

A STORY TOLD BY

MARGARET ROSE GLADUE



OUR OLD TIMES

I was born in this community called Wabasca. I was raised in the St. John's Mission. I remember I stayed until I was sixteen years old. A year after I got married and that's where the story starts.

I'm writing for all the other women at that time, as I'm sure most of them went through the same things as I did.

When my first child was almost a year old, we had to go with the men to their trap lines, which was down the Wabasca River. The men thought it would be better to take their families, instead of going back and forth to their trap lines during the winter. So we started out in September, in canoes. But of course there were about five other families who went including my in-laws. It took us about a week to get there, but we stopped on the way for two days as the men were moose hunting. We dried the meat, and started again on our journey, till we got to where we were going to spend the winter.

As soon as we arrived, the men started building log cabins, where we were to live for the winter. We brought

along a small wood heater, which I used for cooking as well. Some of them made their own stoves out of mud, straw & sticks. It was a high thing with an open fireplace that went up to the ceiling. They had a piece of heavy iron across where they hung a pot for cooking. They cooked their bannock in the hot coals. We even made a little bread. We had to have something with a cover. The 3 lb. lard pails were good for this. We just covered them with hot coals and ashes. It took about an hour to cook. While the men were busy building, we, the women picked cranberries and kept them for the winter. But that time I didn't stay all winter, as something happened and I had to come home. We used 2 dog teams, we just followed the river. It took us three days to get here just before Christmas. The others stayed till spring.

The next time we went, I had two kids by that time, and was expecting my third. This time it was about the same. There were about the same number of families who went, but the men had to build other cabins, as we stayed in a different place. Among the families who went with us was a girl who was pregnant. Nobody knew. So

the mother came and stayed with her daughter. In November, a seven month premature baby was born. There was no incubator. The old lady found something to use. It was a rabbit skin that had been dried in a stretcher. She put the baby in it up to the neck, the fur inside, and kept her in a dark place. She fed her with a dropper for ten days. After that she could use a bottle, but the girl got very sick. When the men came with the freight to Chipewyan Lakes, they came and got the girl and brought her home. They had to make a caboose on the sleigh, with a little wood heater. The baby that was born still lives in Slave Lake with her mother. She is now in her forties.

So by the end of February, my third baby was born in my little wood cabin, with two midwives. But I had to come home too, as I wasn't feeling too good. I had the flu, and we thought it would be better if I came home. So when the freighters came for the last time before breakup, I came home.

Again I went the third time, the same as before. But now I had four kids or I should say five, but I lost one. So we stayed all winter this time with other families,

every thing happened about the same, only this time I walked the portage to Chipewyan Lake in April. The snow was almost gone and the river was starting to break up. So we started early in the morning. I went with a fourteen year old boy who helped me carry the baby. We walked all day through muskeg and the snow. The water was so cold. We stopped for dinner and cooked a prairie chicken in the open fire. We dried our footwear by the fire which were soaking wet. Then we started again on our journey. I was so tired. We got to Chipewyan about sun set. We started back the next morning. After going to the Hudson Bay to do a little shopping, we got home about sun set. So in May we started our journey home in canoes. So ends my journey.

In those days we used moss bags for our babies. We made them with velvet and bead work on them and put a lacing on both sides. We wrapped some moss in a diaper, for the bottom. Also a small pad for the top if it was a boy, with some diapers of course. There was a special kind of moss we used. It had to be cleaned before. We used to pick alot in the fall and let them dry. Then we put them away for the winter. Also our babies

used to wear bonnets. The old ladies used to tell us if we didn't, our babies would have big heads.

Now we started a new way of living. We started with one cow. Then later on we had two to three cows, and a team of horses which were very useful for hauling wood, and hay in the winter. We had a big garden of potatoes and vegetables. Sometimes we had two milking cows so we had plenty of milk and cream. We even made butter sometimes. But still it was kind of hard, as the women had to do the outside work while the men were away trapping. They sawed up their own wood, hauled the water from the lake and even used to trap for squirrels and snare rabbits in the winter time. But we liked it very much. Of course when the kids were old enough they did most of the work.

Still it was hard for the men to find jobs in the summer, except cutting cord wood, which was only \$1.50 a cord. Later on there was fire fighting and hauling freight from Slave Lake with a team of horses. It was hard when the weather was cold. Other times we took our families to Slave Lake with a team of horses so that the men could get pulp wood. But of course everything

was cheaper then, like groceries and clothing. But still we had a hard time to have enough for the kids to wear. So we made good use of the flour sacks. We even made clothes for the kids. There were 100 *lb* sacks, 50 *lb* and 24 *lbs*. We waited till we had about twenty sacks or more. Then we soaked them over night, and the next day we washed them, to remove as much of the writings as we could. Then we boiled them till they were white. We made sheets with the big ones, it took five 100 *lb* sacks to make sheets. Also we used them for dish towels, the smaller ones. Also we dyed them different colors and made shirts for the little boys and something for the girls too.

Another thing the women used to do in the spring, was to tap the birch trees, and boil the sap to make syrup which was very good. Sometimes we camped in the bush so that we could start boiling it early in the morning. Sometimes we made 2 to 3 gallons of syrup each spring.

Of course we only had log houses to live in but we tried our best to make them warm. After the men went to their trap lines in the fall, it was up to us women to fix

up their houses as best they could; like patching up the mud walls. Then we would use the white lime the men used to make. They gathered special kinds of rocks and made a big hole on a low hill, to fill it up with the rocks. Then they dug another hole under. That's where they built a big fire and kept it going for eight or nine days and nights. They never let it go out, as it would spoil the lime, or white wash we used to call it. Then after a week or when it was cool, they poured water on it. Then it turned to white powder, that's what we used to use for our walls. We mixed it with boiling water, let it boil for a while, then we let it cool, and it was ready to use. We used brushes to spread it on the walls. Well at the time we thought it was pretty good. Some of us even made our own kitchen cupboards, sometimes with only two boxes nailed together. Also the men used to make wooden beds and tables.

Often during the summer holidays, when the kids were out of school, we used to go to a place called Bear Lake where one of my married daughters lived. There we had a big garden, lots of meat and ducks and they had cows. So there was always lots of butter and milk. Also

lots of berries. So I used to take two or three cases of jars and canned the raspberries and blueberries. Then it was easy to carry them that way. We used a team of horses and wagon. It took us three days to get there, sometimes we got stuck in a muskeg as the road was bad in some places.

They even had a cream separator and a freezer. It was a deep hole made in the muskeg, lined with boards, the floor too. And it had shelves where they kept their ducks and whatever else they had. It had a door on top, they could keep their food for two months and it stayed frozen, as there's always ice in a muskeg all summer, at the bottom.

Two of my grandchildren were born there. There was also another thing the girls used to do, they used to have horse back riding in the evenings with their friends, also they used to play ball.

One time we went out there in the summer, my husband and me. We took the priest, Father Vanderatine to baptize one of them. We went on horseback, camped once on the way. I enjoyed it very much. Again we went in the winter time with another

priest to see a sick man. This time we camped in my brothers house in Big Lake, as that was the winter road. This time we used a team of horses and sleigh, which was faster than the wagon.

In the old days the girls never went out at nights. There were no picture shows. Hardly any dances, even if there was one, the parents took them to the dance and came home with them.

There was no pool hall or any of these things they now have. So in some ways I think the old times were best for many things. Everyone used to be so friendly to one another. And that's the best part of the old times. So now we are living in the new times, better houses, lots of welfare also Family Allowances and everything. But if I had a choice, I'd still go for the old times. But of course I will never have a chance to go back. When everything was so peaceful in our community, we had our own native food. A person could build a house wherever he liked, or go to the lake and put a net in without paying for a permit or go to the bush and kill a moose without a permit. Also ducks and everything else we wanted, we could get. It's really too bad the way a native person has

to live now a days, when they have lived here all their lives. Now the white man has taken over everything. We even have to pay for the water we use from our own lake. And we can't even cut down a Christmas tree without a permit.

Well here ends my story of the old days. I have not written every detail, just some of it.

THE STUDENTS AND STAFF OF ST. THERESA SCHOOL WOULD LIKE TO
EXTEND OUR THANKS AND APPRECIATION TO MARGARET ROSE GLADUE
FOR SHARING A PART OF THEIR LIFE WITH US. THE STORY THAT FOLLOWS
WILL BE USED AS A TEACHING TOOL AND WILL SERVE AS A RECORD OF OUR
PAST.

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DARROL DIERKHISING

PRINCIPAL

ST. THERESA SCHOOL

WABASCA, ALBERTA CANADA