

Whispers



Elders' Writings
Fort Resolution, NT
April, 2003

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Foreword

Buffalo River

My Story

Apple Tree

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

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

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

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

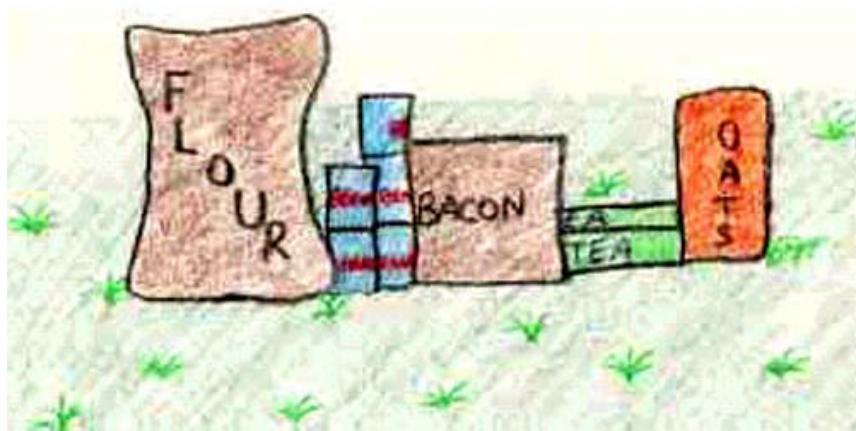
Buffalo River

I stayed in Buffalo River all year around. In the springtime, everyone would go up the river, and people would come from down the river to Buffalo River. There used to be a lot of old people in Buffalo River. Dad, Grandmother and I, only the three of us, stayed in Buffalo River all year.

In the winter, everyone that came down to Buffalo River on their way to Fort Resolution would have to wait in Buffalo River until the ice was gone. When it was windy, the ice would move, and then we would all head to Fort Resolution for Treaty Days. Our treaty money was five dollars, and we got that at the end of June. After the treaty money was given out, we would get beans, bacon, flour, tea and sugar; and then we would go back to Buffalo River.

If you wanted to go up the river to Hay River, you could paddle your boat or use your kicker. We would stay in Hay River for about one month and then come back to Buffalo River when it started to get cold.

We went to the Fort Resolution Mission to get potatoes and then returned to Buffalo River. We stayed there until it got really cold. When it started snowing and everything started to freeze up, we would go trapping until Christmas. At Christmas, we would come to Fort Resolution and stay for one week; and after Christmas, we returned to Buffalo River until March when it started to get warm for Easter.



Then we would come back to Fort Resolution for Easter. After Easter, we went back to Buffalo River until the ice broke up. When it warmed up, there was no place to go but hunting for moose.

We had our own church. Every Sunday, we would go to the place of one of the old people, and we would pray. Jim Bugghins, Henry Beaulieu and I would go from house to house and tell everyone that it was Sunday and it was time to pray.

There weren't that many people that lived in Buffalo River: maybe about ten people and four families. The rest would always go back up the river. There wasn't that much to do but to go hunting, trapping and ice fishing in the winter. When it was warm out, we would hunt for muskrats up the river or around Buffalo River.

One time Jim Bugghins told me that we should go back to Buffalo River while we were in Fort Resolution. "Now let's go up the river," he told me. It was raining and the ice had broken up that time. Boy, it was tough. There was a big water hole that we canoed through; when it melted, we would hunt beaver and muskrats. One person would get five beavers. Coming back down the river to Buffalo River, we would set traps for muskrats and beavers.

We came back to Fort Resolution for the summer. Some would stay the whole summer long looking for work. There were no jobs in town at all. At least there was Baldwin's Sawmill up the river at that time, but how were you going to get there? I don't know. No radio, no phone, but Baldwin had a big boat, which came to Buffalo River to find guys to work. You had to find out who was going to pick you up, buy gas and take you back to Baldwin's. A lot of families stayed out at the sawmill to work, eat well, hunt for moose and make dry meat. There was a big bunkhouse where we watched shows every night. After the show, we would play ball. There wasn't much else to do.



One time, Jim Bugghins, Maude Beaulieu, Henry Beaulieu and I went to Hay River to look for jobs. We travelled on the ice by dog team; three dog teams took us there, and it was hard to find a job. The four of us got jobs fishing in the West Channel, and that was for about one month. We would stay in the West Channel and fish for weeks until we got paid.

After they were broke, some people packed up and went back to Buffalo River and stayed there all year around. When winter came, trapping started again. We would stay in the bush for one week and then go back to Buffalo River for a week and then back in the bush for another week. We did this the whole winter. That is how we made our living year around.

We would buy what we needed for the week in the bush. It would all come from what was called relief. Every month we would get flour, beans, bacon, oats and tea. Everyone lived like that. Now if you have five dollars, you cannot buy anything. There were lots of families, and we would be reunited after everything was over. We would get together and go back up the river. Back then, you never ran out of anything because you could go up the river, and the next family would help you out.

I am the only one born and raised in Buffalo River who is still alive today. Now I have moved to Fort Resolution. The only people that live at Buffalo River now are Edward and James Beaulieu and Archie Delorme.

There were no houses, only the Mission in Fort Resolution; and now there are lots of houses. In the Mission, there were lots of priests and nuns; and now they are all gone. I spent a lot of time with my family in Buffalo River. We would make dry meat and bannock, and we had fun.

Harry Mandeville

My Story

I was born in Rocher River, NWT, in 1928. In those days , it was hard living; the people had to live off the land. We moved around from place to place with our whole family. We stayed in tents, and winter was always so cold.

In the fall around November, there used to be lots of caribou. The caribou came from the barren lands. The people from Hay River and Fort Resolution used to come to Rocher River to hunt for caribou.

My mom would make a lot of dry meat as soon as the caribou was brought back to camp. She would use all parts of the caribou; not much went to waste. She would also make tanned hide out of the caribou skins. She would soak the hide for five days and use the bone from the caribou to tan the hide. She would make sinew out of the parts of the skin that were too thin . The sinew became babiche, which was used for lacing snowshoes and all other household tasks.

Caribou bone marrow is also used for cooking. In the springtime, my mother would boil the marrow, skim the top to remove the fat and save it for making bannock, frying food and eating with dry meat. The caribou hooves were also used; they were dried and kept until the summer when we were low on food. Mother would boil them and make soup.

In the wintertime, we mainly hunted, trapped and fished. Wherever the hunting was good, that was where we would stay until we had to move again. All the meat and fish was cut up and stored. Then the men would go to Fort Resolution to sell their furs.

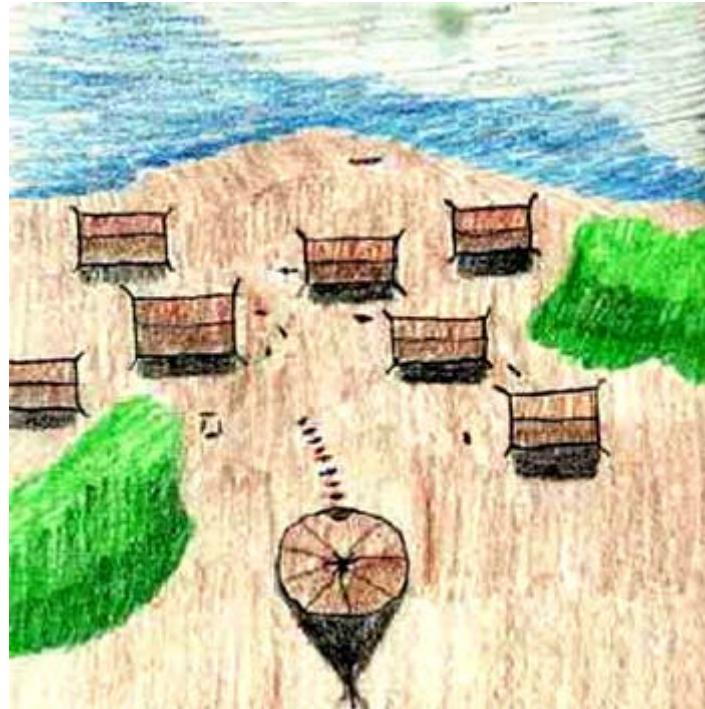
In the summer, we would go to Fort Resolution to collect treaty money and rations. The rations consisted of dry goods, such as tea, flour, beans, rice, porridge, nets and gun shells. Blankets and canvas were also given out to each family. We would go shopping at the NT store, Hudson's Bay Company and Alex Loutit's.



People would gather here in Fort Resolution for Treaty Days. The people came from Fort Rae, Fort Simpson, Hay River, Rocher River, Rat River, Reliance and Snowdrift. There were so many tents down by the bay that they were almost touching each other. When we went to church, they had to keep the doors open, and the people even sat outside during mass on Sunday.

After all the people got their treaty money, they would get the chief and sub-chiefs together, and they would all chip in and put together a big feast for all the people who were there. During the day, the people would play hand games; and in the evening they would have tea dances, fiddle dances and play cards. All the children would play together.

The treaty celebrations would go on for about a week. Then everyone would go back to where they came from. We would go back to Rocher River, and my dad would hunt and fish on the way back. He was in no hurry to get back, mind you. It is only about fifty miles from Rocher River to Fort Resolution, but it would take us about a week to get back home.



When we got back, we would put up a tent and stay there. My mom used to make dry fish and pick berries. She dried saskatoons; and when she made bannock, she would soak them and put them in the bannock. We also collected cranberries in ten-gallon drums.

Then we would move again up the Taltson River. When my dad killed a moose, we would make dry meat. What we were going to eat soon was tied up and kept in the water so it wouldn't spoil. The hide was tanned right away, and we would stay in the bush until the hide was tanned. Only then, we would move again.

This is the way my mother and father traveled with five children until my mother died in 1937. Then we stayed in Rocher River until my dad died in August of the same year. There was nobody to take care of us, so we were put in the St. Joseph convent, and that is where I grew up until I got married.

Margaret Sayine

Apple Tree

When I first came here from Snowdrift, I was so excited. As we were leaving, I looked back and Snowdrift slowly disappeared. I started crying. My sisters were already living in the Fort Resolution convent, and they said it would be okay.

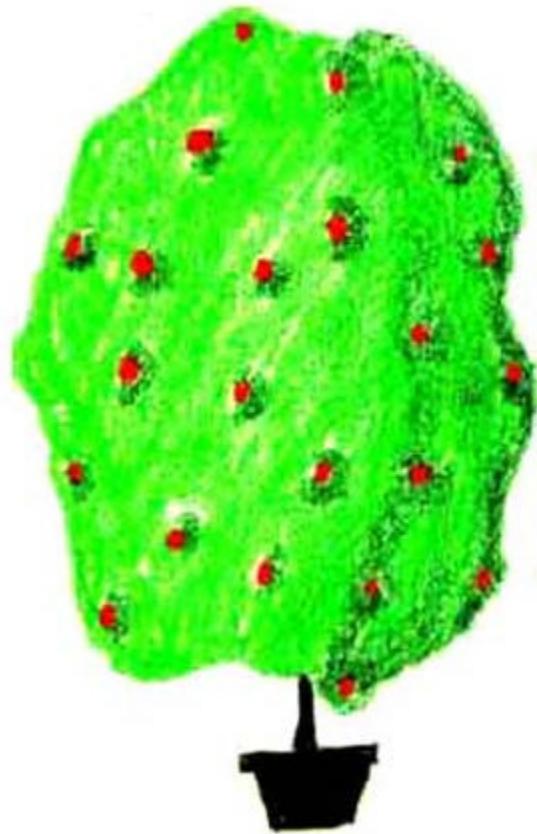
When we got here, we were separated. I didn't understand what was going on. We were assigned to a bed and shown where the honey bucket was. In the middle of the night, I was so scared my first night that I never slept. The next day, we had to go to church. We were just like little army men, marching into church, single file. We were even given a number, and my number was forty-five, I'll never forget that.

When we got into church, I had never seen anything so beautiful. I didn't know how to pray, but I saw this tree. I thought, "This is where we must get our apples from." There was this beautiful plant, which I thought was an apple tree.

The reason I thought this was because there were buds on the plant. To me, they were tiny little apples. At that time, I couldn't confirm if the apple tree was real or not. I didn't know because I couldn't ask questions. I didn't speak any English at all, and besides I wasn't in contact with my sisters.

My tree disappeared when I went to church, so I thought that the nuns must have planted it somewhere else so we can have apples. No matter where I looked, I could never find the tree. I always looked forward to going to church just to see if my apple tree was back, but there was no sign of it.

About two years later, I found out that it was only a house plant. I had told my friends about my apple tree in church, and they all sat back and laughed at me. Until this day wherever I go and see plants, I always look for my apple tree. No kidding.



I went to Freda's house and saw that plant, and she had told me that it is an impatiens plant. That is when my memories came back of when I was a little girl, far away from home and in a strange place with apple trees.

Christina King