

Transcript

Emily Buermann

Hello, my name is Emily Buermann and I was born and raised in Becker County on the White Earth Reservation. And I was given a story—a water story—to preserve for my generations and I think it is a story that should be shared.

My great-grandma was born September 8, 1918 in a wigwam on the shores of Basswood Lake at wild rice camp. And she was born, her birth name was Aychewazhid Cayuganig and that translates to She Flies Across the Water. And as she grew older she was given an English name and that name was Isabelle Cordelia Bagley. She was later married to Fred Hatlen and she is buried under the name Cordelia Hatlen.

And I was given her story to tell because she once told us what she thought heaven was like. And so we asked her, “Grandma Cord”—we called her Grandma Cord—“Grandma Cord, if heaven is your most beautiful day, what’s heaven going to be for you?” And I thought she would say the day we moved into a house, a house with a real roof and a real floor or a real stove; or the day we got a car and didn’t have to ride in a wagon anymore; or I thought maybe the day we got air conditioning; or electricity; or running water. But she chose, she said, “heaven is going to be fish camp.”

And so I said, “What do you mean fish camp?” and she said fish camp is where they went in the summer. They would move the wigwam and they would put it on the shores of the lake and the kids--all day long the kids--would play and swim and they would gather berries while their parents went fishing and gathered the fish and then they would preserve the fish so they would have something to eat in the winter. And fish camp, in the hot summer! And I said, “OK, the humid summer? All the mosquitoes, grandma? All the wood ticks? All the everything, the mosquito bites and the sleeping and thunderstorms in a wigwam? And it’s going to be fish camp?” And she said, “Yes.”

And I said, “Well what about strawberry camp? Or what about maple sugar camp where you got eat candy? Once a year you got to eat candy. Or, was it like hunting camp? You know, maybe where it was warm with a fire?” But she insisted that it was going to be fish camp. Because kids could run free, and they could be in the water, and she said, “heaven is going to be when your, your hair smells [gasp]. When your hair smells like lake water.”

“Heaven is going to be when your hair smells like lake water and you’ve got sunburn on your shoulders and your cheeks, and the smell of fresh fish frying and roasting over the fire, and salt in your hands because you were helping preserve the fish, and it meant your family was going to have food for the winter. And everything—the sun was shining and the sky was blue--and everything was going to be okay.”

And that was fish camp. And that was heaven.