



Elders Chair: Peter Pequette, Jr., A Legend in His Own Time

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Interview and photograph by Patsy Gordon

After traveling through one of the worst snow storms of the winter of 2004 and after my knuckles had turned thoroughly white, I finally reached Pete Pequette's home on Dupont Avenue in South Minneapolis. He had been up early and had already shoveled off his walk and steps!

I could tell as he greeted me at his door that Pete was one of those people we would consider "a young senior"! He still has a lot of spring in his step.

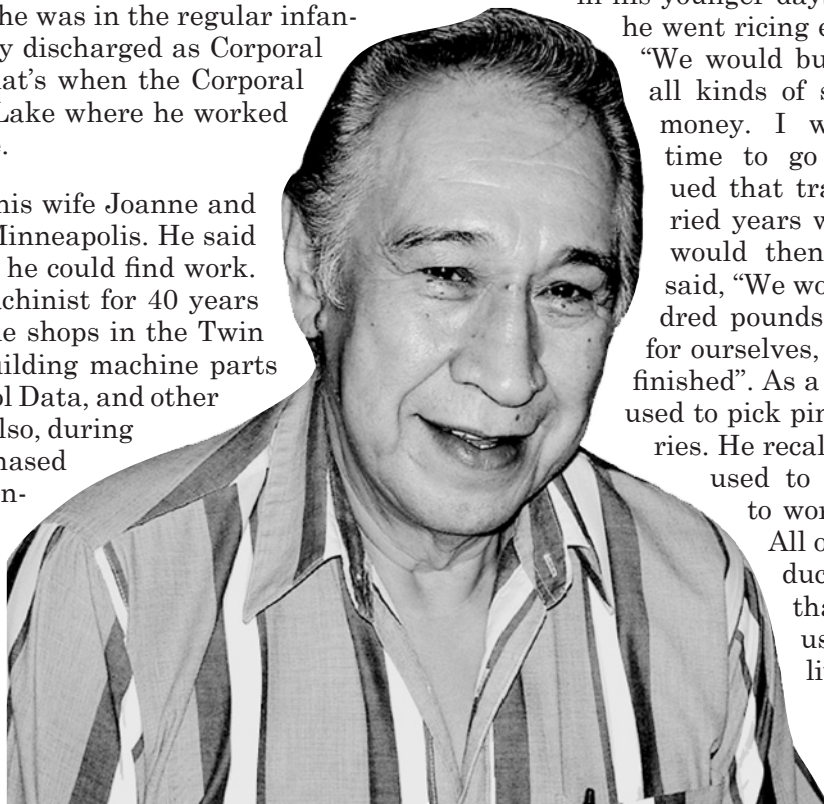
Pete was born and raised in Cass Lake, MN. to Peter and Susan Pequette, 62 years ago. His siblings included 3 brother and 7 sisters, whom all still live within the state of Minnesota.

Pete attended school in Cass Lake and Duluth where he completed the 11th grade, and enjoyed bowling as a sport and boxed as a young man. He then enlisted in the service in 1958 and spent 3 years in the Army. His tour of duty took him to Berlin, Germany, for 19 months where he was in the regular infantry. He was honorably discharged as Corporal Pequette in 1961. That's when the Corporal moved back to Cass Lake where he worked for the Forest Service.

In 1963, he married his wife Joanne and they moved back to Minneapolis. He said they had to go where he could find work. Pete worked as a machinist for 40 years in 3 different machine shops in the Twin Cities. He worked building machine parts for Honeywell, Control Data, and other major corporations. Also, during this time, he purchased the neighborhood convenience store from a friend of his. He ran the store for 5 years from 1985 to 1990 until he sold it himself.

Together, Pete and his 21 year-old granddaughter live in his well-kept home in Minneapolis. I told him, "You sure do keep a clean home for a man!" He confessed that it was his granddaughter that was responsible for the tidy house. Pete lost his beloved wife, Joanne, in 1994 after 32 years of marriage. Pete and Joanne raised their 5 children in Minneapolis. They had 3 girls and 2 boys. Every year during the first two weeks in July, Pete would take his family camping. They visited places in South Dakota, Wyoming, and other states, but mostly went up north where they enjoyed spending their vacation time. His children have blessed him with 17 grandchildren. His daughters still live in Minneapolis, but both of his sons live on the Leech Lake Reservation and work for the Band. Pete said, "I've always kept in contact with the rez, if there had been work there, I would have stayed".

Growing up, Pete said he danced at the pow-wows in his younger days. He also made sure he went ricing every year. Pete said, "We would buy school clothes and all kinds of stuff with our ricing money. I would take vacation time to go ricing!" He continued that tradition into his married years when he and his wife would then rice together. Pete said, "We would get a couple hundred pounds, just enough to last for ourselves, then we would get it finished". As a young fellow, he also used to pick pine cones and blueberries. He recalled the days when he used to go to North Dakota to work on a "spud truck". All of these activities produced income and food that he and his family used as part of their livelihood.



Pete spoke both Ojibwe and English as he was growing up. Unfortunately, over the years, he has lost some of his ability to speak Ojibwe. He says he can now understand it better than he can speak it.

When we talked about his favorite past times he told me about how he likes to hunt and returns to Cass Lake every year to do just that. I hadn't noticed the buck when I first walked in the house, how I could have missed it, I don't know. Being a hunting woman myself, I was curious and when I inquired if he had ever shot a legend, he pointed to the buck hanging above the fireplace. Perched behind me was Pete's legend, a 10-point buck that he shot one year while hunting on the rez. (see photo). I was flabbergasted and amazed as I sat there and admired the buck because that looked like one fine prize to me!

Pete used to do a lot of fishing, but "I don't fish much anymore though, my son's got a boat", he said. When I asked if his son takes him fishing now he said, "No, I take him fishing!"

Pete says he is now retired and he hates it, "I just can't live on that fixed income, I just can't make it!" We all know this proves to be a common problem with many seniors in today's life. He said there are a lot of elders that need help, just to have medical insurance is \$130.00 a week!

Being retired, one of the activities he participates in and enjoys is singing with the Ojibwe Hymn Group. Pete said his dad started that group in 1968 and made sure that he and his siblings sang and he said they still do it. The group sings at all the wakes they are asked to. ■

