

# *the writer*

Stories, poems and muses  
by writers at  
The Learning Centre.

These poems were inspired by the deep winter weather we endured in November.

These are two different ways of looking at winter **by circle "C"**.

## *Winter*

Too much snow, 30 below  
Standing at the bus stop  
Numb feet and hands,  
Slipping on ice while driving  
Through rush hour traffic  
Just trying to get home.



## *Winter*

First snowfall  
Quiet, romantic,  
Walking on feathers  
Dark, snowflakes drifting down  
softly Peaceful.



# *Thirty Thousand Marbles*

## *by Allen Duguay*

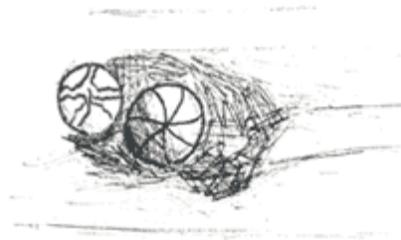
I grew up in Timmins, Ontario, in a house with 22 bedrooms. There were ten boys and 12 girls in the family.

When I was ten years old I was the champion marble player in the town. I used to play kids my own age and older. The games were called *Jack - in - the - bush*, *the hole*, *the pot*, *the wall*, *the tin can*, and *tick*. Marbles were also called alleys or steels. The larger marbles were called plugs. Smaller, solid colour marbles were called pee wees. I won most of the time. So I had many marbles. I had a six gallon molasses can filled with marbles (or alleys).

In my room upstairs we had a hardwood floor. There was a knot in one of the boards. I took a knife and dug the knot out of the board. There was then a hole there and I started putting the alleys into the hole. Some of my brothers and sisters and I played a game of shooting the marbles into the hole. As I put more and more alleys into the hole the ceiling below the bedroom floor began to sag from the weight of all those marbles. There were thousands of marbles between the ceiling and the floor boards.

When my dad came home after being away for two weeks he noticed that the ceiling was bulging. He asked why the ceiling was bulging. "Has it been ' raining?" " He said, "We've going to have to fix it." I said "O.K." "We'll have to build a scaffold." So we built a scaffold. My dad went up onto the scaffold and started tearing the ceiling down. Then he got rained on by a load of marbles. He asked me, "Whose alleys are those?" I said "Dad, they are not mine. I don't know who put them there." He repaired the ceiling.

My dad didn't say anything more about it at that time but a month or so later he found out about the hole in the floor board. He didn't say anything and went back to work in the bush.



## *In my younger days* *by Yolande*

In my younger days I was going to school, but as a young teenager I had to quit. I had seven sisters and four brothers and I was the oldest in the family.

I always helped my mother to wash clothes with the washboard. I washed clothes by hand on the wash board. I used to wash about three lines every week. We had to haul water from the lake. Sometimes my brothers would get the water for me. I liked washing clothes with a wash board, but I hated washing socks. They are small and I scraped my hands on the wash board.

I used to have lots of blisters from washing. After I washed the clothes I scrubbed the floor. Then I cooked lunch for my brothers and sisters. When they came home from school, I cooked bannock stew and fish. Sometimes I would make bread.

I used to help my mom sew beads on moccasins. My mom made a moosehide jacket with bead work on it. I helped her sew the beads, it is very hard work. She finished the jacket before Christmas. She also made a pair of mukluks for my brother.

I used to pick berries every year with my mom and brothers and sisters. My brothers and sisters liked to play rather than pick berries, but when my mom brought out the jars of berries at Christmas they really enjoyed them. We would pick all kinds of berries. Raspberries, blueberries, cranberries, We kept the berries in a cool place, the cellar underneath the house. We had a trap door in the floor and stairs going down into the cellar where the berries were kept. We also kept dried moose meat and smoked fish in the cellar.



*Yolande as she looks  
today*

Below: *Yolande washing clothes*



# *Journey on the Road of Life: Birth and Youth*

*by Gladys Antonine*

I'd like to write about my birth and youth; well, not so much about my birth, but my youth.

I was born in Fort Vermilion, Alberta, a tiny hamlet of about 300-400 people, which to this day is not that much bigger. I remember when I started school. I was put in the convent when I was seven years old. I really felt alone and lost, and new to all my surroundings. I remember I used to always want to cry, I was so lonesome.

I went to the convent every year from then on, right until I was eighteen years old. I learned from an early age to be away from my parents, and was raised by nuns and a priest. We couldn't speak our own language, and our traditional ways were robbed from us. We went to school every day, and we prayed every day, sometimes ten times a day. We learned how to work and be independent. I used to be home only two months out of a year.

I got sick with tuberculosis when I was about eight or nine years old. That was when there was a TB epidemic spreading. Many people died from the sickness, but I was fortunate enough to be diagnosed in time.

I never did spend too much time with my parents. Then, when I finally finished school -- or quit school -- I left home. Then I started to work and have kids. I didn't settle to a relationship till I was 26 years old. I'll say that I had a very good life, because I was happy with my five children, till today. I am now 49 years old, going on 50 next year, and I'm quite happy with things the way they are, but that's a whole different story.



## *What I would like to say about the Learning Centre*

*by Kelvin C.*

First of all -- when I first came here I didn't ... know how to write... but now I do. I'm learning more about how to write. It's a good place for a person who wants to learn. They give you your own space and time and give you what you want to work on. They learn you how to do your writing and your reading, and they show you how to do it. They're here to help when you need help.



It's a nice place to learn when you want to learn. They learn you. Lots of people, lots of friends, lots of nice tutors. Everyone is friendly. Everyone is here for the same thing.

## *Plans and Goals*

*anonymous*



To quit smoking is one of my goals. I want to quit for my health and the health of people around me. I would like to get more exercise. It makes me feel good about myself and gives me energy.

I would like to be the best parent possible. I want to teach my son how to read and write. It is important that he enjoys reading & writing.

I plan to go to school and learn more about the computer. I want to learn as much as possible about the computer. I would like to have a job in the computer area.

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## *Suzanne's story*

*by Suzanne*

I was the first student to attend The Learning Centre. When I first began it was located at the Bissell Centre. I began to learn to read and write at the learning centre in 1989. I attended for a few years, then dropped out for a while. I returned to the learning centre to learn to read and write better. I am glad to be back.

Below: *Suzanne at the Centre*



## *I am proud*

*by Lil Gallant*

I am very proud that I'm a Grandma. I love all my grandchildren. I spoil them. When I look at the grandchildren, I see my own children when they were small. I read to them and I bake lots of goodies for them. I'll make up stories to tell them and I tell them things about myself when I was a child. They really listen. Now they tell me stories. Some of their stories are funny. They tell me things that they don't tell their parents.

Above: *Lil at the Centre*

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## *Four Generations*

*by Madelene Aikle*

My mother and father were the first generation. They had five children, four girls and one boy. They have six grandchildren, four girls and two boys. The fourth generation is their great-grandchild, one girl.

Three of the grandchildren are in their twenties. Two of the grandchildren are fourteen. The youngest grandchild is five years old. The great-granddaughter is seven.

When the older ones were little, they would spend a lot of time with their grandmother. She would tell them about the way we were when we were young children. Her stories held their attention. She would tell them how she brought us up. Five children without running water or TV. She taught them to respect and understand the things we take for granted. The grandchildren loved to hear the funny things their parents did and how much they are like their parents. As far as spoiling them, she was like most grandmothers. She gave them sweaters and jackets that she had knit. Knitting was one of the things she taught them when she was telling them the stories. They were with her when she was cooking. All of the meals were from scratch, so they learned a lot about cooking from her. She would give them a few dollars for extra pocket money; that made them happy. The older grandchildren still visit her a lot. Each Christmas one of her grandsons gives her a rose. He has done this since he was a little boy. He is twenty-three and has never missed a year yet.

With the younger ones she has done the same things. They are told all the same stories the older ones were told. They love to hear them over and over. The younger grandchildren receive more material things, like store-bought things, because their grandmother can't knit like she used to. They all know Grandma has candy and chocolate around her place for them when they visit.

My mother loves all the grandchildren the same. Her great-grandchild is her pride and joy because it was her first daughter's child that gave birth to the first grandchild -- a girl! She is seven years old and has been told the same stories as the rest of the children. Her great-grandmother gives her pocket money like the others. My mother is going to be a great-grandmother again January 28, 1997, please God. She is looking forward to even more great-grandchildren in the future. Maybe with God's help there might be another generation.

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*Poetry pause ...*

*The Difficulties in Winter*

*by Maria Teresa de Sousa*

The difficulty in winter is watching older people walking on sidewalks that haven't been shoveled, or to see someone falling, not able to get up without help. The difficulty of being afraid of crossing the street just in case someone's driving too fast and can't stop in time. The difficulty about winter - to run so you can catch the bus on time to get somewhere. The difficulty in winter is seeing the homeless curl up in their old jackets or in boxes trying to keep warm. The difficulty is seeing accidents unintentionally happen because of slippery streets caused by snow. All these difficulties that happen in winter will always be there every year, and every year we always go out and see all this. But there is one thing: it never keeps us in the house.

*Dreams of a cozy bed*

*by Mary McGinnis*

Life is a cozy bed.  
Comfortable, relaxing, joyful.  
The youth of my life is like  
When I wake up in the morning.  
The sunshine in my face and  
I hear the birds singing.  
Old age is my bed wrinkled.  
Old and faded. But now I can crawl up inside  
And enjoy comfort.

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## *Life's Wall of Fame*

*by Esther R. M. Croswell*

There is a space in my life,  
I call it the wall of fame.  
It's a place where all my family and friends  
Are all the same.  
It's a picture wall where I will always have them close.  
Most of all they have no choice  
But to get along with each other.  
It's a place I can remember  
and even forget hard feelings.  
It's a place for the people  
who have passed on,  
And a place to be remembered and loved.  
There should always be a place for everyone's heart  
on the wall of fame.

## *The Beauty in Winter*

*by Maria Teresa de Sousa*

The way I feel about winter  
is to enjoy it. I know it's cold.  
but to me it's beautiful and romantic.  
I look outside my window, and all I  
see is the snow coming down slowly  
just like feathers would. And when I  
go outside, I just dress warm. I take  
a walk and look up and watch the shine  
on the snow. I take a deep breath and smell  
the fresh air and feel no pain,  
but only peace in my heart. I look ahead and see  
children playing, laughing and feeling no cold,  
only warmth. So how I feel about winter,  
is only how I feel about myself.

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# *The Chief on my Reserve*

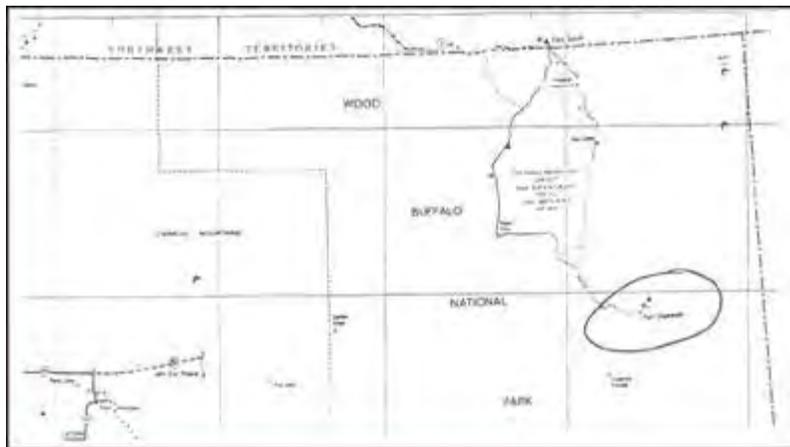
*by Gladys Antoine*

I'd like to write a story about my Chief, who lives in the town of Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, which is about 400 to 500 miles north of Edmonton. His name is Archie Waquan and he's also a treaty Indian from my home town. I went to school with him. He's married to a non-native and also has a couple of children. Fort Chipewyan, Alberta is a hamlet of about 2,000 or 3,000 people.

The reason why it's very interesting is that it started in 1983 to be a self-governed town. They had sold many hectares of land, or acres is more like it, for which they got 26 million dollars, and they also got hunting rights in the park (Wood-Buffalo National Park) and fishing rights anywhere. This idea had come long ago, from a former chief. The money that they got they invested into a lot of businesses, and the profit that it makes and the interest are what they distribute annually amongst those people who are band members. They also have their own newspaper, which anyone can get.

But I always find this very interesting, because it is at this time of the year that the money comes, and people are always so anxious. They get so excited and a lot of rumors go around about how much money they're going to get. I belong to the membership also, and as I'm writing, I don't have a clue as to how much we'll be getting, because it's not until November 15, 1996 that we'll know.

As I said, the Chief and council have done a good job, and Fort Chipewyan is a role model for all reserves.



# *My Goals*

*by Elsie Mandeville*

*English version:*

When my children were little we did all the things boys like to do. We played hockey outdoor. We made a snowman and went for walks. We went sliding on the high hills. I had lots of fun with my boys. Now they are grown up to be a man. Now I am back in school and picking up where I left off. I am doing reading and writing and math. I am working on a computer.

All my life I wanted to work with some people in a restaurant or work in an office somewhere... someday. That is my goal.



# *Gone*

*by Jim Croswell*



One year I was working at Shelly Sawmills, at Shelley, thirteen miles out of Prince George, B.C. We had just ate supper (at 5:00 p.m.), it was only 7:00 o'clock when the boss came out and hit the whistle with three short blasts. That meant shut down now, there's an emergency.

We went to the filer's room; he said he had just got word from the RCMP to get both sawmill crews and planer crews to Willow River. The mill and planer there had shut down to help as well. Even the hamlet was involved.

A friend of mine and I were told to bring our rifles. Tracking dogs were brought in. Even a man came in with two trained bloodhounds.

A family that lived in Willow River had a little two year old girl, name of Betty. The dad had gone to work in the planer at 7:30 -- they started at 8:00.

The little one had been put out to play in the front yard, in her sandbox. She had a small wagon and tricycle, some toys -- she never went beyond the picket fence. But she was missing. No one knew for sure what happened to her.

Not until the next evening did an elderly couple tell the police that twice during the last six days they had seen a big white two door car with two men. They were not mill workers, both wore sports jackets. One got out to look at a tire that he must have thought was low. He hesitated before getting back in. He slowly looked around, finally driving off slowly.

The elderly couple said they felt the two were up to no good. Being elderly and staying home a lot they thought no one would believe them.

The police dragged the river and creek in vain.

Meanwhile, we had been ordered to shoot any bears we met. I shot one that first night. I took the "bowie" and slit from the crotch up. I found nothing after cutting the stomach open, other than some grass, berries, and part of the tail of a digested trout.

I was close to another man of about forty or forty-five, he saw and shot a bear but just wounded it. This guy was no hunter.

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Not many black bears will charge but this one let out a bawl of rage and charged. I was off about one hundred feet to this guy's right. He dropped his rifle and stared



The bear had happened to come out of the bush and was probably going to the river (it was wadeable near there). He may have been after a drink, or just crossing, or maybe after fish. It was a big bear.

I swung the old 1896 Winchester into play. The first shot entered behind his right shoulder, going through the lungs and heart. He went down sideways. On impact I levered another round then walked up. He was dead. No need for another shot.

One of the rangers came up and we gutted it. We found nothing.

Later coffee and lunch was served at the local hall. No trace of little Betty was ever found. Most thought she ended up on the black market. All that was learned was the first part of the license number of the car. It was a Vancouver plate. The old couple were not sure if it was a Lincoln or a Cadillac. They were just sure it was a two door hardtop.

The mother had put her out in the front yard to play and went to do the washing. She had to carry water from the well for her electric wringer washer. Lots of time for two people to take the child.

She was a curly headed, blue - eyed blond -- that would sell good on the child black market. Well off people would pay most any price for her.

I sure felt bad for the parents. I was single then but could see their grief and heartache. It was beyond words. It sure gave me a bad feeling. I would experience it in later years first hand at the loss of a loved one. It did not occur to me then but I suppose it could be the Lord sort of preparing me for the later years.

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## *Drag racing sport*

*by Audré R. Phillion*

Drag racing is two cars beside each other, two cars racing each other. It is not the one which arrives first that wins. It is the one that does not break his 1/4 mile time.

If he gets a red light that means he lost. A 1/4 mile racing car has to go through technical and mechanical checks to be able to race. A racer usually get three test runs before the real racing begins. Drag racing is very well maintained, it is very safe. If you go see drag racing you can go to see the cars in the pit and it does not cost you extra money. I love drag racing because it's a natural rush.



## *Our Thanksgiving dinners*

*by Rick McSparron*

I went to Peoples Church for a Thanksgiving dinner. They put the vegetables and cranberry sauce in bowls on the table and the turkey and dressing was put on a platter. For dessert there were four kinds of pies and a cake.

The next day I went to the Mustard Seed Street Church for supper. The pastor said grace then the servers brought around the meal.

Monday we went to the Salvation Army for lunch. While I was there someone came up to me and said there was a dinner at Senor Frogs later. Everybody at Senor Frogs was given a teddy bear.

A good time was had by all at all the dinners.

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## *Social services*

*by Stephen McCartney*

In my opinion the social services system works well for most people but not for everyone. I have noticed that some welfare recipients are being treated with disrespect and rudeness, for what reason I'm not sure. I often wonder if the reason is that some social workers show compassion and fairness to their clients while other social workers do not. Being a welfare recipient myself, I have found that for the most part, I have been treated with fairly, but there have been times when my social workers have treated me with disrespect and have been very rude at times for no apparent reason, and I was not at all happy about it, to say the least. To be honest I got very upset with my social worker and lost all respect for the entire system. It is hard enough for a welfare client to live day to day, and it is even harder when your social worker is on your back and treating you unfairly. I realize that social workers have large caseloads to deal with, but that's no excuse to treat their clients poorly. The worst part about this problem is that it is not going to go away on its own, and the welfare client sure can't do anything about it, so where does the problem end? If I treated by social worker with disrespect and rudeness, I would either be living out on the street or I would have to do a lot of explaining. However if the social worker does the same to me, they would get away with it. And that really gets me mad.

## *Poetry pause...*



## *Kitten*

*by Joyce Porteous*

A kitten is a small baby.  
To love and care for.  
To look after well.  
To cuddle and hold  
In your arms.  
Playful and cute.  
Lovable, tiny, a friend.  
Soft as white snow.  
Jealous of you.  
Soft fur to touch and pet.

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# *The first years of my life*

*by Edna Vaughan*

I was born in Little Grand Rapids, Manitoba, November 15, 1948. I lived with my grandmother for the first ten years of my life. When I was ten years old I went back to my parents to live with them. My dad was helping the community to build a nursing station. After it was finished, my dad worked as a janitor and my mom worked as a housekeeper. After that my dad built a house for my mom, my three brothers, my sister and me.



My dad made his living as a trapper. We used to go with him to the trap line for the winter, that's why we didn't go to school.

When I was fourteen, we went to Berens River. My mom and dad visited their relatives. They left me there to go rice picking in September. I stayed with my auntie for one month. I didn't like her and I ran away.

After my mom and dad came back I went to Winnipeg and baby-sat for my auntie's sister-in-law.

After seven months, my dad came to get me to go back to Grand Rapids because my mom was sick. I stayed one month and I went back to Winnipeg where I stayed for about 26 years.

Thank you to all of the writers  
who contributed their stories,  
poetry, and muses for  
publication. Your willingness to  
share your memories (pleasant  
as well as unpleasant), your  
goals, your hopes and dreams is  
appreciated. Thank you!

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