

Survival By Janet Quaw

I feel like a million years old, like a pioneer woman or something. Memories of riding in the back of a wagon pulled by a team of two horses on our way to my grandmother's house come and go with every year that passes by.

Yes, I felt embarrassed that we didn't have a vehicle like everyone else; but my parents made sure that we had a roof over our heads and food for all ten of us kids! We ate veggies from two of our gardens, one smaller garden closer to the house; that was not small by any means and one larger garden farther away from the house. My parents had a hundred and fifty head of cattle that my grandparents gave to my daddy and my mama for their wedding present. My daddy also hunted moose and caught fish from the local lakes, Francois Lake and Uncha Lake, where I was born beside a fire in the living room.

There was much work to be done around the clock. My little brother Norman and myself had to get up two or three hours before we had to catch the bus just to do farm chores! We were happy to be able to go to school because that meant that we didn't have to work so hard, physically. The community of Southbank was so small that we only had two classrooms that both consisted of three different grades in one classroom. One classroom had grades one, two and three and the other classroom had grades four, five and six.

The residential school had taken me away from my family at the age of five! I was traumatized! For the next eight years of my tender young age, I was beaten and raped and starved half to death! I tried to run away from the school with a couple of the other girls, but we were caught and brought back to the school only to be punished by eating a bowl of live maggots, a bowl of mold or nothing at all! I was twelve years old when the residential school let me go back to live with my parents. The reservation I once knew was in chaos! There was alcohol, drugs and incest to name a few! My oldest sister was living in Vernon with her new husband and needed me to help her with the new baby on the way. I jumped at the chance just to get out of the community of Southbank.

At first, the beautiful Okanagan welcomed me with open arms and I had high hopes of my future and well being. My older sister treated me as well as she could; but, the natives from the Okanagan tribe did not welcome me at all! My grades in school went from A's and B's to C's and C minus. This was a culture shock for me! The highschool was so enormous that I felt overwhelmed every day! I had no idea what McDonalds was, or Tim Hortons, Pizza Hut or any fast food or restaurant for that matter! I had no idea what a pizza was or how to eat it, I was eating it with a fork and knife! The other students that I was going to school with would tease and laugh at me all the time for not knowing any of the things that they grew up with. This endless teasing would make me feel so stupid!

My oldest sister would soon turn from being nice to treating me like a slave and also withheld food from me as a punishment. In order to get away from her, I took on a boyfriend at a young age just to get away from her psychological abuse. This was the worst decision of my life! How did I know how to pick a life partner? I certainly didn't choose him because of love, it was

decided out of desperation. This man who was fourteen years older than I would then go on to teach me bad habits, like drinking and smoking. I stayed with him for the next thirty years despite the fact that he almost killed me more than half a dozen times. Our three boys have witnessed the countless times he had physically, emotionally and psychologically abused me.

My final decision to leave was a hard and difficult one for me; for I had never been on my own my whole life! My life has never been easy. As a single woman, I started off rocky with many bends in the road and twists and turns and ups and downs; but I know one thing, a bend in the road is not the end of the road! My life has come full circle! I spend my days sewing, beading and reading! I go on hikes up Knox Mountain and swim in Okanagan Lake. I am the happiest I've been since I was five years old!