugurated. Costing \$30,000, the gathering was actually a Métis Society of Saskatchewan (MSS) convention, with July 25 being set aside as a "camping day." The Army supplied tents and ration kits, and policing was provided by "Special Native Police" and the



Rosthern RCMP. The event was labelled as a political and cultural "rebirth" of the Métis Nation, and included powwows, racing, sports events, turkey shoots, bannock baking, tent pitching, fiddling, and dancing contests.

During the 1970s, Back to Batoche occurred on various dates throughout July, August, and September. During the 1972 gathering, over 12,000 attended, and enjoyed watching and participating in a beauty contest, a powwow, a greased pole event, chasing greased pigs, bannock baking, jigging, fiddling, tent pitching, hand games, canoe racing, ball tournaments, bingos, and saddle horse racing. In 1976, the Association of Métis

and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan (AMNSIS) received funding only three days prior to Back to Batoche's start. In 1977, there was no gathering at Batoche because AMNSIS and government could not agree to a funding arrangement. In 1978, 7,000 attended Back to Batoche, which demonstrated that government interference couldn't dampen the Métis and Non-Status Indians' spirit and resolve to fight for their rights.

During the 1980s and early '90s, Back to Batoche was almost always held in July. At times, the event struggled: in 1980, there was no AMNSIS AGM, no dances, and no rations, and the 1983 celebration was poorly attended because it coincided with the Labour Day long weekend.

From 1981 until 1985, the event was officially called "Métis Heritage Days" since "Back to Batoche" was being saved for the upcoming 100th anniversary to be held in 1985. With the week-long 100th anniversary celebrations in 1985, directed by the Batoche Centenary Corporation, the event became known again as "Back to Batoche" days.

In 1986, political events eventually led to a change in the cele-

bration as the split between the Métis and Non-Status Indians in AMNSIS intensified at that year's Back to Batoche. Soon, the celebration would become a Métis-only event run by the newly formed MSS (1988), and its eventual successor, the Métis Nation—Saskatchewan. The Métis Nation Council

also started to take a more prominent role at Back to Batoche, holding its AGM during the 1989 celebrations.

By the mid '90s, Back to Batoche would always be held during the third week of July — a tradition that continues to this day. Back to Batoche 2010 drew in over 75,000 people during this special "Year of the Métis." While the original purpose and some of the activities have changed over the years, coming together to celebrate the Métis' vibrant culture and rich history has always been consistent.

— Article by Darren R. Prefontaine,
Gabriel Dumont Institute

125
1885-2010
with Pride

Chronology of the 1885 Resistance

1885 (May 15)

Louis Riel surrendered.

1885 (May 26)

Poundmaker surrendered to the Canadian military.

1885 (June 3)

Major Samuel Steele's 40 scouts attacked a Cree camp killing four people, including Seekaskootch. Hearing of the skirmish, members of the main camp rushed to the site of the fight. After three hours at battle, Steele retired and awaited reinforcements.

To be continued next month ...

Prepared by the Gabriel Dumont Institute with material developed by Darren Prefontaine, Leah Dorion, Ron Laliberté, and Father Guy Lavallée.



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Back to Batoche 2010, what a memory

By Fabian Ratt
For Eagle Feather News

As I opened my eyes on Sunday morning, I could not believe that a whole week had already passed. But as I started to move, the ache in my back, and scratches and burns on my hands, and shoulders, said differently though.

I wondered if the work and events that had tired me out were as tough as the work and things our fathers and grandfathers did when they came Back to Batoche. I wonder what it'll be like in the future. If we can see anything in the changes that have taken place, during the past 40 years, then people will be coming back, and enjoying the changes for a long time to come.

In the early 1970s everyone had Army tents to stay in, and in the present, while some people still enjoy roughing it and sleeping on the ground, my back prefers some type of bed. My wife, Janet, and I are lucky enough to have an older model trailer to take camping.

By the looks of the campground at Batoche there were just a many types of trailers, as there were tents. So much for roughing it, but it does have a whole new set of challenges that go along with it, too. I haven't stayed in too many tents where I had to change one of its tires, or the ... well that's another story.

Since there is more room, we tend to fill it, and so there is more to pack, and unpack. I'm not saying that it's all work, but if a person works hard they like to play hard too. I like to play with my camera. I must have taken over a 1,000 photos. After watching the way some of the people dance, and jig, or ride chariots and chuck wagons, fun was being had by all.

Marlene Laliberte has been coming to Back to Batoche since the early days, and remembers the Army Tents, Catch the Oiled Pig, and the Oiled Pole climb. Those are absent this

year, but the rodeo is back, and staples like jigging, square dancing, and bannock baking are still around.

Laliberte remembers competing against many other people in bannock baking, up to ten and more.

"I won three years running," she shyly admits. "Now I organize it."

Apparently she has been doing that job for the past seven years. She misses the past, but really enjoys the changes that are part of Back to Batoche 2010. The headliners on the stage, children's and youth events, and the artist and drama tents, are welcome additions.

"I really like the mix of events this year," Laliberte admits.

Change can be good, but we must remember and learn from the past to keep our traditions alive. Back to Batoche is an excellent venue for Métis people to be proud of their traditions. As we packed, my mother-in-law, Rose Umpherville, pointed to a camp that some other Elders had already vacated.

"That's the way all camps used to be," she said.

After some inspection, I think that the work our Fathers used to do was a little bit harder. I just had to put up some extra tarps. Apparently they used to create a shaded cooking and eating area completely from the surrounding underbrush, only with some creative weaving, some string, and an axe.

I still learn something new every day, and hopefully that never changes. I also hope my grandchildren and I can continue to enjoy, and learn at Back to Batoche for many years to come.



The Back to Batoche site has seen many changes over the years, but still amid the sea of giant campers and RV's, some take the traditional approach. And you can also see that old is new again. (Photos Fabian Ratt)

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Feds get tough on crime stance not the answer

The current minority federal government is running its policy agenda almost unchallenged by a weak opposition. A big part of that agenda is to be 'tough on crime'. This type of approach cannot be justified on grounds of effectiveness.

Creating more legislated serious crimes, setting minimum mandatory sentences that remove judicial discretion, putting more people into jail, jailing more women and children, jailing the energetic 18-30 year-old portion of the Aboriginal population, and building more jails, is a colossal waste of Canada's human and fiscal resources. It does not make Canada a safer place to live or a better country.

This ill-advised agenda mirrors American models, complete with air-headed rhetoric such as 'zero tolerance.' The bad grammar in this regrettable expression fails to hide the concept of 'intolerance' which it holds up as a social virtue.

State propaganda has already done a great job in getting almost everyone to refer to the 'criminal justice system' rather than the criminal legal system. To be 'tough', according to my handy Oxford dictionary, means to be 'unyielding', 'stubborn', 'difficult', 'unpleasant', 'hard', 'unjust'.

A tough person is 'a violent aggressive person', and a 'tough' refers to a ruffian or criminal. Are these the inspiring concepts that Canadians want to inform the policy thinking of our political leaders?

Politicians have used 'tough on crime' approaches, especially since the 1980s, believing that it is an easy sell to prospective voters and so a way to hang on to political office.

There seems to be little evidence that this is so.

Far better than playing the school-yard bully is the policy approach that seeks to create social and economic conditions in which crime is not prevalent. Far better than being difficult, hard and unyielding is to be intelligent and reasonable; to base policy on evidence. The slogan, if a slogan is needed, is to be effective in reducing crime.

The root causes of crime, associated with poverty, lack of education and life opportunities are, in fact, well-known but politicians have a tough time linking spending on social programs with crime. It is easier to fight the bogeyman.

A summer sports camp program run by the University of Manitoba and the RCMP on northern Manitoba reserves in the 1990s resulted in a dramatic fall in juvenile crime statistics. There are many examples.

Of course people abhor and condemn crime, and not all the current criminal law initiatives are ill-advised. The tough on crime approach suggests that society is safer with criminals behind bars. That idea comes from watching the front door of the jail, where the convicts enter.

I suggest a peek at the back door, where the prisoners who have served time are being released into society every day. Your assessment whether the prisoner at the exit door is a better citizen than the convicted offender at the entrance depends

entirely upon your assessment of the effectiveness of jails as a place of repentance and reform.

One of the controversial parts of the tough on crime approach is the increase in minimum mandatory sentences. There are all sorts of problems with this approach, including the merits of politicians deciding in advance what each offender deserves instead of a judge trying to do justice

in individual cases.

The cases of morally blameless people caught by minimum mandatory sentences makes harrowing reading.

There is cause to despair when the present government ignores the fact crime is decreasing in Canada and spends billions on its crime agenda, including building more jails.

When the minority Harper government first introduced its bill on the issue I was invited to appear before the Parliamentary Justice committee to give an expert opinion.

One of my points was the high cost of such a move, a cost that was not apparent by looking at the bill. The bill was killed by the opposition then, but the government reintroduced it later and the opposition caved in.

Recently the newspapers have been reporting that the federal government plans to spend billions in new jails and that Canadian annual spending on jails is to rise from \$4.4 billion to \$9.5 billion.

In 1996 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples proposed an ambitious 20-year agenda to the federal government on Aboriginal policy that would cost \$2 billion annually for 20 years. The idea was to allow Aboriginal communities the chance to create conditions to live well, to become relatively self-sufficient and, incidentally, to make crime less feasible and attractive.

Successive federal governments have ignored this agenda.

There are many ideas better than those revealed by the churlish 'tough-on-crime' approach. Unfortunately governments tend to sacrifice long-term plans and a goal for what they believe (wrongly on this one) is short-term political gain.

• • •

Congratulations to Manitoba's Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Eric Robinson (Cree) for issuing an apology on August 3 on behalf of the Government of Manitoba to the Sayisi Dene of Tadoule Lake for the horrific experience of being forcibly relocated from their homes in Duck Lake to the port city of Churchill in 1953.

In 1994 I visited Tadoule Lake as a sole representative of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. I cannot find words that can properly describe the horrors suffered by the Sayisi Dene.

The federal government has not moved to apologize, nor to provide compensation, as it did in the 1990s for the Inuit who were forcibly relocated to the High Arctic in the same era.



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Poilievre helps gang members understand their lives

By Leisha Grebinski
For Eagle Feather News

Father Andre Poilievre doesn't see the men he works with as criminals. He sees them as people who are striving for a better life.

"They are heroes. They are absolutely amazing," says Poilievre.

Poilievre runs Str8up, a support group, predominantly for men, who are trying to leave the gangster lifestyle behind.

He currently works with more than 30 ex-gang members between the ages of 17 and 35 with ten still serving time in a correctional facility. Some have been working with Poilievre for only a couple months while others are going on six years. All had to vow to drop their colours and commit to a path of healing.

"These guys are priceless, they are fun to be with and when they're hurting and they're in pain how can you walk away from that?"

Twenty-two year-old David Shingoose was serving time when a fellow inmate gave him a brochure about Str8up. He asked to speak to Poilievre, but was skeptical.

"He was really concerned but I didn't trust him," says Shingoose. "I thought maybe he was an undercover guard or just another white guy in a suit who said he was going to help me."

But there was something different about Poilievre that demonstrated honesty and commitment.

"He told me I had to do four things. I had to drop my colours, be honest, have healthy relationships, and quit addictions. So I agreed and signed my name."

A year has passed and Shingoose hasn't looked back. He now holds a steady job and is proud to be part of his two young children's lives. He gives all of the credit to Poilievre, the first person, he says, who ever believed in him.

"He's a straight up guy. Literally. If he wants to say something he's going to say it. He doesn't fear nobody and I can see that in his eyes and that's what I really respect about him."

Talk about Str8up has spread rapidly, on the streets and throughout the prison system. The group has a reputation of successfully getting people out of gang life, but Poilievre says if a guy wants help, it's up to him to make the first move.

"They have to call us. If they don't call, we don't connect. They have to want to be serious about this."

After the first meeting with a gang member, Poilievre asks the individual to write a three to four page essay outlining his or her life story. He does this so gang members can understand the circumstances that drove them to a life of crime and what obstacles they have to overcome to stay out for good. He says stories of neglect, abuse, fetal alcohol syndrome, addictions, and racism mark the pages.

"It hurts so much to hear their stories. It tears you apart," he says. "But it's



Fr. Andre Poilievre has succeeded in convincing several men to leave the gang lifestyle even though gang numbers are rising.

important for them to take ownership over their story and their lives."

Shingoose wrote nine pages for Poilievre. Through writing he realized he had Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder so Shingoose confronted his mother about it and forgave her.

Shingoose started attending sessions with Poilievre and other gang members where they would smudge and share stories.

"I thought I was the only one. I felt safe when I went there and I felt like an important person there."

Poilievre says it's important the former gang member doesn't embark on this journey alone.

"When you connect with one individual, the circle gets bigger not smaller. You end up dealing with siblings, and girlfriends, and parents. There is no end to it. All these people are hurting people."

Poilievre takes numerous calls throughout the day and even more after dark. He sits through court proceedings, he visits guys in jail, and he's conducted three funeral services for men who couldn't make the positive turn. One of his last calls was a plea for help from an ex-gang member's girlfriend – she had just been raped.

"I can't walk away from these guys. And I enjoy it. They are little steps but in my mind they are big steps. And they've got to take a million."

Poilievre's 10 "graduates" of the program are caring for their families and holding down steady employment.

"Their names will never appear in the paper again," he says.

Members of Str8up also work as mentors with kids with hopes of deterring

them from getting involved in a gang.

Poilievre says the number of gang members continue to grow and he says their crimes are more vicious and more

organized, but the solution is not to put them in jail.

"We need to put them in a situation where there is healing and wellness."

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Letters from the Inside ...

My name is Brendan Jimmy. I am a 37-year-old male serving time at the Saskatoon Correctional Centre. I've got plenty of experience on doing time. I've spent a majority of my life in jail or prison.

So when asked what can be done to change the system, I say this; 90-95 per cent of the guys and girls in jail have one or more addictions, whether it is drugs or alcohol or both. The so-called system knows this, but it's a big business locking up the Brothers and Sisters.

They don't want us natives to change or rehabilitate. If that were the case then why not send people to treatment centres instead of jail? Why aren't the judges asking the offenders questions such as, "Are you an alcoholic? Are you a drug addict? Why not give these people sentences to try and help themselves? Send them to treatment, and then if they don't successfully complete the treatment program, their ass is sent to jail. The "JUST US INDIANS SYSTEM" is too quick to lock up the Native people.

Right now I'm in jail for six months for an argument where I ripped my girlfriend's necklace off her neck. It was a stupid mistake, but I don't feel I need to be behind bars for it. This was just another example of unnecessary incarceration and wasting of taxpayers' money.

This is what they do to you in the correctional centres: They ask if your crimes were alcohol or drug related. They don't ask you if you have a problem with drugs and alcohol. In most cases, the crimes are drug and alcohol related. If they were, they make you take programs.

They don't ask if you need or want them, they make you. They dangle carrots like lower level security, temporary absences, urban camp, community training residence etc.

So the offender takes the programs even when he doesn't want to change his behaviours. This is why the doors are revolving for most offenders. They jump through hoops, take programs, do what the man says, just to keep them happy. Or to get out earlier. It's B.S. in my eyes, and I don't really care who knows about it. It's like that in all the jails. I've been in almost every jail in Alberta and Saskatchewan and I've seen it all in those 16 years behind fences and walls. It's B.S.

Never once has anyone ever asked me about my support circle, or what can I do to stay out of jail. How about come up with a plan to stay out? I've had to learn all that on my own out on the street. Jail doesn't teach you any skills besides how to manipulate the system or how to be a better criminal.

It's sad for me to still be in a place like this at my age, because I see the kids coming in here, and they think they are cool. Shit, they are in for a rude awakening when they finally learn it is a waste of time. There is a lot more we as Native people could be doing than wasting our time overpopulating the jail and prison systems.

One such organization that is making a difference is headed up by Father Andre Pollivere. It's called STR8UP. Andre and Stan Tue, along with the John Howard Society help offenders who want to change

their lifestyles do just that. It's a struggle to leave the life you've lived for so long and they realize this.

We support each other, help one another, whether it's a place to stay, money to get ID, help finding a job or getting into school. Whatever it is, the guys from STR8UP are always there to help. I'm so glad to be a part of this support system. Its because of STR8UP that I actually believe I can and will be a positive role model and mentor to the next generation coming up.

The Lord knows that I haven't been a positive or good influence on anyone up to this point. But I haven't given up on myself, and most importantly, neither has STR8UP.

They have given me the confidence and support I need to make it in today's society.

• • •

Hi, my name is Josie Pelletier from Regina North Central Hood. I am currently in Pine Grove CC in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan for the past four years of my life, straight on remand facing a Long Term Offender Application, a step away from a D.O.

My last offer was nine years and L.T.O. but I shot it down. My charges that I got convicted on was two armed robberies with violence. A \$20 robbery that led to the next which was a drug buy that went bad and I got picked up at the scene. That was in 2007.

I am an ex-gang member of Syndicate that I rolled in since the age of 13. I got out of the gang when I was 21. I came into Pine Grove having to face ladies that did what they had to do to follow the Orders of the Game to take me out. So I had troubles for the first year I was in here but I held my stance and never did what they expected of me and that was to "Check In" as what most of us would call it.

The second year of my remand time, life began to become more miserable, the guards started to give me a hard time, I started to go through more lawyers than expected because once they would take a look at my case they would step down without a reason (and) leave me strapped?

I started doing so much drugs that year to numb my feelings it was really easy to get and as much as I wanted through inside connections. All I paid was \$100 a pouch and we filled the pouch up with as much as dope as I wanted syringes, anything! That year my Grandma passed away, my family never even phoned me. No one did and I could of went to her funeral.

A month later of her passing I found out I took it extremely hard. None of the guards knew we were getting drugs. They had suspicion, but didn't know. I started using heavily and fighting a lot. I went running into another unit to fight another unit girl just so I could go down and get drugs and get high.

I went to the hole and never came out till 10 months later.

When I went down we had a shakedown in secure, 15 guards or more

came down about 6 in the morning giving us a rude awakening, finding syringes, weed, tobacco, weed, pills on a number of ladies and the narcotic dog sniffing out a guard's bag that she used to bring substances in but never found nothing in it. Paid her with leave. She ended out quitting before they actually fired her. That's my belief. This was in 2008. After her leave they knew the circumstances involving me and her and a friend of mine because of people talking and staff started treating me differently big time.

They did everything they could to keep me in the hole, charging me for stupid charges and provoking to react in situations just so they can write me up.

When someone would act out in secure they would leave me to blame and say it was because of me ... I told them to do it. There was one time they left me with no water for hours I was so dehydrated in my cell and felt faint there was nothing I could do to harm them or myself. When they

restrain you, regulations are there has to be a camera on the inmate when this occurs but there was times when they would just open my cell with the shield and tackle me down, mess me up, next day I would be so sore I'd hardly move.

I knew in my heart I was getting treated unfairly but I didn't know what? And I called the Ombudsman so many times I think they just got sick of me. I remember one time they told me: "Josie this is not an advocate," so I quit calling them and continue taken the BS, I continued writing to the director hoping for a miracle for him to let me out of secure to no avail.

I remember Xmas rolled around and one of the ADDs came and popped my door and gave me hug and snuck a chocolate bar to me and said Merry Christmas. That was cute. That was that the last thing I expected but it sure did put a smile on the loneliness and isolation I was feeling.

In October 2009 I was in a camera cell down with another gang called TS, sick of feeling alone, fighting these people on my own so I hooked up with a crew I didn't even know, seeking the love I always craved for the ultimate rush I only ever knew. I was laying there on the cement segregated without a bed or a mattress, only a security gown and a blanket hoping for the best and expecting the worst.

I heard this amazing woman's voice like a godsend voice, like I needed right there and then she was singing gospel, something I despised. But one song she sang clouded my heart like the clouds in the sky and the angels in the heaven.

It was called Ride Out Your Storm. She sang it so perfect, so beautiful something I never heard and I will never hear again cause that's what changed my life. That night I cried so hard and prayed

to the Lord. Two things I never believed in. Now I am Born Again and can proud fully say I am a woman of God. Since October I never went back to secure and I am working on my addictions, I am out of the gang life for good. I seen my son for the first time two times in 7 years. He is now nine years old. I am building a relationships with my mother and grandmother and father who I had absolutely no respect and contact with in the past all of this because of the grace of God.

These Eagles in my life that soar the sky that roam my dreams and that protect me night and day are my protectors. I believe there was a reason I had to write my story to your Eagle Feather News because I am a woman of history and this is part of my story. Amen.

God Bless.

Josie Pelletier.

• • •

I am inmate #278919326 at the Pine Grove Correctional Center in Prince Albert, Sk. I have been here for six months on remand, and I have been remanded until December. I am 27 years old, I have a husband and three children who are ages 7, 4, and 2 right now. I haven't seen them in over a year.

I have two University degrees, a Bachelor of Elementary Education and a Bachelor of Arts in Indigenous studies. I once had a promising life and a bright future. I even enjoyed teaching Sunday School and helping my husband with his church youth group.

Now I'm a prisoner.

At first I used to get up early and look out my cell window. I would see the fences, the razor wire and the concrete courtyard. It was then that the full weight of my bad decisions and everything I had lost would drop down on me and I found it strangely appropriate that the dawn was always called mourning.

I am a drug addict, an alcoholic, and now a criminal. This is not how I was raised and not what I wanted to become. It is incredibly hard to be here and to live like this, but I made my choices that brought me here. Every woman in this place has a story to tell. This is a part of mine.

I was born and raised in the North Battleford area, mostly on Sweetgrass First Nation, with my Kohkum. I lived with her since I was 9. My Mooshum had passed away and I chose to live with her. Those are some of the happiest memories I have of my childhood, just me and her. When I was about 10 an adult cousin came to live with us. A few weeks later he started raping me. This would set the tone for the next few years.

When I was 14 I became pregnant as a result of the rapes. I told my doctor what was going on. He urged me to go to the police or at least my family. I was afraid they wouldn't believe me because that's what my abuser told me would happen.

My doctor arranged for me to have an abortion in Saskatoon, even though it was illegal for someone my age to have one without parental consent. My abuser drove me to the appointment and pretended he was my dad.

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Mom carries guilt for son's gang life, death

By Creeson Agecoutay
For Eagle Feather News

The bone chilling cold felt even icier as Susan Creeley stood in front of her son's grave for the first time since his funeral in January. Her son, Daniel Richard Wolfe, died after being stabbed in prison while serving a life sentence for killing two people and wounding three others during a home invasion in Fort Qu'Appelle in 2007.

"For some reason I knew this day was coming but I just didn't know when. I thought it was going to be suicide," Creeley said.

Wolfe's story is one of bad choices and deadly consequences that left a legacy of hurt and pain. He didn't start life as a killer but as an impressionable child.

"He was a human being and he was my son. He was a gift from the Creator. I tried to raise him as good as I can, being a single mother," says the grieving mother.

Creeley shoulders a lot of the blame for the way her son lived and died. She admits her former lifestyle left a mark on her son.

"I was sick with drugs and alcohol. I showed them that negative side, which was wrong."

Wolfe's destructive path began as a teenager in Winnipeg. He helped organize one of Western Canada's most infamous gangs, The Indian Posse.

"But he chose that path. I didn't choose it for him and when he chose it, it brought him more into that criminal way of life. He didn't know any other way because I didn't teach him the traditional way and he was right back into that activity."

Wolfe began serving his sentence at the Saskatchewan Penitentiary last November when he was sentenced to life with no chance of parole for 25 years.

Five years ago, Wolfe was on a different path. He left the gang and was on a mission to stop others from joining gangs. But he was pulled back into the gang lifestyle.

"I was hurt that he didn't turn his life around. But I can't change that. He had to do that himself," Creeley explains.

Violence played a huge role in the life and death of Wolfe. Creeley has turned her life around and now wants to help other parents avoid the same mistakes she made. As for Indian gangs and their role in the life of her son, she says: "It's really sad this life they choose. He once said he wanted to belong. It's way out of hand now, the gang."

"But when he was younger he just wanted some sense of belonging and that's why they formed that gang and it's way out of hand."

Creeley still has guilt for the life she led and its impact on her family. She changed her life by drawing on the strength of her First Nations traditions and looks to these ways to keep her strong.

"I didn't teach him how to pray and smudge, but now I have a second chance to teach my grandchildren that way."

She has lost one son but continues to worry about her other children who are also in prison.

"It gives me a head up, 'is my son going to live today?' I expect a phone call every day just feeling that hurt. I wouldn't want any mother to go through that. That's why I say, pray with the children and talk. Praying is powerful and going to ceremonies is powerful."

"I was lost too one time. I turned my life around and got into my traditional ways. It's carrying me a long way. If you believe this way it will carry you a long way."



Susan Creeley turned her own life around but it was too late to save her son, Indian Posse member Daniel Wolfe.



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Letters from the Inside ...

• Continued from Page 15

He signed the forms, and bought me a Happy Meal after the procedure was done and we were on the way home.

When he tried to start up with me again I threatened to tell and started screaming. He moved out shortly after. I never told anybody and I hid all the guilt and shame I felt as a result of all the abuse in a little room in my heart and I shut the door for good, or so I thought.

Life continued on, I went to school, had three beautiful children and got married to a wonderful man I loved very much. Now they are all staying away from me.

My husband wisely decided to remove the children because I was doing them much harm by not being the wife and mother I should have been. I had begun the descent into the madness that would eventually leave me here, writing this letter from my jail cell.

I had been lying to my husband from the very beginning by not telling him about my abusive cousin and the abortion. He was such a good husband and father that I felt even worse, and I began using drugs recreationally as an escape. Pretty soon the escape turned into an addiction, and I began drinking to excess and doing any drug I could get my hands on.

The night my husband caught me in the bathroom with a needle and a spoon was the worst. He gave me the choice between the drugs and alcohol and my beautiful little family. I was so addicted I chose the drug. He left me, taking with him my three little children. That made me snap out of it, but it was too late, they were gone.

Everyone who knew where they went thought it was in their best interest not to tell me. That was the worst I'd ever been. I was a wreck when I showed up at my mom's house.

I kicked the drugs, but I was drinking whenever I could. I got a job, bought a little car and began pulling my life together. I planned on seeing my kids the next weekend, so I went to the bar to "celebrate".

I had shot after shot and eventually ended up at a friend's place drinking with

a new crowd of people. I "blacked out" but at some point during this fateful night I agreed to be hired to drive these guys to a house I didn't know. As it turned out, the friendly guys I was drinking with were actually gang members, who broke into that house. The cops called it a home invasion, and they hurt someone very badly.

I came to in the city buckets. As a result of that night, I am charged with criminal organization, break and enter to commit an indictable offence, assault causing bodily harm, assault with a weapon, armed robbery, robbery with violence and public mischief.

It only took one bad decision to destroy my life. I had no criminal record and now the crown is asking for quite a bit of time.

I lost everything and through the cultural healing program here at Pine Grove I was able to face my demons, find the root of my pain, open up that door I closed up so long ago and clean the damn thing out. Little by little I am reclaiming what I once had and I am owning my life.

My story is only one of hundreds.

Every woman who passes through these doors is somewhat fragmented. Through the programming here and everyone from the Elders, to the corrections workers, to the support people who arrange sweats for us, we can begin to piece together the fragments and reclaim what was taken from us.

I want everyone to know that jail does not have to be the end of the world or the beginning of a pattern of returning here, within the walls of concrete and grills of steel.

Dear fellow inmates, please realize how powerful you are. Just think, you had the power to bring yourself here, and you have the power to build something better for yourself.

No matter that you are behind bars, stripped of your belongings, family, and freedom, your existence still matters a great deal.

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Deluge of obstacles couldn't sink rapper

I had it all planned out ... and then life happened, as is usually the case. I had intended to do an entire column about the magnificent totem pole display at the Mendel Art Gallery – I went twice! –, until the benevolent forces of my universe took over.

Always a sucker for a good story, I was compelled to share the tale of a young, aspiring rapper/producer who overcame a bevy of obstacles last month, always with a smile on his face.

Terry Chief, from Onion Lake First Nation, heard about the Missinipi Broadcasting (MBC) Talent Search on the radio and decided to submit a few songs, for curiosity's sake.

Once selected, he cheerfully boarded a bus from Lloydminster to La Ronge via Saskatoon. With the layover in Saskatoon, the trip took 12 hours, but patiently he waited.

At one point he had to trek to a nearby store to purchase some new shoes, as his were stolen – and in turn he nearly missed his bus to La Ronge.

By the time he finally arrived in La Ronge, he had missed dress rehearsal. Unfazed, he headed to a nearby campground where he planned to spend the weekend in a small tent he brought along because he didn't know anyone in La Ronge.

The rains poured heavily that night. Early in the morning, as the rain continued, he walked about three kilometres into La Ronge to call one of the women who helped organize the event.

Leslie Choumont was surprised when she picked him up, as he was clearly

drenched from his journey into town. She asked where his dry clothes were, and he explained they were back at his camp.

They drove to his tent and when they unzipped the door, a small flood poured out. His dry clothes were soaking wet, along with everything else.

Leslie insisted they take his clothes to a laundromat to dry before the competition began. He happily obliged, never once complaining about his situation.

Then, as the competition began, the CD he brought for background music

wouldn't work on the CD player nor the laptop. The band had to create an impromptu beat behind him so that he could rap. But as Terry explained it, the live music energized him.

"That was my first time with a live band. As soon as the

music started and I had the flow, I had to jump on it right away. I was very nervous up there but grooving with them kept me cool enough to perform my verses."

Later, considering Terry's rained-out campsite and the unrelenting weather, several MBC staff were concerned about Terry staying at the campground.

Having witnessed their outdoor stage blow away, they moved the competition to an indoor venue.

So radio announcer, Dale Roth, invited Terry to stay with him until his bus departure on Monday morning.

After everything he endured to get there, ultimately, Terry didn't place. Still his radiant optimism shone through, regardless.

"The weekend was awesome. Those little setbacks didn't really do anything to dampen my spirits. All in all, I would definitely do

it again, for the experience," said Terry.

I soon discovered that everyone who met Terry that weekend was astounded by his remarkable outlook on life.

Rare is the man who overcomes adversity with a humble heart and a gracious smile. Though his path was fraught with obstacles, nothing swayed him. He had a vision of singing on stage and wouldn't rest until it happened.

I'm certain that his attitude will carry him far as a rapper or a producer. To be successful at anything, one must have passion, talent and unwavering faith. I'm convinced Terry is well on his way.

He's still quite new to rap, but he spent a few years creating beats and instrumentals. Along with the help of a new computer program he's been penning lyrics and recording songs since March. He claims he's learned a lot since then, and is confident that he will only get better.

"So far, my greatest goal is to open a recording studio, in or near, Onion Lake," said Terry.

"Whether just a demo, or a double LP, I want to be able to accommodate musicians with their needs."

I really hope Terry sticks with it, and gets everything he wishes for because I have mad respect for people who demonstrate strength and perseverance, and who inspire hope in others. Cheers to you, Terry!

Please email me if you have any comments or arts and entertainment leads in your community at: snazzyjess@hotmail.com.

Also, be sure to visit the Mendel Art Gallery before Sept. 19 to catch the breath-taking totem pole exhibition.



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STC Chief Felix Thomas records the most important coin toss of career

By John Lagimodiere
Of Eagle Feather News

Saskatoon Tribal Council Chief Felix Thomas had never been so nervous in his life. He has met famous and powerful people and has spoken in front of huge crowds during his career as a Chief of Kinistin Saulteaux Nation and as a Tribal Chief.

But nothing prepared him for performing in front of 31,000 rabid members of the Rider Nation on the hallowed grounds of Mosaic Stadium.

The July long weekend saw the Riders hosting the Hamilton Tiger Cats and the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority was the game sponsor. As one of his responsibilities for the Tribal Council, Chief Thomas sits on the Board of SIGA. And that's how the football gods aligned to allow this Rider fan to get to midfield and get the game going with a coin toss.

They used to have the people do an opening kickoff for these kinds of things," said Chief Thomas. "But people kept hurting themselves and not doing well. I am very glad that they changed that and we now only have to do the coin toss."

Originally Thomas was under the impression that because of the rules, the referees had to do the toss, while the game day sponsor just stood beside him. Simple stuff. He found out different when he arrived by the field and was told that it was actually him that was going to do the toss.

"My first thought was what if I blow it ... who wants to be the guy to flub a coin

toss in front of 30,000 people and however many on TV," Thomas said.

"There are actually a lot of rules. The coin has to go over shoulder height, we have to show them both sides and we have to make sure we don't hit anyone with the flipped coin. Lots of pressure I tell you."

A champ under pressure, Thomas executed a perfect coin toss that the Riders won. They then put on a great show for everyone by eviscerating the Tiger cats 37-24.

Chief Thomas thinks there might be a connection between his tossing skills and the victory and has offered his services to the Riders, but doubts he will get another chance to do something quite as cool as that. Even then, Thomas knows one thing.

"That was the biggest coin toss of my life," he laughed.

Get your Rider tickets here!

We are still looking for the biggest Rider fan out there. We want to hear from you about how nuts you are about the Riders.

We want to see fan photos from Mosaic Stadium. How Green can you be? Do you have a Riders Pilsner hard hat? Do you wear it? We want to hear about your favourite player.

The most memorable game you went to or saw. Don't be shy...we have ten tickets to give away and we want them going to fans that will truly appreciate the experience. Get those letters and photos in to johnl@eaglefeathernews.com contest closes August 31.



Tribal Chief Felix Thomas received "coin-toss" instructions/protocol from the officials moments before he was to head out on the field. (Photo courtesy SIGA)

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Siksika Rebels win third consecutive Native Fastball title

By Delaney Windigo
For Eagle Feather News

Eighty fastball teams from throughout the country gathered at the Dakota Whitecap First Nation for the annual 2010 Canadian Native Fastball Championships. Thousands of people, including athletes, coaches, spectators and volunteers made their way to Whitecap to take part in the three-day tournament held from July 30 to August 1.

Native Fastball Championships board member, Tony Alexis described the tournament as a weekend of top-notch athleticism and socializing.

"It's a good weekend of ball, you get to see professional athletes, people who've played for Team U.S.A and Team Canada and see the best of the best of the Aboriginal community and at the same time it's a good visit," Alexis said.

"You see old friends, you make new friends. It's a wonderful week and it's been going on for a long time."

Saskatchewan's own Trevor Ethier was the pitcher for Alberta's Siksika Rebels. Ethier is known for his fierce pitch but he remained cautious going into the final game.

"I'm expecting it to be an extremely tough battle just like in the previous game it was down to the last inning and no matter who we play it's going to be a tough challenge for our Rebel team here."

The Rebels managed to come out on top and defeat British Columbia's KDC Braves 3-1, making it the Rebels third consecutive Men's Division win.

After Ethier's game winning final pitch struck out a KDC batter, the dominating pitcher reflected on the victory.

"It just feels fantastic, just a great ball game by both teams. You know I tip my hat off to the other team, they battled us hard twice today, it could have went either way," Ethier said.

"Just a great bunch of guys battled through and had a character win. It just feels pretty special to make it three in a row for us."



Alberta's Red Nation Jets defeated Saskatchewan's AMI Memorial Pride by 16-0 for the Women's Division title. One of Red Nations Jets star players, Jayme Sky, from Six Nations Ontario, is currently on a softball scholarship at Syracuse University in New York.

Initially, Sky was interested in other sports before she accepted her first softball scholarship in South Carolina.

"It was difficult for me to go to South Carolina because hockey is what I really like to play and it was a choice of me giving up hockey and going to pursue softball and because there aren't a lot of people from my reserve who take that opportunity to go the distance and go to further places. You know, leave the reserve and have the experience of

a lifetime."

Muskeg Lake Cree Nation partnered with the Whitecap First Nation to host the event through their Dakota-Cree Sports Incorporated partnership.

"We target areas of education, sports, culture and recreation. It is a good opportunity for two communities; two very progressive communities coming together to ensure that we build our communities. It's about building our nations from our youth to our elders," said Muskeg Lake Chief Cliff Tawpisin.

Next year's Canadian Native Fastball Championships will be in Winnipeg.



Alberta's Siksika Rebels won the Championship for the third year in a row. (Top photo) Muskeg Lake Cree Nation Chief Cliff Tawpisin presented Trevor Ethier with MVP jacket. (Above) Alberta's Red Nation Jets won the womens side. Their team included three NCAA players. (Left) Whitecap Dakota Chief Darcy Bear, Saskatoon Tribal Council Chief Felix Thomas and Muskeg Lake Cree Nation Chief Cliff Tawpisin enjoyed the final game down the third base line. (Far left)





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