



Elders Chair: Josephine Dunn Is Still Twirling Like the Wind

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Interview and photograph by Patsy Gordon

One thing I found most interesting about Josephine Dunn and a mystery to her, is the fact that she, to this day, does not know how she ever got her name - Josephine. Her parents, Amos and Daisy Woods, taking advice from one of Josephine's Anties, named her Ge-we-tah-yoush-she-quay, which she says means "something like a twirling wind, or going around in circles". Josephine is not sure where she was born but says it was probably in Oak Point at home. Her mother told her a baby's Indian name must be given to them before they turn 4 days old. "You use someone's name who is very close to you, it gives the baby a namesake," her mother said. She was named after an elderly woman, with the name of Mrs. Stump, who lived out at Oak Point many years ago.

Josephine was born on October 28, 1932. Her birth certificate did not show her English name, it showed only her Indian name which she had been given at birth. It wasn't until she started grade school that she received the name Josephine. She says that somehow her birth certificate had been altered to show her name as Josephine, but that name is in hand writing, whereas the the rest of the original information on the birth certificate had been typed.

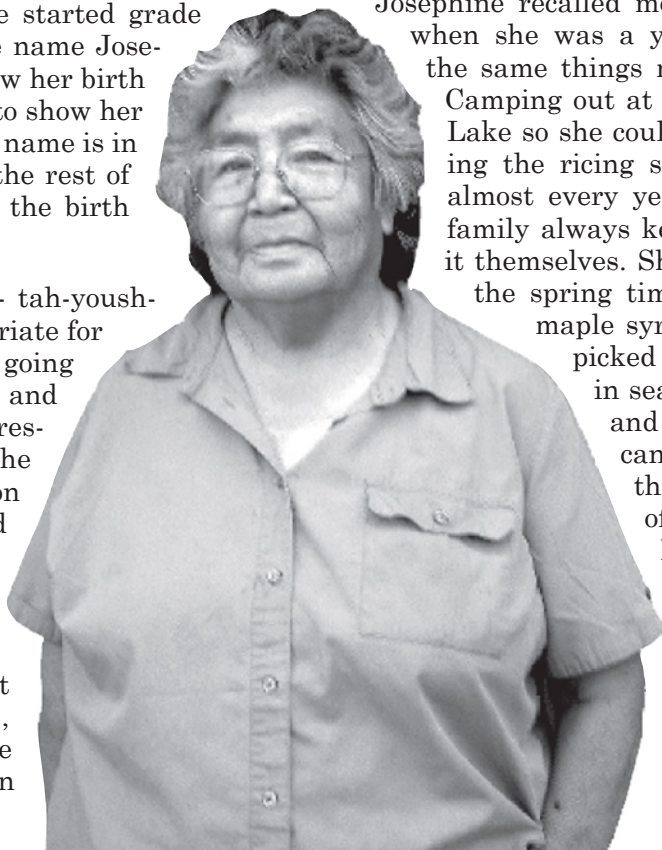
However, the name Ge-we- tah-yoush-she-quay seems very appropriate for Josephine since she is still going strong at seventy years old and has not yet retired. She presently works part time for the Leech Lake Elders division as an elders advocate and has been employed there since July of 2000. She also worked for Leech Lake in the Housing office, Head start, and the old Credit Union. In September of 1971, she started working with the Leech Lake Health Division

and remained there for 27 years as a Community Health Representative (CHR). In 1992, her mother suffered a stroke, and Josephine took a leave of absence during a span in 1992 and 1993 to care for her elderly mother.

Josephine married Richard Dunn on February 6, 1963. After many years of marriage, Richard died on March 11, 2000. Richard and Josephine always made their home in the Oak Point community. Together, they had 4 children and raised them at Oak Point, where Josephine still lives today, as do some of her children and grandchildren.

No different than most other Indian children growing up in her day and age, Josephine never learned English until she was 6 years old, at which time she learned the English language mostly from her teacher.

Josephine recalled memories of things she did when she was a young girl. "I did a lot of the same things my Mother did", she said. Camping out at Hardwood Point on Leech Lake so she could go ricing every day during the ricing season became a tradition almost every year during her youth. Her family always kept their rice and finished it themselves. She also camped out during the spring time to tap trees and make maple syrup and sugar cakes. She picked berries too when they were in season. All of the berries she and her family picked were canned. She helped set net in the fall. "We never sold any of our harvests, we always kept it", she said, "we never went hungry, we had deer meat, ducks, rabbits - we made our own bread, today I still make biscuits!"



Just as her mother did, Josephine too, made moccasins, “little bitty moccasins”, she said, and sold them for a quarter a pair. She tanned deer hides and still partakes in that tradition today. As a matter of fact, she has one hanging in her basement right now that keeps reminding her that it needs to be tanned and she thinks, “Gee, I should do this.” Josephine knows that day will eventually come! She also used to make braided rugs and quilts. She said there were many times when she would sit up all night sewing up her blankets.

Although Josephine never seen the old building in Oak Point, her mother told her about the dance hall where the community would hold their pow-wows. She said that building was before her time but “people came from North Dakota to attend these pow-wows, it was just a dance, there was never any money involved,” Josephine said.

Before we ended our visit, Josephine offered these words of advice to parents out there in today’s world. “If you teach your kids the right way, they will grow up with respect. Respect has to be taught to them starting at a young age.” ■

